THE WRITING LAB

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Words are our staple—we process them, play with them, revise them, and in this newsletter, offer some thoughtful definitions of them. The authors of some of the articles in this month's newsletter ask us to rethink terms such as "audience," "difference/*differance*," and "dependence." All have special meanings in our context and have to be weighed and examined from various perspectives even as we use them with the writers with whom we talk.

For those of us planning and packing (and getting those presentations ready) for the forthcoming Conference on College Composition and Communication, a request. Since there are hundreds of newsletter readers who will not be attending, please consider sharing with them some of what you say and hear at the conference. Presenters are invited to send their papers (if suitable for publication) or brief summaries of their presentations to the newsletter, and audience participants are also invited to write short reports for the newsletter that would be helpful to those who will not be attending. What's new in the world of writing labs? What are the topics of concern? What resources should we know about? Let's hear what you heard.

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

...INSIDE...

Audience reconsidered: Focusing on peers

In his April 1994 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Establishing the Role of Audience," Robert Dornsife raises an important issue. He asserts that writing lab tutors need to address the role of audience with student writers. However, Dornsife believes that this is somehow dangerous territory for the tutor to explore, that it is an area where the tutor might interfere between student and teacher. In tutoring, this risk is always present, but no more so in addressing audience than in assisting students with understanding assignments or deciding whether or not a word choice is "academic" enough. Writing is not a science; writing tutors must assess their proper role as tutor each time we venture to help a student in the midst of not only writing, but meeting the needs of a specific assignment for a specific instructor.

The issue of audience is complicated because it is a theoretical issue more than a pedagogical one. It's seldom addressed in the entry level composition course, and when it is, most often, it is a solitary concern, a chapter from a textbook or a single day's lecture—not a primary concern to be dealt with in every

piece of writing undertaken. Personally, I've read about audience because of my interest in writing, but I've never had it brought up in a class I was taking (other than a graduate rhetoric seminar), and students in the writing lab never bring it up on their own.

Yet audience comes into play in every piece of writing. Outside of the classroom—in the *real world*—audience is addressed directly be-

cause any piece of writing is headed for a specific purpose and person(s). If I write a letter to a friend, I know the audience—I know which words to use and what kinds of sentences to write because I'm used to communicating with my friend. I trust how he'll respond. If I write a classified ad to sell my car, I know what features potential buyers will be interested in and how to use abbreviations to save myself space and money. If I write a report for my boss, I know what details she'll want me to cover and what to leave out. In all of these instances, I know the audience and their expectations and to some degree I trust that knowledge.

It is only in the classroom that audience takes on a more ambivalent role because writers must often imagine an audience. For accomplished academic writers, audience is a group of peers who participate in the particular conversation that the text addresses. Beginning students do not have a sense of such an audience. If they consider audience at all, they usually think of the teacher as the audience which is more about the power of grades than it is about an actual audience. After all, a teacher has passed judgment on their writing by assigning them grades for 12 years or more. Those grades indicate the importance of the instructor and seem to dictate that she be the audience, but this may not be the best stance for the writer to take. In fact, I would argue that the teacher is not the proper audience for the writer to consider.[1] When students assume the teacher is the audience, they tend to reduce the clarity and completeness of their logic.

Most frequently, I talk about audience in tutoring situations in which an instructor has commented on a paper that the student's writing is "underdeveloped," "needs clarification," or "jumps around." To me, these assessments signal that the writer "assumes" too much about the audience, the reader/instructor. The writer doesn't see his work as an independent piece of writing. He sees it tied to class discussions or interactions with the

teacher. Or sometimes, he is so tied into his own thinking about the ideas that he assumes too much in the writing because it's already clear in his mind; he is his own audience. In each of these cases, the presumed "audience" misleads the writer into not fully explaining or connecting his ideas.

With such students I raise "audience" as a writing consideration. I point out the problems of thinking of the teacher as the audience. I say that because as students we presume the teacher is "all-knowing" or at least knows more than we do; after all, she's the teacher. But such audience expectation tricks us into a lack of specificity. We don't draw the connections needed to effectively make our points. We imagine writing is still part of the classroom dynamic, not an independent text which must create its own context. I try to explain to students that when a teacher reads a paper, it's a reading task. The teacher doesn't supply any information from discussions outside of the paper; the paper must stand alone. It's difficult to convey this to students. I think I learned it most clearly by being a tutor and a teacher. When you read others' writings, you begin to discover that jumping off from the assignment question directly into an answer doesn't work well because the question isn't in the paper, it's not part of the new context. Equally, assumptions about definitions of words or explanations of who characters are cannot be ignored in the writing. The exact *what*, the exact *who*, create the space for the argument that the writer is making—the context is not pre-existent.

Bringing up audience can be problematic for students if tutors try to suggest inappropriate audiences; otherwise, I think it can raise an awareness that seldom gets addressed with undergraduates. I suggest students think of a peer to write to, a college friend who may or may not know the material but can understand their reasoning. As Peter Elbow points out, that's what professionals do. Simultaneously, such advice helps writers

achieve a more confident tone because the writing goes across to a peer rather than up to a superior. Such an audience also leads a writer toward more explanation, explicitness, and examples because there is not an assumption that the reader already understands. A peer audience creates the kind of writing that most of us are familiar with.

It can also help students write in language and ideas that they have control of. There's no need to inflate vocabulary for a peer. There's no need to write in convoluted sentences so that the writer appears more intelligent and the writing more complex. Appearance diminishes as a concern and communication increases when writing is done for a peer.

It is vitally important that tutors not merely change the type of problem a student writer has by proposing an audience that will change their discourse so much that it leaves the academic realm. For example, suggesting an audience of Aunt Sally or their best buddy Joe could cause students to move into familial or colloquial language that could make their paper less palatable for their academic instructor who still decides on the grade. Such audience choices might help some students think their papers through more thoroughly, but the language choices that go with such audiences may not be acceptable in the classroom.

