

# THE WRITING AB

N E W S L E T T E R

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writing

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of  
April, 1997

## ...FROM THE EDITOR...

In this month's issue of the newsletter, you'll find an emphasis on the value of tutoring for teachers. This insufficiently explored topic needs our attention because, as Christina Van Dyke explains, tutoring pedagogy can be a source of convergence with classroom practice and because, as the tutors from Texas Tech demonstrate, the writing center can be a site for teacher training. This raises an interesting possibility to puzzle over. If tutors do become better teachers, then should we open our labs to more teacher candidates so that we can be instrumental in the improvement of the teaching of writing? If so, have we lost our ability to do quality control in selecting tutors? If our primary focus is the student, are we relegating students to being the material teachers train on? For those of us facing pressures from education departments to give their teachers-in-training more writing lab experience, the answers are neither obvious nor easy.

For those of us who are curious about writing labs in other countries, Viviane Chase describes her writing center at the University of Brussels, in Belgium, where the unique mingles with the familiar. Yet another reminder that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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## From tutor to TA: Transferring pedagogy from the writing center to the composition classroom

In 1984, when Stephen North's essay "The Idea of a Writing Center" was published in *College English*, a revolutionized way of teaching emerged. The writing conference depicted tutor and writing student sitting side-by-side engaged in a stimulating dialogue about the organization of the student's paper, the writer with her pen in hand, the tutor asking directed questions that elicit insightful responses. In these conferences, although both the tutor and the student collaborate to facilitate the writing process, the bulk of the responsibility for composing and revising is placed on the student.

Keeping this image in mind, consider for a moment a different setting, the composition classroom. Here the teacher and the writing student are on opposite sides of the podium; the

teacher lectures about the importance of organization, while the student takes notes on abstract concepts about what is expected in an upcoming essay. In this situation, instruction is collective, and the teacher, more often than not, is prescriptive in her efforts to teach writing.

What becomes most apparent when we compare tutors to compo-

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sition instructors, writing centers to classrooms, are the different, in some ways radically opposed, pedagogical approaches simultaneously existing within the same department. At many colleges and universities there is an obvious pedagogical schism that divides the English department into two schools of thought concerning writing: there is the composition and rhetoric faculty on one side, stressing the importance of writing centers, favoring process over product, and promoting student-centered learning environments. The other side consists of literature faculty, referring to the writing center as a "fix-it shop," stressing product over process, and conducting classes that are teacher-centered or text-centered. North calls misconceptions such as these "pedagogical aberrations" and posits that the schism is a "vital and authentic reflection of a way of thinking about writing and the teaching of writing that is alive and well and living in English departments everywhere" (437). If North is right and "pedagogical aberrations" do exist and stem from differing views and approaches to thinking about and teaching writing, then perhaps the best way to begin creating unity within the English department would be to bridge the gap between writing center pedagogy and pedagogy employed in composition classrooms.

Creating unity in a department divided by opposing perspectives on how writing should be taught will be difficult but not impossible. Fortunately, writing centers and composition classrooms are not as dissimilar as many may believe. In fact, faculty in both areas agree that "the primary goals in teaching writing should be the development of general patterns of thinking and writing" (North 435). As a former writing center tutor and a current teaching assistant, I have had experience teaching writing in both environments. My experiences have led me to believe that the most effective way to achieve the goals that writing centers

and composition classrooms strive toward and to successfully bridge the pedagogical gap that causes dissension within the English department would be to use the writing center as a training facility for all future composition instructors. Most graduate programs in English, whether they are two-year M.A. programs or four-year Ph.D. programs, do not allow first-year students to be teaching assistants. Instead, first-year students are usually research assistants or tutors in the writing center. If we assume that the majority of English graduate students will pursue teaching as a career, then their first exposure to the classroom is often as a TA. Even though TAs receive training prior to entering a classroom, they may not be prepared to teach composition since their own course load, undergraduate and graduate, has emphasized the study of literature. To better equip TAs and all future teachers of writing with the skills they need to teach composition, graduate students should work as tutors in the writing center before they become TAs. The skills that tutors acquire are invaluable and can be made applicable in composition classrooms.

To realize how writing center pedagogy can be transferred into composition classrooms it is important to have a clear understanding of what goes on in writing centers and why tutors are vital assets. North explains that writing centers

have been open to anybody in the university community, worked with writers at any time during the composing of a piece of writing, and dealt with whole pieces of discourse, and not exercises on what might be construed as 'subskills' (spelling, punctuation, etc.) outside of the context of the writers' work. (434)

Additionally, North points out that the writing center should represent the "marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that

writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered" (438). Tilly and John Warnock expound upon North's idea of how writing should be taught by affirming that

In many writing centers writing is taught with a focus on meaning, not form; on process, not product; on authorial intention and audience expectation, not teacher authority or punitive measures; on holistic and human concerns, not errors and isolated skills. (16)

Focusing on "those who teach in writing centers," Gary Olson acknowledges that tutors

do not play the role of shaman, guru, or mentor, but instead are the architects and partners of collaborative learning. They redesign the learning environment so that more of the responsibility and the activity of learning is shifted onto the learner. (xii)

The process of redesigning the learning environment affords tutors the opportunity to redefine the way writing is taught. Tutors approach writing as a recursive process rather than a linear one. Writing center pedagogy runs countercurrent to "old school professors. . . [who] hold that composing is a step-by-step process," a process of "choosing and limiting the subject; assembling materials; outlining; writing the first draft; revising; writing the final draft" (Myer and Smith 68). Tutors promote fluency by acknowledging that "generating, forming, reconsidering, editing, and revising are continuous rather than sequential processes" (Myer and Smith xv).

Tutors promote more than just fluency, however. They promote more effective methods for teaching writing, methods that are not confined to the writing center. Many tutoring practices can be transferred into composition classrooms. Future TAs could learn alternative ways of instruction by work-

ing as tutors before entering a classroom. Despite the fact that writing conferences are highly individualized and classroom teaching is collective, much of what takes place in a one-on-one tutoring session can be applied by classroom teachers.

One of the first things future TAs can glean from writing conferences is the ability to individualize instruction. According to Myer and Smith in *The Practical Tutor*,

[T]he tutorial conference is an ideal format . . . because it is truly dialogical, consisting of two speakers . . . By commenting and asking questions, a tutor can temporarily stand in as an inexperienced writer's questioning self. The writer hears and responds to the kind of questions he should be asking himself. (28)

Although a composition teacher cannot conference with every student in the course of a class period, she can comment and ask questions in the margins of a student's paper, thereby "temporarily stand[ing] in as an inexperienced writer's questioning self." The classroom teacher simply transfers the tutorial conference onto the written page.

