...FROM THE EDITOR...

In the September newsletter I asked about your preferences for type size in the newsletter. When re-formatted last year, the newsletter switched from 10-point to the present 9-point, on the advice of a graphics designer who noted that pages set in smaller size look cleaner, more contemporary. Not wishing to be archaic (and conscious of the growing attention paid to page formatting in writing), I followed his suggestion. But I wonder how wise that decision was. Those of you who have responded to my question in the Sept. issue have uniformly stated a preference for the larger type, and if I hear a few more votes cast this way, I'll switch soon. This is YOUR newsletter, so please let me know.

That raises another issue. As more writers come to our centers from disciplines where page formatting and other visual concerns are important, we need to know more about tutoring for such matters. If you have some useful insights to pass along, we look forward to hearing from you too. Responses to a reader request on page 4, concerning credit-bearing writing labs, would also be appreciated.

And yet one more challenge for you to respond to. On page 4 of the lead article in this month's issue, Susan Blau notes that the stories we tell one another are powerful ways to connect theory to practice. What are the stories told in your writing lab?

•Muriel Harris, editor

Issues in tutoring writing: Stories from our center

"Help the writer, not the writing."
"Let the client set the agenda."
"Writing is a collaborative process."
"We don't proofread."

We've said these words so often they've become our writing center mantras. Yet, when I listen to the talk in our center, it's clear that in the real world of conferencing, practice often differs from theory.

Just as the paradigm shift in composition theory from product to process was based on looking at what writers do when they write, writing center theory should be informed by what writing fellows and their clients actually do in their conferences.

Here are five scenarios from our center that challenged conventional writing center wisdom. Each issue is annotated by the writing fellows' recognition of the problem, our deliberations, some strategies we applied, and implications of the issue for writing center practice. Obviously, not all problems have easy solutions, and some of the solutions I describe evolved over many semesters. I offer these stories hoping that they might serve as springboards to discussion about writing center theory and practice.

Personal Issues

The textbook writing center conference is built on collaborative learning theory. But,

collaboration, as many scholars have pointed out, is a complex concept and takes many forms. (See Severino and Lunsford for two incisive views of collaboration in the writing center setting.) Our experience shows that any type of collaboration quickly breaks down when students bring certain kinds of emotional baggage to the tutoring session.

1. Dependency

In our writing center, with its candy jar and sub-text of nurturing, students find, if not a friend, at least a peer. The writing fellow provides a smile and assurance that writing is a process that can be improved. Stu-

dents find a willing collaborator with whom to brainstorm, compose or revise. All for the good. Except that sometimes this middle ground between authority and friend is hard to define for both the fellow and the student. Writing fellows often find themselves "walking the boundaries" as Adam wrote in his end-of- term report:

> In the course of a half-hour session, I'm a friend, with the same problems as my client. I'm a teacher, explaining the dogma. I'm a co-conspirator, explaining ways around the dogma. And I'm a student, listening to everything the client says.

The tutor/client relationship is equally confounding for needy students who try to make the relationship something it's not. Michelle, a veteran tutor, found that in her final semester, when she was feeling confident and clear about her tutoring skills, she was thrown by the emotional demands that surfaced. She wrote:

> When I took a job as a tutor, I had never worked in a helping profession. I thought that my love for writing would carry me past my inexperience. But "helping people" know how to set boundaries and I didn't. When a student rushed in at the end of the day shouting, "It's an emergency," I stayed. When a student wanted to call me at home to ask questions, I gave them my number. If I had to cancel an appointment, I would schedule another one for the student on my own time.

> Soon international students stopped me in the halls to ask questions. They demanded copies of my class notes, called late at night for me to explain teachers' comments to them. One woman wanted me to go with her to get her drivers' license. I resented them, even though I hadn't set any guidelines for my own behavior. I had to learn to say no to them and to define for myself my task as a tutor.

Michelle needed to set limits, to make her personal boundaries clear to her students, a difficult and complex task. Yet, not much has been written in writing center literature about this aspect of tutoring even though psychology and pop psychology are rife with studies of dependency and co-dependency.

Michael Pemberton's presentation at the 1993 Conference on College Communica-

tion and Composition suggested some psychological models for reducing dependency. Useful though it may be to recognize and identify this problem, surely we don't want the graduate or undergraduate writing fellow to become a resident shrink.

We can be aware of dependency issues, talk about setting personal boundaries, and refer students to professional counselors, if necessary. But, we also have to realize that while true collaboration is certainly achievable, it may be hard to attain in some tutoring sessions. Moreover, there are writing center relationships where collaboration may not even be desirable; international students, for example, come to the center specifically to find an authority in their new language.

2. Passivity

Passivity, like dependency, is a psychological problem that won't stay outside the writing center's doors. Students are not "sentenced" to our center, but some do come reluctantly. Their body language and attitude are a clear challenge.

Dan was one of those students. He was very distant from his work, didn't seem to want to improve his writing. Yet he came to the writing center and signed up with Sallie, a high energy, high powered writing fellow. Sallie describes the conference as a dance. She would be sitting straight in her chair, elbows on the table, ready to work. Dan would come in, scoot his chair back from the table, and lean back in his chair. She would hand him the pen. He would hand it back to her.

Sallie tried to have Dan set the agenda, but often with passive students, the result is frustration for the writing fellow and the student. "What do you want to work on" elicits "I don't know," "grammar," and "my writing" more often than it allows the student to chart the course for the conference. After going over the same type of grammatical problem three times, Sallie asked Dan to find and correct an error in the next paragraph. "You do it," Dan replied, and Sallie lost her cool. "I really let loose and yelled," she says. Dan's response to her anger was to sit up and correct the error. Sallie discovered inadvertently that one way to deal with passivity is to force the student to take control. Interestingly, she relinquished control by losing it.

Dan didn't become a great writer, not even a particularly good one, according to Sallie,

but he kept coming back and kept signing up with her. And, she says, "The most important thing I learned was not to hold the pen. It tells through your own body language that you're not going to take control of their writing."

Passivity, like dependency, is a characteristic of some students who come to the writing center to have needs met that are outside the purview of tutoring writing. If the writing fellow can help the student work through control issues and get on task, then the tutoring can proceed. However, since we run writing centers, not counseling centers, it's important to know where to set limits and when to end the session.

Ethical Issues

Sometimes letting the client set the agenda can result in frustration, as in Sallie and Dan's situation, and sometimes it can lead to murky ethical dilemmas. It's hard for a writing fellow to "help the writer" when the writer uses blatantly offensive language. It's hard to know how to respond to a student's agenda that includes revising an essay on masturbation or one that promulgates racial stereotyping.

1. Inappropriate Topics

Clearly, what is appropriate for a university paper is relative to the course, the professor, the intended audience, and the format. Masturbation can be a fine topic in a developmental psych course or a Philip Roth novel. But, when a student handed a memoir about masturbation to Sheila, a mature and extroverted writing fellow, she felt that his purpose was simply to shock her. She questioned the appropriateness of the topic in an academic setting as well as the writer's intentions in bringing this paper to a "female fellow." Sheila tells how she handled the situation:

> This student's paper was entitled "Discovery" and focused on the first time he masturbated, and apparently every time since. As the student settled into his chair, allegedly seeking advice on grammar, punctuation and style, I nervously checked to see if my blouse was fully buttoned.