Or, gratefully, they may be acceptable. In some classrooms, for some assignments, personal, colloquial, comfortable writing and language is not only allowed but valued. And this is where I again agree with Dornsife—it's important as a tutor to ask questions which help students assess their instructors' preferences. And if students don't have enough information to make such assessments, I send them back to the classroom with questions: "Can I use *I* in my paper?" "Should I use or avoid examples from my life to support my points?" "If I use street talk, will it negatively affect my grade?" As a tutor, one of my jobs is helping students learn how to be good

students, not only in their writing, but also in classroom interactions. This too is an audience consideration.

Students may come to us hoping for "the right answer," but all we can ever provide is readerly feedback, an outside perspective on what they've written. There aren't "right" answers when it comes to writing though there are often better choices, and those choices are based on asking appropriate questions of ourselves, our teachers, and others who are willing to read our writing. Audience considerations can help students to realize that writing is not a single entity. All writing is not the five-paragraph essay. As tutors, we can help students to learn this. Michael Clark puts it this way:

> There is no such thing as Good Writing, a style that is always appropriate in every situation. Or, as a corollary, there are many kinds of good writing; good technical writing is different from good journalism is different from good exposition, etc. (131)

Part of learning that there are a variety of audiences is learning that different kinds of writing are preferable in certain settings. I talk differently with my mother than I do with my friends. I need to write differently for history than I do for literature or for a letter to the editor. There are many kinds of good writing. As tutors, we need to encourage students to think about audience whenever and wherever they write.

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[1] In "Intimacy and Audience," Thom Hawkins accepts the teacher as the audience and sees the tutor as an intermediary between student and teacher. He says student writers don't fully understand what the *teacher-audience* wants, and tutors provide the "missing link [which] is the opportunity to use oral language in discursive

intellectual discourse, and that such discourse helps teach students the skills and judgment necessary to revise" (64). I agree that talking about a paper helps writers to re-think and re-vise, but I believe that shifting the audience to a peer creates a short-cut to students' understanding, particularly in terms of judgment which can be elusive.

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Differance: Aiding the writer to reader shift

Ah-haaa—we say to ourselves when a theoretical concept suddenly pulses with the energy of a familiar practice. Ah-haaa. So that's why. . . . Admittedly, such moments may be all too rare in our writing center practice; we tend to be too busy doing to spend much time musing on why *what* we are doing works. But when serendipity strikes, I think we ought not ignore the moment of recognition.

Take the issue of *"differance"*—or if you've had it with Derrida, plain old "difference." I assure you it won't make any. I was thinking the other day about the whole abstract concept of otherness, Other, (m)other, Not-Me—call it what you will—when a little "aha" went off in my mind. We already know how concepts that engage us in romps through literary critical theory can play out significantly in our responses to student texts as well as literary texts (Crowley, 1987, 1989; White, 1984). But it occurs to me that when we read as literati—especially when we read literary theorists—the otherness of the text is hardly in question. I mean, it's not and never has been our own text, right? We are in no danger of confusing ourselves or our words or our thoughts even for a minute with this text we are reading.

The same goes for us when we are in our tutoring role in the writing center. We sit down and talk with the students about their texts. We are the readers. They are the writers. The text is text. No problem.

But there is a problem when a writer tries to be the reader of her own text. We think we know about the problem. We realize that it is difficult to be "objective" about one's efforts, and that it is

easy to skip over or self-correct misspellings or omitted words or fail to recognize a gap in logic. To compensate, we provide the fresh eye so necessary for constructive responses through our writing center tutorials and our peer editing groups in composition classes. When we do this, we are fostering *differance* with a capital D.

Derrida has much to say to us about his coining of the word to meld the sense of deferral of meaning (from "defer") with the sense of differentiation and articulation (from "differ") (*Of Grammatology*, 63-66). But an articulation is a joint, or hinge, as well as a rupture. In writing, such cracks or brisures are also "traces," Derrida posits, indications of meaning "beyond the text" that has been deferred or repressed. The trace thus leads back to the "enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside" (70). What this means to me (on a good day) is that when a writer reads her own text, she is likely to be pulled back into the very struggle to identify and articulate meanings. The places in the text that are problematic ARE the cracks, or brisures, that indicate where she's wrestling with words that keep displacing and deferring and repressing meaning and mixing up inside and outside.

A reader's relation to writing is—has to be—Different, Other than a writer's. If, ultimately, we are trying to move a writer into a reader or editor's role, then of course we have to put her into the Different or Other position. We have to increase the *differance* between the writer's text, a lot of which is still swirling around in her head, and the reader's or interpreter's or critic's, most of which is only on the page. It dawned on me

that some of the successful moves we already make as part of our writing center conference strategy are successful precisely because they foster this sense of otherness.

For instance, the tutor reads the text aloud. Here are several steps into difference. One is the aural rather than written mode. The text is going to be different when heard as sound rather than seen as print or handwriting. Another step is spatial. Instead of the writing still being in my hand—especially if it is no longer literally in my handwriting or being held by me—it is coming from somebody else over there, and coming from the other's mouth and tongue, with different, perhaps surprising, interpretations. Considerable distance, otherness, is being created.

Pushing them even further away from the writer's position, I often ask students in my comp classes and in the lab to write a response to the text—their own—they've just heard. They may use a response sheet to guide these responses—just as they do when they respond to a classmate's text. The intent is to force attention onto elements of the text itself and away from themselves as writers. For example, I might ask them to underline the thesis statement, or number the examples for each of the main points; I do not ask them to "tell about what it was like for you to leave your family." That might be a valid and important prompt when a writer is trying to generate new material—when the writer is still appropriately being encouraged to be a writer, to be in the writer role. But when we are trying to get the writer out of the writer role and into a reader position, we need to get and keep her outside of the text.

There is third tactic for keeping the writer from slipping through those cracks and brisures long enough to be able to literally see what is actually on the page and not in his head. This involves calling the writer's attention to the form of the text, as opposed to the content. Responding to form involves questions like these: Are the sentences long or short? Are they questions? Are there patterns of words or phrases which are repeated? What verbs are used? Are they passive or active, to-be or action verbs? What are the sentence patterns— S-V-O? Any variety?

