THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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...FROM THE EDITOR...

To friends who have been part of this newsletter group for awhile, hello again. And to those who have joined us during the summer, a hearty welcome. After a summer's hiatus, the newsletter is back in full swing, and we're eager to hear from you. Many newsletter readers say that various articles in each month's issue become the topic of tutor training sessions or staff meetings. For those of you who use these essays as springboards for your own discussions, I invite you to let the rest of us in on your conversation. Why not send a paragraph of two (or more, of course) in which you share your talk with us? What issues did these articles raise in your discussions? What questions arose?

Certainly there's a full platter of topics to ponder in this issue, uses of off-topic conversation in the tutorial, issues to confront in on-line tutoring, concerns in bringing multicultural awareness into the writing lab, and strategies for starting tutor training courses. And once again, we hear a number of tutors' voices. Let's hear from you too.

And while you're writing to the newsletter, could you let me know if the type size is a bit small for you? When the newsletter switched to 9-point type last fall, there were a few comments—but not many. Is it just my aging eyes that are blurring when trying to proofread this tiny type, or does anyone else want to make a motion to switch back to 10-point type (which looks like this)?

•Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Off-topic Conversation and the Tutoring Session
• **John R. Parbst**   1

Towards a Rhetoric of On-line Tutoring
• **David Coogan**   3

Ask Carl
• **Carl Glover**   6

Conference Calendar   6

Cultural Diversity in the Writing Center: Defining Ourselves and Our Challenges
• **Judith Kilborn**   7

Tutors' Corner: "Getting It on the Page"
• **Jean Bruce Scott**   11

Tutoring across Cultures
•**Xia Wang**   12

Starting from Scratch: Developing a Tutor-Training Program
• **Patricia Salomon**   15

Conference Announcements   16

Off-topic conversation and the tutoring session

Beads of sweat, forming and dripping off the student's face and hands, gradually transform his or her essay into an indistinguishable mass of wood pulp and ink. The student, now wringing out the smeared mess, complains that he or she has no brilliant ideas that will transform this chaotic essay into one of the pinnacles of academic achievement—a polished written composition. What is a tutor to do? Students often come to the writing center and complain that they lack ideas for their essays. Combine this problem with a nervous student (or a nervous tutor!) and, suddenly, the tutoring session can prove to be an awkward and unproductive thirty-minute experience. A tutor must develop certain tutoring techniques and a style that will make the best use of the time available during the session.

One of the techniques I have found most helpful is a purposeful moving away, or off-topic conversation, from the strict agenda of the session. Although this technique may seem to be unproductive because it is a movement away from typical composition topics, I have found it very helpful for two reasons. First, this type of conversation can relax a one-on-one tutorial session for both the tutor and the student. Also, this type of relaxed interaction is one of the best ways to unintentionally brainstorm new ideas. Both

of these goals can be achieved when this type of conversation is carefully initiated and controlled by the tutor in order to bring about these improvements in the session.

Students are often nervous when they enter a one-on-one tutoring session. Of course, many factors may contribute to this nervousness: asking a complete stranger for advice about writing, disliking the writing process, being unfamiliar with the English language, or any number of other reasons. It is even possible for a tutor to succumb to occasional

bouts of nervousness. A friendly greeting and some casual conversation can go a long way toward relaxing the session and helping both the tutor and student focus on the paper and the issues to be discussed. Students often provide clues that prove to be good conversation topics. For instance, the student's name may lead to a conversation about its origin which, in turn, can lead to a discussion about foreign countries or languages—topics that will involve the student's background. A student's interests or hobbies may also provide information for discussions to start the session in a relaxing manner. A student wearing athletic clothes or sports logos may enjoy a question about the upcoming sports season. Even scanning a student's backpack or books can lead to a discussion about other classes, academic majors, or future plans. These discussions, although seemingly time consuming, can ultimately help bring about a better and more productive relationship.

A very striking personal example last semester happened when a non-native English speaker came in for his first appointment at the Writing Center. He was very shy, to the point that he would not make eye contact with me or even speak to me. The session started poorly because of his lack of involvement, so I asked about his home country. This led to a discussion about his hometown and educational background. As the session progressed, the student became more and more relaxed. Although we spent about twenty minutes talking about his background, the five to ten minutes we had left to talk about his assignment was very focused as a result of our more relaxed tutor-student relationship. That five to ten minutes of a true exchange of ideas was better than the alternative: me talking at an uninvolved audience for thirty minutes. Meyer and Smith say that it is very important "to create the supportive atmosphere that is vital for good collaboration" (8); through casual conversation I was able to lend an air of support and interest in what the student had to say that led to a productive exchange of ideas and a focus to the session.

Off-topic conversations with students ultimately can generate ideas that help to support their papers. Students often come into sessions with papers that lack developed ideas or enough supporting ideas for their thesis. They frequently have trouble brainstorming new, supporting ideas or have difficulty incorporating specific examples into

their essays. Often, they have terrific personal experiences that will help support their essays, but they seem reluctant to use these examples because, as several students have told me, they feel "personal experience" is not a valid support for an academic paper. By initiating an off-topic conversation, the tutor may be very successful in pulling out some of these ideas and then explaining that such personal experience adds strength and support to an essay. For example, in one of my tutoring sessions I had a student who was working on an essay dealing with the importance of "names." He had developed some good ideas about the names of his family and friends, but he felt that he needed more supporting ideas. I tried brainstorming techniques, such as listing and freewriting, but the student was still having severe difficulty in developing new ideas. He was so concerned about his assignment that he was not able to break away from the narrow range of ideas he had already explored. He mentioned the added pressure of completing his assignment quickly because of his work commitments that weekend.

I was beginning to sense his anxiety and asked him about his work. He mentioned the name of the place he was employed, and I asked if he felt the name had any significance. He began to realize that naming takes place in many societal situations—not just in the naming of people. At this point I stressed that his experience with this company name adds an element of personal authority to his paper that strengthens his argument. Soon he was thinking about the names of restaurants, sports teams, cars. . . his list grew until he had too much information. The simple and calculated act of casual conversation broke his frozen thought process. What happened in this tutoring session, as with others I have had, goes a step beyond simply relaxing the student. Ideas from a new perspective begin to develop, and it is important that the tutor be very aware of this process. These ideas, which may seem to be unrelated to the paper, often will make a connection—some thread of similarity that ties into the thesis or body of the work. This, of course, is where the tutor must be aware of the conversation and tighten that thread to pull these ideas back to the main topic.

This process of leaving the topic, spending some time away, and then coming back is a technique that the tutor must closely control. Of course, the danger with pulling away

Towards a rhetoric
of on-line tutoring

In the spring of 1993 I got this great idea: why not turn a writing tutorial into an actual *writing* tutorial? So often writing center tutorials have nothing to do with the act of writing. Students read aloud, make conversation, do some editing or planning, but rarely compose or communicate in writing. And there is no guilt here: As Stephen North reminds us in "Training Tutors To Talk About Writing," the student's "text is essentially a medium" for conversation (439), a starting point, a place to *begin* the session, not end it. But what would happen to that conversation if I took away the paper, took away speech, and took away physical presence? What would happen to the idea of a writing tutorial if we decided to make the act of writing the main event?

To test this idea, I decided to conduct writing tutorials over electronic mail. I wanted to see how such interaction would work. My plan went like this: students would send me their texts and questions over e-mail during posted hours and I would respond right away. The motive was to exchange lots of e-mail—say, over the course of an hour. In a sense, I wanted to replicate the conditions of face-to-face tutoring: two people conversing about a text. What I learned, however (surprise, surprise), was that e-mail could not—and probably should not—replicate the conditions of face-to-face tutorials. Virtual appointments were hard to keep, and hardly anyone actually made contact with me during the posted hours (Sunday—Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.—12: 00 a.m.).

It was just as well. The advantage of e-mail, I soon found out, was that you didn't *need* an appointment. You didn't even need regular hours for drop-in sessions. I began to advertise quick turn-around instead of appointments: "Send your text whenever you want. Get a response within six hours!" This became the drop-everything-and-tutor method. Instead of sitting in front of the monitor "doing time" waiting for someone to send me some e-mail, I'd log on every other hour: when there was e-mail, there was a session.