Most teachers tend to write prescriptive and abstract comments in the margins such as "Your thesis is not clear," "You need a transitional phrase here," or "Your conclusion is weak." To model the approach tutors take in writing sessions, TAs could pose questions like "What is your thesis?" "How do these two paragraphs relate to one another?" and "How could you have made your conclusion stronger?" By asking more open-ended questions, the writer has a chance to rethink words, sentences, and paragraphs. She can explore her own options more freely and create original responses. As the teacher becomes more like the tutor, volunteering less, the responsibility for composing and revising is placed on

the student.

In addition to transferring the tutorial conference onto the written page, TAs can enhance the learning process by utilizing the art of conversation in the classroom. Conversation is the foundation of the writing conference. Tutors and writers spend most of their time together talking about writing. The tutor asks questions and then empathetically listens as the writer responds. Involving the student in meaningful dialogue about her writing forces her to become an active participant in the writing process. In support of this method of teaching is Kenneth Bruffee. "Writing," Bruffee observes, "always has its roots deep in the acquired ability to carry on. . . conversation" (7). The task of the tutor and the teacher, according to Bruffee, is to "[engage] students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible," ensuring that "the conversation is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them eventually to write" (7). For tutors, conversation exists as the backbone of the conference. In the classroom, however, conversation usually turns into a monologue as the teacher asks questions and then ends up answering them herself.

Conversation in the classroom can best be promoted through the use of class discussions. Discussions help to decentralize classroom authority and actively involve students in their own learning. Alice Gillam calls such learning environments collaborative because both the student and the teacher share knowledge and discover meaning on fairly equal terms. "The general goal of collaborative learning," Gillam says, "is to replace the alienating, teacher-dominated methods of traditional instruction" (42). Allowing the classroom to be a safe arena for sharing opinions, grappling with new concepts, and bouncing ideas off of others creates an atmosphere of collaboration similar to that of the tutorial conference.

(cont. on page 10)

# Writing center theory and practice: Pedagogical implications for teacher training

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## Introduction

Writing center people whose positions require them to teach courses as well as tutor often discover that what they do in the classroom impacts their ability to assist writing center clients. As teachers, we can frequently understand another teacher's assignment, especially if we have taught that course ourselves. Many of us have found also that working face-to-face and one-to-one in the writing center forever alters the way we interact with students in our own classes. From my writing center experience since 1982 and from discussions among writing consultants over the years, I've come to appreciate the role the writing center experience can play in teacher training, regardless of the graduate student's particular area of concentration.

This article will present the reflections of five writing consultants concerning the implications of writing center theory and practice on teaching a specific subject as well as on training graduate students to become effective classroom teachers. The subjects include literature, creative writing, computer-based writing instruction, and technical writing.

## Using tutoring strategies in the literature classroom

— Lynnea Chapman King

As a writing consultant, I have had the opportunity, as Alan Jackson describes, to encounter "a myriad of writing methods, assignments, styles, and tools that I could assimilate into my own classroom" (1). Among these innumerable assignments are those

which come from undergraduate as well as graduate literature classes. My experiences with these assignments and the students who seek help with them have caused me to reconsider my approach to teaching literature and restructure not only my assignments but also my courses.

Because I have seen first hand the strengths and weaknesses of many essay assignments for literature courses, I have come to better understand what encourages or frustrates students in these assignments. Consequently, the key term which drives me when I list my expectations for an essay is "specificity." Too often students enter the University Writing Center with paper in hand and respond to my queries regarding the assignment with the statement: "I don't know, she just told us to write a paper." Though students may overstate the teacher's lack of direction, they obviously lack a clear idea of what the instructor expects. In what must be an attempt to allow students liberty to select a topic and method for the essay, the instructor actually sets the students adrift in a sea of uncertainty. In addition, students fear that writing about literature is different from or more difficult than writing essays in first year composition courses; consequently, they often doubt their abilities to complete the assignment. After grading several sets of essays and after working with literature students in the writing center, I have come to realize I can not assume that my literature students know or understand concepts such as thesis, structure, and organization and that these concepts apply to literature papers as well

as those in first year composition. I must take the time to present these concepts in my literature classes.

In addition to specificity in creating assignments, I have learned through my writing center experiences that though a teacher may present terms in class, these terms may remain problematic for the students. For example, a student called the University Writing Center, asking if any of the writing consultants had read a particular work, and if so, could someone please tell her what the theme of the work was, as she was to write an essay explaining the theme. Although I had not read the work, I explained to her what a theme was and, using an example off the top of my head, how one might discuss a theme in a paper. Before she hung up, she expressed her gratitude, as she now had a basis from which to begin her paper. While theme, imagery, plot, and symbolism are part of my daily vocabulary, these terms are not words most sophomores use frequently outside of class; therefore, these terms deserve careful, specific definitions and examples as well as illustrations on the board, if necessary.

Because students visit the University Writing Center at various stages in the composing process, writing consultants are able to observe not only the assignments but also "the problems faced by students in completing the assignment, and the kind of products students . . . ultimately create," notes Jackson (2). This panorama of the entire assignment cycle allows me to incorporate into my course only those assignments which

have proved successful for other instructors. While an assignment may initially appear to be stimulating to students, by observing several students at different stages in the same project I can determine whether or not the assignment has the potential to be successful. Seeing effective assignments created by other teachers has spared my own students and me much wasted time and heartbreak.

In a more general sense, my face-to-face experience in tutorials has enabled me to approach the students in all of the courses I teach on a more personal level. In the UWC, consultants are exposed to the full range of students' emotional responses. Their reactions to assignments may vary from excitement to frustration to anger, and I am reminded constantly that the classes I teach are made up of students whose perspectives are probably very similar to that of my current client in the University Writing Center. This realization affects my tendency to see students as undifferentiated members of a group and encourages me to recognize that students are diverse, culturally and educationally. This knowledge, in turn, makes me receptive to an individual student's queries and more willing to ask for questions when none are offered. I recognize the importance of dealing with students as individuals to an extent which was not possible before my exposure to the UWC. Alan Jackson notes that "working in a writing center prepared me for teaching more than any methods course or composition theory book," a statement which I have found to be true in my role as tutor and teacher (1).

### **Writing center theory in the creative writing classroom**

— Jeff Williams

I am a writing center consultant who is also a creative writer. During my graduate studies I have yet to teach a creative writing course, but I look for-

ward to that time. In preparing to teach such a course, I have contemplated how my writing center experience may impact what I'll do in the classroom. In addition, I have researched the literature for articles concerning teaching creative writing and tutoring creative writers in the writing center. Unfortunately, I've found the scholarship to be scarce, but I will cite three sources.