> Perhaps he was sexist and consciously chose to harass a female tutor, or perhaps he really wanted help on this paper. Regardless of motive, our main task as tutors is not moral instruction. . . . I found the paper personally

reprehensible and questioned whether I should even continue the session. . . . Aside from writing guidance, maybe I could subtly convince him that masturbation is not an appropriate topic for a university level paper.

> My strategy was simple: Use more graphic, biologically correct language than he did. . . . The moment I questioned him—Was he describing the surface caress or the firm grip hold?—the atmosphere changed . . . Once he realized that I was not going to giggle prudishly and retreat. . ., we began to really work on the paper.

Although Sheila defused this student's potential threat to her through logic and an unflappable demeanor, she was uncomfortable in a role that demanded that she be more than a writing collaborator. And, from the tutor's point of view, any conference that borders on harassment, sexual or psychological, is unacceptable. Writing fellows and directors have to be vigilant about guarding those borders. Sheila herself questioned whether she should continue the session, even though, in this case, she felt her strategy was effective.

One of the many ethical issues raised in this situation is whether or not a writing fellow should impose her own standards or commonly accepted standards of morality on a student's work. Our policy is "No. . .it's not our job." Unfortunately, when deeply held beliefs are challenged, in practice we sometimes ignore theory.

2. Racism

Ann's student, a bright, gum-snapping young woman, went to the local gym to research her obligatory freshman composition "classification" paper. Although the assignment itself demands stereotyping, most students seem aware of the pitfalls of pigeonholing. But, this particular student seemed unaware that talking about "Jewish princesses" and "Italian stallions" could be offensive. Ann saw her dilemma as an ethical one. Should she tell her student that what she wrote was offensive? Would she be crossing the line between helping her with her writing and moralizing?

Ann brought copies of the student's paper to a meeting, and we took turns role playing the situation to see what strategies would surface. In each case, even though the "stu-

dent" writing fellow played out different emotional responses ranging from "Aha" through carefully selected expletives, the consistent solution was to point out to the student that some people, including teachers, would find the language offensive but that it was ultimately the student's choice about what language to use.

The writing fellows have found this stand to be useful in situations where conscious or unconscious sexism, racism, or insensitivity appear in a student's paper. Their response is always reader-based ("an editor or teacher might respond in this way. . ."), and then the decision is left to the writer.

Writing centers are certainly not in the business of legislating morality or policing papers for political correctness. We have to recognize and appreciate differing political and ethical views. We have to serve as writing guides, not moral guardians. Nothing could be harder.

3. Proofreading

More meeting time, more space on our electronic forum, and more informal conversations have been devoted to the fine line between proofreading and teaching writing than to any other issue.

Our guidelines, our brochures, and our flyers spell out, sometimes in italics, sometimes in caps WE DON'T PROOFREAD OR COPYEDIT. In our orientation meetings and talks we emphasize that we are not grammar dry-cleaners where students can drop off soiled papers and pick up clean ones in twenty-four hours. Yet, the problem persists. Students want us to proofread their work.

Some writing fellows are hard-liners. "Just say no." Others see their job as delivering on the promise to let the students set the agenda, including producing a grammatically perfect paper. Most wander back and forth across the line calling their approach "flexible."

Here are a few comments from our electronic forum:

> I think when it comes to the issue of proofreading, we shouldn't give ourselves heartburn. We certainly shouldn't re-write papers, but sometimes a systematic, instructional re-structuring is the best way to go.

The best check against doing too much for the student is the sheer tedium of detailed copy editing. -Cliff

You know, this proofreading business that we are all struggling with is going to continue to nag at us if we let it. I believe that we shouldn't get too worked up over the whole issue; if we do, it may get in the way of our natural teaching instincts. When you are constantly second-guessing your own reactions and involvement in the details of a student's paper, I think it is counterproductive. Obviously, based on various definitions, some of what we do in each session could be considered proofreading. With many of the international students we end up having to fix sentences word-by word, and paragraphs sentence-by-sentence. -John

Mika, a bilingual Japanese writing fellow advocated "tough love," particularly for the international students. She felt that often the international students formed very dependent relationships with the writing fellows and that it was not in the students' best interests to allow that to happen. The more proofreading the fellows do, the less the students learn.

Our practical solution is to advocate going through a paragraph closely with a grammatically weak student and pointing out and correcting errors. Then we set the student the task of finding and correcting errors page by page, independently. Though time consuming, this strategy is successful.

The larger issue, however, is more complicated. Proofreading and copyediting can substantially change text. If a student is being evaluated on style as well as substance, then proofreading can become uncomfortably close to plagiarism. If an international student's teacher assesses progress by noting change in number and type of error, then copyediting can mislead. On the other hand, if a thesis director demands letter perfect copy from an international student, many ESL experts advocate having a native speaker correct the copy. If this service is allowed for international students, are we unfairly penalizing native speakers? What's a writing fellow to do?

Clearly, the issue of proofreading has larger institutional implications, and each institution should debate and set policy. Yet, it is in the front lines of the writing centers that these decisions and judgments are made every day.

Conclusion

The stories that we tell to one another are powerful ways to connect theory to practice and to learn from the people who are at the heart of our work. These five scenarios highlight some issues that surfaced in our center. We discovered that some of the traditional guidelines were difficult to follow, even unattainable, as we confronted the daily reality of tutoring.

We realized that collaboration is a goal that may not always be achievable or even desirable, that letting students set the agenda can backfire with students who have problems with control, that "helping the writer, not the writing" sometimes leads us into murky areas of moral relativity, and that the "no proofreading" rule opens a Pandora's box of problems.

Writing centers by their very nature are dynamic. Each interaction brings a new set of variables as unpredictable and challenging as the two people who sit down at the conference table. We need theory to underpin our work and to connect us to our intellectual communities. But, the theories we embrace should emerge from practice, from heeding what actually happens in our writing centers.

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A reader request for information on credit-bearing writing centers

We are looking for any information/advice/warnings, etc. concerning writing centers funded and run as credit-bearing classes. We're in the beginning stages of developing one and have many questions and concerns about funding, staffing, philosophy. In particular, we're interested in seeing syllabi for such courses. We have a tutor training course which is credit-bearing, but we are going to make the Writing Center credit-bearing too, for students who come, in order to generate FTE's and thus funds for instructors to run the center. At the moment our center is run by an informal coterie of part-time instructors who are paid at an instructional technician rate only for the time we are actually in the center, usually conferencing along with the student tutors. We have no director. Thus, moving to a fee-generating structure will provide institutional funding for instructors' work in the center rather than paying them out of a miscellaneous tutoring budget in one division. Students can sign up for one to five hours credit, which means they could just come in once a week regularly for consultation on writing assignments or for more continuous work in particular areas. If students are taking from twelve to eighteen credits, adding the Writing Center won't cost them anything but will generate money on paper.

