

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T L E R

Volume 39, Number 3-4

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing

Nov./Dec. 2014

— FROM THE EDITOR —

The Nov./Dec. issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* fills all our available space with conference and job announcements, plus news of projects WLN is initiating. The result is that some of the relevant news has been necessarily limited. But for more complete job descriptions, contact information is included, though the application deadlines are very short—the result of some search committees finalizing their searches in October. For more details concerning the call for proposals for a WLN Special Issue, plus our first “Reflections” section, please check the WLN website, where you’ll be able to download Jeff Brooks’ “Minimalist Tutoring” article to reflect on, if you don’t have a print version in your writing center’s library.

The articles for this month begin with Lynn Shelly discussion of how writing centers are relevant and necessary because of the one-to-one interaction with students in ways that tell them that they matter. “Mattering,” as Shelly explains, contributes to these students’ ability to persist in college. Jeffrey Howard acknowledges a problem many of us have—the inability to tolerate silence when talking with students. But, as Howard explains, silence can be useful, and some types of silence are positive and necessary for tutors to offer students. Challenging the focus on one-to-one as a primary characteristic of writing centers, Daniel Sanford emphasizes the need to consider other forms of interaction with student writers. And Elizabeth McCabe, a tutor, reflects on her need to look beyond grades as a mark of writing success. Indeed, a very full issue of articles, news, and announcements. ♦

♦ Muriel Harris, editor

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“YOU CAN’T GET ANYWHERE WITHOUT RELATIONSHIPS”: MARGINALITY AND MATTERING IN THE WRITING CENTER

♦ Lynn Shelly
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA*

As writing center professionals, we know about marginality. Some of us began our academic lives “on the boundary,” feeling, as Mike Rose did, like a stranger in a strange land. Or we have come to know marginality as a central fact of our working lives. Perhaps our writing center is located in a basement or in some out-of-the-way building, at a remove from the life of the rest of our department. Or we may not be situated in an academic department at all, but instead placed, by our academic administration, somewhere in the hinterlands, on the border between academic and student services. Indeed, marginality is often seen as a defining condition of writing center work.¹

Not only have many of us experienced marginality personally and professionally, but also our work in the writing center frequently brings us face-to-face with students who may also feel marginal. Some are actual strangers in a strange land, attempting to adapt to American language and customs while studying chemistry or computer science or business. Others come from minority cultures or have learning disabilities.

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Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines and suggestions for prospective authors on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format (including Works Cited). Please send files through the *WLN* website.

In addition, a significant percentage of our students are in their first year of college and, as such, are likely to experience some degree of disconnection. As Vincent Tinto, a leading researcher in the field of student retention, states, "For virtually all students, the process of separation from the past is at least somewhat stressful and the pains of parting at least temporarily disorienting" (443). Because they are in transition, moving from one phase of life to another, many first year students feel marginal.

Sociologists have traditionally used the term *marginality* to describe the experience of being between two cultures. In their studies of immigrant groups, these scholars have identified marginality as one of four possible types of acculturation, the others being assimilation, separation, and integration. In assimilation, the individual comes to favor the dominant culture over the minority culture; in separation, the immigrant maintains affiliation with the minority culture; and in integration, the individual maintains ties with the original culture while also seeking "to participate as an integral part of the larger social network" (Sam and Berry 476). Robert Park coined the term "marginal man" in 1928 to identify that individual who is "living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now seeks to find a place" (892). Later studies sought to identify those characteristics associated with the condition of marginality. Kerckhoff and McCormick, in 1955, wrote:

The marginal man is said to be characterized by serious doubts about his place in any social situation. He is unsure of his relationships with friends and acquaintances and is fearful of rejection. This fear of rejection leads him to avoid many situations. He often wants to take part in activities or attempt to do various things but is stopped by fear of failure or rejection. . . . He is painfully self-conscious in the presence of other people. He feels inadequate and is convinced that others can do things much better than he. He thus feels lonely and isolated most of the time and wishes he were more adequate and skillful. (52)

At the small branch campus writing center that I direct, located in Punxsatawney, PA, I frequently see individuals who are in the process of moving between two cultures. In fact, one could say that my branch, a residential campus located about 45 minutes away from the much larger main campus, has been expressly designated for such students. With the exception of a small percentage of local students who have elected to begin their college education at our campus, students are placed here because their low SAT scores and/or high school grades would otherwise disqualify them for admission to the university. A relatively large number of these students come from urban Philadelphia, and many, including those from the local area, are the first generation in their families to attend college. Typically, students spend one year at the branch campus, and, as long as they achieve a grade point average of 2.0, move to main campus at the start of their sophomore year. But, like that of first-generation college students across the country, their success rate is disappointingly low, with only 27 per cent graduating within 6 years. Thus, the students at my branch campus may be considered doubly, if not triply, marginal. They are first-year students taking their initial steps toward adulthood and independence; many have left their homes, their families, their communities, and sometimes their culture. In addition, they have been marginalized by the larger university, accepted for admission but excluded from the main campus and situated at a distance from it. Truly, it is hard to imagine students more marginal than they. Who, in their shoes, would not have "serious doubts about [their] place"? Who would not be "unsure" and "fearful of rejection"? Who would not "feel inadequate" and "convinced that others can do things much better than [they]" (Kerckhoff and McCormick 52)?

Some writing center scholars, faced with similarly marginal—and marginalized—students, have responded by proposing sweeping institutional change. Like Nancy Grimm, these scholars believe that "in order to work toward more socially just practices of literacy education, we need to rethink the present system" (xvii). However, social psychologists Morris Rosenberg and Nancy Schlossberg, who draw on the sociological concept of marginality in their work and are often cited in student affairs research, offer a different perspective from which writing centers can meaningfully approach this issue.

Rosenberg is responsible for introducing the concept of “mattering,” a term that can be understood as the polar opposite of marginality. In their study “Mattering: Inferred Significance and Mental Health Among Adolescents,” Rosenberg and McCullough define mattering as a “person’s sense that, as far as other people are concerned, he is an object of interest and importance, that he is wanted or serves as an ego-extension, or that others depend on him” (179). According to this research, adolescents who feel that they matter, particularly to their parents, are happier, have greater self-esteem, and are better adjusted socially. But clearly, mattering is not just important for adolescents. As Nancy Schlossberg says, “We will discover that mattering is important all through life—people need to feel that they count, they belong, they matter. When this is so, they no longer feel marginal”(11). In fact, Schlossberg’s research with returning adults showed that when these students felt that they mattered to an advisor or to the institution, they were more highly engaged as learners (11).