From these new working conditions, I began to figure out a methodology of e-mail tutoring. The main difference underlying all the issues I discuss below is that e-mail changes our sense of time, and in so doing, it changes the power dynamics of tutoring. After all, a face-to-face tutorial takes place in real time. It is bound by beginning, middle, and end. A session must have a point. And we often feel cheated if there is no point. (We're not comfortable with "dead air.") We even have to train ourselves to recognize different kinds of silence so that it doesn't *feel* like dead air. But e-mail tutorials have nothing but dead air. They are mute, silent—like any text. Often they take place over a few days. They are open-ended, sprawling, not bound by the hour or the actual writing center. E-mail tutorials could happen anywhere, anytime. However, access to the writing center doesn't necessarily get easier. In fact, it may get harder. Many students don't know how to do e-mail, let alone upload files. (And it goes without saying that many students don't have PCs and modems in their rooms.) These sessions are also solitary. They take place at the scene of writing. Wherever the student and tutor may be—in a crowded user room or a room of one's own off campus—the student and tutor extend themselves into a social space, but only in their minds, only in writing. The tutor's job is to create a textual scene of learning. In this scene, the tutor and the student have time—perhaps too much time—to revise their thoughts and *construct* the tutorial. They become aware—even self conscious—of their emerging rhetorical identity: "tutor" and "student" become characters in a story, elements of an instructional "plot." Phatic cues no longer set the scene. All we have is text.

As we know from the writing center, presence is everything. A student wears his paper like clothing, often asking right away, "how does this look to you? Is it ok?" The paper doesn't communicate by itself—the person communicates. But an electronic text *announces itself* as communication. It arrives in the mail without the benefit of speech to support its content, defend its appearance, or in other ways indicate who (or what) is inside. Thus in a face-to-face meeting, the student and tutor talk "over" a paper. The paper connects them. They see the same text. And the paper creates tension: who touches it? reads from it? marks it? The underlying question soon becomes, what will be DONE to the paper? As a methodology, then, the f2f tutorial is grounded by paper, and The Paper can limit tutor-student interaction.

In his experiment with an asynchronous, e-mail based writing class, Ted Jennings concludes the following:

> The crucial difference between the paper-bound and paperless environment lies in how a writer's texts are perceived. In the electronic medium they are harder to "own," harder to possess and defend, than are tangible pseudo-permanent sheaves of paper. Sharing an electronic text does not imply giving it away, and telling writers what you remember about their texts is not like defacing their intellectual property. (47)

The catch-all theory is that the paper-bound environment creates vertical relationships while the paperless environment creates horizontal relationships, precisely because the student's "property" (in the paperless environment) is disembodied, less clearly marked. When students send me their electronic texts and we correspond, I'm asking them—implicitly or explicitly—to re-envision their writing: to use writing to improve their writing. I'm not asking them to focus on line five of paragraph six. The pedagogical idea is to encourage them to write by telling them how their words affected me while I read them; give them what Peter Elbow calls in *Writing Without Teachers*, a "movie of my mind"—a rendering of their text. In turn, the student stretches out to "me," the *idea* of a tutor, and in the process stretches her own thinking, her own writing. The net result is a bunch of e-mail stretched out on a clothes line.

Of course, movies of the mind are nothing new. Perhaps the only innovation here is that e-mail leaves a tangible trace—a transcript of the interaction. Pedagogically, we could even say that *nothing* has changed. The spirit of tutoring—intervention in the composing process—remains intact along with the political issues defining that intervention. But the actual tutorial becomes something different. Classroom teachers who teach in a networked environment describe a similar change. Thomas Barker and Fred Kemp say that "using the computer as a communication medium 'purifies' informal exchanges in interesting and pedagogically advantageous ways" (21). They praise computer conferencing for its ability to cut to the chase, to foster a "pure," informal dialogue at the level of *ideas* instead of *personality*. Without the "distracting" elements of personality, computer-mediated discourse establishes a more egalitarian atmosphere. No one has to compete for the floor.

But without the classroom context, which Barker and Kemp rely on, how might on-line tutors gauge learning, or even communication, as discourse-specific? More to the point: as a cyborg tutor, am I an integral part of the writer's world or a ghost in the machine? Does my discourse construct a tutorial setting? Or does my discourse become something else? The fuel for somebody else's fire. . . .

E-mail tutoring, so it seems, puts us smack dab in the middle of the postmodern condition—the critique of presence in discourse. We hold onto this idea of "personality" in order to make tutoring work. But as Barker and Kemp show us, computer-mediated discourse reduces the guiding logic of personality. This makes it fascinating, but also confusing. I like the idea of intuiting a writer "in" the text. (I like to imagine I'm helping a real person.) But what I intuit ("who" I imagine) has nothing to do with the writer, per se. As Roland Barthes says, "I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) without knowing where he is. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site; the possibility of a dialectics of desire" (4).

This, of course, is tricky turf and I'm no postmodern theorist. In fact I'd rather keep this essay practical. But I bring up Roland Barthes to raise the specter of textual indeterminacy—our best laid plans to create a scene of learning slipping down a chain of

signifiers. My instinct is to fight this. Let me put it to you this way. In face-to-face tutorials, half the job is reading the person, paying attention to silences, tone of voice, body language, and so on. On-line there is no difference between reading a person and reading a text. The threat seems to be that we could lose the tutorial by forgetting about these imaginary students we are helping. Another threat is more practical: e-mail tutoring lavishes a lot of time on the student's text—it takes a while to read and respond—and there is no guarantee that anything will happen. The student might not respond. (A challenge for the 21st century: how can we shape our e-mail instruction to elicit response and create a scene of learning?)

Michael Marx's study of e-mail exchanges between students in two composition courses at different colleges, explores the rhetoric of anonymous instruction. Students had to read essays by writers they had never met and write "critique letters," much like on-line tutors write feedback and questions to writers they have never met. The students' reactions to this experiment were complex. On the one hand, Marx indicates anonymous feedback was easy:

> At the end of the semester one Skidmore student summarized her experience of writing for the network: 'When writing to someone in class, I can talk to them if they do not understand a point. When writing to Babson [College], I found that I was concentrating on giving a complete critique. I also found new freedom because I did not have to worry about the Babson student getting upset with me.' (31)

But on the other hand, e-mail critiques were demanding—more focused and intense. Another student comments, "I wanted to make sure that I made useful suggestions because they couldn't get in touch with me; so my critique needed to be self explanatory" (34). Marx concludes that e-mail "creates a distance between student critics and student authors which, ironically, brings students closer together in analyzing and discussing written texts" (36). The pressure to communicate fights the pressure of ambiguity.

But even that's not enough. As Andrew Feenberg summarizes, "communicating on-line involves a minor but real personal risk, and a response—any response—is generally interpreted as a success while silence means

failure" (24). If Feenberg is right, and I think he is, then the goal of an on-line tutorial must never be to fix meaning on the "page" but to engage meaning in a dialectic. We need ambiguity. We need open texts. Ironically, ambiguity works *for* us and *against* us. In a different context, Stephen North describes this dialectic between readers as acts of "textual good faith." Specifically, he describes his written correspondence with David Bartholomae, and more generally, the impulse to find 'common sense' in composition studies, as "negotiating (establishing, maintaining) good faith agreements about the conditions that will make it possible for us to communicate. Or, to put it another way, negotiating (establishing, maintaining) good faith agreements about which of the conditions that make communication impossible we will set aside so that we can communicate" ("Personal Writing" 117). When e-mail tutorials work, so it seems, they work by engaging this dialectic. They work when we somehow negotiate a scene of learning.

One graduate student sends me a long philosophy paper and asks if his main idea is coming across. He wants to send the paper out for publication. I read the text, comment extensively in six separate messages (snapshots of my mind), and we correspond for about a week. The ideas percolate. A relationship forms. Eventually we meet in the writing center to talk about the paperbound issues: sentence level stuff, the actual length of the manuscript, bibliography, and so on. We are both encouraged and amazed at the novelty of this arrangement. Where else in the university can two people correspond about a work-in-progress? As a partner to the face-to-face tutorial, or even a solo act, e-mail could help us sustain long-term instructional relationships, much like Internet discussion groups such as WCenter or MBU help us sustain our own professional relationships.