Our snail mail address is Judy Bentley or Kate O'Leary, South Seattle Community College, 6000 16th Avenue S.W., Seattle, Washington 98106; phone: 206-764-5335; e-mail: jbentley@sscc.ctc.edu.

The *sine qua non* for writing tutors

Two years ago I had a lively and occasionally contentious tutor-training class that challenged me at every turn. One earnest student, for example, consistently resisted the indirect, inductive method of tutoring recommended by me and by our text, *The Practical Tutor*. In one of the dialogues he wrote out for an assignment, he followed along in the recommended questioning style for awhile and then blurted (on paper) "This is wrong. Don't do it!" His exasperation was palpable.

Also, every year about 50% of the people in the tutor-training class choose not to apply to be writing tutors. This is appropriate if people are selecting themselves out because they realize they don't want to do this and/or wouldn't be very good at it. However, if students choose not to tutor because they feel they must follow some rigid, lockstep process and put their own personalities on hold while they are tutoring, a problem exists.

Student behavior always leads me to reflect on my own behaviors and practices, so I asked myself to what extent I should insist on the indirect, questioning approach for all tutors. This led me to the bigger question of what is the *sine qua non* for a writing tutor. What are the qualities that she or he absolutely must have, and what things can be open to differences of personality and approach? As I pondered this, I realized that it is not the formulaic asking of questions that must be insisted upon in all tutors. Rather it is the spirit behind those questions that is the essential element.

Several years ago Bernard Taper, a writer for *The New Yorker*, was a visiting speaker on our campus. I asked him at one of the talks he gave that day what characteristics were needed to be a good writer. His answer was immediate and pointed. "A good writer," he said, "needs two things: energy and curiosity." These are two qualities that tutors absolutely must have also, attributes without which they cannot be successful.

I have an example in mind of a tutor who did not have these qualities. His sessions with writers were deadening. No eye contact, deadpan facial expression, pen-in-hand, he went through papers as quickly as possible marking errors, with no questions, almost no conversation at all. Obviously, he didn't last long as a tutor. On the day I called him in to talk to him about his approach, he opened the conversation by telling me that he was quitting because tutoring was "too boring." Well, I have long believed that boredom is a choice rather than a condition of circumstances, and I am now convinced that tutors who find writers and their projects boring have no business being tutors at all. (I feel the same way about professors, but that's another article!)

Tutors must be not simply "error hunters" like the above tutor but eager learners who truly want to know and understand more about a variety of subjects. Intellectual curiosity on the part of tutors will make them not just mechanical, rote questioners but the person whom the writer is really trying to reach and to teach.

Certainly tutors must be competent writers themselves and must work without taking over the task from the writer, but beyond these basics, there is room in the tutoring interaction for a quiet Susan and a talkative Ralph. There is room for a coolly competent Chris and a shy and nervous Rich. There is room for a boisterous, hearty Tony and a slyly humorous David. There is room for all the individual personalities that tutors bring to their task and for many different approaches to any particular paper or problem. Just as my colleagues give me various responses to my writing based on their individual preferences and strengths, tutors bring different abilities, outlooks, and personalities to the tutoring session.

Every year the tutors-in-training and I take the Myers Briggs Learning Styles Inventory and discuss the results. We learn how we function as individuals and how our preferences may differ from those of some other types. Knowing more about ourselves and the people we work with helps us understand that there is no one right way to learn, or to teach.

The director of writing in our School of Business and Economics made an intriguing comment when she talked to the writing tutors at one of their staff meetings several years ago. One of the tutors asked her what kinds of things they should work on in the writing her students brought to them. "Do what you're best at and most comfortable with," she said. Go with your strengths is not bad advice.

The one strength that all tutors must have, however, is energetic intellectual curiosity. Without it they become, at best, automatons going through the motions but lacking the substance, perhaps following the letter of the "law" that mandates questioning techniques in tutoring while completely missing its spirit. With it, they become the real audience to whom writers will want to communicate their observations and ideas. They are true collaborators because each person in their tutoring interactions is both teacher and learner.

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Correction

The software announcement in the June newsletter for a new writing tool computer program, *Writing Coach* (written by Paul Hagood), had an incorrect phone number. If you're interested in more information or want a free demo disk, call 1-800-264-7936. We're sorry for any inconvenience or frustration you experienced if you tried the other number. We're also curious to know if you want more announcements for writing software in future newsletters. If so, we may even be able to include the correct phone number the first time around.

Also, is anyone interested in doing a review for the newsletter of *Writing Coach*? If so, please let me know by November 1 (at the latest) that you're interested before you call Paul Hagood for a review copy. To avoid multiple reviews, I'll designate someone if we have more than one offer.

-M. Harris, editor

✋RITING CENTER ETHICS

Drawing the line between personal and professional

Welcome back to another year of thorny ethical questions for writing center directors and tutors/consultants. I have a number of issues I would like to address in this year's columns—including how we manage to justify (or fail to justify) the kind of work we do with students—but I would like to spend this month's and next month's columns wrapping up the troublesome scenarios I began discussing last year.

As you may recall, the second set of difficult scenarios I introduced last year concerned students who had written angry, abusive letters of various kinds and asked the consultants in the writing center to help them "sharpen" the sting of their prose. The four audiences and topics addressed in the letters were (1) a government official about an environmental issue, (2) a professor about a grade dispute, (3) a roommate about personal hygiene, and (4) parents about sleeping arrangements with a boyfriend. In essence, there were two issues I wished to focus on in these contrastive scenarios. First, should the qualities and characteristics of the varying audiences presented in the scenarios play a significant role in our decision about whether to assist the students with their letters, and if

so, how? Second, to what extent are we obligated to help students with the specific rhetorical requests they make? In other words, if the students in each of these scenarios begin their conferences with the stated goal of making their letters even more pointed and insulting, then must we respect that goal and work with them to accomplish it? Are we responsible, ethically, for helping students to fulfill their clearly-stated textual goals for a piece, regardless of what those goals might be, or must our ethical responsibilities take into account a wider, more broadly conceived set of audiences including our peers, our institutions, our communities, and ourselves?

The nature of the audiences addressed in each of these four scenarios can be illustrated best, I think, by the chart at the bottom of this page.

In the first two scenarios, each of the audiences is addressed—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say "attacked"—in his/her role as a member of a particular profession. The government official is maligned in her capacity as a vote-giver, and the professor is disparaged in his capacity as a grade-giver.

Personal epithets are included in both of the letters, true, but these epithets are largely directed towards matters of professional competence, not social or emotional behavior. By contrast, the second two scenarios focus on letters written to people with closer personal connections to the writer. The main thrust of each letter is a personal attack on social or moral behavior, the difference between the two lying in the relative strength of the emotional bond likely to exist between writer and audience.