Schlossberg’s mattering scale identifies five aspects of mattering: 1) *attention*, the feeling that others notice us, that we are visible to them and command their interest; 2) *importance*, the belief that someone cares about what happens to us; 3) *ego-extension*, “the feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures”; 4) *dependence*, feeling we are needed by others, that they rely on us; and 5) *appreciation*, knowing that someone appreciates the efforts we are making, regardless of whether those efforts lead to success (10). The need to matter to others in these ways is important to all of us but especially when we are in transition. Knowing that we matter helps us to persist through our discomfort when we change roles or when we move from a familiar and safe environment to a new and challenging one.

Research on the effect of mattering on college students has found a significant relationship between mattering and student success. According to a study at a large southeastern university, first-year students who felt they mattered, not only to friends and family but to their colleges, experienced less academic stress than their peers (Rayle and Chung 31). While the relationship between mattering and academic success has not been fully studied, it makes sense that if mattering reduces students’ stress, then it also contributes to their ability to persist in college. The researchers concluded that “mattering matters” to first-year college students and that it “may actually aid them in their transition to the college environment and their academic success” (31).

Based on my understanding how mattering can make a difference for students like those at my branch campus, I have re-cast the role of the writing center as a place where students can find not only assistance in improving as writers, but also support in making a successful transition to college. In part, I do this by sponsoring a variety of outside-the-classroom literacy activities that create opportunities for students to feel important, needed, and recognized for their efforts. Writing center-sponsored poetry slams and cafés provide opportunities for students to step up to the microphone and earn the applause and appreciation of their fellow students. The writing center also encourages students to write articles about campus events for the local newspaper and assists them with revising and editing. At our Celebration of Learning event, students display projects they have completed in their classes, with prizes awarded to the most informative and creative. Frequent opportunities to write and be heard outside the classroom enable students who might otherwise feel marginal to see themselves as valued members of the campus community. As one student wrote on a survey after a poetry event, “It was a fantastic way for students to display not only their voice but be recognized for there [sic] work.”

But even more important than these activities in fostering mattering are the relationships that develop between tutors and students, especially when students work with the same tutor multiple times. To better understand the way writing centers can impact mattering, I interviewed two students (I’ll call them

“By helping students in transition feel that they matter, writing centers contribute to [students’] well-being and support their efforts to persist in college.”

Call for Proposals

Nov/Dec 2015 Special Issue of *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*

Guest-edited by

- ◆ Susan Lawrence, Director, George Mason University Writing Center
- ◆ Terry Zawacki, Director Emerita, George Mason University Writing Center

Supporting Graduate Student Thesis and Dissertation Writers in the Writing Center

Writing centers are key participants in increasingly vigorous campus conversations focused on improving graduate student completion rates and time to degree, and the role writing might play in both. As sites of graduate writing support, however, we are aware of our possible limitations: the paradigmatic writing tutorial accommodates papers much shorter than the typical thesis or dissertation chapter, and effective collaboration and feedback on these projects call for disciplinary and research expertise that tutors may not share with advanced graduate student writers. Yet graduate students continue to call on us for assistance, and, in response, writing centers have developed an array of programs and strategies for providing writing support, as evidenced by recent scholarship on dissertation boot camps (Lee and Golde, Simpson, Powers), graduate writing groups (Phillips), and graduate fellows programs (Gillespie, Heiderecht, and Lamascus).

For this special issue, we invite proposals for articles up to 3000 words that explore, reflect on, or report on the programs and strategies by which writing centers support graduate student writers working on theses and dissertations. Proposals of 150–200 words will be accepted through Jan. 5, 2015; invitations for full articles will be sent out on Jan. 19, with full articles due April 13. Revisions may be requested with a later due date.

Please see the full CFP on the *WLN* website <www.writinglabnewsletter.org> and the WCenter, EWCA, and MENAWCA listservs, plus on the blog, *Connecting Writing Centers across Borders*: <www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog>.



“Sonia” and “Tajia”) about their first year of college, their writing center experiences, and their relationship with their writing center tutor (a grad student whom I’ll call “Lindsay”). Both Sonia and Tajia had been to the writing center multiple times, both were minority students, and both were the first generation in their families to go to college.

In their respective interviews, Sonia and Tajia initially described their experiences as first-year college students in terms of what they missed about home. Home was comfortable and fun, their “comfort zone” or “bubble.” But college was the place they worked toward meeting goals, college represented their futures, and if they weren’t as comfortable there as they were at home, they would just have to bear it as best they could. As Tajia said, “I came from being in the comfort zone of my parents and my family. I wasn’t used to being here. . . . My bubble is where I’m from and who I know. When I was taken out of my bubble, you need to learn to do things on your own and grow up.” Both girls saw themselves as in transition and therefore somewhat vulnerable. But going to the writing center, both Sonia and Tajia said, helped them to feel more at ease in the college environment. Of course, the assistance they got with their writing assignments from their tutor, Lindsay, was important in this transition. Sonia said that she found college to be much more difficult than she had anticipated. “Some of the classes are harder, stuff I didn’t get in high school,” she admitted. Both Sonia and Tajia felt unsure of themselves as writers, believing that they made lots of mistakes in their writing and that these mistakes would prevent them from being successful. Lindsay, however, spent time with Sonia and Tajia and explained things so that they could improve and become more self-assured as writers. “Before, I would need help from Lindsay on how to start a paragraph, but now I can get started myself,” Sonia said.