This of course represents the ideal. I *dream a network nation where we all exchange our texts.* But there is no network nation, at least not the kind I imagine. The technology, itself, is not the problem. The Internet is certainly growing. The Conference on College Composition and Communication will be on-line in 1995. But who in the university values the lateral exchange of texts, the "pure" exchange of ideas unfastened from the classroom? Let me be specific here. For students to even *use* the on-

line tutorial service at SUNY-Albany, they need to know how to use a word processor, save an ASCII (text-only) file, upload it to the VAX mainframe, and send it to the virtual writing center as an e-mail message. That's asking a lot—especially on a campus where most computer labs are NOT linked to the mainframe, and posters for the service have to compete with commercial advertisements for proofreading services. Advertisements on the mainframe, though successful, tend to lure students more interested in computing than in writing (an unfortunate division of talent). The vast majority of paper-writers (students in the humanities and social sciences) don't know about the e-mail tutorial service. How could they?

I guess what I'm concluding is that the idea of e-mail tutoring cannot change these institutional politics. I can dream a network nation if I want. But the reality is something else. Again, this is not a technical problem. We just don't know what we want technology to do. The university and the larger society still value paper, intellectual property, and authorship (all deregulated on the net), and the writing center—for good reason—still values face-to-face interaction over a text. But while we continue to work face-to-face, new technologies such as e-mail will continue to grow. If we don't decide what to do with them, somebody else will. As the writing center moves into the 21st century, I'd urge us to grab the bull by the horns: we should have a say. That's our responsibility. This essay is just one attempt to imagine the future. But what the on-line tutorial will *actually* become is something we are just beginning to understand.

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Off-topic conversation

from the main agenda of the session is the chance that the conversation will saunter away on a path—never to return! A tutor must realize that after leaving the topic, a return must be initiated sometime during the session. It is the job of the tutor to lead the conversation back to the paper if the ideas explored during the off-topic conversation do not steer the student in that direction. This can prove to be a difficult task. Consider my first example of the very quiet, shy student. It would have been very easy, and perhaps not altogether unproductive, to talk about his native country for the entire session. However, the tutor must make an effort to return to the paper and tie in some aspect of the conversation to the academic agenda. In this way the student leaves with a positive impression of the writing center and a sense that the tutoring session explored new or expanded ideas for the paper. Problems arise when the discussion begins to stray too far from the agenda. It is sometimes necessary simply to stop the conversation with a polite, but firm, "That is very interesting—perhaps we could talk about this again during another session. How about getting back to your paper and some unfinished business before our time is up?" Control of the session remains a constant challenge for the tutor, so it is always good to have a prescribed "plan for control" ready to spring for any awkward tutoring moments.

I am currently employed in my second semester as a tutor in our writing center, and I still find this conversational technique to be an asset during my tutoring sessions. I make a concerted effort to utilize some aspect of casual conversation during all of my sessions—whether it be a friendly greeting or a technique to brainstorm new ideas. What I have tried to do this semester is allow students to see how this conversational technique can help their papers. For example, I recently had a session with a student writing a paper about the importance of winning. She had a strong main idea for her paper but was having trouble thinking up various examples to support her thesis. Her difficulty came from the fact that she could not think of the various societal contexts where winning takes place. I asked about any activities involving her family or friends where winning is a goal and, after kicking around a few ideas, she soon realized how and where these new ideas would help her essay. I think that it is important for a tutor to consciously withhold help at times during the session so that the student can see the process of relaxed conversation at work. Of course, time limitations during the tutoring session often dictate how long a tutor can wait before hinting at ideas that might otherwise slip away. But keep in mind that the paradoxical conversational technique of silence can often pay great dividends in allowing the student to experience the sudden development of ideas through off-topic conversation.

Tutoring sessions that involve a nervous student crop up quite frequently in the writing center. This tutoring obstacle, combined with students who lack ideas for their papers, can prove to be very problematic for a tutor. With this in mind, it is important to prepare a strategy to handle this dilemma, and I have found that off-topic conversation, when "handled with care," is a very helpful tool in making the best use of a thirty-minute tutoring session.

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ASK CARL

We have a winner! Maggie Hassert, Writing Center Director at the University of Delaware, answered all the questions correctly in the "Ask Carl Figures of Speech Quiz," which ran in the June issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. For her efforts, Maggie wins a swell prize, about which I will say more later.

For those of you who have spent long hours in the library hunting the elusive answers, I apologize if I have ruined your summer. Search no further. Here are the answers.

1. *"Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like bananas."*
   This is an ENALLAGE, which Richard Lanham defines as the "substitution of one case, person, gender, number, tense, mood, part of speech, for another" (*A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* 62-64). If you had guessed "alleotheta," "anthimeria," "antiptosis," or "anthypallage," you were "close, but no cigar."

2. *"In tennis and in life, you can't win without serving."*
   According to Ed Corbett, this is a SYLLEPSIS: "use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more other words, which it modifies or governs" (*Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* 448-49). If you had guessed ZEUGMA, I would have accepted that as correct also, but since no one did, I won't bother to elaborate on Corbett's hair-splitting distinction between the two.

3. *"Graduate student"*
   This is an easy one: OXYMORON, or the linking of ordinarily contradictory terms, such as "jumbo shrimp," "pretty ugly," and "deliberate speed." During my annual pilgrimage to a shopping mall, I collected this one: "homemade deli sandwiches."

4. *Bonus question: "What contemporary rhetorician is named after two body parts."*
   Answer: PETER ELBOW. Think about it.

Congratulations, Maggie! You have just won an all-expenses-paid internship at my soon-to-be-established Writing Center Revival Center on the sandy shores of Lake Titicaca in Bolivia. As many of you know, I lead the "Rhetoric Radio Writing Center Evangelistic Team" in tent revivals across the globe in an attempt to save the language. I have just returned from our highly successful winter crusade at the Lake but was troubled that even in July it felt like winter to me in Bolivia. (I guess they are really feeling this ozone-depletion thing in South America, though the global-warming thing seems to be a myth.) In any case, July must be the rainy season in the Lake Titicaca area, because it rained throughout the entire crusade. Admittedly, we went bargain hunting when we purchased our revival tent, but we didn't expect it to leak quite as extensively as it did. My Uncle Red Green, who handles the arrangements for our road trips, dubbed this last crusade "The Winter of Our Discount Tent."

Of course, Red Green is quite a character. At a recent staff meeting, someone asked him the question we all ask ourselves every few minutes: "What is the meaning of life?" Well, Uncle Red thought a while, cleared his throat, and replied: "Let me answer this question in two parts: part 1: Who knows? and part 2. Who cares?"

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Cultural diversity in the writing center: Defining ourselves and our challenges

Reports from campuses nationwide describe both cultural diversity initiatives and backlash from students and faculty. According to Donna Gorrell, "Students not protected and favored by new legislation and policies, the reports go, are reacting with racism, sexism, and other forms of hatred toward those groups who are so favored" (1). This "new intolerance" is not limited to campuses which have seen national exposure in both print and film journalism. Actually, we are all affected in some way by the dynamics of the controversy and by the backgrounds out of which we come. Barbara Ehrenreich argues in an essay responding to multiculturalism's critics that all of us are victims of monoculturalism, a "narrow and parochial" education "that [has] left us ill-equipped to navigate a society that truly is multicultural and is becoming more so every day" (84). If we are indeed all victims of a narrow, parochial education that has left us ill-equipped to deal with a multicultural society, and if many of us are in fact white tutors and administrators in writing centers in predominantly white institutions, how can we effectively prepare ourselves to respond to the challenging—and, at times, murky—political climate in which cultural diversity immerses us? The issues are complicated, and the answers are not simple.