Do these differences matter? Yes, I think they do. Or, I suppose I should say, they would matter to me. My own reaction to these scenarios would be to cut a fairly clear line between the capacities in which the audiences are being addressed. If people are being criticized in their roles as professionals over questions of competence and incompetence (as in scenarios 1 and 2), then I believe there is a justifiable social and civic rationale for working with these students on their letters. Professional incompetence has public consequences and can therefore be regarded as a matter of public concern. That, to me, places the substance of these letters within the purview of the writing center and its mis-

Scenario #1	**Government Official** **Professional; Distant**	
Scenario #2	**College Professor** **Professional; Intimate**	
Scenario #3	**Roommate** **Personal; Emotionally Distant**	
Scenario #4	**Parents** **Personal; Emotionally Intimate**	

= Professional Context
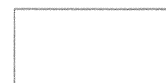
= Personal/Private Context

sion. If, conversely, people are being attacked for personal, behavioral, or moral reasons that have more to do with private conflicts than public or professional concerns, then I wouldn't touch the letters with a proverbial pole of any length. When I work as a consultant in the writing center, I'm doing so as a professional in a professional capacity and as a representative of my home institution. I have no interest in getting involved in a writer's private life and personal problems, and my ethical responsibilities would be fulfilled by suggesting that the writer pay a visit to the campus counseling center for help in resolving the dispute.

But even with the two letters that I would be willing to work on, I can see myself handling the situations in quite different ways. In the letter to the government official, I might be quite willing to do exactly what the student wants: help make the insults nastier and more pointed, help make the prose slicker and more direct. Let's face it—writing mean-spirited, nasty, insulting, spleen-venting letters to government representatives is a commonplace in our society. It's the purest expression of our Constitutionally-guaranteed right to freedom of speech. I'd even go so far as to say it qualifies as a legitimate genre in itself. And what's more—it can be a lot of fun! Barring the inclusion of any death threats (and assuming I, too, didn't care much for the government official), I could have a great time working with the writer on this letter, teaching him a bit about style and sentence rhythm at the same time.

With the letter to the instructor, however, I would feel a good deal more constrained and sensitive about how I approached the writer, the text, and the conference. I would be far more inclined to set aside the writer's desire to write an even more abusive letter and to begin asking pointed questions about the overall tone of the text and just what desired outcomes she expects. Does the writer really want the instructor to reconsider the grade he originally assigned? Then a vicious, aggressive letter might not be the best way to achieve that end. (I can see using this same approach with the letter to the government official, but I'd be willing to work with the student even if he just wanted to spew venom for a while.) Does the writer just want to insult the instructor and express her anger? Well, that's fine too, but don't come to me for help. Perhaps it's because I'm a teacher as well, or perhaps it's because I feel that teachers would take the letter's insults far more personally than a government official, but I would feel very uncomfortable about becoming an "unindicted co-conspirator" in the production of this particular letter. If I could persuade the student to modify the tone and to ground the letter more firmly in the presentation of argumentative evidence, then I would have no ethical problem helping her to write the letter. Failing that, I'd suggest that she pursue the grade appeal through proper administrative channels and handle the epistolary work on her own.

Next month, I'll share what you, the readers, had to say about these scenarios.

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Some questions about the politics of on-line tutoring in electronic writing centers

On-line writing tutorials are evidence of the advance of computer technology into the "safe" space of the writing center. Swirling conversations about writing operate there in a seemingly time-less, space-less space. Given the exciting visions of such possibilities, however, there are still some concerns about the connections between computers and writing which need to be addressed while we also begin re-imagining the idea of a writing center and the idea of computer-mediated conferencing.

On-line writing tutorials bring up several questions about the proposed "free-ing" "powers" of computer technology. In the broadest sense, the question is, how do we "read the writer"? We argue that the apparent anonymity that seems to come hand-in-hand with on-line tutorials creates an atmosphere that "frees" up the student to write whatever he or she wants, to ask questions with no regard for the judgments that are often visibly apparent in face-to-face encounters. Computer anonymity gives us the liberty to play freely with language. Such writing, and the resulting conversation about writing, tears down the barrier between signifier and signified in ways that would make a post-structuralist proud. We are re-visioning what academic writing might be. This can be an exciting, stimulating process, but at the same time I believe that we have to be on guard to ensure that the situatedness of this technology in a postcapitalist academy inclined toward the commodification of writing is not forgotten.

The advent of on-line writing and collaboration presents a potent critique of the specific confines of conventional, institutionally driven writing, but can this critique move beyond cyberspace? Are we taking into consideration the actual material effects of writing in schools, on our writing students in particular? On-line writing can disrupt conventions, can challenge the way we are "supposed to" write, but we must remember that after logging off, the writer returns to her classroom and to the potential repercussions that may surface from "un-conventional" writing. An on-line conversation about writing may create the sense that the writer works and speaks in an "unconstrained" and ideology-empty community of nameless writers, but the writer also remains physically alone, working silently in front of a screen. What kind of community is this? Part of our work is to remain responsive to the space in which the writer writes, the physical space in addition to the technological one.

Tutor and ESL student oral communication in the writing center: An inquiry into strategies for effective tutor training

"Yes, I agree. We have bigger fish to fry," I said to a Japanese student named Yoshi during one of my regular sessions with him. Yoshi, a student who was all business during our sessions and rarely showed much emotional response, suddenly looked at me very strangely and then burst into laughter. Quickly, though, he wrote down the phrase in an idiom book he was keeping and asked me what it meant. He also asked me the meaning of some other choice phrases he had heard throughout the semester, many of which I had trouble explaining. Even though training and experience made me aware of the unique concerns and benefits of working with ESL students, this humorous experience taught me that I continually needed to be much more careful when I spoke with ESL students. The informal language I used in the writing center sometimes was laced with idioms and phrases that anyone not from the middle of Indiana—let alone another country—might have trouble understanding. On this particular evening, my attentiveness to Yoshi's needs lapsed, and I knew better. Experiences such as this and others I have observed have made issues of oral communication between tutors and ESL students an interest of mine and a serious concern for writing center staffs.

However, while the issue of oral communication between native speaking tutors and non-native speaking students is important, I could find very little mention of this in the writing center literature. Fink's "Help! How Do I Tutor the International Student" is excellent at showing the need to talk about talking in the writing center, as she writes of some of the effective strategies her tutors use to foster clear oral communication. Of interest, though, is the fact that her tutors often

blame themselves for communication "failures" and express a desire for "training in interpersonal relationships" (14). In my five years of experience as a tutor and tutor trainer, oral communication concerns have always been dealt with on a case-by-case, experimental basis (not necessarily a bad way). However, as a member of these writing center staffs, I do not think we have dealt with concerns of oral communication between native speaking tutors and non-native speaking students as well as we might, and I have often felt the frustration that Fink's tutors have experienced (as well as the joys). Oral communication is a sometimes difficult two-way street. In the writing center, however, tutors obviously only have control over what *they* can do to communicate clearly, and what they do is either natural or comes from training. With this in mind, I looked at some ESL research as well as research in second language acquisition to see if any of these studies could benefit writing centers. I found six areas of concern that can be woven into the beginnings of effective training for tutor/ESL student oral communication (and hopefully) continued inquiry into providing tutors with the training in "interpersonal skills" they seem to want and need.