An important aspect of the writing center for both girls was Lindsay’s availability. Though Tajia sometimes went to her geography professor for help, she felt that professors usually didn’t have time for students or they were unlikely to be in their offices when she was looking for help. It also made a difference to Tajia that Lindsay was an outgoing person: “You could tell she wanted to help,” Tajia said. “Lindsay is a friendly person, a person who wants to help you and it’s not straining on their time.” Tajia and Sonia knew that if they went to see Lindsay, they would have her full attention; she would be there for them when they needed her. The two young women felt they were visible to Lindsay; she wanted to see them, and she wanted to help. “She always asked how I’ve been, how things are going,” Sonia said. “We’d talk about class and social things, things that would ease my mind so I wouldn’t have those heavy burdens on my plate,” said Tajia. In these ways, Lindsay not only assisted Tajia and Sonia with their writing, she also communicated to them that they mattered, that someone who represented the university cared. In addition to attention, Lindsay also provided appreciation: she knew the efforts the young women were making with their academic work, and she applauded their successes. When Sonia got good grades on papers for her composition class, she made sure Lindsay knew about it. When she struggled with her psychology coursework, it was often Lindsay who provided encouragement and reminded Sonia that she could do it. The young women also felt that they were important to Lindsay, that she was concerned about what happened to them. In college, “you feel like you’re far away from home. I don’t have anybody that’s on my side, but she’s willing to listen,” Tajia said.

At the conclusion of our interviews, both Sonia and Tajia expressed confidence in their ability to succeed in college. “Staying in college is going to make me successful and that’s what motivates me. I’m not here to play games. I’m here to make a difference in my life,” Tajia said. Though she planned to transfer to a college closer to home, Tajia felt that she was leaving with important skills that she would need as she prepared for her future as a psychology major. Sonia, too, expressed great confidence in the future. “When I get to main [campus], I don’t think I’ll be going home [as often]. I’ll have more opportunities. I’m going to join a lot of clubs; I know I am,” Sonia said. Both young women felt that their relationship with Lindsay in the writing center had contributed to a growth in their confidence and believed that this confidence would

carry over into their sophomore year. Thanks at least in part to their relationship with their writing center tutor, at the end of their first year of college, Sonia and Tajia seemed well-integrated into the “larger social network” of college.

“You can’t get anywhere without relationships,” Tajia told me, and it is clear that writing centers are ideally situated for fostering mattering relationships with first-year students who, like Tajia, might initially feel marginal in the college environment. Though not a solution to the larger social problem of marginality, these relationships can help students to weather the storms that come with the transition to college and boost their chances for success. With this positive attitude in mind, writing center tutors can be trained to be more mindful of mattering in their work, to discover ways to convey to students, as Lindsay did, that they are important and valued members of our community. In addition, writing centers can sponsor poetry cafés and other events at which students can be recognized and appreciated for their efforts as writers. By helping students in transition feel that they matter, writing centers contribute to students’ well-being and support their efforts to persist in college. Mattering is not just valuable in the way that it helps writing center staffs to re-imagine our work with students, however. It also provides a meaningful way to communicate to administrators about how our work aligns with broader institutional goals for retention. Far from being marginal, we can argue, writing centers play a highly important role in student success. By paying attention to mattering, we situate our writing centers not on the margins, but firmly within the larger culture of our universities. ♦

Notes

¹David Bringhurst, in “Identifying Our Ethical Responsibility: A Criterion-Based Approach,” offers an insightful critique of the perception by writing center professionals of their own outsider status.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call for “Reflections”

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* (soon to become *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*), we invite your participation in reflecting on some of the articles that have appeared over all those years. How has some particular article influenced writing center scholarship and work? How have you used that article in tutor training? Why? How do tutors respond to it? We offer additional possible thought-starters on the WLN website: <www.writinglabnewsletter.org>. And we invite your recommendations for articles for these Reflections. Send suggestions for future articles to Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

We recommend that reflections be limited to 100-200 words and encourage responses from directors who have known a particular article and used or modified it as well as from consultants who are first visiting the article or have re-shaped their tutoring after reading and discussing it. Send your reflections to the submissions section on the WLN website <www.writinglabnewsletter.org>. We will notify you in advance as to whether your response will be published.

Reflecting on Jeff Brooks’ “Minimalist Tutoring” essay

WLN (soon to become *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*) initiates our “Reflections” section with the most quoted article in *WLN*’s history, Jeff Brooks’ “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work,” first printed in 1991. Given that it was published 23 years ago, we offer a number of thought-starters on the *WLN* website to help you reflect on what your response might be. You can download the issue with Brooks’ article on the *WLN* website: <www.writinglabnewsletter.org/archives/v15/15-6.pdf>. Please limit your responses to 100-200 words or less, and submit your comments through the *WLN* website “Submissions” section.

Deadline for submission reflecting on Brooks’ article: December 12, 2014. We will notify you in advance as to whether your reflection will be published.

NEWS

Writers Workshop, Director University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign

Full-time, academic professional, non-tenure track, 12 month position. Expected start date: Aug. 16, 2015. Direct questions and requests for full job description to Amy Rumsey at <rumsey@illinois.edu> or phone: 217-333-3251. Apply by Nov. 15, 2014.

Writing Center, Director Rowan University

This is a full-time, tenure-track asst. prof. position. Apply online by Nov. 15: <rowanuniversity.hodesiq.com/jobs/assistant-professor-writing-arts-full-time-tenure-track-glassboro-new-jersey-job-4795796>.

Writing Center and Tutoring Services, Director Regis University

Full-time staff position. Start date: immediately, but open until filled. See the website: <jobs.regis.edu/postings/1067>. Apply to Human Resources, Regis University, Dept. of Human Resources K-4, 3333 Regis Boulevard, Denver, CO 80221-1099; e-mail: <hrinfo@regis.edu>; phone: 303-458-4161; fax: 303-964-5498.

Writing Center, Associate Director Texas Tech University

Full-time, 12-month professional staff position with full benefits. Please direct all questions and request for full job description to Kathy Gillis at <kathleen.gillis@ttu.edu>; phone: 806-834-7219.