If we are to survive and thrive as the population in the United States becomes more diverse, we in writing centers must adapt our services to the changing clientele. We must be proactive in defining models of multicultural centers unless we want others to define what we are and what we might become. Moreover, writing center personnel must meet the challenges and move toward diversity by formally and informally collaborating with faculty and administrators of color as they plan and implement services for minority students.

Writing center personnel wishing to make their centers truly culturally diverse face six challenges:

1. Defining what we see as multicultural

2. Working with administrators and faculty on campus who can lend support to our endeavors and enable us to institutionalize changes, and—perhaps most importantly—working with personnel within our institutions who have been hired to work with minority and international students

3. Recruiting and retaining a multicultural writing center clientele

4. Recruiting, training, and retaining minority and international tutors

5. Training our tutors to become more sensitive to students with cultures, languages, and dialects different from their own

6. Assessing writing center services.

Each of these challenges is significant, complicated, and worthy of on-going dialogue.

Defining what we see as multicultural

The definition of what we see as multicultural will underlie all of our endeavors. In Minnesota, the terms "multicultural" and "cultural diversity" are defined by both the legislature and the state university system as targeting African American, Hispanic, and Native American minorities. For the purposes of academic initiatives, funding, recruitment, and retention, these minorities are favored. Thus, for the state and state university system, specific minorities equal diversity. However, when considering cultural diversity for the purposes of university curriculum and academic programs, the university itself includes non-mainstream American cultures as well as foreign cultures; thus, diversity includes such foreign cultures as African and Asian as well as American minorities such as Asian American, Native American, African American, and Hispanic. This is also true when focusing on the quality of academic, campus, and community life for the purposes of addressing racism and ethnocentrism or developing specialized support services; the university includes in its definition of cultural diversity students and faculty who are refugees, who are visiting from other countries, or who are naturalized citizens. Thus, Pacific Islanders, Indians, Africans, and Middle-Easterners, for example, are included along with American minorities. In other words, for my university, minority plus non-western equals diversity.

Although I report to the university and state university system administrators using their specific definitions of cultural diversity, I think of multiculturalism in the writing center in a very different way. For me, cultural diversity includes minority, non-western, and western—Caucasian as well as African American, Hispanic, and Native American; rural as well as urban; southern as well as northern; non-traditional as well as traditional, and so on. In other words, my definition is inclusive rather than exclusive.

Working with those who can help institutionalize change

For those of us working in predominantly white institutions, an overriding concern is support. In a very real sense, we cannot change the complexion of our staffs or clientele without the assistance of administrators and faculty who can lend support to our endeavors and enable us to institutionalize changes, and—perhaps most importantly—personnel within our institutions who have been hired to work with minority and international students: minority and international student recruiters, advisors, and those who work in minority and international support services such as cultural or academic centers. Ideally, networking with people in these po-

sitions should lead naturally to recruitment of minority and international tutors and to minority and international student use of center services.

In reality, however, this networking is frequently undercut by two distinctly different views of what the nature of support services should be—especially when it comes to minority students. On one hand are those who believe that minority students are best served by mainstreaming them into the general population to prepare them to interact with the diverse population they will meet in the work place. For example, in "10 Principles for Good Institution Practice in Removing Race/Ethnicity as a Factor in College Completion," Alfredo de los Santos, Jr. and Richard C. Richardson, Jr. argue that "Good practice...moves away from providing minority support, primarily through peripheral special programs, toward the integration of minority programs with those for majority students" (45). De los Santos and Richardson believe such services address barriers minority students face to both academic achievement and social integration. On the other hand are those who believe that minority students are best served by services designed and run by minorities for minorities; they feel that such services provide a sense of community and cultural pride.

Although the answer probably lies somewhere between these two camps, the presence of these two drastically different perspectives may seriously undercut the ability of writing centers to develop and implement cultural diversity initiatives which will truly change the complexion of writing centers and have long term impact. In some places, in fact, tutorial services for minority students are available in two places: in the writing center and in some sort of minority tutoring center. Such is the case at St. Cloud State. Although tutorial services for the general student population and ESL students are housed in the writing center, a separate Minority Academic Support Center provides minority students with tutors in all subjects, including writing.

In the past, students tutoring in this program received no formal training: they were given no strategies that would enable them to empower students to do their own work and had no means of avoiding the proofreading trap. It should be noted that Minority Academic Support Center administrators were working under two false assumptions. First,

they believed that since the tutors they had hired were good students and good writers, they needed no training to be good tutors. They also believed that since their tutors were minority students, they were already culturally sensitive and required no additional background or training to deal with students having backgrounds different from their own. Addressing these concerns required that I meet with the Dean of Fine Arts and Humanities, the academic vice president, and the director and assistant directors of the Minority Academic Support Center and gain their support in working out a resolution. Centers implementing cultural diversity initiatives will find such administrative support essential.

As a result of administrative input, two collaborative projects emerged: minority students worked with writing center tutors in producing the minority newsletter, and the writing center began publication of an annual multicultural magazine, called *Kaleidoscope*, which is a collection of students' poetry, short stories, essays, artwork, and photography. The writing center also co-hosted with Minority Student Programs a reading at the minority cultural house of the award winning writing from the magazine. This event not only enabled voices which are frequently marginalized to be heard, but co-sponsorship of this event demonstrated that Minority Student Programs has publicly acknowledged support of this magazine. In addition, the magazine has validated the excellence of work produced by ethnic minorities, has educated the university community about minority and international experience in an intimate, non-threatening way, and has included minority students in the writing center community so they are not resistant to receiving tutorial assistance.

Our experience convinces us that administrative support of writing center cultural diversity initiatives—including the support of administrators of minority academic support services as well as those administrators to whom they report—is critical to the success of these initiatives. In addition, administrators of minority academic services must be encouraged to contribute to the development of these initiatives so that they feel ownership over the programs.

Such ownership and collaboration has also been encouraged at St. Cloud State through the writing center's involvement in the summer Advanced Placement Program (APP),

an early entry program for minority, international, and refugee students. According to de los Santos and Richardson, such bridge programs, which always include tutoring as an integral component, "help make the learning environment less formidable during periods when students are most vulnerable to academic failure" (46).

As a result of this program, coordination and cooperation with those hired to work with minority students has begun to work more smoothly. An additional strength of the writing center's involvement with this program is that minority students work in the center during their first quarter in the university. Positive instructional experience early in their college career has convinced many of these students to use center services throughout their university schooling. Hence, the center's work with students in the APP has assisted in recruiting and retaining a multicultural writing center clientele.

Recruiting and retaining a multicultural writing center clientele

Minority and international students, who already feel labeled by virtue of their race, language, or cultural background, are unlikely to attend services which stamp them with yet another label. That is why it is essential that these students, in particular, do not see our centers as remedial. Therefore, at St. Cloud State, part of recruiting minority and international clientele involves simply emphasizing what we tell all students: that we work with all students, freshmen through graduate school, from departments across campus, on any aspect of the writing process. The distribution of *Kaleidoscope* has also helped: it has shown that we support and encourage creativity and appreciate a multitude of voices and backgrounds. Students wandering in to pick up a copy of the magazine have rarely made that their only visit to the center.

The writing center will soon begin outreach to minority student groups on campus by offering to present workshops on writing resumes, job application letters, and essays for graduate and law school applications. We hope that emphasizing writing that is not for freshman composition will completely undercut any myths students may have about who we are and what we do.

Much of our success so far, though, has resulted from informal communication. I and

members of my staff have attended such events as the Chinese New Year; poetry readings during African American Awareness Week; banquets, potlucks, and pow wows; and panel discussions, teleconferences, and speakers on such topics as racism and racial violence, global awareness, the "Making of *Dances with Wolves*," and the Persian Gulf War. Our steady presence and active interest in such activities shows that we are serious about what we are doing and that we are not just paying lip service to cultural diversity to fill quotas. Our presence at such events also enables us to meet and get to know students and faculty on campus with backgrounds different from our own. In addition, we have made connections by asking on-campus speakers on cultural diversity topics to submit articles to our writing center newsletter, which is distributed to all faculty and administrators on campus.