Although such points may well have been raised by the composition teacher or textbook, a writer is unlikely to observe them at play in his own text until specifically pushed to do so. This, I submit, is not due to willful disobedience, but rather due to the natural preoccupation about getting thoughts—any thoughts at all—on the subject under control in one's mind. That is a huge and ongoing, roiling and internal operation, which precludes much attention being paid to the external form of expression. How often, for example, have we had the experience of calling a student's attention to three passive voiced constructions in a row and receiving no satisfaction for our pains: "But it's true; it WAS announced in the assembly hall and it WAS decided by the principal and it WAS protested by the students that same afternoon and that's exactly what happened. If you don't believe me, ask Mike, he was there, too. . . ." More often than not, it's not just that the student doesn't understand passive construction (although too many don't seem to), but that the student is putting his entire attention on articulating the meaning or content of his expression. That student is not being a reader of his text—he has not experienced enough difference or distance to respond TO its form. He has not pulled himself to the outside.

But with practice he can. He can circle and count his "was" words. He can use square pieces of felt to represent major divisions of his paper, and smaller triangles to show examples within them, and look at the resulting shapes to assess balance and relatedness. He can learn to see the surface of his text as surface. We can show him where the surface breaks—where there is a gap, a word omitted, a fluke of tense or agreement, a "brisure" or "aporia." We don't have to launch into a mini-course on Derrida and poststructuralism (although students often enjoy hearing that there are people who make their living thinking and writing about language and who think that glitches in writing can have meaning "beyond the text").

Those of us who have been trained in composition theory and who work with writers know, perhaps better than anyone, that one of the most important benefits of writing is its fostering of perspective on what, until they are written, are just blurred, pre-conscious or proto-ideational glimmers. Through writing, the writer can achieve vision and re-vision. But the writing itself is just the first step. We have to make the next one—from the writer's to the reader's position—explicit. And that makes all the *differance*.

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Freshman Tutoring

I loved grammar, the punctuation
of life: ecstasy in exclamation marks,
humble question marks. So
I became a tutor, organizing myself
around the sentences of freshman composers,
taking their run-ons into my blood, their fragments
under my skin. I sat them at round tables
in a room with sanctioned graffiti on the walls—
permanent black parables, pictures of chickens,
the crazy horse that was my logo. I read their summers,
practiced posture with standard square shoulders
and eyes two inches apart searching
through their papers for the man
that bit the dog, for the divorces narrowed down
to a car, to a speedboat, to the turning point
that brings young women to wear leather.

It's funny how I come to accept things.
Not to correct content—you can't
make the student love ice cream.
Hate chocolate, if you like,
forget that fudge dripping down
your lip feels like a kiss. And licking
around the cone, the discovery of sweet
solidity at the cone's edge, the return

to frozen chaos just above that line.
I can't require them to include details about a sister
walking out of the kitchen at age twelve
setting candles, cake and Neapolitan
on a make-shift dinner table at Halloween.
I have no breath to enforce that image,
or to remove the paragraph where
at age eighteen she turns to heroin—
that essay began in an alley, I see
garbage cans, and Ellen,
first mention of name on page five,
laughing. My job is to say, "How Poignant,"
or that's a run-on, you need a comma here.
Hold your own breakdown
for the conclusion. Whatever you do,
don't buy a rusted Chevy in this essay,
or please use it in the introduction. Start Happy.
Let your reader identify with the story.
Who would believe you care, unless they can visualize
the tracks on her arm, almost feel the rubber band
popping up one lonely vein. Show the street light
flickering around the corner, shining shadows
onto the brick walls. Use imagery early, I say.
Let the details be clear.
Make them punctual.

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Wyoming Conference on English

June 20-24, 1995
Laramie, Wyoming
"The Politics of English Studies"

The 23rd Wyoming Conference on English invites teachers, graduate students, and administrators in schools, colleges, and universities to participate in a program of workshops, panels, and social gatherings. The purpose of the conference is to address critical issues in English. For a list of invited speakers and workshop leaders and information about the conference, contact Kathy Evertz, Conference Director, English Dept., Box 3353, University Station, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071-3353, 307-766-6311 or 766-6486. E-mail: kevertz@uwyo.edu

$\mathcal{T}$UTORS' COLUMN

(Ed. note: This month's Tutors' Column includes two tutors' essays.)

The open-ended "personal narrative" is often the most daunting part of a graduate school or scholarship application. Even straight-A English majors may have trouble condensing all of their interests and accomplishments into a brief, interesting essay.

While some universities and scholarship organizations request essays responding to specific questions, many still require a 500- to 750-word narrative of the applicant's background and goals. When I tutor students writing essays of the latter kind, I stress the following points:

The people reading your essay want a sense of who you are, not just what you have done.

Since most applications provide special places for listing extracurricular activities, academic honors, and job experience, students should avoid cramming their personal narratives with information more appropriate to a resume. The narrative should evoke the writer's personality and aspirations, thus supplying the human dimension missing from lists of activities.

Focus your essay on experiences that relate to the program or profession you hope to enter.

Students can strengthen their applications by connecting their past experience with their academic and professional goals. Consider the following examples:

• I recently advised a medical school applicant to focus his essay on his volunteer work for a hospital and local rescue squad. By going into detail about these experiences—and expressing the excitement he felt when he helped deliver a baby—he illustrated his personality and his commitment to the medical profession.

• In the case of a student applying for a study-abroad scholarship, I suggested she concentrate on her happy experience living in the Spanish House. She could thus show how fellow students, as well as faculty, had piqued her interest in studying Spanish language and culture. She could also create a narrative frame for discussing her future as a teacher with a special interest in international education.

Use active, concrete language.