Sandra Gail Teichmann, in "Teaching Creative Writing: That Is, Teaching Something Other Than the Craft," addresses the issue of whether creative writing can be taught, much less tutored. She sifts through the current debate over the quality of contemporary poetry generated by graduate and undergraduate creative writing programs. Teichmann takes issue with Rod McFarland, who claims in "An Apologia for Creative Writing," that only craft—one of the five qualities (desire, drive, talent, vision, and craft) essential to the serious writer—can be taught (4). Teichmann asserts that teaching craft is not enough (it is the least important consideration), and offers suggestions for teaching desire, drive, and vision by stimulating them in the classroom environment (4-5).

"Tales from Creatively-Inclined Peer Tutors: Making Facts Dance" addresses the way creative writers work with clients in the writing center. Michelle Gezcy and Louis Filippone found that such tutors use a four-step process when working with students: they assist the client in overcoming the "A-grade syndrome"; they build self-confidence; they encourage the client to free-write in a daily journal; and they suggest that the client develop stronger reading skills by making annotations in the margins of the texts (5-6).

Katherine Adams and John Adams suggest changes in writing center pedagogy based on creative writing classroom practices in "The Creative Writ-

ing Workshop and the Writing Center." Adams and Adams provide the historical background of changes within writing center philosophy, changes which range from current traditional rhetoric to social constructionism (19). Then they present the historical background on creative writing workshops. According to Adams and Adams, the one element found in a workshop setting but absent in a writing center environment is collaborative or collective learning. To them, one-to-one interaction is not recognized as collective or collaborative. They propose replacing the authoritative, one-to-one structure in the creative writing tutorial with the group structured workshop.

The research on creative writing in writing centers primarily concerns writing center pedagogy and how to modify writing center practices, but the writing center atmosphere can also spawn pedagogical innovations for the classroom. These three articles offer insights into bringing some innovations into the creative writing workshop. Out of the many creative writing workshops, both for poetry and fiction, that I have participated in, all have used the group structure mentioned by Adams and Adams (20-22). None of the workshops, however, used the one-to-one "workshopping," and none discussed or analyzed the workshopping process. Though I agree, in part, with Adams and Adams's assessment of one-to-one consultation, I do not agree that this approach has to "replay the teacher-student office conference" (23) nor create a superior/inferior power position between tutor and client (23). A synthesis of approaches could provide a more diverse learning environment and provide the models, presented by Teichmann, for teaching those essential qualities of a serious writer.

The proposed creative writing classroom would blend the writing center's one-to-one technique with the creative

writing workshop's small group discussion, providing a working model for teaching vision. The four-step process referred to by Gezcy and Filippone would form a pedagogical foundation where workshopping would exist within small groups, between the instructor and small groups, and between individuals and the class (including the instructor). An environment where students feel like equal partners in sharing and discussing the process of their writing will teach vision according to Teichmann's paradigm, break down the authoritarian hierarchy common in many creative writing classes, and bring writing center theory to the classroom.

Teichmann writes that students can learn vision by learning to think in new ways. A creative writing class in which the workshopping process is analyzed and writing-as-a-process is a major focus will facilitate such risk taking and thinking in new ways. An instructor who takes risks and thinks in new ways creates a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to exploration, self-involvement, and curiosity.

### **Making theory personal**

— Joanna Castner

Pedagogical theory comes alive when theory is experienced through personal action. My involvement in writing center pedagogy has enabled me to understand network theory which underlies computer-based writing instruction.

When I began work as a writing consultant, I was simultaneously a brand new graduate teaching assistant. As a writing consultant and as a writing instructor, I had had little experience in responding to texts of any sort. With training in text analysis—how to look for the thesis statement, organization, development, etc.—I began to recognize these elements in the papers the students brought to the center. In many ways I was very similar to my students whom I required to peer critique their

classmates' papers. Neither of us were experienced in reading and responding to texts. In addition, like most first-year composition students, I was a fairly unreflective writer. I could write good papers, but I did not think consciously in terms of organization, clarity, or development.

When I began teaching in the networked, computer-based instruction project, my writing center experience helped me understand the underlying pedagogy which Thomas Barker and Fred Kemp call "network theory." Barker and Kemp explain in "Network Theory: A Postmodern Pedagogy for the Writing Classroom" one of its main tenets: "The essential activity in writing instruction is the textual transactions between students. These transactions should be so managed by the network as to encourage a sense of group knowledge, a sense that every transactor influences and is influenced by such group knowledge, and a sense that such group knowledge is properly malleable (responsive to the influences of each transactor)" (15).

In the networked classroom, the above tenet is put into action as students publish their drafts on-line. They respond to one another's drafts in the class as well as receive responses to their own drafts. These activities, according to network theory, are central to writing instruction. Students, receiving comments on their drafts throughout the writing process, come to understand which elements make an effective text and which do not. In addition, by reading other drafts in terms of pointed questions about issues such as organization, clarity, and development, students learn to pinpoint problems and successes in their own writing.

Because of my experience as a writing center teacher, I have adopted this theory as my own. In the writing center, the writing consultant/student relationship partially parallels the student/student process described in network

theory. As a writing consultant learning to respond to a student's text, I experienced the same kind of transformation taking place in myself that network theory envisions for student writers. I became increasingly more skilled at identifying and explaining the elements that make a text effective or ineffective. Students who brought me drafts to read left with strategies for improving those drafts after my response and the following student/teacher dialogue. I could see that in the drafting process, writers often get so close to a text that it is difficult to detect problems, and a fresh reader can give writers a much needed new perspective. Furthermore, I became a more critical writer myself, and consciously thought about different writing issues when working on my own texts.

Reading and responding to texts in the writing center has taught me much about writing and writing instruction, and it has enabled me to understand network theory as it affects an individual. Without the writing center experience in which I became a student responding to a student's text, I would not have as completely understood the theory itself nor what my students were experiencing.

### **Technical writing**

— Amy Hanson

Working in a one-to-one relationship with student writers in the writing center has helped me to focus my technical writing course on the students as writers, making the form and genre expectations secondary to developing effective writing skills that can be applied to any type of professional writing.

My writing center experience has improved the way I work with students as they draft their projects. Technical writing students most often struggle with believing in themselves as authorities on the subjects about which they are writing. Through working in

the writing center, I have learned to accept writers as authorities on subjects with which I am unfamiliar, and I have been able to carry that understanding to my own students.