One of the most important aspects of recruiting and retaining a multicultural clientele, however, has to do with whether or not minority students are comfortable working in the center. We can create a comfortable environment for minority students through careful tutor training and ongoing assessment of our services, which will be discussed later. However, no matter how careful our training and assessment, minority students will be uncomfortable if our staffs do not themselves reflect diversity. Recruitment, training, and retention of minority and international student tutors, then, is essential.

Recruiting, training minority and international tutors

Many of the strategies we have used to recruit and retain minority writing center clientele have also improved our ability to attract minority tutors. For example, our involvement in the Advanced Placement Program, our production of *Kaleidoscope*, and our assistance in the production of the minority student newsletter have helped us to recruit minority tutors and desk workers. However, we have used additional informal and formal recruitment strategies. On-going, informal discussions with the ESL director, for example, have enabled us to recruit international graduate students.

Nevertheless, we have found that professional development opportunities are the key to recruiting both minority and international tutors. We have, in informal discussions with prospective tutors, and teachers and administrators who might recommend them,

stressed the opportunities available to tutors. Professional development possibilities include, of course, experience in working one-to-one. In addition, however, we offer the opportunity to help in supervising and training other tutors through such activities as presentations at staff meetings and in the practicum class as well as formal observation and mentoring of other tutors. We also encourage minority tutors to become involved in the judging of *Kaleidoscope* submissions and in the production and editing of the magazine. Moreover, we encourage minority tutors to write articles and to serve as editors of *Writing Consultants' InK*, the writing center's newsletter. Finally, we encourage them to present papers and workshops at regional conferences. These professional development opportunities—and the warmth and acceptance of other center personnel—have helped us to retain both minority and international tutors.

We have also been able to retain these tutors by offering them the option to become involved in cultural diversity activities, in problem-solving, in planning, and in researching; by listening to them and supporting them when they receive negative reactions from students simply because of their race, language, or cultural backgrounds; and by simply being there when they feel torn between their obligations as students and the many requests they get from various units on campus to help out by being their "resident minority person." On a homogeneous campus such as ours, demands on minority students to serve as spokespeople for their race or ethnic group are strong. It is important to remember that minority students should have the option not to speak: they may, in fact, consider their ideas, opinions, or background too private; they may be disinterested in culture or race relations or in educating others about these topics; or they may simply be—like other students—busy and involved in their own education. If we wish to retain minority students as tutors, we must respect them as individuals; although we should provide opportunities for professional development, as we do for all tutors, the focus of this professional development should be the student's choice, not ours.

The writing center plans this year to promote professional development opportunities available to tutors and to extend our recruitment of minority and international tutors by meeting with minority faculty and student special interest groups. We have also devel-

oped a brochure as a recruitment tool for our writing center practicum, which is used to screen and train tutors. This brochure will be distributed to all minority and international students with GPAs of 3 or better (on a 4-point scale) who have completed the freshman composition sequence.

Training tutors to be more culturally and linguistically sensitive

Clearly, all of our attempts to recruit and retain minority and international tutors and writing center clientele will be in vain if our tutors are not linguistically and culturally sensitive. I am reminded, for example, of a tutoring session three years ago when an African American woman was working with two tutors taking the graduate-level writing center practicum. Although the African American's teacher had not objected to dialogue using black dialect and "ghetto humor" in her essay, the tutors in training clearly did; ignoring the teacher's suggestion that the student work on development, these tutors instead kept trying to get her to take the black dialect and humor out of her paper. In addition to stepping in to resolve the situation, I have added several things to tutor training to prevent such tutor responses.

First, I use books in the tutoring practicums which raise pertinent topics. Meyer and Smith's *The Practical Tutor*, for example, has a chapter on dialect and second language interference, and Muriel Harris' *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* covers rhetorical patterns Kaplan has identified in the writing of other cultures. Finally, sections of Lustig and Koester's *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures* introduce theories relevant to intercultural communication: Stewart's taxonomy of cultural patterns (including activity orientation, social relations orientation, self-orientation, and world orientation); Hall's high-and low-context patterns (covering use of covert and overt messages, importance of ingroups and outgroups, and orientation to time); and Hofstede's cultural patterns (relating to power distance, individualism/collectivism, and their effects). Lustig and Koester's book also provides in-depth discussions of verbal and nonverbal cultural communication and potential obstacles to intercultural communication, including ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, and racism. Readings in books such as these provide tutors with background knowledge of subjects relating

to cross-cultural tutoring. These readings also highlight issues—both overt and covert—which affect intercultural communication and sensitize tutors to the complexity and multiple dimensions of tutoring in a culturally diverse writing center. Discussions of such readings are inevitably lively. They also sometimes surface behaviors and attitudes that are unwelcome in writing centers; these can be addressed immediately in the practicum classroom, and potential tutors who are deemed uneducable can be eliminated from the list of those who will be hired to tutor long-term in the writing center.

Second, I require that practicum tutors write a paper about the discourse or speech communities of which they are a part. This paper requires that they analyze their own experience: specifically that tutors reflect upon the various dialects and rhetorical patterns they use when interacting with different groups they belong to (whether formal or informal groups) and share their insights with their peers. Students learn from this assignment how much they adapt the language, content, and organization of their writing and speaking to their audience; how much their use of language determines whether or not they gain "membership" in a group; and how flexible they already are in addressing the demands of various speech communities. Such assignments also encourage potential tutors to appreciate the similarities and the differences between discourse communities.

Third, the ESL director makes presentations in the practicums and staff meetings about contrastive rhetoric and other topics pertinent to tutoring ESL students. We have practiced identifying the rhetorical patterns of different cultures, talked about strategies for encouraging international students to adapt to the direct American organizational plan, and considered the emotional responses that frequently accompany such a shift. In addition, we have talked about tutorial strategies for addressing sentence-level errors. Finally, we have reviewed how ESL teachers comment on student papers and have coordinated classroom and tutorial instruction.

Fourth, we work in small groups problem-solving possible tutor responses to cultural conflict scenarios which have taken place in the center. I also provide on-going training in cultural diversity by asking minority and international faculty to speak at staff meetings, to educate tutors about issues facing students, and to raise concerns pertinent to

tutoring a multicultural clientele. Additionally, I have used videotapes on culture shock and on ivory tower racism on St. Cloud's campus to facilitate discussion about minority and international students' experiences in the university. Finally, we are currently in the process of developing a videotape which shows segments of three tutorials: one between an African American tutor and a white student, one between an Hispanic student and a white tutor, and one between an Asian student and a white tutor. The goal of this videotape is to show subtle examples of racial/ethic stereotypes at work in the writing center and to illustrate how they undercut the success of the tutorials. This videotape will be used in practicums and staff meetings as a vehicle for small group discussion.

Assessing writing center services

Assessment is the key, and it should begin with establishing yearly goals. For us at St. Cloud State, yearly goals have included planning specific multicultural activities we will complete, as well as targeting the number of minority and international tutors we hope to recruit and the number of tutoring and workshop hours we hope to reach for specific populations. Setting these goals, and then keeping careful records to show how well we have met them, helps us to reflect upon what we have achieved and what we have yet to do.

Evaluations are also a central part of this assessment. First of all, we have added a cultural sensitivity question to our student evaluations which we distribute at the end of each quarter. Specifically, we ask students, "Was your tutor sensitive to your individual needs, including academic, racial, and cultural background?" In addition, we have developed specialized evaluations which we send to teachers of minority and international students, asking them to comment on students' progress in the specific aspects of writing covered in tutorial instruction. Finally, we have interviewed a random sample of minority students to find out whether or not students have taken advantage of center services and why, what they like about the services, what they feel could be improved, and what their impressions of the center's comfort level for minority students are. This survey has informed us that many minority students are simply unaware of our services; we now know that we need to advertise our services more widely in media that will reach this potential clientele. We plan to sur-

vey minority students on a regular basis to track our progress and to monitor our services in an on-going way.

By thinking carefully about how we define cultural diversity; by working with administrators and faculty on campus who can support our endeavors and enable us to institutionalize changes; by recruiting and retaining minority and international tutors and clientele; by training our tutors to become more sensitive to students with cultures, languages, and dialects different from their own; and by assessing our services, we can develop writing centers which are truly multicultural. We need to define ourselves as centers of diversity and embrace the challenges that diversity brings.