People who read hundreds— maybe thousands—of applications are starving for precise, personable prose. In the words of Professor Sara Mack, who advises Rhodes Scholarship nominees at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "Write concretely. Avoid abstractions. Whenever possible, use verbs rather than Latinate nouns. Remember, you don't need to be fancy; just write clearly and directly."

Also, students are well advised to vary their sentence structure. Whole paragraphs consisting of sentences beginning,"I participated in. . . ," and "I traveled to. . ." become repetitive and may appear conceited as well.

Play down your weak points.

Students sometimes ask whether they should try to explain the lone "D" on the transcript or discuss problems that have hurt their overall academic performance. In general, the answer is: No—unless they consider their bad experience useful preparation for the future. An essay that focuses on positive experiences suggests a much more upbeat, achievement-oriented applicant than an essay that dwells on bad grades or bad times. Students should mention unfortunate experiences only if they can explain how these past difficulties have helped prepare them for the challenges of the program to which they are applying.

Seek a second opinion before you mail your application.

Fellow students, professors, or writing center tutors may provide the objective viewpoint a grad-school or scholarship applicant needs. Confronted with a live audience, most writers quickly realize the importance of precision and clarity in their own work. If they can fill in the gaps in their essays now, applicants stand a much better chance of impressing the reader who will help determine the direction of their careers.

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Am I a good tutor?

As writing tutors, we have very limited contact with our students. We see students' papers at various stages of the writing process, but seldom do we share the student's entire writing experience. With this in mind, we commonly struggle with feelings of self-doubt: Am I really helping her become a better writer? Am I really making a difference? Am I a good tutor?

Most of our self-doubt is grounded in our commitment to our students and our desire to provide them with the best possible tutoring experience. In the tutoring environment, we want a sense that our students perceive the time they spend in the Writing Center with their tutors as valuable, that they feel their writing has improved, and that they have satisfied expectations for a given assignment. So, to assure ourselves that we are effective tutors, we often seek ways to measure and evaluate our tutoring abilities. In our attempts to establish criteria, we can find ourselves pulled towards the more visible students' products. However, we should look for our marks of success within our students' improved writing processes and attitudes. For example, frequently we are tempted to assume responsibility for students' writing successes and failures: If the student succeeds, we succeed, but if the student fails, we tutors fail. When our students achieve writing successes (especially when highlighted by a favorable grade), it is easy for us to feel a sense of shared pride and a sense of "I am a good tutor." However, more often than not, our students may not return to us eager to share or discuss a paper once it is no longer needed for class. They may have closed the door on that paper and be focused on their next writing task, they may feel discouraged by the lack of positive grades, or they may feel as if they just want to get on with the assignments so they can finish and pass the class. Therefore, for us to focus on graded papers to measure our effectiveness as writing tutors is un-

reliable and unfair to us. We are forgetting that we are only part of the process enabling our students to complete their writing assignments.

So where can we turn to get a sense of whether we are honestly helping our students improve their writing? We easily accept the fact that we would be expecting too much of ourselves to see monumental leaps in their writing abilities. Yet, we still seek signs that indicate we are effective tutors. If we can't expect to see monumental leaps, what can we hope to see?

To begin with, we hope to see our students become more comfortable with the idea of writing. Frequently, we need to remind ourselves that for most of our students, writing has been a less-than-pleasurable experience, so many of them are skilled in writing avoidance. As they attempt to avoid writing, we may observe them spending great amounts of time shuffling paper, sharpening pencils, and getting comfortable—as they might describe it, "getting ready to write." Also, we may hear such comments as: "I can't think of anything to write about," or "I have writer's block, so I'll work on this later," or "I've always been terrible at English," or "I just don't understand what my teacher wants." On the other hand, some of our reluctant writers may have plenty to say, so will try to present an oral version of their paper to us rather than begin writing their paper. However, not all of our anxious writers will attempt to avoid writing.

In the writing center environment, it's not uncommon for us to find students who consistently produce the *safe* paper: a generalization with short, simple sentences that weakly describe something they hope their teacher will accept as meeting the assignment. For many of these writers, writing is not an opportunity to learn more about writing and to improve their writing; it is another

chance to appear stupid and to fail. Rather than appear stupid or risk failure, they try to cling to safe writing that presents fewer chances for writing failure. To validate their safe writing, they may turn to us with "How should I say this?" or "Is this right?" or "What do you think?" or "You're so good at this; how would you do it?" They are unable/unwilling to experience learning that can result when risks are taken; their fear of error/failure controls their writing. Yet, it is through their taking risks in sharing their ideas and placing their writing errors in view that our students will learn how to make writing work for themselves and experience growth as writers.

Consequently, major tasks for us in the writing center are to help our students reduce writing avoidance behaviors and to lower their levels of writing anxiety, so they are comfortable taking writing risks and learning from their writing. When we are supportive and non-threatening, when we encourage our students to write out their ideas, and when we help our students to begin seeing themselves as people with good ideas worth writing, we facilitate their willingness to take personal risks and write. Our helping them feel comfortable writing and comfortable discussing their writing enables them to take a major step towards improving their writing. Our students will learn to write only if they feel it's safe to write.

When our students can comfortably discuss their papers with us, when they come to the writing center ready to work, when they value our responses to their writing, and when they relax and occasionally smile, we have succeeded, and we can say: "I am a good tutor!"

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Let's have a different conversation!

Introduction

The topic of student dependence is an interesting one because it may reveal more about how we, as learning assistance professionals, tend to personalize many issues, assume too much responsibility (or blame), and often fail to open up a more critical dialogue. Fortunately, in "Countering the myth of (in)dependence: Developing life-long clients," Dave Healy wisely moves the conversation toward a larger perspective by reiterating Andrea Lunsford's dismissal of the center-as-storehouse model and further developing the concept of socially constructed and mediated learning.

Let's not misframe complex issues in terms of students' independence/dependence when we need to look at the larger ecology, the ways in which many factors—our institutional cultures, expectations, resource deployment, student profiles, center budgets, staffing patterns, and mission—can get played out (often beyond our control) and can get mislabeled as client dependency. In this article I examine some of the institutional factors which contribute to perceptions of dependence, and, along the way, I identify some of the associations raised through the use of the term.