Being a writing center consultant has also improved the peer revision sessions in my technical writing courses. I have learned through my writing center experience the importance of having writers point out areas of concern for peer revision sessions. My technical writing students use their assignment sheets and grading criteria as templates for peer revision sessions. Each writer reads the assignment and criteria sheet and writes down three specific things that he or she would like the group to work with in the draft. This method forces the writers to return to the assignment throughout their writing process, and it also encourages them to reflect on their writing and how it fits the criteria outlined for the project, as well as how someone else's draft meets the same criteria.

Also, in working with peer revision groups and with individual students, I have discovered the importance of allowing writers to maintain ownership of their texts. In reviewing the drafts of projects that my students bring to my office, I leave my pen in my desk and encourage the student to make notes on the draft. My tendency before becoming a writing center consultant was to write comments or make corrections on a writer's draft, partially because I did not know how else to respond to individual drafts. Now I approach my own students' drafts as I do the drafts of the people I see in the writing center. In addition, I encourage my peer revision groups to follow this "hands-off" rule; students read through drafts and discuss the three concerns that the writer specifies, but the writer him or herself is the only one who makes any kind of mark on the draft. This approach not only allows writers to maintain ownership of their texts, but it also encourages students to become more actively involved in the revision pro-

cess, rather than simply "correcting" whatever "mistakes" their peer revision groups point out.

Working as a writing consultant has also affected my grading practices. I am more aware than ever that students take their writing personally; many writers have come into the writing center feeling that they have been "ripped apart" by their instructors. They often view criticism of their work as personal criticism. As a writing consultant, I have learned that writers need to know what is good about their papers, so I make a point in a writing center session to highlight some area of the writing that is effective. I now use this same tactic when making comments on my students' papers. Although I first discuss areas that need improvement, I always comment on at least one good aspect of the document, something that the writer can incorporate into later documents. This strategy has improved my attitude toward grading because I now approach a set of documents expecting to find something good in each paper, rather than dreading all of the problems that I will find.

Perhaps the most crucial realization that I have made as a writing center consultant is that technical writing is not overly technical. Good technical writing skills apply to all of the documents that my students produce. Technical writing conventions simply add formatting requirements to the basic requirements of good writing. This realization allows me to focus my work with students, both in the writing center and in the classroom, on the skills of good writing that writers can carry through to other writing projects in school and in their future workplaces rather than to focus on individual problems in individual documents. Being a writing center consultant has improved my teaching of technical writing, which has, in turn, had a positive effect on the skills of my technical writing students.

**The writing center: A place to**

## **[re]train teachers**

— Lady Falls Brown

Based on my experience as a writing consultant and as a teacher, I believe that the writing center plays a profound role in training graduate teaching assistants to become effective classroom teachers, regardless of the specific subject.

Many graduate students who accept a teaching assistantship may have only recently completed their Bachelor of Arts degree and have had no teaching experience at all. Others may have had some experience either in the public schools or in the freshman composition courses. Here at Texas Tech, new GTAs take English 5360, a methods course, but they actually learn to teach "on the job" while under the supervision of the director of composition. In spite of what they discuss about methodology in the classroom, many default into techniques used by teachers they have admired in the past and become proscenium teachers.

Prior to becoming a tutor in the writing center in 1982, I was no different. The classroom for many years had been my stage upon which I performed literature, composition, or Spanish for what I hoped would be an adoring, receptive, well behaved audience. I practiced this method of teaching because I had been trained to be a proscenium teacher through education courses and student teaching in the public schools. At that time, "good teaching" seemed to be a matter of control, especially at the junior and senior high school levels. Maintaining order in a classroom filled with young bodies in various stages of hormonal imbalance meant for the most part keeping the students focused on me—on what I was doing and on what I was saying. As I grew more confident in my ability to quell riots and in my knowledge of the subject matter, I evolved over the years from a dictator to a benevolent despot who used wit, charm, intelligence, and kindness to make me the center of attention in a proscenium classroom. I

set the agenda and the students followed it.

Working as a tutor in the writing center, however, has since changed the way I teach. I remain responsible for what takes place within a classroom, but my approach is much more student centered. I talk less about writing to and at the whole class. Instead, I engage my students in one-to-one conferences so that I can assist them as they select topics that interest them and as they develop their ideas. I am still rather directive, especially when working with technical writing documents, but I prefer to discuss with individuals what they need to know about a specific genre as they create a document rather than to point out their failure to meet the expectations when I grade their completed assignment. My focus is on my students, not on myself.

Conclusion

The writing center can play a profound role in training graduate teaching assistants to become effective classroom teachers, regardless of subject. I believe that we can become the site for training graduate students from all the disciplines and that we should argue for graduate courses in which we teach writing center theory and practice and the courses should be open to all graduate students. Not only will we better serve our clients in the writing center but we will serve even greater numbers of students who are fortunate to have as their teachers people so trained.

As Murphy and Sherwood state: tutoring is contextual, tutoring is collaborative, tutoring is interpersonal, and tutoring is individualized (1). Through tutoring/teaching in the writing center, our GTAs learn that teaching in the classroom can also be contextual, that teaching can be collaborative, that teaching can be in-

terpersonal, and that teaching can be individualized. I think that each of the preceding authors have demonstrated such characteristics in their different types of classroom. I contend that their experience in the writing center has made them more effective teachers.

Lynnea Chapman King, Jeff Williams, Joanna Castner, Amy Hanson, and Lady Falls Brown Texas Tech University Lubbock, TX

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Program Coordinator—Writing Center The University of Illinois at Chicago

The University of Illinois at Chicago is a diverse, urban university with an enrollment of more than 24,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. Administered by the Department of English, the Writing Center serves the entire university and is staffed by undergraduate and graduate peer tutors. The Writing Center assists a significant number of non-native English speakers and students enrolled in Writing in the Disciplines courses.

The Program Coordinator is responsible for the planning, development, coordination, implementation and administration of services, programs and courses offered by the Writing Center. This involves managing the day-to-day operation of the Writing Center, including data collection, record-keeping, and publicity. The Program Coordinator also shares responsibility with the Director and staff for tutor-training, coordinating instruction, and communicating with departments and faculty.

Required qualifications: BA required, MA preferred; experience teaching writing and/or tutoring; some familiarity with computers; managerial experience in a comparable situation. Desirable: knowledge of issues in teaching English to non-native speakers, working with prospective teachers, and/or training of tutors.
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# TUTORS' COLUMN

## "You're not helping me!"

Writing about a difficult situation in tutoring is not easy because almost every situation is difficult. When the tutorial is over and I look back on it, the simplicity of the solution comes to me and I wish the hours would reverse themselves. Why didn't I say that or this, or how come I didn't think of that. (Admonishing myself is my favorite task.) Anyway, no particular time comes to mind that was especially difficult, except for a time when I felt a student was trying to undermine the tutorial. This happened when I first began tutoring, and I was rather nervous about the task at hand. Here was my student, a young woman, with absolutely no interest in reading, writing, or taking English 110, and especially no interest in coming to see a tutor.