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𝒯UTORS' COLUMN

Getting it on the page

ESL students arrive at the learning resource center with lots of ideas locked securely in their heads and an overwhelming fear of the blank page. They are concerned with the same issues that confront all writers: how to approach a topic, how to narrow it, and how to organize their thoughts. Suddenly their problems become my own.

Writing—should be—a four-letter word. Unfortunately it took me thirty-five years to hit upon which four-letter word it was. I stumbled through more than a few "choice" ones before my tutoring experiences gave me the opportunity to analyze my own writing process and led me to one that worked. Writing should be—easy.

Trying to follow someone else's idea of a brilliant strategy for getting your thoughts on the page only to discover you are more confused than ever creates the fear we all associate with the act of writing. A teacher, tutor, fellow student, or parent says, "Do it like this," insisting that it's the best way because it works for them, but it doesn't work for you. Now, faced with failure, neither the strategy nor the paper work.

In my enthusiasm to help students in what I perceived to be the "right" way, I found myself trying to use strategies for writing and organization that had been foisted upon me by teachers, tutors, fellow students and parents. When asked to describe my own writing process, I discovered it was a hodgepodge of all these brilliant strategies I couldn't master. Through tutoring I realized that my "hodgepodge" was all right and that no single organizing strategy works for everyone. The trick is finding the right combination of strategies to motivate the student into the act of writing.

My first "tactic" involves sizing up the student and planning my attack. In this war the first beach-head I have to take is the student's fear. As friend and "fearless" leader I willingly jump into the breach. After reading the assignment and briefly discussing the student's paper or ideas, I ask the student to put everything away for a minute and take out a blank sheet of paper. The battle is engaged.

Using the assignment as my guide and taking into account the student's paper, notes or ideas, I start asking simple questions. Sometimes this is all it takes to get started. Other times the walls are impenetrable, but I'll stop at nothing to get the student to write something on that page.

I use all the old standards: the five W's and the H routine; the outline; no outline, but a list; no list, but a series of columns with adjacent ideas directly across from each other. I throw in all the "new" ideas like brainstorming, clustering, freewriting, guided imaging, and glossing. I've even "invented" some of my own on the spot like "keep it a secret," "make it a joke," "tell a lie," or "get a date."

Continually asked questions, refining the answers, and going down my list of writing strategies, I find that it usually takes three or four different approaches before something clicks and the pen starts moving. Locking in on whatever works, I encourage the student to keep writing, filling up the page.

What's on the page? A hodgepodge. Any number of old and new strategies, a few jokes and maybe a secret. It's whatever works for that particular student—her own personal hodgepodge she had *actively* created. I don't spend a lot of time on any one system or strategy, and no time at all on ones that aren't prompting the pen.

The point is to get students to think about their topic in some kind of framework, to organize their thoughts by narrowing the focus of their papers through different strategies, and to give them confidence in their ability to write. I know I'm coaxing them to put pen to paper, but once it's there, they are the ones filling up the page. Sometimes my questions are met with answers—sometimes resistance. I ask them to write both down. Either way students are responding through writing—it's on the page and they own it.

It's like getting a present. They all go away with something in their hands that had made them think about this particular assignment in a new or expanded way. Many return with a new draft or a different topic, and we get out a blank sheet of paper and go to work. They are fearless and I'm having the time of my life—we're getting it on the page!

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Revised Date for LAANE Conference

The Learning Assistance Association of New England will be meeting on Friday, October 28, 1994 (not Saturday, October 29, as previously announced), at the suburban campus of Northeastern University, in Burlington, MA. For a registration form, please contact Margaret Pobywajlo, UNH at Manchester, 220 Hackett Hill Rd, Manchester, NH 03102 (603-668-0700, ext. 255).

New *TETYC* editor

Mark Reynolds, Jefferson Davis Community College, Brewton, Alabama, is the newly appointed editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, a quarterly publication of the National Council of Teachers of English. *TETYC* publishes articles on composition, literature, pedagogy, basic writing, technical writing, professional issues, and other subjects related to the teaching of English in the first two college years. Subscription information is available from NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801. Contributor information is available from the editor at P.O. Box 250, Brewton, AL 36427.

Tutoring across cultures

Tutoring a writer from another culture means that the tutor has to address cultural differences as well as the student's writing. Each person represents a specific group, specific "set of behaviors (verbal and non-verbal), materials, world view, values, symbols and designs for living" (Korzenny 104). In other words, people cannot be separated from their cultural background; the relationship between the language (both written and spoken) and its social setting plays an important role in initiating an effective tutoring session. However, people tend to make judgments according to their own behaviors, attitudes, and language usage without realizing that one set of communicative rules does not always apply to another language. Thus, tutors in writing centers not only face the challenge of interacting successfully with "strange" writers to reach the same goal—presenting good writing to their readers, but also must avoid misunderstandings among people from different backgrounds. In this paper, tutors and writers are divided into two different groups: we will look at how Americans can tutor Asian students, Asians can tutor American students, and Asians can tutor Asian students effectively and happily despite possible cultural blocks.

American tutors with Asian students

When an American tutors an Asian student, cultural differences become problematic because of differences in systems of logic, in non-verbal communication, and in the styles of asking and answering questions. One of the main problems is Asian students' logical way of thinking reflected in their writing. As Kaplan's (1984) cultural thought patterns reveal, Americans write linearly while Asians circle around a main point without touching it directly. Therefore, an American may find it hard to catch the main point from an Asian student's paper. American logic dictates the direct, unequivocal communication of information, while Asian logic dictates a more subtle and artistic style of communication. The tutor may feel that the writer lacks basic writing ability since the whole organization seems up-side down and the ideas are too vague to show the student's stand. At the same time, Asian students may

think that the American tutors' suggestions for a more direct form of communication are asking them to express themselves in a rude, uncivilized, and uneducated style.

First, the tutor needs to understand this different style of writing and to realize that neither rhetorical pattern is better than the other: Americans simply prefer a direct pattern and Asians a more artistic one. With this understanding, the American tutor then needs to create the same understanding on the part of Asian students. He must treat the student carefully and patiently by introducing the English way of writing and by reviewing with the student a number of good model essays. After being exposed to the English structure and style of writing, Asian students will know what kind of writing is acceptable to an American reader. In the writing conference, the American tutor will be a good guide if he becomes a patient and an interested reader.

Second, an American tutor needs to understand an Asian student's non-verbal behaviors, which are an important part of the student's feedback in the tutoring process. Non-verbal behaviors, as Foust says, are shown by "body movements and gestures, use of space, eye movements, the 'use' of time and touching behavior" (14). In the tutorial, although writing is discussed, ignorance of certain signals indicated by non-verbal behaviors may either embarrass the writer or cause misunderstanding. For example, extended eye contact means frankness and sincerity to an American but may give offense or can have a special underlying sexual meaning to an Asian. The American tutor needs to understand, first, that a lack of eye contact from the student does not mean lack of attention or disrespect. Second, for the same sex, an American should sometimes replace good eye contact, which is a popular strategy among Americans, with sitting close to an Asian. In Asia, especially between students of the same gender, close space shows a person's intention to be another's friend and may avoid putting a person in the awkward position of being looked at by an unfamiliar person. For the opposite sex, the American tutor should avoid direct

eye-contact when listening to Asian students, as this American behavior would be regarded as a sexual advance or sexual harassment. Concerning seating arrangements, the American tutor may sit down first before the student comes to the table and let the student choose a chair at a distance appropriate to the student.

American tutors may also misunderstand non-verbal cues by Asian students and think that students understand an explanation when they do not. Since Asians usually have less facial expression than Americans, it becomes difficult for an American to tell whether an Asian understands what the tutor says just by looking at the writer's face. At the same time, most Asian students are reserved and tend to use few words or just conveniently keep silent unless well oriented or stimulated. Thus the tutor, especially before she is familiar with an Asian student, needs to observe with her eyes more often than with her ears in order to get sufficient feedback. For example, Japanese listeners tend to use head movement continuously and frequently to indicate understanding (Maynard). Instead of expressing their agreement in words, Japanese listeners nod. Their high frequency of nodding indicates their high rate of agreement. On the other hand, frequent eye blinking may indicate a lack of comprehension or an inability to answer a question (Choi & Choi). In short, non-verbal behaviors by Asian students may be interpreted as a lack of attention or interest by an American tutor, but the students may actually be paying attention and trying to communicate respect and interest.