PAUSING FOR EFFECT: SILENCE AS A PRINCIPLE OF LEARNING

◆ Jeffrey Howard
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I hate silence. Whether I am teaching or tutoring, I cannot stand to let silence rule the air. Silence makes me insecure, as though I'm not doing enough to incite thoughtful answers from students in my classes or students I tutor. If I pose a question to a student, I often wait six seconds or less for an answer before I intrude into the awkward quiet with a gentle yet convincing "Answer the question, or I will start calling on you." I may even answer the question myself, if I'm feeling especially desperate, and then move on. The same scenario often occurs in my tutoring sessions. The students come to me, eyes full of muted awe and mouths full of relevant questions they cannot verbalize. I have them sit down and let them read through their papers as I silently follow along. When the students finish reading, they survey my face for signs of approval or even disdain. From that point, I fill every second chock-full of incessant and to-the-point instruction. I do not let silence into the session because we only have a half an hour to talk about the paper and what needs to be done to improve it. I speak, and the student listens with rapt attention, soaking up my advice like a fresh sponge in a bucket of suds. My voice drives stillness into the shadows and keeps it there until I allow it to return. Then I can leave the room, and I don't have to spend any unnecessary time with the student. For me, that's simply how things are.

At least, that's how they were before my perspective on silence changed.

Rosa Thornley, one of my colleagues at Utah State University, observed one of my composition courses once, and she noticed that I never gave the students more than a few seconds to answer any given question. We later talked about that particular nuance of my teaching. I explained to her that silence tends to crawl under my skin if I allow it to sit and fester in my classroom. She replied, "It's okay to have a critical pause. Silence sometimes really helps to bring [the students] out." Karen Morris claims the same thing applies to a tutoring session, saying, "Silence is . . . a good way to get students to play a more active role in the tutorial" (14). Students need time to think, to process questions and formulate replies, and ten seconds or less may not be sufficient time to figure out what they think and to provide me with the answer I and they think I want. Worse still, my inability to cope with silence was sending the message that I not only did not have enough patience to wait for an answer, but also that I did not value the students' replies enough to wait for them. However, the messages of silence can speak to students universally and apply to any tutoring situation. While many tutors stress over what they need to say in a session, they need to understand how silence functions as a mode of positive communication. In other words, they must understand that "being silent means more than simply not talking" (Murray 12).

Silence is not the enemy of my students or of the system. Rather, as Morris claims, "it is an ally to communication" (14). Like the methodologies involved with delivering poignant lectures or facilitating beneficial discussions, it certainly deserves a permanent place in the classroom. Further, in a more intimate setting like the writing center, the messages of silence can be even more effective. In Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*, Thomas Cromwell, during the trial of Sir Thomas More, explores the potential meanings of silence in particular contexts. "Consider first," he tells the court, "the silence of a man lying dead . . . and let us say it is in the dead of night—there's nothing like darkness for sharpening the ear; and we listen. What do we hear? Silence. What does it betoken, this silence?" He explains his opinion that such a silence means absolutely nothing, for "this is silence, pure and simple." However, Cromwell presents another case in which he, hypothetically, might draw a dagger and stab Sir Thomas More in front of the judge and jury and attendant peasantry, gentility, and nobility. If the audience sat silently and allowed it to happen, Cromwell exclaims, "That would betoken! It would betoken a willingness that I should do it." In Cromwell's mind, then, "silence can, according to circumstances, speak" (88). Well, if silence can speak, then it stands to reason that it can also teach and facilitate learning. However, the content of silence depends upon the individual who controls the potential messages of silence.

In *The Chosen* Chaim Potok demonstrates the use of silence as an educational method. In the story, a highly intelligent boy, Danny, a Hasidic Jew, receives instruction from his father in preparation for taking his father's position as rabbi and religious figurehead of the community. However, his father prepares Danny for that career without speaking to

him. Thus, silence becomes the boy's teacher; or rather silence becomes the means by which the father teaches Danny everything his son needs to know about becoming a rabbi and coping with its accompanying responsibilities and issues. Danny explains the situation to his friend Reuven, or at least he explains the origin of their mutual silence, although he does not completely appreciate it or understand its importance in the process toward his own development and preparation for leadership: "My father believes in silence. When I was ten or eleven years old, I complained to him about something, and he told me to close my mouth and look into my own soul. He told me to stop running to him every time I had a problem. I should look into my own soul for the answer, he said" (Potok 169). While some people may look at this use of silence as cruel and even negligent, Danny learns about the extent of his own knowledge and how to increase his own capacity for learning.

While the same practice can apply in every facet of education, in the writing center the idea of silence carries more weight perhaps than other places if applied correctly. Silence can force students to search their own mental archives and rational capabilities for concrete resolutions, instead of relying on their teachers or tutors. Students have the capacity to bring up valid comments and questions if the instructor or tutor will only give them time and space enough. Silence's ability to lubricate the cogs of communication does not stop there. Imagine a teenage girl communicating anger and frustration to her best friend because that friend dared to speak to a boy she herself could not approach. Imagine a boy silently squeezing a girl's hand in the doorway of her apartment, rubbing noses with her as he hovers an inch from her lips, then letting go of her hand and walking away from her forever. They don't need speech; their particular brand of silence says it all. Imagine a son sitting by his dying father's hospital bed, watching in tear-stained silence as the red line shrieks loudly and signals finality.

The questions still remain: "What can a writing tutor communicate through silence? What purpose does it serve? Muriel Saville-Troike explains that "the prosodic dimension of silence . . . may convey a wide variety of meanings" (6), which may seem obvious. However, if silence, as far as writing tutors are concerned, is to become what Włodzimierz Sobkowiak calls "'meaningful absence of speech' (Jaworski 1993: 66), in that it emphasizes the volitional, teleological, substitutive, and contextual aspects of CS [communicative silence]" (44), then writing tutors ought to acquaint themselves with the many meanings of silence in order to convey them clearly and effectively in tutoring sessions.

THE SILENCE OF INTEREST

When students are reading their papers out loud, which I ask them to do as a general rule, a tutor ought to remain silent throughout to indicate interest in the perspectives voiced by the students in their papers. Morse concurs, "Saying nothing but being attentive and interested suggests you are listening and that you want the person to say more" (2). However, if tutors also take notes during that reading, they can amplify their silent indication of interest. The tutor's body position and facial expressions also confirm the tutor's unspoken interest in the student's ideas. Failing to act in a way that supports the silent message of interest may indicate, however falsely or justly, that the ideas the student is attempting to convey are worth little or nothing in the tutor's eyes. Silence, properly initiated and maintained, can do much for the student; it breaks barriers and levels the tutor/student relationship realigns tutor and student in an egalitarian relationship. The voice of the so-called sagacious tutor, which often focuses too much on relaying bit of information to students who come begging for scholastic sustenance, cannot, either by constant interruption or complete verbal domination, communicate interest as well or as entirely as a temporary but respectful deferral of speech.