We started off rather badly. She didn't want to read her paper to me, and I couldn't read her handwriting. When she finally consented to read her paper she did so in rather low, uninterested tones while she slumped in her chair. (Her initiative was completely lost on me. Maybe I could have been more responsive.) She became more and more frustrated as she read, and I remained silent. (I didn't dare inter-

rupt her, fearing she would never finish.) Finally she said, and I quote, "You are not helping me. Get me somebody else." (Well, OK, we didn't get along, but geez to be so blunt.) So I got up and went into the receptionist's office and asked if there was anyone else available. The receptionist said no, and I said OK and figured I was going to have to wake this woman up (easier said than done).

I returned to the table and told the student that she was stuck with me and since her paper was due tomorrow, we might as well try to get something done. Then I started to question her. (No, not like in those old cop movies.) She didn't appreciate it. What the heck, I gave her the old "this-is-what-I'm-supposed-to-do-here" speech. I said that I was instructed by the directors that my job is not to tell her the answers but to get her to understand the mistakes she had made and help her to correct them. (Yes I did tell her that.) So we worked on. I looked at her errors, and she asked me how to correct them. Now I was very new in the writing center, and I sure didn't want to lose my job because I didn't follow the "Handbook In Progress," so

I was particularly careful in trying to follow the rules. This student did not appreciate it and eventually left with a very sour face. The moral of the story is you can't please everyone, and if you try to and risk your job to do so, you're a bigger fool than I.

There was very little I could have done to redeem that session. She was difficult, and to be honest so was I. She wanted me to break the rules and write her paper for her, and I was pushed to be very stubborn about following the rules. Maybe I could have been a little easier on her, but I really don't think so. There was nothing I could honestly have done considering she didn't want help: she wanted a ghost writer and was rather nasty about it. I did learn what to look out for though. (If I had been her, I would have been a little more polite about getting my paper done for me!) I never expected a student to be so antagonistic. I learned that if a student does come in here with an attitude, I can't take it personally and as long as I honestly attempt to do my job, there is nothing else I can do.

Mary Fierro  
Peer Tutor  
City College of New York  
New York, NY

National  
Conference  
on Peer Tutoring

Call for Papers  
October 24-26, 1997

Lexington, Kentucky

*"Peer Tutors: Leaders in Collaborative Learning"*

Proposals for concurrent sessions (indicate 10, 20, or 50 minutes) are now being accepted. Special attention will be paid to collaborative sessions, touching on themes such as tutor training, work across the disciplines, tutor outreach, and technology. Please send a one-page proposal (single or double spaced) to Gail Cummins, Dept. of English, University of Kentucky, 1215 Patterson Office Tower, Lexington, KY 40506-0027. Phone: 606-257-1356; e-mail: writing@pop.uky.edu; Web site: <http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/English/wc/welcome.html> Deadline: May 1, 1997.

## From Tutor to TA

(cont. from page 3)

Although TAs can make use of the collective setting of the classroom to encourage discussion and collaborative learning, they can also introduce students to a more individualized method of teaching as well. Individualization can come in the form of one-on-one conferencing, the tool of the trade for tutors. Muriel Harris maintains that “conferences, opportunities for highly productive dialogues between writers and teacher-readers, are or should be an integral part of teaching writing” (3). To this Harris adds, “It is in the one-to-one setting of a conference that we [teachers] can meet with writers to hear them talk about their writing” (3). If we begin talking generally about writing in the classroom, by means of class discussion, then the next logical place to continue the dialogue in a more specific manner would be in a student-teacher conference in which the student’s paper is the topic of conversation. Time usually becomes the biggest obstacle for classroom teach-

ers, preventing them from conferencing more often. However, teachers could require students to schedule at least one conference during the course of the semester as part of their grade on an essay, or they could invite students to drop by during office hours to talk about an upcoming paper, or get help with brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, or revising. Instead of grading a student’s paper in private, the TA could respond to the writer’s work during the conference, a practice indispensable to writing center pedagogy. Regardless of how a teacher employs the use of conferencing, the point is that working one-on-one with students should not be limited to the writing center.

Changing the way we think about and teach writing essentially requires us to change the way we think about our profession. The factions that now exist within the English department will remain unless a conscious effort is made to create unity, a unity that can

only be achieved by merging existing pedagogies and sharing knowledge rather than hoarding it. The most effective way to synthesize the disparate teaching practices found in writing centers and composition classrooms would be to realize that teachers and tutors are not performing adjunct services; they are simply using different pedagogical approaches. By using the writing center as a training facility for future teachers of writing, we are taking the first step toward convergence.

Christina Van Dyke  
Clemson University  
Clemson, SC

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## NWCA News from Joan Mullin, President

While the May edition of *WLN* will contain details of our 4C’s sessions and conversations, all of us should consider two proposals that will be coming up for a vote by the entire membership. One concerns the tenure of the president of NWCA. It is very difficult to come into the position in November, figure out exactly what all you need to do that you didn’t know about, and carry out the expected responsibilities (covering conferences, catching up on projects in progress, fostering initiatives that have been started), much less begin projects you would like to see initiated. Those who have been in the position and those who have viewed it from the executive

board agree that our organization would benefit from a presidency with a two- year tenure.

The second issue that will come before the membership concerns nomination to the executive board of the editor of NWCA Press. Currently, the editors of *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Journal* serve as ex-officio members on the board. It seems fitting that we now include the editor of our press in the same ex-officio capacity. Like the decision about the president’s service, however, the inclusion of anyone on the board means we must change the constitution, and that calls for a vote from the membership: watch

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Warlock, John and Phil Warlock. “Liberatory Writing Centers: Restoring Authority to Writers.” *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana: NCTE, 1984. 10-23.

feel free to e-mail me at [jmullin@j10.ft02.utoledo.edu](mailto:jmullin@j10.ft02.utoledo.edu). Trite but true: this organization will only be as strong as its individual members’ involvement.

## “LOC’s” as the building blocks of “HOC’s”: Discussing basic sentence issues with writers as a way to understanding more complex writing issues

My first year as a Writing Lab instructor, I stunk, more or less. Not because I lacked conviction, for I was filled with passionate intensity. I thought I could help each writer fix everything. Mentor meetings instructed me to prioritize, but I struggled for about a year to gain some mastery of this complicated analytical process. Don’t get me wrong, I learned all about “HOC’s” and “LOC’s.” I could distinguish Higher Order Concerns (HOC’s)—organization, development—from Lower Order Concerns (LOC’s)—grammar, punctuation, spelling, and such. But, it took me about a year to realize that setting “priorities” grew from the initial “negotiation” period during which the writer and I would set a kind of “verbal contract” covering which issues we intended to address during our half-hour tutorial.