Strategies of ESL students

The first area of concern is strategies non-native speakers use when having difficulty communicating with native speakers. According to Ludwig (278), Russian non-native speakers of English avoid topics, use approximations (vagueness), circumlocution and description, and inappropriate words, phrases, or idioms as strategies in their efforts to communicate with native speakers. There is a sense in Ludwig's article that the strategies used by the Russians are not un-

common to non-native speakers of other nationalities. This list of strategies is good for tutors to be aware of when thinking about how ESL students might react in tutorials. For instance, if tutors notice an ESL student talking around a subject because they lack certain vocabulary, tutors might change or repeat their own speech, provide necessary vocabulary, or use comprehension checks. Ludwig's list is by no means exhaustive or descriptive, so by observing strategies ESL students use, a staff can begin compiling more specific, descriptive lists that can help a tutor know when an ESL student might be having trouble. The use of strategies does not imply a deficiency; it is the use of ineffective strategies that tutors need to be aware of. The use of Ludwig's list or any list compiled locally by a writing center is for awareness, to provide tutors with knowledge which allows them to be more aware of the types of strategies ESL students may use when they are having problems.

Tutor strategies

Tutors can also use strategies to make their speech comprehensible to ESL students or to help ESL students through some rough spots. Michael Long reports that native speakers use a modified but well formed version of English when communicating with non-native speakers that is marked by such things as shorter utterances, less (syntactic) complexity, and fewer idiomatic expressions (Long, "Linguistic" 178-179). The significance of Long's work is that it is observational; his findings are things that native speakers already do "naturally." His list of strategies native speakers use to avoid problems consists of

(1) relinquishing topic control;
(2) selecting relevant topics [for the

ESL student];

(3) treating topics briefly;

(4) making new topics relevant;

(5) checking non-native speaker comprehension.

(Long, "Native Speaker" 132-36)

The negotiation of "topics" in the writing center—or, for example, deciding on the issue to be addressed that session—can be an extremely tricky task, especially if an effective communicative strategy is to relinquish topic control. But the list of strategies above seems to provide for such negotiation in the apparent contradiction between the first two strategies—to relinquish topic control or to select topics for the ESL student. The answer is to be flexible. Let the ESL student establish the "topic" of the session, and if there needs to be negotiation, make sure the reasons why you want to refocus the session are relevant to the student's writing needs. Listen for why the student is at the writing center; make especially sure you maintain contact with that "touchstone." As for the other strategies, they seem to make sense and are related to the first two: Be as brief as possible and check for comprehension. My only advice for comprehension checks is to ask in a non-condescending way for the student to repeat what you have just said (e.g., take the blame upon yourself for needing to check comprehension). In contrast, a simple nod of the head from the student is often an easy and ineffective way for both student and tutor to continue miscommunicating. Some international students will nod "yes" out of courtesy or respect, not understanding.

Long also provides a list of tactics native speakers effectively use to repair problems:

(1) accept unintentional topic switch;

(2) request clarification;

(3) confirm own comprehension;

(4) tolerate ambiguity.

(Long, "Native Speaker" 136-38)

And to make sure that he is thorough, Long also provides a list of strategies *and* tactics for both avoiding and repairing conversational problems:

(1) use slow pace;

(2) stress key words;

(3) pause before key words;

(4) repeat own utterances;

(5) repeat others' utterances.

(Long, "Native Speaker" 138)

Again, most of these strategies and tactics are self-explanatory and can be used as resource strategies tutors can call on if they have problems communicating with an ESL student. The strategies and tactics suggest that effective native speakers move deliberately and carefully through conversations, are flexible with topic changes initiated by non-native speakers, and do not hesitate to check for comprehension. For Long and other researchers (see Derwing), these strategies and tactics are important because they are "naturally" used. The difference between conversations between native speakers and those between native speakers and non-native speakers is the frequency with which native speakers use such strategies and tactics. In native speaker/non-native speaker conversations, effective native speakers use such strategies and tactics with greater frequency. The goal for writing center tutors is that we become capable of using such strategies with effective frequency. For Derwing, the experience the native speaker has in speaking with non-native speakers of English is extremely important—more experienced native speakers use the strategies with greater frequency, which accounts in part for their success.

Concerns about naturalness and frequency

There is a slight contradiction in some of the research on oral communication between native and non-native speakers, and this contradiction or "gap" is the reason why I think Long's strategies and tactics need to be part of tutor training. Long asserts that with varying frequency all native speakers use such strategies and tactics. Other research, however, suggests that non-native speakers do not always cause native speakers to modify their speech (like Long's strategies). Sometimes non-native speakers are left without the help they need to be able to understand native-speaker English. This, then, is the third area of awareness that I think is important. Though native speakers naturally use some set of strategies to make their speech more comprehensible to non-native speakers, native speakers may not naturally use an effective number or variety of such strategies with adequate frequency for effective communication with non-native speakers.

Specifically, I am concerned with a study that demonstrates just this fact. The authors of this study conclude that ESL learners "will not automatically trigger the much-sought-after comprehensible input . . . merely by their appearance or foreign accent" (Pearson and Lee 123). In fact, the study showed that ESL learners must "explicitly question their interlocutors or in some way display obvious lack of comprehension . . ." in order to get native speakers to simplify or modify their speech—like using a slower pace or emphasizing key words (123). The findings of this study are an excellent example of the interactions of both non-native speaker and native speaker oral communication strategies. When the ESL student asked for help (a very direct strategy), or displayed a lack of comprehension, perhaps by misusing words or using other strategies like the ones Ludwig lists, then the native speakers modified their speech in various ways to be understood. But again, this was not an automatic or immediately conscious process. It took misunderstanding to begin the process of understanding, and this can be a difficult and frustrating process for both native and non-native speakers. Perhaps this process is to some extent unavoidable, but by providing tutors with a conscious recognition of both non-native and native speaker strategies like those listed above, tutors begin the process of making immediate, effective oral communication an important concern as well as having a "stable" of strategies they can consciously use, modify, or discard as needed. An awareness of non-native speaker strategies may help tutors recognize early when an ESL student is having problems. Similarly, an awareness of native speaker strategies provides tutors with tools to communicate clearly, and hopefully, before there are serious misunderstandings.