Third, cultural background may also influence an American tutor's strategy in raising questions and detecting an Asian student's real concerns because of cultural differences in wait time and because of the confusion of yes/no questions. Traditionally, Asian culture teaches a student how to accept or gather information instead of reacting individually as Americans learn in their educational system. According to my observation of an ESL class, when the teacher raised an open question or just asked "any questions?" European students, in a fashion similar to

Americans, would not wait for more than eight seconds to give their responses, while Asian students had no trouble keeping silent for nearly twenty seconds, even when their names were called by the teacher. Americans value "thinking on their feet," so they tend to answer questions as fast as possible. Asians tend to consider a talker suspicious or foolish. Consequently, Asian students take their time when formulating an answer to a question. This fifteen- to twenty-second wait time can prove very painful for an American tutor but very comfortable for an Asian student. Therefore, American tutors need to tolerate silence for twenty seconds after asking a question. Asian students are also reluctant to identify problems or to ask questions because of concerns for "face." As Robinson (1992) has reported, Asian students may be reluctant to identify problems, as this admission of ignorance would be a "face" diminishing act. They have also been accustomed to not asking their teachers questions in a classroom. They do so to show respect to the teacher and to avoid showing off in front of their classmates. Questioning a teacher in class would be regarded as challenging the teacher's authority (Robinson, 1992). Students would be most reluctant to correct an error on the part of the teacher. A Malaysian student once wrote in his journal, "Even though I knew that my teacher made a mistake, I just kept silent. I did not want my teacher to lose his face in class." At the same time, Asian students should be more comfortable asking questions in the one-to-one tutoring session than in a classroom context. Again, the main point is that American tutors need to be patient with their Asian students and not expect the typical interaction of an American student.

In the writing conference, American tutors may find that their Asian students tend to avoid answering questions or to limit their answers to "yes" or "no." The yes/no question is a special problem. First, a negative yes/no question (Don't you mean...?) would be answered, "No, I do," or "Yes, I don't," in several Asian languages. Second, even with normal yes/no questions or simple statements, a "yes" response does not necessarily mean agreement or understanding. It may mean I am paying attention in the same manner of an "uh-huh" in English. Third, students may simply be using a politeness formula to show the tutor the proper respect that a knowledge-giver should receive. In short, "yes" may mean "yes," "no," or nothing.

Therefore, to get more information from Asian students, tutors need to structure their questions to help students learn to interact more in the writing conference. First, they should avoid yes/no questions. Second, they can raise questions which require that students make alternative choices to enable the students to feel more comfortable answering them. Then they can ask open-ended questions to motivate the students' thinking and get a broader view of their opinions. Again, tutors should be patient and wait up to twenty seconds for students to answer.

Asian tutors with American students

A second cross-cultural tutoring situation occurs when an Asian student tutors an American. While Asian tutors may face some problems because of their non-native English, these tutors also have some advantages over American tutors. In this situation, the tutor has to face a different language, unfamiliar culture, and, at the same time, the distrust and sometimes racism of some American students. The tutor often doubts if his language capacity is good enough to give advice about a native speaker's writing. He may ask himself, "Will the writer take a foreigner's advice?" In addition, the slang, jargon, and dialect spoken by the writer may confuse the tutor. It is said that a Chinese is afraid of an American teacher's cracking jokes because all the other students laugh and only he is at a loss. If the tutor does not want to face such embarrassing situations in a tutoring session, an Asian has to learn idiomatic colloquial American English fast. Many opportunities to experience new things and be exposed to daily language exist in the tutor's residence hall and dining hall, and even on a bus. After the tutor knows "cool," "holy smokes," "eat a horse," and other expressions such as these, he may feel more at ease when he talks with an American.

At the same time, since Asian tutors are not native speakers, some distrust does exist in some American students' minds. In one of my tutoring sessions, the American student had problems in using punctuation with quotation marks. He placed the comma or period outside instead of inside the quotation marks at the end of the sentence. I pointed out this problem and asked him to correct the punctuation. His first reaction was, "Is it true? I doubt it." After I showed him the rule in the handbook and asked for other American tutors' confirmation, he accepted

what I said. He felt a little bit embarrassed and told me that he really appreciated my help. For the Asian tutor, such distrust is both understandable and hard to confront. The tutor realizes that she is not a native speaker and is still learning English. At the same time, an Asian student would never confront her as the American student did in this example. A larger question is whether this distrust is connected to prejudice.

In an unfamiliar culture, Asian tutors may also face distrust from Americans since they may seem ignorant of what is popular and supposed to be known by all Americans, such as General Motors, famous American actors/actresses, or a show on T.V. It takes time for Asian tutors to be exposed to different aspects of American culture, and they need to be confident in their abilities. Sometimes, Asian tutors' weaknesses can turn into strengths if tutors handle them correctly. Because they do not know these common things, they raise more questions for the writers and help them produce better reader-based prose. From answering these questions, some American students gain a sense of how to clarify and further develop their ideas.

Another aspect which challenges Asian tutors is American students' attitudes towards and concepts of education. As tutors, Asians tend to treat writers as "students" according to their understanding of what a teacher is. In an Asian's mind, the teacher's duty is to give suggestions and be in charge of the session. However, she may find that even in front of an instructor, an American student takes it easy and starts an informal conversation; the student may sometimes even seem to lack respect towards a teacher. This is understandable given the differences between Asian and American classrooms. In an Asian classroom, whatever a teacher says is assumed to be right; students accept it as their natural learning process; yet in an American classroom, if the teacher's ideas are not the same as the student's, the student will argue with the teacher without hesitation. In an American student's mind, teachers and students are the same in a sense: they are all learners. An American's acceptance of what the tutor says cannot be influenced by the teacher-student relationship as it is in an Asian country.

In addition, as Robinson points out, in an American classroom, the teacher is an "en-

tertainer" who pays attention to motivating the students' interest, while an Asian teacher fills his course with lectures and learning materials no matter whether the students can or want to absorb them or not. In Asian countries, teachers usually dominate classes. The teacher-student relationship is a kind of parent-child relationship. It is natural for an Asian teacher to be direct and to say to a student "You do...." In the U.S., a teacher might actually be indirect and say "Could you do...?" While in tutoring sessions, Asian tutors need to shift their language. Rather than making commands, they need to make suggestions. One colleague suggests using "I" instead of "you" language. Instead of telling the student "You need to do this," the tutor would focus more on letting the student do the work by saying, "I don't understand this." In order to establish a friendly relationship and create a relaxing environment, Asian tutors need to change their role from a teacher to a peer, or perhaps take on the senior position in the older-younger sibling duality as opposed to the parent-child duality that would be more common in Confucian-influenced Asians. An Asian tutor's touching the main point at the beginning of the session and trying to load as much information as possible into the session may turn into a failed session for an American student. In short, the Asian tutor needs to talk less and let the American talk more.

Though there are potential weak points in tutoring Americans, Asian tutors have some special advantages in tutoring native speakers because of their language sensitivity. Once a Chinese tutor told me that some American students came to her instead of another American for help since they felt that she could explain grammatical rules more clearly than Americans did. American tutors, as native speakers of English, can say "It sounds good," "We do not write in that way," or "We need an article here to keep the ideas flowing." But they often feel frustrated using particular grammatical terms to analyze students' problems. In contrast, Asian tutors can talk about the differences and show reasons from the perspective of being a second language learner. Since Asian tutors started learning English from grammar and sentence structure instead of acquiring it naturally in their early years, they concentrate more on language differences and are more sensitive detectors of their target language's sentence-level problems. So international tutors from Asia can be successful with American students because of their

ability to explain grammar and because of their culture-free position as an audience if only they can overcome their own doubts and the prejudice or distrust of American students. In addition, one could argue that as a cross-cultural experiential learning experience, this situation provides the American student a great opportunity to learn to work with someone from another culture.