This five or ten minutes amounted to an intricate dance between myself, the writer, and the writer’s audience/purpose (in most cases the classroom teacher and the assignment). Now, I begin each tutorial by foregrounding the writer’s audience/purpose, asking such questions as, “Who are you writing for and why?” (In the case of student writers, I ask to read the teacher’s instructions for the assignment. For writers looking to publish articles, I ask about their prospective publishers. For resumes and business correspondence, I ask about the prospective employers.)

During most tutorials, I generally try to address the “HOC’s” first. This approach usually seems best, though not necessarily. Occasionally I work with a writer who insists on examining his or her “lower order concerns,” say

comma usage or (as with some ESL writers) maybe articles and verb forms. Other times, considering audience and purpose, I might overlook certain “higher order concerns” to focus on a “lower order concern.” For instance, some basic and less proficient ESL writers have no major problems with “HOC’s” but may have fundamental problems with sentence structure and grammar.

What can a tutor do to help a writer struggling with a number of sentence level errors—subject/verb agreement, fragments, comma splices, absent or misused commas, and so on? First, as we’re taught, we prioritize the errors, focusing on those we judge most “important” in regards to audience and purpose. In a given half-hour tutorial, we try to teach the writer to identify and correct one or two of these, reminding the writer at the end of our session of those grammar issues we ignored and perhaps setting another tutorial to deal with them. This approach has worked well for me. However, some basic or ESL writers become unnecessarily confused by the many names and kinds of grammar and punctuation problems.

I try to avoid such confusion by simplifying my discussion of the text. For instance, these days when I work with writers who have fundamental problems with sentence structure and grammar, I begin by asking their definition of the “sentence.” (In fact, I ask a writer’s definition of any issue we’re addressing, questions like “What is your definition of writing?” or “What is your definition of a paragraph? What does a paragraph do for you?” “What is a transition?”) The writer’s answer offers me an immediate toe-hold on his

or her situation, and I follow with subsequent questions designed to clarify the strengths and limits of a writer’s knowledge.

Asking a writer to define a sentence, I attempt to guide her or him to recognize the three basic features of any grammatically correct sentence: a *subject*, a *verb*, and *expression of a complete thought*. (I explain that many writers occasionally ignore these basic features—depending on why and for whom they’re writing—but such writers do so on purpose. They work to control the language, rather than allowing the language to control them.) These three basic features do one thing, I explain. They simply contain and carry forward information in the text. Each sentence, in this sense, acts as both a vessel and a vehicle. I rarely spend time helping a writer distinguish a simple, complex, or compound sentence and seldom mention subordinate clauses, phrases, and such. Invoking these terms too soon may confuse beginning writers more than clarify issues for them. The point is to limit and simplify information that, in the case of some older writers, may have intimidated them for years.

Once writers grasp a working definition of a sentence, then I try to get a sense of their ability to identify these basic features (preferably by examining the writer’s own text). “How proficiently can you identify the subject and verb in one of your sentences?” This question, or some appropriate variation, reveals much about the writer’s previous instruction. Together, we proofread a couple of sentences, and I’ll ask the writer to underline the subject and to circle the verb. (To focus on the sentence, I generally suggest we

proofread, sentence by sentence, from the bottom of a page to the top, thus isolating each and treating it as a single unit of information. If it can't stand on its own, there's a problem.)

As soon as the writer can ably identify the subject and verb of a sentence, a whole set of issues arise, issues of grammar, punctuation, clarity, and voice. Do the subject and verb agree in kind and number? What sort of punctuation, if any, comes between the subject and verb? How many words in the sentence separate them (if any)? Which comes first, and does this matter in context? Is the verb in a passive or active construction, and which construction works best for the writer's audience and purpose? How well does the verb "carry forward" the information in the sentence? And, has the writer placed the most important information in the basic sentence (the independent clause)? (Depending on audience and purpose, one may wish to keep the most important information in the independent clause.) The questions one may wish to deal with proliferate at this point. However, I generally save for another time those questions dealing with issues of "clarity" or "style." Usually, at this point the tutorial has spent its allotted time. I recapitulate the main topics of our discussion and set some goals for subsequent tutorials. (For instance, I often suggest practice

in identifying independent clauses, asking the writer to proofread a couple of pages of his or her text, circling the subject, underlining the verb of each sentence. When we meet again, we begin by going over this material together.)

While I leave off at this point with many basic or ESL writers, I often begin here with more advanced writers who wish to work on issues of style and clarity. I may initially ask some of the basic questions, "What is a sentence? A paragraph?" and so on. But eventually I ask the questions in previous paragraphs. I begin, in short, by talking about verbs. Many of us pay little or no attention to verbs. (Arguably, our general disinterest in verbs contributes to separating most American writers from those we look to as "masters." The term "master" lacks politically correct approval. Yet, one foregrounds audience and purpose, distinguishing the masters of a given discourse community.) Because we ignore them, we habitually rely on the "to be" verb form (am, is, are, was, were), and thoughtless choices tend to be weak as well. To make my point, I suggest a revealing exercise. Try to write a page, let alone an entire essay, without using the "to be" verb form.

This exercise confounds even experi-

enced writers. Thus, many choose to wait until revision to perform such precise verbal surgery. However, attempting to write without using the "to be" verb may improve one's writing in a number of ways. First, this process necessarily increases one's writerly self-consciousness. One makes informed decisions, rather than reacting out of habit. Second, avoiding the "to be" verb form may automatically improve clarity by eliminating passive constructions and extra words. (A "rule" I try to follow when audience and purpose permit: Never say with two or more words what I can as easily say with one. Passive constructions tend to lack clarity and conciseness. Again, audience and purpose determine "clarity." But, for the reasons I have developed, active verb constructions generally improve the text.) Third, by eliminating the "to be" verb form, one may choose stronger "action words." Strong verbs introduce unforeseen yet evocative possibilities. "Masters" deploy verbs to introduce helpful metaphors and connotations, insightful second meanings. Adroit verbs may alter signification. Language reveals its elastic quality, rendering itself plastic for the writer.

Simply by focusing on subjects and verbs, a tutor can show a writer the larger significance of words. Writing instructors do well to remember and distinguish between "HOC's" and "LOC's." However, we also remember that a writer's audience, purpose, and desires shape the "priorities" we set. I remind myself that writing does not begin with grand ideas but with a single word. Writing is a word-by-word accumulation of information, its purpose to communicate something to someone.