Discourse structures

"Discourse structures" are my fourth area of concern. By discourse structures, I mean the ways non-native speakers organize their speech and use things like transitions. What is important about this research in terms of oral communication is the understanding that non-native speakers often use different structures and patterns of speech (and writing)— different from native English patterns. For instance, one study discussed the fact that

American business people often had trouble understanding their Chinese counterparts because the Chinese speakers of English did not naturally provide structural cues like transitions that native English speakers listen for and expect (Tyler and Bro). The authors of this study also speculated that the ways in which the Chinese speakers ordered and organized their speech was so different from normal native English patterns that native speakers had trouble following the flow of the presentations and conversations. For example, the Chinese speakers of English would provide background information first and then their position statements. Native English speakers—especially in formal business situations—often expect a position statement first, followed by the necessary information to explain or support the position. The study showed that structural cues, like transitions, were more important for understanding than the organizational patterns of the oral presentations, though "the results hardly demonstrate that order of ideas never affects communication" (83).

It is important to understand that the "natural" order and presentation of ideas in English conversations is often a learned and perhaps unnatural order and presentation for some ESL students. In situations when ESL students feel that they are struggling to be understood, they may rely on ways of organizing and presenting their oral speech which is native to their language but confusing in English. Therefore, a tutor's ability to diagnose why there are communication difficulties with a particular ESL student may lie in an awareness of such larger discourse structure issues. An ESL student may not be using ineffective strategies (like Ludwig's), but instead may not be using transitions or other conversational cues tutors have come to expect from native speakers. The ESL student may also seem to be "rambling on" during a tutorial because their "point" will come much later; they may be using an organizational pattern unusual for English. I think it would be useful to understand rhetorical tendencies particular to various nationalities or language groups of ESL students who utilize writing centers, or on a local level, your own writing center. The Tyler and Bro study only dealt with Chinese speakers of English in a business situation, and it may not be warranted to extend their findings beyond similar situations, or to English speakers from Japan or Mexico, for instance. At the present time, I know of no research concerned with oral discourse that is this spe-

cific, and I think such information would be valuable for writing centers.

Negative attitudes toward non-native speakers

I intend the fifth area of focus as a cautionary category. My experience, and I am sure the experience of many other writing center tutors, is that as a "rule," writing center tutors are sensitive, helpful, and concerned individuals. The authors of the next type of study did not feel their native speaker subjects to be particularly insensitive or prejudiced; in fact, Mettler felt some of her subjects to be particularly sensitive (Mettler, Sebastian and Bouchard). These two studies focused on the "discredited speaker," or the fact that native speakers—in one study undergraduates at a large American university—often evaluated a non-native speaker of English negatively because they spoke an accented English (in both cases, Spanish-accented). Mettler concludes that listener comprehension involves text interpretation and an evaluation of a speaker's way of talking—the ability to understand as well as form attitudes toward the speaker. Likewise, Sebastian and Bouchard write that listeners are capable of "multiple classifications" based on speech. The negative evaluations they discuss are based on class and age as well as accented English. As I read these studies, I was as surprised as Mettler seems to be as to the near uniformity of the negative evaluations of the speakers in her study, even from those native speakers (listeners) who had absolutely no trouble understanding the Spanish-accented English. When I speak of uniformity, I am speaking of the fact that almost all evaluations of the speakers were negative; the evaluations varied as to how severely negative they were.

The understanding these studies provide for tutor training is for increased awareness. Most of these negative evaluations were subtle or unconscious, and only were brought out in the open through the methods employed in the studies. However, I cannot help but think that non-native speakers of English can pick up on such negative evaluations, and if the subtlety of such evaluations translates into similarly subtle and negative behavior, then this is a serious problem for the writing center environment.

Learning strategies and saving face

Finally, the sixth area I want to highlight is primarily concerned with increasing cultural

sensitivity. A 1987 study by Huang and Van Naerssen sought to discover successful learning strategies used by Chinese learners of English in China (a foreign language as opposed to a second language situation). As most of the Chinese ESL students in American colleges and universities are successful learners, the strategies listed in this article are probably similar to those used by Chinese students visiting writing centers. The strategies consistently involve both practicing common speech situations and risk taking, things like speaking in English with other Chinese students as well as native speakers of English, listening or reading for comprehension, attending lectures in English, or talking to oneself in English. Significant in the discussion of risk taking, though, is the importance Chinese students placed on the notion of "saving face." Successful learners were willing to take risks, but the best situations were those in which the risks did not involve or had a reduced risk of losing "face." So while a knowledge of learning strategies used by most successful Chinese learners of English (or Mexican or Indian learners of English, etc.) would be beneficial, perhaps the most important part of this study is the concept of saving face. This concept is obviously important to the Chinese students, but it was one I was previously unaware of. It is important for writing centers dealing with non-native speakers to be aware of such cultural preferences and stigmas in order to create situations in which Chinese students—or any other population served by a particular writing center—can indeed feel secure and able to take risks without the danger of losing face. I can only offer my sense of what I think "saving face" means; the study from which I took this term spent no time defining the concept. I offer avoiding "embarrassment" or "humiliation" as possible synonyms.

Certainly more inquiry into the cultural preferences and needs of specific ESL student populations would be very important. It is the type of local knowledge writing centers could generate from their daily practice and from speaking with non-native speakers who use the center and would be willing to talk about such things. For immediate training, I think it is good for tutors to be aware that such a thing as "saving face" exists for some (many?) Chinese students, and in general, that tutors can help create an atmosphere in the writing center in which ESL students can feel comfortable enough to take risks, and hopefully, to enhance their lan-

guage learning as well as their writing. Much of the training tutors already receive is centered on creating a comfortable, non-evaluative environment, and sensitivity to such concerns with a special emphasis on ESL students could be of great benefit.

I see the function of this article as two-fold: first to highlight an often stated need to provide tutor training for oral communicative issues between native speaking tutors and non-native speaking students, and secondly, to provide information and concerns from research in other areas in order to help tutors become more aware of the types of issues that might be discussed in tutor training. To this end, I hope the six issue sections are helpful information, but, furthermore, I hope they help individual writing center staffs begin the process of generating information about oral communication between themselves and the ESL students they work with, as well as the tutor training to address their needs.

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On-line tutoring

The only way that we tutors identify the writers on-line is by and through the writing product. The writer becomes experienced through the language of the writing he or she sends to us. The writing actually writes the writer. The writer is constructed in the language used on-line. The philosophical and physical subjectivity of the writer seems to dissipate. The self appears to become disembodied and, therefore, detached from ideological constraints, especially of gender, race, class and sexuality. Our writers appear genderless, raceless, classless. It is argued that on-line writing handily dispatches with the constraints of ideological naming. The computer technology behind on-line writing tutorials encourages us to ignore both these material concerns and the oppressive realities that the writers may be responding to and writing out of. We are also encouraged by the "liberatory" status of on-line work to ignore the dynamics of authority between tutor and writer. But are the writer and tutor actually equal in position? And, we must also consider, in what subtle ways, the tutor might strive to assert his/her authority over the writer, in ways that might not be felt necessary in a face-to-face tutorial. In fact, is it easier to deconstruct these types of authoritarian hierarchies working toward a more critical pedagogy, when working in the writing center face-to-face than it is on-line? On-line, differences ominously disappear. Is it more convenient for us to forget that they are there?