THE SILENCE OF APPRECIATION

This may seem like an extension of the previous paragraph, but a tutor's silence may also indicate an intense level of interest and appreciation for the amount of work the student has put into formulating the ideas and components of his or her content. Appreciation for a student's work is often in short supply in the instructor/instructed dyad. Students do not generally become better writers if all their teachers provide praise and no criticism, but if a teacher overly focuses on correction without noticing the improvements and good points in their students' papers, students often feel their writing is not valued by teachers, their ideas worthless, and their effort wasted. As Beth Impson, Burl Self, Susan Dorsey, Lucinda Hudson, and Laura Johnson note, such feelings exist already, including "the fear that one's ideas are not intelligent or interesting enough to be communicated,

NEWS

Writing Studio, Director Duke University

Asst. Prof. of Practice in Writing Studies or related discipline to direct the Writing Studio. For complete job description, contact Margaret Swezey: <mfs9@duke.edu>. Review of applications begins Nov. 1, 2014, and continues until position is filled. Applicants must apply through Academic Jobs Online: <academicjobsonline.org/ajo>.



Writing Center, Asst. Director Washington College

Full-time, 10-month exempt staff position. For complete job description, contact John L. Boyd: <jboyd2@washcoll.edu>. Apply online <highereddecisions.com/wcm/current_vacancies.asp>.



Writing Center, Director U. of Tennessee at Chattanooga

For the complete job announcement, see <www.utc.edu/library/about/jobs/writing-center-director.php>.



Center for Writing and Rhetoric, Lecturer Trinity College

This is a full-time, non-tenure track, contract renewable, faculty position, beginning Fall 2015. Direct questions to Tennyson O'Donnell, at <tennyson.odonnell@trincoll.edu>. Apply online <trincoll.peopleadmin.com/>. Materials due Jan. 19, 2015.



MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**Call for Proposals
April 10-11, 2015
Harrisonburg, VA
James Madison University
Sharing Spaces
Keynote: Nathalie Singh-Corcoran**

Conference chair is Jared Jay Featherstone: <feathejj@jmu.edu>. For information about the conference theme of sharing spaces, proposals, registration, and accommodations, see the conference website: <mawcaconference.wix.com/mawca2015>. Deadline for proposals: Jan. 15, 2015.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

**March 7, 2015
California State University,
Fresno
Keynote: Peter Elbow**

Contact: Magda Gilewicz: <magdag@csufresno.edu>. Further information will be available soon on the conference website: <www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/writingcenter/ncwca2015.html>.

the fear of becoming vulnerable by expressing feelings that are deeply personal, or even the fear of delving into such feelings in the first place”; unfortunately, criticism often serves to exacerbate these fears, even when such an effect is unintentional (10).

A writing tutor has the opportunity to be one of the very few allowed to see the student’s paper while it is in progress, and we all know how wasted that privilege would be if all the tutor does is fill the time offering corrections in the same manner some instructors often do when marking a paper for a grade. The writing tutor has more than one objective in a tutoring session. If the tutor spends the entire time yakking about the student’s misuse of commas and lack of organization, a student may once again feel that his or her work does not have enough merit to deserve positive attention. If a tutor remains silent as a client reads his or her paper, it not only gives the tutor time to formulate an idea of how to help the student based on knowledge of the scope of the paper as a whole, but it also communicates a pronounced appreciation that can inspire and augment, like nothing else can, a student’s desire to improve. Silence may be one of the best ways to communicate a positive sense of appreciation to the student.

The tutor may attempt to communicate this appreciation, using phrases like “I feel like you invested a lot of time into this project” or even “your ideas are really good. You must have put a lot of thought into this.” But the silent tutor, through behavior and body language like nods and smiles, can also convey appreciation through silence while the student is reading over his or her paper, thus concurrently communicating and confirming that feeling almost from the outset.

THE SILENCE OF EXPECTATION

Finally, the tutor can effectively convey, through silence, a sense of expectation or responsibility on the student’s part. This type of silence can teach self-reliance, much in the same way that Potok’s character Danny learned it: by looking to oneself for a solution and answers because the presumed authoritative figure refuses to become the student’s only source of wisdom. The student will receive that message of expectation if silence is allowed to speak loudly and long enough. If a tutor asks a student a question, often a period of silence will—and should—inevitably follow while the student ponders his or her answer. The tutor may be tempted to ease the awkwardness of the silence by rephrasing the question every ten seconds or so (as I have done at times), or perhaps even by giving a potential answer (which I, again, find myself doing). This is not the best approach to this situation. In fact, it’s not even close. Some tutors may want to quickly rephrase a question if a student doesn’t immediately respond; however, it is best employed when the tutor is certain the student did not understand the question. The awkward nature of silence, that “unbearable repartee” as G.K. Chesterton calls it (qtd. in Sobkowiak 39), will push the student to think harder and faster for a response because he or she may not be comfortable and will wish to end it as soon as possible. After all, a vocal reply is the quickest way to reduce the unpleasant distress induced by the silence, and the students will feel that just as much as the tutor.

Of course, the tutor is probably attempting to be helpful with his or her all-too-often prompting, intending perhaps to clarify the wording of a question, even though it is not always the clarity of the question which is at fault. In fact, the question may have been clear from the beginning; it may only be that the student needs the pause not to figure out what the tutor is asking, but how he or she can provide the tutor with an adequate response. When the writing tutor asks a question, he or she needs to step back and wait, letting silence allow the student to feel the tutor’s confidence that the student has the capacity to formulate a solid response.

Now, I am not attempting to say that the silence ought to go on *ad infinitum*. If the extended silence is not broken by students at some point, the source of the issue may not be that they are thinking about an answer any more, but rather that they are too shy or embarrassed to give it because it may be “wrong.” On the other hand, they may have absolutely no idea what to say because they have not been paying attention or are struggling to understand the assignment. The point is, silence, if allowed to poke at the student for a long period of time, may prove counterproductive and should, according to the good judgment of the tutor, be squelched. Students can respond well to pressure, but if they are unprepared to answer the tutor’s questions, silence can hurt more than help the poor student, in a sense closing the coffin and sitting on the lid. In that case, the tutor may need to rescue the student from the harping of silence.