Dependence—What Do We Really Mean?

Defining dependence is no easy matter. The first criterion one thinks of in terms of dependence as it relates to tutees is the sheer number of times they may come to our centers (as in, "Gee, don't you think X is coming too often to the center; we don't want to create a dependency now, do we?"). This thinking assumes some optimum number of visits, some cosmic quota, but would such a quota be the same for each student? Clearly not. Then what factors could determine the optimum number?

Are two visits a week really so much worse than one visit? Most of us would probably feel uncomfortable with a limit of two if we had the resources. So let's say we could establish that three visits a week could possibly be considered overuse. But what about three or even four visits a week during short, but particularly loaded or stressful times? Here's a scenario: What about the freshman student with strong narrative writing but extremely limited research and persuasive writing experience who finds herself in a class where the faculty member has assigned a rather complex and lengthy research or persuasive paper? Would that student be said to be dependent if she came into the center three times a week for two weeks to get her bearings? Now supposing this student's first language is Mandarin and she has a learning disability? Well, as I've said, defining dependency and applying it to establish a policy is no easy matter.

What about the notion of the "dependent personality" as raised by Michael Pemberton? To what extent do our centers encounter or even draw dependent students? And, in the absence of trained psychologists, how are we to untangle the complex factors involved in a DPD (dependent personality disorder) diagnosis? Livesley, et al. provide a compelling set of descriptors for this "personality," and granted, our institutions should be interested in learning more about these folks. Logically, couldn't dependence be demonstrated in a single visit to a center (which does not seem to be a concern, at least in the circles I'm traveling) or be operating outside center use? And, if we are worried about DPD within the center, why wouldn't we be equally concerned with DPD as related to other aspects of campus life? So, I'm not so sure that what people are talking

about is really related to DPD, although it is an issue worth discussing.

We also hear from our colleagues that students are "overdependent." How is overdependence different from dependence? Is the former just more of the latter? Is there some kind of continuum of dependent behaviors? Are there different kinds of dependence and are all kinds "inappropriate?"

Are there certain situations which can promote what could look like dependent behavior? Are there strategies, positions, attitudes in the tutoring process which can foster dependence? If so, isn't it possible that these elements may also be present in the classroom, although we don't hear as much comment about this?

The term "dependence" also suggests a kind of addictive quality. However, when we begin to apply Marie Winn's criteria of addiction to our students' relationships to our centers, we realize this sense of dependence is inaccurate. For example, Winn cites as one criterion for addiction the "pursuit of pleasure," but is center work really pleasurable in the same sense as drugs or alcohol? Other criteria—including the need to experience some interaction to feel normal or the seeking out of certain experiences repeatedly but never being satisfied—fail to work when applied to our clients. Do they ever really need our centers to feel normal? Do they find themselves constantly asking for appointments? Rarely, I think. Another of Winn's criteria is the constraining of one's life because of a particular experience. Does coming to the center really result in a shutting off of other relationships or a decreased capacity to care for oneself? Clearly, dependence as even a mild form of addiction is inaccurate, not to mention ludicrous.

The use of the word "dependence" is too judgmental, too vague, too richly associative of images which are more confusing than helpful. But, most importantly, the term masks how the institution itself impacts what I'd rather name as misuse of many resources, which include the center, but also other staff and faculty. If we replace "dependence" with misuse, I think the conversations we'd have would be more productive and less loaded, especially if we ask questions about what is being misused, who is doing the misusing, and how the misuse is occurring.

Institutional Factors Contributing to Misuse

I. Diagnostic Data and Student Profiles

In order to know whether a student is overusing the center we need to be able to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of that student's learning needs. Students acquiring a second (or third or fourth) language, for example, take years to improve their sentence structure and grammar (Spack) and, consequently, may need to return to the center frequently for help in those classes in which grammatically correct sentences are a requirement. Some learning disabled students benefit greatly from comprehensive testing, consultation, and tutoring over a lengthy time period in order to make adjustments in their study habits and skills and develop an understanding of the ways in which particular classroom accommodations may benefit them. Other students who benefit from more discussion than is available in their classes may also be found to progress with frequent contact in a collaborative learning setting such as the tutorial.

Unfortunately, how many of our centers are staffed with personnel who both have the time and the expertise to help students comprehensively explore their learning needs? And, how many students would be willing to take the time to participate in such exploration? Yet, until we really understand a student's

academic profile, how can we say he/she is overusing or misusing the center?

2. Assessment of Student Motivation and Institutional Responsiveness

Given our many tasks, how many of us are able to work through a comprehensive needs assessment to determine all the reasons students are coming to our centers? Although many of us use some form of intake procedure to ascertain clients' initially stated reasons for coming, there are often many more subtle and even pressing reasons that may not be easily identified. In my 1993 Annual Report, I speculated that our Lesley students came for at least eighteen different reasons, some of which were rather short-term (to survive a particular course or project, to comply with a particular faculty member's request to begin tutoring, to finish an "incomplete" grade, to understand a particular assignment better, to learn certain academic research conventions) and might be fairly easily accommodated within a semester or just a few sessions. Other reasons that drove students to the center were much more complex and in many cases could require tutorials over a longer period of time (to work on coping strategies which cut across classes and projects, to assess appropriateness of a career choice, to increase self esteem, to have social contact within a learning community, to work through particular blocks or self-defeating behaviors, to work on reading comprehension, to reduce test anxiety). Students returning to the center throughout the semester who wish to work on any of the above might well be using the tutorial in appropriate ways, but an outsider might only see the number of visits accumulated and prematurely decide that these students had become "dependent."

Ideally, once we fully understand our students' motivations, we would either satisfy requests through center work or referral to another campus office. Yet, all too often we may realize that there is no other appropriate office or existing procedure for that student. Or, we decide that while another office might be able to offer effective support, a particu-

larly fragile student would be better served by maintaining a short-term connection to center personnel as the student is triaged to another department. Since centers tend to be both extremely flexible and client-oriented, we often find ourselves in the position of attempting to meet client needs to whatever extent is possible. This attitude can be misconstrued as "enabling" in the psychological lingo. Some might see us as "overcommitted."