And from where, then, comes this need to name our un-named writers? We have found ourselves often looking for the subtext beneath the words of an e-mail paper. Why do we find ourselves searching for a face and body, to satisfy surprisingly essentialist needs for a visible connection between writing and writer? This act of naming could be read as perpetuating society's ideological namings. By "calling" some anonymous writer "female" or "woman" because of the style of her writing, aren't we merely re-subscribing to the strategies of the dominant voice, re-inscribing a gendered and race-ed self to the self of the cyber-writer that has supposedly been exploded? Does it give us a greater sense of power "over" the writer if we can categorize him/her in a particular way? Why is it important for us to "know" the writer in order to talk about writing?

These questions must be asked as we work on-line because we know that ideological issues do not disappear magically when we begin computer conferencing. They remain embedded in our writing, in the language we use and the way that we use it, and in the relationships we construct through words and in our minds with our co-writers on-line.

Yet, a shifting space does present opportunities for social change. The shivering and shaking in the foundations of conventional writing that the on-line writing tutorial presents does open up encouraging gaps if we take them carefully into account. If we can, through our efforts on-line, actively and consciously expose and subvert the "nature" of writing as defined by the institution, we are taking steps toward a new definition of writing that uncovers, instead of masks, the social situatedness of students and writing in school. Unmasking power relations instead of ignoring them, can provide shifts in power. The immediate problem is that when a paper is transmitted to us over e-mail, we are not directly confronted with the visible evidence of conventional demands, such as might be found within a teacher's red, margined comments. There is not an obvious place to begin the unmasking that comprises institutional critique. On-line writing does not provide these "easy" imprints of institutional patriarchy. Is this why we search for an identifiable writer? Is a body connected to writing necessary for the practice of liberatory pedagogy in computer-mediated communications? Can we reconceive our place as teachers within the institution while we are on-line? How are the signs of authority and ideology re-configured through computer writing tutorials? We must continue this conversation so that we can combat the seductive ambiguity of cyber-space even as we luxuriate in its relative absence of boundaries, and remember that we are still working within the academy with real writing and real writers.

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations (WCAs)

𝒯UTORS' COLUMN

What do you mean, "there is no writing fairy"?

I'm still reeling from the effects of learning that there is no Writing Fairy. It came as a very big shock to me. She had been such an integral part of my life, especially over the last few years since I returned to school. In fact, it was the Writing Fairy, I thought, who helped secure me a job tutoring in the writing lab this semester.

I thought I would enjoy being a writing tutor, but my first few weeks in the lab were a nightmare. I kept seeing papers that screamed out for work on grammar, spelling, and punctuation (things I know well how to do—they were drilled into me years ago), yet my instructors encouraged me NOT to work on these things but to concentrate on the broader issues—how to generate ideas, form concepts, develop a thesis—problems of organization and development. What did I know about these things? These all fell under the purview of the Writing Fairy.

Although I had never really seen the Writing Fairy, I imagined her to look something like Tinker Bell. I knew she visited me often—every time I had a paper due. After weeks (if I had the luxury of that much time) of worrying about the paper, after picking and then discarding idea after idea, after lying awake nights thinking of opening paragraphs only to change subjects the next day, after asking myself countless questions like, "*why* didn't you jot down that great idea you had last week?" just as I was on the brink of pulling out my hair, the Writing Fairy would arrive, sprinkle some Fairy dust around, and then disappear as mysteriously as she had come. Her timing left a little to be desired I thought, but she never let me down. All I had to do then was to get the stuff on paper and make sure it had the proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The paper always seemed to write itself. After only a few drafts—OK, maybe more than a few—with a change of a word here, a sentence there, maybe a paragraph somewhere else, I ended up with a finished product, thanks to the creative powers of the Writing Fairy and my own talent with mechanics.

A week or two into the semester, however, my instructors presented me with a new concept, something called "writing process," and directed me to examine mine! I didn't even know I had one. I had the Writing Fairy. Since this self-examination didn't seem to be an option, I tried it—although I wasn't too keen on the idea. Well, it turned out to be one of those Gestalt kind of experiences—you know—AH HAH!! I discovered that all that stuff I'd been giving the Writing Fairy credit for I'd really been doing myself and never knew it. On the outside it had taken the form of nail biting and sleepless nights, but a lot of it is interior work. When you put the interior and the exterior work together, you get what's called "writing process!"

You're probably asking yourself, "Yeah, but what exactly does she mean by writing process?" Well, I mean generating ideas, forming concepts, developing theses; I mean organization and development; and yes, I mean grammar, spelling, and punctuation. I mean everything that goes into creating the final product. It can include brainstorming, and freewriting, and clustering, and glossing, and all kinds of other tricks to help you get your thoughts and ideas out of your head and onto paper where they're a little easier to keep track of. It's all the things my instructors want me to help the students with in the writing lab.

Yes, I still have a *thing* about grammar, spelling, and punctuation; sometimes I have to sit on my hands in the lab to keep from making corrections; I am, they tell me, a tutor, not an editor or a proofreader. But now I can look at a student's paper and recognize that it is somewhere in process, and I can help the student where she is. Maybe the grammar, spelling, and punctuation can come at the end of her process. My job is to help her *in* the process. I need to help her know that writing *is* a process and that it can be fun, especially if she takes it a step at a time and doesn't try to crank out a finished product in her first or second draft.

Seeing writing as a process has helped me as a tutor and as a writer. I am much more relaxed about tutoring, and the students I tutor get a lot more from our time together than they did when I was proofreading and editing. I'm a little more relaxed about my own writing too, though I still have occasional sleepless nights before a paper is due—part of my process I guess. Every once in a while, though, I'm still sure I can detect a light sprinkling of Fairy dust on the keyboard of my computer.

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Joining WCenter

WCenter is an electronic forum for writing center specialists hosted by Texas Tech University. The forum was started in 1991 by Lady Falls Brown, writing center director, and is managed by Fred Kemp, director of composition. If you have access to the Internet or Bitnet, you can subscribe to the group by sending e-mail as follows:
  send to:listproc@unicorn.acs.ttu.edu
  (no subject line)
  message: subscribe wcenter <your name>
    set wcenter mail ack

If you have problems, send e-mail to Fred Kemp at ykfok@ttacs.ttu.edu

Using "process recordings" to train tutors

Two years ago, as director of the writing center at Southeast Missouri State University, I was asked to conduct a three-hour workshop on writing for a group of social workers employed by regional welfare agencies. To prepare for the workshop, I read a book loaned to me by the head of the Social Work Department, *Recording: Guidelines for Social Workers* by Suanna J. Wilson (New York: The Free Press, 1980). Here I read about "process recording" which is a report social workers-in-training write about a conference or "interview" with a client. These reports are typically arranged in three columns (although some process recordings include a fourth column, for a supervisor's comments). In the first column, the social worker narrates what happened in the conference, step by step, including selected dialogue. In the next column the social worker analyzes these events as they relate to the client's situation specifically and as they relate to social work practice in general. In this column, the social worker critiques his or her own performance. In the third, right-hand column the social worker describes his or her feelings about the events of the conference as they occurred. The third column is the place for recording "gut-level feelings."