Murray Shugars  
Parque University  
West Lafayette, IN

the fall of 1998, pending budget approval. The search will remain open until the position is filled. All candidates must submit a letter of application, curriculum vita, three current letters of recommendation, at least one course syllabus, and a sample of recent scholarly writing to: Karen Stein, Search Committee Chair, (Log #021294) University of Rhode Island, P.O. Box G, Kingston, RI 02881. The University of Rhode Island is an AA/EEO employer and is committed to increasing the diversity of its faculty, staff and students. Persons from under-represented groups are encouraged to apply.

## Assistant Professor, Rhetoric & Composition Studies University of Rhode Island

Teach graduate and undergraduate courses in rhetoric and composition and serve as coordinator of Writing Center. Doctorate in rhetoric and composition studies or in related field required, as is experience in directing a writing center or writing tutor program. Degree must be awarded by August 1998. Evidence of teaching excellence, scholarship, and publication required. Preference will be given to candidates whose interests include one or more of the following: qualitative research; writing across the curriculum; computer technology for writing instruction. This is a tenure-track position beginning in

the fall of 1998, pending budget approval. The search will remain open until the position is filled. All candidates must submit a letter of application, curriculum vita, three current letters of recommendation, at least one course syllabus, and a sample of recent scholarly writing to: Karen Stein, Search Committee Chair, (Log #021294) University of Rhode Island, P.O. Box G, Kingston, RI 02881. The University of Rhode Island is an AA/EEO employer and is committed to increasing the diversity of its faculty, staff and students. Persons from under-represented groups are encouraged to apply.

## Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

April 3-5: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in South Padre, TX  
 Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 Dept. of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs.ttu.edu

April 10-12: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Baton Rouge, LA  
 Contact: Judith G. Caprio: phone: 504-388-4077; e-mail: jcaprio@unix1.sncc.lsu.edu

April 11: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Bloomsburg, PA  
 Contact: Terry Riley, Dept. of English, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815. Phone: 717-389-4736; e-mail: triley@bloomu.edu

April 18-19: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Pittsburgh, PA  
 Contact: Margaret Marshall, Dept. of English, Cathedral of Learning, U. of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Phone: 412-624-6555; e-mail: marshall+@pitt.edu

April 18-20: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Augusta, GA  
 Contact: Karin Sisk, Augusta College, Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Communications, Augusta, Georgia 30904-2200. Fax: 706-737-1773; phone: 706-737-1402 or 737-1500; e-mail: ksisk@ac.edu

Sept. 17-20: National Writing Centers Association/Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Park City, UT  
 Contact: Penny C. Bird, English Dept., Brigham Young U., Box 26280, Provo, UT 84602-6280. Fax: 801-378-4720; phone: 801-378-5471; e-mail: penny\_bird@byu.edu

Nov. 7-8: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Kansas City, MO  
 Contact: Shireen Carroll, Dept. of English, Davidson College, P.O. Box 1719, Davidson, NC 28036. Phone: 704-892-2012; fax: 704-892-2005; e-mail: shcarroll@davidson.edu

## Midwest Writing Centers

Call for Proposals  
 November 7-8, 1997  
 Kansas City, Missouri  
*Presented by the Midwest Writing Centers Association*

Keynote Speaker: Michael Pemberton

Proposals are being solicited that encourage effective individual or group presentation of ongoing research projects, experiences both unique to your writing center and important to all centers, and a wide range of theoretical perspectives. Proposals are also solicited for workshops in which participants explore problematic issues collaboratively. For further information and a copy of the proposal form, please contact Shireen Carroll, Dept. of English, Davidson College, P.O. Box 1719, Davidson, NC 28036. Phone: 704-892-2012; fax: 704-892-2005; e-mail: shcarroll@davidson.edu Deadline for 200-250 word proposals: May 1, 1997

# Starting up a writing center in an international setting

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Vesalius College, which is part of the Dutch-speaking University of Brussels in Belgium, offers an American-style liberal arts program in English. It was founded in 1987 in association with Boston University in response to an increasing demand for university programs, in English, in a European setting with a distinctly international character. More than sixty nationalities are represented by our 400 students. Most speak an average of three to four languages, English being their second or third.

Some background information is necessary to provide insight into *how* and *why* the Vesalius College Writing Center came into existence. The idea of the ‘writing center’ is totally foreign to most European universities, so the Vesalius College one is the only one of its kind—if not on the European university scene—at least on the Belgian university scene. The reason for this is quite simple and has to do with the underlying philosophy of education and theory of learning common to most European university systems which embrace a top-to-bottom transmission of knowledge model.

When looking at how American writing centers function, although there are possibly as many writing center *styles* as there are centers on American campuses, they all function as ‘learning centers’ and are based on a theory of learning that tends to reject the top-to-bottom transmission of knowledge model in favor of a more *interactive* and *collaborative* learning model. In addition, they all adhere to a pedagogy that stresses positive rather than negative reinforcement. This is not the case

in many European universities which often ( though not always ) follow a policy of *not screening incoming students*. In some countries, of which Belgium is an example, a high school diploma alone allows entry into the university system. The universities then use negative reinforcement strategies to screen and eliminate students along the way. As a result, there is no institutionalized framework which aims at *helping students help themselves*—another underlying aspect of the philosophy of writing centers. In the European system, not only are university students expected to be effective writers from the outset, but they are also expected to work independently, without outside help, to achieve their goals; the most fitting description for success in this system is survival of the fittest.

Vesalius College, which offers an alternative, American-style education system to the traditional European one, and adheres to a liberal arts philosophy, was therefore open to the idea of the Writing Center. In addition, since most of the students attending the college are non-native speakers of English, both faculty members and administration felt that a writing center would provide the ideal setting to help students improve their writing proficiency across the curriculum. So this is *how* and *why* the Vesalius College Writing Center came into existence.

After introducing our Writing Center at some length, maybe it’s time to have a look at *who* visits the center and *why*. Our most assiduous visitors are freshman students who are required to take two intensive English writing courses

early in their academic careers. In addition to writers of English papers, we come into contact with numerous students with papers in the fields of history, psychology, sociology, art, economics, and communication. Some even come in for help overcoming writer’s block or practicing oral presentations in various disciplines. Since our college prides itself in graduating students highly proficient in both written and spoken English, oral presentations are very much built into the curriculum.

As might be expected in such a culturally and linguistically diverse environment, language problems appear to motivate most non-native students to visit the Center. Tutors, however, feel they deal more with general writing problems common to all writers such as thesis statement and development or essay structure and organization than with specific grammatical issues. Of the grammar problems most often encountered however, verb tense choices and shifts, subject-verb agreement, preposition choice and overall sentence structure are high priority concerns. Clarity of expression and idiomatic usage are also popular issues.