3. Faculty Expectations for Student Writing

What kinds of comments are faculty making on student papers? For example, faculty comments that urge students to take papers to the center to "fix" something (usually sentence structure, grammar, spelling) rather than to develop ideas and explore ways to find a focus may encourage the view of centers as Red Cross stations where students should go to be cured. Those comments which direct students to finish their work through the center suggest that the center function as a stand-in teacher. This message, in turn, contributes to a misunderstanding of how centers best operate and can lead to inappropriate student expectations about and behaviors during tutorials. Do some faculty have expectations that the center will "save" a student from failing? Are faculty using the center to teach discipline-specific concepts that really need to be taught in the context of a class? Are faculty overrelying on our centers to address learning style issues they are unable or unwilling to address in their classes? And, as faculty are giving these messages and students are responding by making tutorial appointments, what conclusions about our clients' center use are others drawing? In short, how much are faculty helping to create a perception of dependence?

Timing is also important. Faculty assignment of papers unexpectedly and/or late in the semester can trigger dramatic appeals for more tutorials among students who feel overwhelmed as they try to juggle yet another task. Such late assignments can create undue stress which

can tempt tutors toward more directive tutorials. This situation can ultimately lead to misunderstanding of dependency. Another aspect of timing involves how much attention faculty are paying to students' writing processes and how faculty conceptualize center intervention in that process. Are faculty encouraging student use of our centers in all phases of writing? Or, are faculty referring students only as a last resort after reading a student's final draft? In the latter case students may see center help as the means to a passing grade; they can press us to provide multiple tutorial hours within a very short time frame. Further, these same students may come to their tutorials feeling generally deflated and insecure about their writing efforts, looking for explanations and suggestions about what the faculty member wants, and casting the tutors as authorities and themselves as lowly novices.

4. The Intellectual Challenge of Writing Assignments

Another critical force which drives students to our centers is the type of writing assigned. Written projects or papers which require more complex analysis or a different kind of research than students have previously performed can increase demand for tutoring (not necessarily a bad thing). And these assignments, coupled with limited in-class time devoted to address assignment-related questions and limited outside availability of faculty to conference on students' writing progress, certainly can encourage heavy use of our centers and make us vulnerable to judgments about students' dependency. But, students who see our tutors as nurturing readers and who understand that writing needs an audience—to which they would otherwise not have access— may be using the center quite appropriately, in the sense of the "Burkean Parlor," to which Healy, quoting Lunsford, refers.

5. Faculty Outreach

To what extent are centers able to reach out to faculty (and staff) to help them understand our work and engage them in discussions about any of the

above? How many of us have the time to do all the outreach that may be necessary? How many of us even include ongoing faculty development as part of our mission? And how many of our faculty members and administrators would be supportive of such an undertaking?

6. Orientation, Testing and Placement

What kinds of student and faculty orientations are our schools holding, and is there a place during these events in which our centers have enough time to encourage the best utilization of our resources? What are our institutions doing about initial assessment of incoming students and allocation of resources, courses and programs for students who need more time to develop their skills? If there are few options for these students, then some will seek out centers as their academic life savers.

7. Tutor Training, Supervision, and Communication

What kinds of tutor training programs do our centers have? What kinds, how much, and at what intervals do we hold our training and in what ways do we promote sensitization to such issues as assessment of learning styles and affective issues? To what extent do our centers pay explicit attention to tutors' issues? It is not uncommon for undergraduate tutors to be working through their own issues about setting limits and establishing boundaries, which can play into issues of dependency among our tutees.

How many of us can afford to have ongoing training (or are in institutions which have open blocks available for such meetings)? How effective is our intra-center communication so that we can find ways to further reinforce strategies for implementing effective approaches?

Especially in centers which employ student workers, what kind of tutor supervision do we offer with whatever re-

sources we have? Do our centers have a clearly articulated and well implemented philosophy of supervision? Do all tutors have adequate access to center staff to help assess tutees' needs and identify the most effective methods to meet those needs? Does the infrastructure of our centers even allow overlapping coverage to facilitate tutor-staff interaction?

8. Center Budget and Other Administrative Matters

Implied in almost every item above, we need to look realistically at our budgets and the ways in which budgetary matters can have implications for the issue of client misuse. In my ten years of conference going, I have rarely heard a center staff person say she/he has an ample budget. Wright notes the small number of centers with the capability of additional funding beyond their university allocation. Without sufficient monetary resources we may find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of having to choose, and, again, being service-oriented, we often choose to put our resources into tutorial time (as opposed to tutor training, supervision, or into administrative assistants who might be able to help us provide more accurate information to prospective tutees and make the best matches possible between tutor and tutee).

Do we have the expertise we need? If we are seeing, as we are at Lesley, a growing number of ESL students, do we have ESL expertise represented among our staff? Are we clear about what peer tutors might be able to provide to these students and what they cannot and perhaps should not be providing without additional training and support?

Centers are change agents. One of the aspects we need to change is the perception of how we work. Unfortunately, as Wright notes, many center administrators lack sufficient administrative experi-

> **The use of the word "dependence" is too judgmental, too vague, too richly associative of images which are more confusing than helpful.**

ence or training to do all the pieces of our jobs.

Conclusion

Dependency is a loaded term and must be re-defined so it is more specific and measurable. Of course we need to look at real overuse of the center or inappropriate use (coming to fulfill needs and address issues that the center cannot or should not respond to). Yet, we need to understand that these phenomena are difficult and impractical to assess on either an individual or cohort level. Acknowledging the real possibility that some of our clients may exhibit characteristics of "dependent" personalities, we also need to understand that the concept of dependence is perhaps more of a social construct used to judge certain student behaviors and attitudes which often have, in fact, been promoted by institutional factors. Where we need to place our attention is on the cultures which promote these factors and the ways in which our centers may unwittingly contribute to misperceptions of our work. Where we ourselves are contributing to these perspectives, to the extent we are able, we need to adopt better strategies and practices. Where other people, policies, and procedures are contributing to the misperceptions, we need to help our institutions move toward change.