Although process recording was not the subject of my workshop, I began to think about how I might apply the concept in the writing center as a training technique. Tutors could write about their conferences with students using the same three-column format and making the same three distinctions among narrative, analysis, and feelings. Two advantages were immediately apparent. First, the process recordings would provide me with evidence of the tutors' work that I needed in my role as supervisor/evaluator—more evidence than I was already getting from informal observation and from the tutors' reports to referring instructors, for example. Second, writing process recordings would benefit the tutors by giving them more chances to express their questions and concerns, which they could then share in staff meetings. I liked the idea of assigning pro-

cess recordings better than observing conferences formally or taping them because writing a process recording would be less intimidating, less an invasion of privacy, more respectful of the intimate nature of tutoring as compared to teaching in the classroom. And as a writer myself, not a movie star, I certainly preferred the idea to videotaping.

In any case, the tutors and I have been writing process recordings for a year now, and I can highly recommend the practice. I don't require tutors to write a process recording for every conference, of course, but I ask tutors-in-training to write one process recording a week, on the conference of their choice. Tutors say it takes them about an hour to write a process recording (typically three to four pages), that writing them becomes easier with practice, and that it helps to make notes immediately after the conference to use later, jotting down a brief outline of the "plot" and any significant dialogue. (And ordinarily tutors will make a photocopy of the student's writing to include with the process recording.) At first, tutors experienced some frustration trying to keep the three columns separate on the page, but WordPerfect allows IBM users to set up "parallel" (cf. "newspaper") columns. On my Macintosh, I set up parallel columns using the graphics function of ClarisWorks.

As I expected they would, tutors have enjoyed writing and sharing the "gut-level feelings" column. One tutor, for example, a liberal Democrat, enjoyed venting her feelings after she worked with a student who was writing about arch-conservative commentator, Rush Limbaugh. In the third column, the tutor recorded what she felt about the student's draft—and the student's politics: " 'Rush Limbaugh shaped my life forever.' That was so hilarious that I wanted to leave it in just like it was so her teacher could get a good laugh. I hope her teacher is a liberal from hell." And so on. As the final entry, the tutor wrote, "I never let [the student] know the things I really thought." Whether the tutor should have been honest with the student, whether she should have risked en-

gaging the student in serious debate, is a question we discussed in our staff meeting. By sharing her own political opinions, she might have inspired the student to examine her ideas more rigorously—and write a better essay in the process. As it was, the tutor may have been guilty of patronizing.

In a related situation, about a conference I had, I wrote in the third column that I was beginning to hate myself for feeling superior. I was beginning to think my student wasn't very bright, because he insisted on mispronouncing "Descartes," the subject of his paper, despite my repeated and emphatic references to *Descartes*, correctly pronounced. But as I shared this story with the other tutors, I realized that my student may have been insisting on his pronunciation as fiercely as I cling to my Southern accent, because to do otherwise would be to presume, to put on airs, to be somebody other than who I am.

Not every entry in the third column leads to insight and understanding. But sharing that third column lets tutors know that they are not alone. They aren't the only one who dreads telling a student that he or she ought to start over from scratch, or worries that she isn't "tough" enough, or feels "dumb" when she can't find anything to say about a draft. Just the existence of that third column lets tutors know that their feelings are respected.

I thought that the third column might be interesting—and even fun to write. But I did not expect that the *middle* column would furnish such an abundance of material for discussion. In a period of only two weeks, for example, five tutors-in-training and myself, writing one process recording a week, considered the following questions, among others, from that middle (analysis) column: (1) Was the tutor "undermining the instructor" by advising the student to write more than the two pages specified on the assignment sheet? (2) How does the tutor know when she's being "overly directive"? (3) How can the tutor help his student recognize fragments when the student doesn't

seem to hear them? (4) Should the tutor have introduced the student to sentence-combining rather than showing him how to shorten his too-long sentences? (5) When working with international students, how much "modeling" can the tutor do without "writing the paper for the student"?

Each question could be the basis for a formal lesson: (1) in tutor-instructor relations, (2) in the role(s) of a tutor, (3) in teaching sentence boundaries (and specifically, fragments of various types), (4) in the use of sentence-combining, and (5) in approaches to working with international students (and more generally, the issue of expectations). Any training program or course in tutoring writing would deal with these matters sooner or later, in one way (and order) or another. The advantage of dealing with them as they come up in the process recordings is the same advantage we writing tutors point to when we insist on addressing our students' problems in context, in process, as the need arises. Students (and tutors-in-training) will learn what they need to know, when they need to know it. Making entries in that middle column, tutors have a chance to identify their needs—and to receive answers to their questions from me and the other tutors when they can best apply them, especially in the case of the tutor who is working with a student on a regular basis.

The middle column tells me what the tutors need to learn and what I should teach. But it also shows me how much the tutors already know. They know, for example, what they ought to have done, even if they didn't do it. One tutor writes that he should have emphasized focus from the start rather than leaping on the obvious errors in his student's draft. Another tutor writes, "I probably should have said something nice earlier." A third tutor knows she shouldn't have asked her student, in precisely this way, "Does it need a comma here?"

Equally important, the middle column gives tutors a chance to explain what they're doing *right*. Thus, they serve as models for others. One tutor explains that "exploring the topic [of the student's paper] in conversation will help [him] see where it needs development." Another tutor writes, "I knew [my student's] main idea, but I wanted to hear her say it." A third tutor observes, "It's important to find out what the student perceives as his or her writing problems." In addition, the middle column allows tutors to justify their decisions: "Sometimes I ask students to read their draft and write questions they have before we confer. But I was pressed for time, so I did the silent reading and marking myself." In any case, the tutors tell me that writing process recordings is making them more analytical about tutoring in general—not to mention what they gain by reading and discussing the process recordings of other tutors.

Compared to an actual transcript, of course, process recordings are contrived. (In fact, one tutor told me she enjoys the "cre-ative" aspect of scripting these little dramas.) But by the same token, they are selective renditions of reality that focus on certain elements for the purpose of learning. As another tutor puts it, "They help me see the *shape* of a conference"—as something with a deliberate beginning, middle, and end.

A final point is that process recordings are interesting, as well, for what they allow us to report (in the first column, mainly) about our students. There is the student, for instance, who "refuses to look at me," writes one tutor. And there's the student who admits, unashamedly, to fabricating a source. He's the same student who says, "I don't know [what that sentence means]. I just like the way it sounds." And there's the African-American student who says to her tutor, Qun Li, who is Chinese, "If you can speak and write English so well, why can't I?"

It is not my purpose here to explore the implications of that specific question or the issues involved. The tutors and I did discuss in a staff meeting the disturbing interplay of stereotypes the scene suggests. I conclude with it only because it is a telling example of the view of reality afforded by these "contrivances." I wonder if the student would have felt comfortable enough to ask that question if she had known I was observing her, or if a tape machine had been running.

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