We have adapted our working strategies (with permission) from Larry Weinstein, Director of the Writing Center at Bentley College (Waltham, MA). We use the following categories:

### *Waiting and Seeing*

- “So then, you’re not sure about your thesis. . . .”
- “Can you try to formulate your thesis now?”

### *Signaling a Problem*

- “I’m not sure exactly what you mean here, could you try to explain?”
- “Do all these sentences support the same idea?”

#### *Diagnosing a Problem*

- “Your verb doesn’t agree with your subject here.”
- “You need a transition between these two ideas.”

#### *Forming Habits*

- “In this handbook you can find a list of transitional expressions that will help you make logical links clear.”
- “When I’m looking for a more specific word, I use a thesaurus. Let’s do that now.”

#### *Demonstrating (our last ditch strategy)*

- “You can say the author *states*, or *claims*, or *suggests*.”
- “Here are some transitions indicating contrast: . . . , . . . , . . . .”

Since multiculturalism and multilingualism are the defining features of our college’s student body, it goes without saying that the uniqueness of our writing center is that the tutors, as well as the tutees, are predominantly non-native speakers of English. This, no doubt, creates an atmosphere of interesting cross-cultural interaction. Our tutors, by necessity, need to be extremely sensitive to cultural differences, not only in writing styles, but also in conversational styles, since the interaction in the writing center is predominantly spoken: tutors and tutees talk about writing. Sometimes, when it is at all possible, tutees seek out the attention of a tutor with the same or similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Their testimonials indicate that *in-group* solidarity can create a positive setting for effective tutoring.

Recently, two telling instances of in-group solidarity between tutor and tutee took place in our writing center.

One involved a Swedish tutor working with a Swedish tutee. I witnessed them code-switching from English to Swedish and back during a tutoring session. Being bilingual myself, and an experienced ‘code-switcher’ in the context of spoken interaction with my husband and children who are dominant French speakers, I was familiar with a phenomenon which is very common in a bilingual setting. People who share different linguistic codes often ‘switch’ when they wish to communicate more effectively and feel that they can do so better in the other language. However, to an outsider, this type of strategy might appear to be ineffective in the ‘writing center context’ when discussing a paper written in one specific language. When I asked the tutor why they had resorted to this type of strategy, he explained that switching to their native language functioned as a ‘confidence-boosting device,’ since the writer felt that he could explain what he meant more clearly to the tutor in Swedish. It also allowed the tutor to point out differences in writing conventions between English and Swedish.

A somewhat similar situation popped up in a conference between a Turkish tutor and his Turkish tutee. However here, rather than resorting to code switching, the tutor, who knew the tutee well (they had a long-standing working relationship), burst out laughing while reading a passage from an essay which was translated directly from Turkish and followed specific Turkish conventions of sentence structure and idiom. Here again, the tutor pointed out structural differences between the two languages. Being able to share this knowledge in an informal atmosphere where they could both laugh while they worked was a unique experience for both tutor and tutee. This does not, however, imply that cross-cultural interaction cannot be just as

effective; it simply involves a different set of interpersonal skills. In this case, the tutor must recognize inter-lingual transfer phenomena and point out the possible origin of errors or awkwardness without actually knowing the tutee’s first language. Here, experience in tutoring is what helps the tutors develop their skills.

After pointing out how national, cultural and linguistic diversity can influence the tutoring process, I would like to stress that, in fact, what happens most of the time within the four walls of our writing center is probably much closer to what happens in writing centers all over the U.S. than what might be expected. Often, just reading a paper out loud helps writers to clarify their meaning. They discover ‘problems’ on their own. If not, suggesting to writers that they simply talk about their papers also helps clarify ideas and results in the writers’ finding new and better ways of formulating more coherent texts without much input from the tutor at all. Sometimes, however, depending on the writer’s overall proficiency, tutors do have to fall back on what we call our last ditch strategy of ‘demonstrating’; but they always do so by suggesting alternative solutions and by focusing on the teaching/learning aspect of the strategy. Overall, those tutees who come to the Center regularly have commented on noticed improvement in their writing.

The Vesalius College Writing Center is a fairly recent development on our campus, and we are still looking for ways to increase our visibility. In order to reach out to a broader audience and let people know that all writers can benefit from the input of *attentive readers*, we organize promotional activities such as writing contests and poetry and prose readings. An example of one of our more recent ‘happenings’ was our Valentine Day’s combined

Writing Contest and Poetry Reading. Students, as well as faculty members, were asked to enter love poems which included a certain number of chosen economic terms. The winning poems were read at the poetry evening, and awards were handed out to the winners. The event was quite a success and brought together faculty members and students in an informal (including wine and cheese), yet intellectually stimulating setting which promotes reading and writing. We are planning to continue organizing such events and possibly adding other Writing Center activities such as workshops on specific writing topics students find tricky. Plagiarism is one, answering essay exam questions is another. Although we are proud of our development and success over the three semesters we have been operational, we continue to look for ways to improve and grow, and welcome any suggestions readers of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* might have to offer.

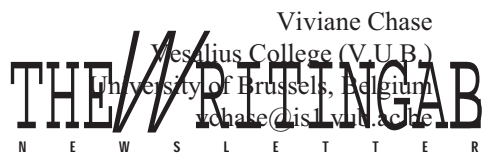
## OWL Resource Page

The Purdue Online Writing Lab has recently expanded its services to include an "OWL Resource Page" ([owl.english.purdue.edu/owl-bib.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl-bib.html)) and an annotated bibliography of scholarly research and discussion on online writing centers and labs. This bibliography is neither comprehensive nor is it complete. Instead, it is a work-in-progress that requires input from others interested in OWLs and online writing. Currently, the OWL Bibliography consists of approximately 20 different annotations of articles and other sources regarding OWLs. Obviously, this is not a comprehensive list of sources. Therefore, your help is requested. Annotations of useful sources will be gratefully accepted

and credit will be given for submissions. Annotations should be no more than 100 words long and must deal with some aspect of Online writing. The current push is to compile all scholarly work dealing directly with OWLs; however, annotations regarding issues that affect OWLs are also acceptable.

To submit an annotation, e-mail Jonathan Bush ([jonbush@omni.cc.purdue.edu](mailto:jonbush@omni.cc.purdue.edu)) directly at the Purdue Online Writing Lab, through the OWL Resource page ([owl.english.purdue.edu/owl-bib.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl-bib.html)), or via traditional mail:

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