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Mary Jo Turley
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<u>*Writing Lab Newsletter*</u>

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Ignorance and the unethical writing center

In my last column, I outlined what I saw as the "Top Ten" reasons why writing centers might be perceived as unethical sites for writing instruction, and in this column, I will begin to review and assess some of those reasons. Let me start with the easiest ones first:

    10) Writing centers are unethical because the tutors who work there tell students how to write their papers.

    9) Writing centers are unethical because the tutors who work there write the students' papers for them.

Well, let me put it this way: we don't. Clear enough? Now in my next column. . . .

Sigh. I suppose I really can't get away that easily. I know that tutors don't write student papers for them. You know that tutors don't write student papers for them. And we both know that tutors don't tell students how to write their papers either. But our perspectives are not really what's at issue here. What's at issue is the fact that there are still people out there who believe that this is exactly what we do in writing centers, and it's one of the reasons why some instructors do not want their students to visit us as they work on their drafts. Now, I don't believe this unflattering view of writing center activities is particularly widespread. Indeed, my sense of things is that the ongoing efforts made by writing center personnel to educate faculty members and students about the conferencing strategies employed by tutors has gone a long way toward disabusing people of this errant—and somewhat aberrant—notion (See, for example, Bishop 1990; Rodis 1990;

Carino, Floyd, and Lightle 1991; Walker 1991; Cosgrove 1993). But we haven't reached everybody, and it's likely we never will.

Though there have been no recent articles or surveys documenting the prevalence of such attitudes (in fact, recent surveys such as those conducted by Masiello and Hayward [1991], seem to indicate that these attitudes may be on the decline), the occasional pithy anecdote in journal articles (e.g., North 1984) or spirited response to the idea that tutors cooperate in a "form of plagiarism" (Behm 1989; Cosgrove 1993) attests to the fact that some instructors—both within English departments and outside them—continue to hold such beliefs. But where do these beliefs come from? What sort of educational epistemology are they grounded in? And how can we best respond to them and the ethical frameworks which they engender?

There are no simple answers to these questions, but I think it is reasonable to assume that the belief that tutors literally "take control" of student papers stems from two primary causes: (1) simple ignorance of what the "writing process" entails, and (2) a clear misunderstanding of the kind of "collaborative" work and peer interaction that goes on in writing centers. The impoverished view of writing revealed in these causes is closely tied to the current-traditional paradigm, which conceives of writers as solitary scribes in secluded spaces ("writers-in-the-garret" to use Andrea Lunsford's term) and maintains a deep suspicion that sudden improvements in student writing must necessarily be due to the inappropriate intervention of outside parties. I will return to these issues in a later

column when I discuss institutional concerns about assessment and accountability, but for now I would like to focus specifically on the above two points as they relate to the issues of textual ownership and ethical conferencing.

If one accepts the idea that writing is, in essence, a solitary activity and that the only appropriate point for response to writing is when instructors see a "polished" text at the end of the process, then yes, what writing centers do is unethical. But let me point out quite bluntly what we have all learned through the last twenty years of writing research and scholarship (and what we need to convey quite forcefully to those who think otherwise): Writing is a recursive process with many stages and it is not—and never has been—a completely solitary activity. Writers draw on their personal experiences, interactions with others, imagined audiences, and knowledge of other texts to supply both the content and structure of their own writing. These are all inherently social activities that refer to and depend upon interaction with others. Writers also generate ideas by talking with friends and colleagues, and they frequently hone those ideas by having other people read and respond to what they have written. Those readers —be they friends, roommates, classmates, family members, or instructors—rarely take a writer's request for feedback as a mandate to rewrite or transform the paper they have been given, and writing center consultants don't do so either. We read. We ask questions. We respond as readers. We offer suggestions. And we demand that the students be in charge of writing and revising their own texts. If one accepts the idea that writing is a process—and an inherently social pro-

cess at that—then what writing centers do is entirely ethical.

What makes our practice so hard for current-traditionalists to understand (and what makes it seem so potentially unethical) is the precarious balance we must maintain in conferences between helping students to improve their texts and insisting that students take responsibility for their own writing. This balance is not particularly well served by the terms "tutor" and "collaborator," which generally overstate the contributions we make to student papers and misrepresent the nature of our interactions with students in conferences. We may be "tutors"—people who teach—but we are also careful not to abuse our authoritative positions and be too directive with students. We may be "collaborators"—people who participate in the construction of written texts—but we limit our participation to asking questions and offering insights, not generating sentences or paragraphs for the students we work with. Nevertheless, given our positions as quasi-authorities and active participants in student writing processes, it is easy to see how current-traditionalists might interpret our efforts as either too directive or inappropriately helpful. To overcome these misperceptions, we must continue to do what we have been doing: educating faculty, inviting them to visit the center, sharing writing center literature with them, and asking them to observe or participate in mock tutorials. We will never manage to reach—or convince—everyone, but even a few victories are victories nonetheless.

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Question exchange

What are some useful questions you ask as a tutor? What questions top your list of ones not worth asking? Send in some of your favorites and rejects (be sure to note which is which), and we'll print them here for others to try out. To start us off, here are a few:
- When is your paper due? (useful)
- What's wrong with this paragraph? (reject)

Send your questions by mail, fax, or e-mail (see page 2 for all those addresses) to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.

What's old is new; what's new is old: Models for conferences

That writing centers have become an important component of many schools has been established beyond any doubt, and the multi-benefits which centers provide continue to be documented and explored. However, one of the truisms that those of us who have been involved in centers for years must remember is that we are constantly dealing with new tutors and new clients on a regular basis, and we must provide models which help tutors become as comfortable and efficient as possible and help clients become self-sufficient and independent as quickly as possible.