CONCLUSION

Verbal communication is often seen as being at the heart of writing tutorials. But tutors often overdo it with their instructions, speaking about content and organization and punctuation, and they often do not realize that they are overloading the students with an abundance of information that may be, even as they relay it, filtering out the far side of the student’s head. Worse yet, the student may actually know all of those things, but if the tutor never asks a question and pauses to find out just how much the student knows already, the session will be wasted. The tutor needs to be conscious at all times that speech can in fact become oppressive, as Deborah Tannen, a professor of linguistics and interpersonal communication, explains (109). Tutors may think that speech is the conduit to communication, but over-vocalization of concerns or correction can often “oppress” a student right into isolation, whereas silence provides opportunities for true connection. Ultimately, as Saville-Troike says, “Just as ‘one can utter words without saying anything’ (Searle 1969), one can say something without uttering words” (6). In other words, when it comes to verbosity and loquaciousness in tutoring sessions, more can be less, less can be more, and none might be most, but it all depends on the role, appropriation, and messages of silence as conveyed by the writing tutor. ♦

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to WLN author Eliot Rendleman

Eliot Rendleman’s article, “Lexicography: Self-Analysis and Defining the Keywords of Our Missions,” originally published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 37.1-2, has been selected for publication in the upcoming *The Best of the Independent Rhetoric & Composition Journals 2013*.

This series is described by Parlor Press as follows:

“*The Best of the Independent Rhetoric & Composition Journals* series represents the result of a nationwide conversation—beginning with journal editors, but expanding to teachers, scholars, and workers across the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition—to select essays that showcase the innovative and transformative work now being published in the field’s independent journals.

Representing both print and digital journals in Rhetoric and Composition, the essays featured here explore issues ranging from classroom practice to writing in global and digital contexts, from writing workshops to community activism. Together, the essays provide readers with a rich understanding of the present and future direction of the field.

To learn more about the *Best Of* series, please visit: <www.parlorpress.com/bestofrhetcomp>.”





**Student Support
Services, Director
Dartmouth College**

The director oversees the writing center (“RWIT”--Student Center for Research Writing, and Information Technology) and Writing Assistance program at Dartmouth College. Starting date is July 1, 2015. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled; the search committee will begin reviewing applications on Dec. 1, 2014.

For a complete description of the position, contact Christiane Donahue :<Christiane.Donahue@dartmouth.edu>.

CHALLENGING THE NARRATIVE OF TUTORING ONE-TO-ONE

◆ *Daniel Sanford*
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM

The effect of the writing center grand narrative can be a sort of collective tunnel vision. The story has focused our attention so narrowly that we already no longer see the range and variety of activities that make up writing center work or the potential ways in which writing center work could evolve.

—Jackie Grutsch McKinney, *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*

As a linguist, I’ve often felt like a bit of an outsider in the field of writing center studies. Writing for me has always been a tool for organizing my thinking, rather than a tool of personal inquiry. I’ve struggled with the idea of a theory as a critical lens rather than as a framework for making hypotheses related to data. The writing conventions of the field are very different from the dry, wordy, data-driven, and eminently (to me, anyhow!) comfortable style of theoretical linguistics. Even the very “homoness” cultivated in the vast majority of university writing centers, developing naturally from a humanities-oriented view of writing as an artistic and personal activity, is a bit alien to my sciences-based sensibilities towards writing. I think these things can be difficult to see for those whose education took place within the tradition that gave birth to the field, and which supplies the vast majority of its professionals and academics—this in the same way that, for example, speakers tend not to recognize their own dialects. Jackie Grutsch McKinney’s recent book *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* was a refreshing read for me, in that it highlighted some of these central, unconscious, and often unchallenged assumptions of writing center work. Grutsch McKinney, drawing on the scholarship of narratology (Berlin 1992; Penner 1998; Royster and Williams 1999) describes these assumptions in terms of cultural narratives that reflect our unconscious, culturally predicated understanding of complex and cohesive wholes. Grutsch McKinney identifies three core aspects of the writing center grand narrative: that writing centers are cozy homes (characterized by comfortable conversations and the trappings of living spaces), that writing centers are iconoclastic (defining themselves in opposition to the norms and accepted practices of the academy), and that writing centers tutor (i.e., that the central, defining activity of writing centers is the verbal interaction between tutor and student writer, and furthermore that tutoring means one-to-one interactions). Grutsch McKinney argues that the danger of shared narratives lies in how they can act as a basis for rejecting new ideas, new ways of thinking, that don’t fit in to the accepted story told by the group. Nowhere, I believe, is this more true than in the case of her third point, relating to the twin assumptions that the work of writing centers is tutoring, and that tutoring means one-to-one interactions.

There are many possible ways of approaching the challenge of engaging student writers, and many well-developed formats for doing so. Despite this diversity, the one-to-one session holds a special and highly prized place in writing center work, close to the center of our sense of disciplinary identity. Grutsch McKinney writes, describing the role of tutoring in our field’s conceptualization of the writing center, that:

Tutoring is always assumed to be one-to-one, peer-to-peer, non-directive, and occurring in set sessions. “Tutoring” in writing center scholarship is not a catchall term like “teaching” is. “Teaching” can imply a range of activities, students, curriculums, and purposes. . . . On the contrary, “tutoring,” for writing center professionals, means a very specific activity. . . . [T]he writing center grand narrative defines writing center work very narrowly as tutoring, and . . . tutoring as conceptualized (and practiced) by many writing center professionals is also very narrow. (60)

Grutsch McKinney bases her argument on a review of the literature and a survey of writing center professionals; a less methodologically sound but just as striking insight comes from a Google image search for “writing tutoring.” Image after image converge on the prototype of a tutoring session: a student writer sits down in a one-to-one conversation with a peer tutor over a piece of writing. The focus on individual consultations in writing centers is a part of a greater pattern; the same assumption holds in peer tutoring more broadly. Within writing centers, the focus on one-to-one sessions is itself related to the iconoclastic identity that writing center professionals assert for themselves: the celebration of the one-to-one consultation began very much as a reaction to the dominant paradigm of university instruction, the classroom lecture model. In the seminal text

Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference, Muriel Harris encourages instructors and tutors alike to consider the benefits of engaging student writers individually, setting aside time for addressing individual concerns and providing tailored support for students in their journey as writers. That book was published in 1986; in the intervening 28 years the individual consultation has been at the core of the practice of writing centers. The tagline of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* itself highlights the central role of the one-to-one session in our disciplinary practice.