Asian tutors with Asian students

Sometimes, an Asian tutor tutors another Asian student. Because the tutor shares a similar cultural background with the student, such as education, behaviors, and even common language, an Asian tutor can become a language and cultural broker: a bridge between Asian and American cultures, between American teachers and Asian students. Because it is easy for Asian tutors to make friends with their Asian students, they can play two roles at the same time in tutoring sessions: language brokers and counselors.

Although there might be some problems, Asian tutors can greatly help Asian students to overcome their language difficulties. Facing an Asian tutor, a student who has been in the U.S. for a short period of time may get rid of the nervousness she has about trying to catch the words when an American speaks at his normal speed or using limited vocabulary to talk with a native speaker about her poor writing. One of my regular appointments, a student from Japan, has trouble understanding his teacher's spoken English. He told me frankly that he had never taken listening comprehension or spoken English in Japan. He wrote in his journal several times, "My English is very poor." So when I talked with him, I used repetition and paid a lot of attention to make sure he really understood me. Since I was also an international student, he felt free to ask about my experiences in understanding and speaking English in the U.S. I used the comments of my American roommate's parents and told him that my English had improved a lot in correct usage and intonation since I first came here. He realized that improvement took time, and he became confident about catching up with the others. Then I suggested that he watch the news on TV and imitate the correct pronunciation. Since news usually follows a particular pattern, it should be easy for him to understand. Even though he cannot understand every sentence, he can still guess what it means from looking at the pictures. Later, he told me it worked.

Listening comprehension might also be a serious problem in some conferences. When Asian students speak English, most of them have foreign accents which are influenced by their native languages. If we do not understand their native languages, we have to try hard to distinguish their sounds and predict their meanings. Before coming to the U.S. to study, if the tutor was trained in standard English, he may have never listened to a student from a different culture speaking English in another way. Therefore, when the tutor sits beside an Asian, paraphrasing or interpreting—such as "Do you mean...?" "Can I say...?" or "Is it...?"—or sometimes using expressions—like "pardon me," "I'm sorry," "Would you...?"—becomes necessary. These sentences help the tutor to understand what the writer is saying without embarrassing him by simply asking "What?" If time allows, Asian tutors may also ask the students to write down key words when they speak. I used this method to do brainstorming when I tutored an Indonesian student who had a speech disorder that affected his Indonesian too. In that case, I avoided giving him the impression that even another international student could not understand him. Yet by looking at his words, I gradually found his rules of speaking English. It helped me a lot to understand him when I tutored him in the following weeks. Eventually, I could understand him just by listening to him.

Asian tutors can also help reinforce the instruction of American teachers. Asian students usually are open and frank to Asian tutors. They tend to expose their problems in learning writing to Asian tutors more than to American tutors. For example, many Asian students find it hard to accept the English way of writing: giving thesis, topic sentences, then controlling ideas, explanations and details. In particular, those who were good writers at home think the English writing style is bland. It seems that every paper starts with a thesis, and every paragraph begins with a topic sentence and is supported by examples. Once an Asian student expressed his opinions about English writing to an Asian tutor: "I like the Asian way of writing. At home, I just wrote down what I thought in whatever form I liked. People could understand me. But here, my teacher always asks me to be specific and give explanations. I think this kind of writing is stupid." The tutor said, "Yeah, I like Asian writing too. But we are studying in the U.S. now. We need to change in order to make

our writing acceptable to American readers. That is part of our learning, right?" Then by giving further explanations about English writing, the Asian tutor actually reinforced the American teacher's instruction. The Asian tutor changed the student's attitude and made it easier for him to accept and adjust to the new way of thinking and writing.

For all the three situations, the writing conference gives the tutor a chance not only to work with writing and students, but also to share interesting and different cultures. Understanding the writer, understanding the culture, and understanding the writer's writing are intermingled into one process. Tutoring a writer from another culture may enrich the tutor's knowledge, expose the tutor to another set of rules, and at the same time, give the tutor a heavy task: to learn to appreciate different thinking and behaviors. Yet with mutual understanding, I believe that Americans and Asians may find and use effective strategies to remove their cultural blocks and make each of their tutoring sessions successful and beneficial to writers from cultures different from their own.

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Starting from scratch: Developing a tutor-training program

I was asked to direct the University of Findlay's Writing Center, after having been a faculty member for only three months. At that time, no formal training program in composition theory or in tutorial skills existed for peer tutors. Student-tutors were hired on the basis of their composition course grade and their overall GPA. From the grapevine I learned of the Writing Center's mixed reputation. There were successes of course, but the major negative was that it was thought of chiefly as a proofreading parlor. Several of the English faculty even confided that they had advised their students *not* to use the Center. A big job lay ahead, I knew, but having been a tutor myself I understood well the benefits of a strong writing center for students, and I was eager to accept the challenge. My first step was to implement a tutor-training program.

The administration was very supportive of my initial efforts. Tutors would be required to attend, and were to be duly compensated for, these training sessions. Most of these tutors were experienced "legacies" from the old regime who felt it somewhat beneath their dignity to attend our training sessions. Not surprisingly, these were the tutors who stood most in need. Two of the original seven tutors survived the reaccreditation process and are today accomplished tutors at the Center.

We began with five introductory sessions covering the following three topics: tutoring as distinct from proofreading, perfecting interpersonal skills, and tutoring ESL students. Together, we also reviewed several sample essays and discussed the sequence of instruction to achieve each goal. In the absence of a request to the contrary from the student's instructor, I urged our tutors to pay more attention to an essay's content, organization, and paragraphing than simply to matters of mechanics.

In order to minimize the expense of paying tutors for their training and to overcome the limitations of what could be covered in a few sessions, I designed a tutor training course required of all new tutors prior to or during their first semester of tutoring. All students meet for weekly one-hour sessions and maintain a journal on their tutoring experiences. In addition to the aforementioned topics, the weekly sessions focus on Writing Center procedures, teaching the writing process, preparing for tutoring, identifying student writing problems, handling problems that might arise in the Writing Center, and tutoring LD students. They also take the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator which provides a perspective on learning styles. Time is set aside during each session to explore particular concerns.

Students who wish to earn as many as two additional credit hours for the course beyond the standard one-hour credit can do so by working on projects that make a contribution to the Center. Students who elected to take the course for additional credit hours chose to make an interactive tutor-training videotape that illustrated and offered solutions for the most common problems tutors face at the University of Findlay. Enthusiasm for this project was so high that tutors taking the course for minimal academic credit got involved as well. Four tutors even presented the videotape at a Michigan Tutorial Association Conference.

Tutor training is no panacea for all tutoring problems. Some tutoring situations will have to be worked out through trial and error. But I am confident that our tutor training program has lifted the morale of tutors, our student clientele, and faculty alike. Tutors realize they are professionals who are making a contribution to their fellow students and the university. Student use of the Writing Center has doubled this fall, as compared with the same period last year; and 35% more faculty report that they recommend their students use the Writing Center.

Patricia Salomon
University of Findlay
Findlay, Ohio

CUNY Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
March 10, 1995
Brooklyn, NY
"Embracing Change: New Investigations of Writing and Writing Centers"
Keynote speaker: Peter Elbow

Proposals should include type of presentation and presentation title. Include name(s) of presenter(s), position(s), institution, address, phone (home/office). Send three copies of proposal (maximum 250 words) with 2-3 line summary to: Lawrence Thompson, Writing Center, Kingsborough Community College-CUNY, 2001 Oriental Blvd., Brooklyn, NY 11235. Proposals due November 8, 1994. For more information, call the conference co-chairs: Lucille Nieporent (718-369-5405) or Kim Jackson (212-650-7348).

Conference on the Teaching of Writing

October 21, 1994
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For information, contact Tom Grady, Conference on the Teaching of Writing, Bristol Community College, 777 Elsbree St., Fall River, MA 02720; 508-678-2811, ext. 2282.

THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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