While the variety of models is almost limitless, in the Burlington Community High School's Write Place, we use a basic model, "Thinking/Talking It Through . . .," to help clients and tutors clearly understand an assignment, and we use two basic response models, "P-Q-P" and "W-W-W," to help tutors provide meaningful response to client writing.

"Thinking/Talking It Through. . ."
We developed the "Thinking/Talking It Through. . ." model because we discovered that many of the problems our clients encountered were due to their failure to clearly understand the assignment, and we know that tutors had to clearly understand the assignment in order to provide most meaningful response. The "Thinking/Talking It Through. . ." model can be modified to meet the needs of individual clients and/ or tutors and can easily be made into a work sheet for use by the client before the conference or for classroom use.

The components of the model are:
Name of class:
Name of instructor:

Assignment due date:

What is the assignment in the instructor's words?

What is the assignment in your words?

What research or information must you read before you can complete this assignment?

What is the assigned form for this assignment?

Are there other special requirements or demands for this assignment?

What does the assignment ask you to do? Inform the reader? Entertain the reader? Convince the reader?

What is the content to do? Summarize information only? Develop and share ideas/thesis? Convince the reader to adopt your ideas/action?

What is the announced grading criteria?

Who is grading this paper?

What will *this teacher* be looking for?

After pre-writing and thinking, what is the thesis you want to develop/share or have adopted?

Who will provide response to your ideas and your writing style?

Who will edit your paper for correctness before final submission?

"P-Q-P" and "W-W-W" Response Models

Once a client has a paper, we train our tutors, especially our beginning tutors, to use one of two response methods and to modify the sections of either model to meet the needs of a specific client in a specific situation. A tutor may use any part of either model or a client may request just specific response within each model. Again, both models can easily become effective written response forms for use when tutors are busy.

In both models, we stress that the tutor is to read the entire paper before beginning use of the model (orally or in writ-

ing), and that if a written response is used or requested, only "positive" comments or question marks are made on the paper. We also stress that the tutor must know the "draft number" of the paper to provide most meaningful response.

"P-Q-P" stands for "Praise-Question-Polish" and was developed by Bill Lyons of the Iowa City School District in Iowa City, Iowa. After reading the entire paper, the "questions" the writer "asks" are:

What parts of my paper do you like or do you think are especially effective?

What questions do you have about the content of my paper or about my writing style?

What suggestions do you have for revision and improvement of this paper?

In contrast to the more holistic approach of the "P-Q-P" model, the "W-W-W" model focuses on responses to "Written-Writing-Writer." After reading the entire paper, the "questions" the writer "asks" are:

What comments about the written (content/ideas) of my paper do you have? (*This is response to the "what" of the ideas.*)

What comments about the writing (style/development of ideas) do you have? (*This is response to the "how" the ideas are presented.*)

What comments do you have to me as the writer of this paper? (*This is response to the "who" of the paper.*)

Again, the client may not request that the tutor complete all components of the model, or the tutor may not need to use all of the components of either model. Also, as tutors gain competence and confidence in responding, the models can be modified in a variety of ways. The conference remains the heart of writing centers and of meaningful writing improvement, and we continue to have great

success with these models in our center work and in our classrooms.

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New from NCTE

The following are books recently published by the National Council of Teachers of English and may be ordered from NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Guide to Home Language Repair. Dennis Baron. 163 pages, paperbound. Price: $16.95; NCTE members: $12.95. (LC: 93-49855)

This irreverent look at the English language also confronts the popular image of English teachers as card-carrying members of the language police and examines such issues as whether the English language is dying, double standards and plagiarism, political correctness and language taboos, and the relevance of spelling bees in the age of spell checkers. This is entertaining and informative reading for tutors between their tutorials.

Evaluating Teachers of Writing. Ed. by Christine A. Hult. 189 pages, paperbound. Price: $19.95; NCTE members: $14.95. (LC: 93-27235)

This collection of essays addresses the theory and practice of teaching evaluations and describes a variety of methods for evaluating, including peer reviews,

student evaluations, and videotaped teaching. While the evaluation process for tutors is not directly addressed, some of this may be relevant to considerations for how tutors can be evaluated.

Voices on Voice: Perspectives, Definitions, Inquiry. Ed. Kathleen Blake Yancey. 363 pages, paperbound. Price: $29.95; NCTE members: $22.95. (LC: 94-21168)

These essays explore the concept of voice in a variety of ways—what voice is and how it relates to the self, to specific discourse communities, to pedagogy, and to culture. Other essays focus on various senses of voice, the process of coming to voice, and the notion of voice in writing as interpreted by deaf undergraduate students. An annotated bibliography is included.

Pedagogy in the Age of Politics: Writing and Reading (in) the Academy. Eds. Patricia A. Sullivan and Donna J. Qualley. 256 pages, paperbound. Price: $21.95; NCTE members: $15.95. (LC: 94-16004)

As current composition instruction shifts focus from the inner life of the writer to the social contexts of writing, from the self that writes to the sources of that self, forces within and outside the academy debate the purpose of writing. This diverse collection of essays explores ways that students and teachers respond to tensions arising from encounters with ideas, people, texts, and technologies; examines the history of writing in the academy; and critiques the content of composition courses. Other essays focus on advocacy and resistance in the writing class, teaching diverse literatures from an outsider perspective; and feminism and power.

Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing. Helen Fox. 157 pages, paperbound. Price: $16.95; NCTE members: $12.95. (LC: 94-16113)

Noticing that international students in her classes resisted her advice about improving their writing, Helen Fox began to realize that they did not (as she had assumed) share her Western view of such concepts as organization, coherence, clarity, depth, and the like. Fox became convinced that differences in ways of viewing the world and social relationships played a dominant role in the international students' difficulties with analytical writing. Fox's discussion explores her view that if American universities are truly interested in multiculturalism, they must open themselves to other ways of seeing the world and to differences in knowing and expressing that knowledge.

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