Two ideas that exist alongside individual appointments at the locus of how writing center professionals conceptualize writing center work are that writing centers are places for writing, and that writing centers are places for interaction and conversation around writing. The former is related to the notion (developing from the work of Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, Donald Murray and others) that writing is a process, rather than a product, and that the role of a tutor is to engage in this process. The latter is the legacy of the social interactionism movement (originating with Vygotsky's ideas on the primary role of social interaction in the construction of knowledge and development of reasoning, and coming to us in the field of composition studies and specifically writing center work through the work of scholars such as Andrea Lunsford and Stephen North), which ascribes a "co-learner" role to tutors and downplays the role of the tutor as an expert.

There is a tension between these ideas, between the goals and daily practice of writing center work, arising from some of the basic attributes of individual appointments. Individual appointments are limited in time. This is usually because such sessions are scheduled by appointment, but time pressure can follow just as easily, in a drop-in center, from tutors' awareness that there are more students awaiting help in the wings. Given that time is limited in individual consultations; it becomes the most shrewd choice for students writers, as rational actors seeking their maximum benefit from the center, to prioritize the limited time that they have with tutors for getting feedback on their writing (which is fast) rather than on writing itself (which is slow). If writing is a process, then of course a beneficial role for a tutor is to engage with this process, helping writers to develop habits and ways of thinking that will serve them well as they move towards developing a writing routine that will serve them both within and beyond the university. But when students have a half-hour or hour to work with a tutor, it makes sense for them to complete a draft before arriving at the center, prioritize their limited time with the tutor for getting feedback on that draft, and then return home or elsewhere to implement the feedback.

As a result—and notwithstanding the fact that many sessions involve prewriting, brainstorming, and open-ended discussions about assignments and expectations—there is an underlying tendency for sessions to be focused on drafts rather than on process. No amount of marketing to the effect that students can come to the center at any stage of the writing process will change the fact that one-to-one sessions incentivize draft-oriented sessions and set up a dynamic that tutors must then actively resist, with student writers arriving at the center after the early stages of the writing process have already passed, precluding a tutor from engaging with students during the critical invention and drafting stages. For the same reasons, the time-bound aspect of individual appointments is at odds with the value that writing is a social act, and the conceptualization of writing centers as venues for social interaction around writing because sessions are focused on the review of drafts, nothing precludes writing itself from taking the form of a solitary activity.

There is another, and perhaps more serious, way in which the individual session may not be the best forum for fostering a view of writing as a social activity: while there is indeed conversation around writing in one-to-one sessions, it's not truly between writers, or at least not between writers who are actively engaged in writing. The conversation is between someone present in the role of writer, and someone present in another capacity. The peer tutor is an individual who, while a student writer in

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tweet WLN? "Like" WLN?

If your writing center and/or tutors have Twitter accounts and/or Facebook pages, we invite you to "follow," "tweet," "like," and/or "post" on our Twitter account and Facebook wall. We invite you to post news of your writing center, photos, online resources, conference notices, other news you wish to share, and links other writing center folk would be interested in.



@WLNewsletter



Writing Lab Newsletter



International Writing Center Blog

CONNECTING WRITING CENTERS ACROSS BORDERS

"Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders" is a blog intended for those of you in writing centers around the world to share blog entries, photos, questions, resources, and comments about topics relevant to your work. There is a link on the *WLN* home page, or connect directly to it at <www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/>.

What's Happening at *WLN*

This has been a busy year for the editorial staff of *WLN* as we have planned and started new projects. You can read about these in more detail on the *WLN* website:

- ***WLN* will become *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship (WCS)***

Beginning with the first issue of Vol. 40, next September, we will officially recognize that what began decades ago as a little informal newsletter to keep a small group of us in contact with each other (that was in the dark days before the Internet) has slowly morphed into a peer-reviewed journal that has long since become much more than a newsletter. The *WLN* that remains in the name is a nostalgic bow to our origins as we move on to be *WCS*.

- **Our editorial staff has expanded**
Kim Ballard, who was the *WLN* Book Review Editor, has moved over to become one of the two Associate Editors, who coordinate with reviewers and authors. Sherry Wynn Perdue has accepted the position of *WLN* Book Review Editor.

- **We will have some guest-edited special issues**

The first special issue will be guest edited by Susan Lawrence and Terry Zawacki, focusing on supporting graduate student writers (see p. 4 for details). Later, Katrin Girsensohn will guest edit an issue on international writing centers. If you have a suggestion for a topic for a special issue or are interested in guest editing an issue, please contact Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

(Continued on p. 13)

her or his own right, has set aside for the time being her or his own writing in order to consult with a tutee over the writing that the student brings to the session. In the tutor's role as tutor, for the duration of the session she or he is not a fellow writer, but an expert advisor on writing. And this is troubling, because in setting up the tutor as expert the student writer becomes the non-expert—a notion inimical to the goal of validating students as writers and as intelligent commenters on writing. Perhaps the single most commonly invoked analogue for writing tutoring is the Socratic method, held up as empowering to students in that it draws on their knowledge, through a series of questions, rather than the tutors'. But there's no more clear example of the problem with the model than a Socratic dialogue. Does anyone read Plato and find themselves questioning who is in the role of expert? Socrates wasn't put to death because the powerful of Athens felt empowered by their exchanges with him.

Individual appointments also limit the impact of the center on the institution. The first reason for this is simple mathematical necessity. A staff of 20 tutors working 20 hours/week (an inconceivable dream, for many directors) limits the potential contact hours with students to 400/week. In a very busy semester with no repeat users, that would mean about 6,000 student users. Here at the University of New Mexico, a large university but by no means among the largest in the US, that would be 21% of the student population. Is that the goal? If we believe in the value of our work in changing how students relate to writing, and if we believe that work has value for every student writer, ought we not to be setting our sights on interactions with a much higher percentage of the student populations at our institutions? Grutsch McKinney, echoing Nancy Grimm (1996, 2011), describes a more troubling way in which the focus on individual appointments limits the potential good that can be accomplished by writing centers: in helping students to meet institutional standards and the standards of individual faculty, the center becomes complicit in promulgating those standards. Finally, and perhaps above all else: individual sessions can't possibly be right for every student. There are so many types of student writers, representing such a diverse range of learning styles, writing abilities, perceptions of their writing ability, language backgrounds, attitudes towards literacy, and other factors. Could it possibly be the case that all of them will be better served by individual appointments than by other potential formats of tutoring? Could it possibly be the case that all of them will be attracted to individual appointments over other venues?

Great things can and do happen in one-to-one consultations, every day. None of the above is to argue that students don't benefit from individual appointments, or that outstanding work doesn't take place within centers that rely on individual appointments (indeed, the vast majority do, and there will be little question among the readership of this journal that writing centers accomplish good work on university campuses). Many insightful pieces of scholarship have been devoted to addressing each of the above concerns within the frame of the one-to-one session. What I am arguing against isn't the view that individual appointments have an important role to play in writing center work. Rather, I'm suggesting that we as a field should question the centrality of the one-to-one appointment to the narrative that defines our identity and our daily practice.

The move towards individual sessions was an important, intentional part of the creation of writing centers and of the practice they follow. But their centrality to our practice is no longer intentional. Grutsch McKinney's 'Grand Narrative' of writing center work is a set of unconscious assumptions about what a writing center is and what it does, delineating our sense of identity as a field as much as it does the day-to-day practice of our centers. And (as she argues) we don't want our work to be based on unconscious assumptions. We want it to be founded on well-reasoned ideas, and empirical inquiry into the effect of our practice on the students with whom we work. We want it to be driven not by a sense of obligation to how it's been done in the past, investment in the approaches we were trained in, and the inertia of long-established patterns that have become second-nature. We want it, rather, to be driven by a spirit of open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity towards how a writing center can best realize its potential in engaging student as writers, and engaging our home institutions in fostering throughout the curriculum the types of skills and attitudes that will serve students as they move beyond their undergraduate degrees to advanced study and professional careers.

Immense changes have swept higher education in the last 30 years. Walking in to a typical university writing center, how much has changed in the same time period? Intense debates are currently raging in higher education as to what

a university is and how it should serve students; these will unfold into new educational models, practices, and norms over the next 30 years. Walking in to a typical university writing center in 30 years, what will we see? How long can we plausibly identify as iconoclastic without questioning, and if necessary making real changes to, the basic model we operate on? The strong sense of unity that we've arrived at is hard-won, but at some point it no longer serves us. Writing centers cannot react fully to institutional contexts and to changes in higher education when the frame within which we conceptualize ourselves is too fully entrenched. And the key to weathering changes in the environment, as Darwin would attest, is diversity. As Grutsch McKinney points out, the dominant narrative of writing center work can obscure the fact that no small degree of heterogeneity of practice exists in our field already. A variety of approaches falling under the umbrella of classroom-based tutoring (Spigelman and Grobman) send the tutor to the student, reconceptualizing the writing center in a WAC-based context as a non-physical entity, and the writing tutor as a highly trained ambassador to students and faculty in the disciplines. In my own work (Sanford) on the peer-interactive writing center, I've argued for the repositioning of tutors as facilitators of peer-to-peer interactions. Tiffany Rousculp's work on community writing centers reevaluates the role of writing centers in service learning, and the relationship between universities and the local populations they serve.

What else? What next? What a thrilling opportunity it represents for the field, and for ourselves as scholars, to open ourselves to alternate ways of tutoring, and alternate ways of being a writing center! The next phase of writing center scholarship will come from exploration of alternate practices, combined with staunch empiricism in evaluating how these practices affect students and institutions. As universities reposition themselves to increase their output of STEM graduates, and as writing, rhetoric, and composition studies increasingly separate themselves from their origins in the study of literature and English, what role do scholars from outside of the humanities have in shaping this vision? As social media revolutionizes our relationship to both technology and literacy, what role ought it play in our emerging understanding of how writing centers engage student writers? What are our goals, and how can we rethink our practice to align with them? Moving forward, nothing will serve us more effectively than a tremendous amount of openness as to what a writing center is, and a willingness to rethink on a recurring basis how the core objectives of writing centers can best be accomplished. What better place to begin this task than a reassessment of the individual appointment as the default center of our practice, a reevaluation of the potential scope of activities in which we engage, and a repositioning of one-to-one sessions within a healthily diverse range of pedagogies? ♦

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NEWS

What's Happening at WLN

(continued from p. 12)

- **A new section in WLN: "Reflections"**

To provide a space for you to respond to or reflect on an article, we will occasionally list a specific article that appeared in a past issue of *WLN* and ask for your responses (100-200 words) sent to the submissions section of the website. (See p. 5.) The first article to respond to is Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring" vol. 15.6. (See p. 5). We'll collect responses until Dec. 12. We would also appreciate your suggestions for other articles for *WLN* readers to reflect on. Send suggestions to Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

- **Database of links to resources for writing centers**

We're still searching for a name for this project in which developers are compiling links to online resources for writing centers, in a searchable database. We'll gather links from listservs, blogs, videos, and other sources. Lee Ann Glowzinski (laglowzinski@gmail.com) is directing this project. If you are interested in joining her group of developers, contact her.

TUTOR'S COLUMN

CONFRONTING NOTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS

◆ Elizabeth McKibben
*University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Amherst, MA*

Grades are a constant stress in any student's life. The preoccupation with quantitative achievement that echoes in institutional halls has created a grade-centric student population, where learning is often valued only by a letter. While not every tutor is consumed by the A-centric mentality, tutors in our Writing Center inherently fall into a file labeled "Academically Successful." Indeed, we are "achievers," students with good grades looking for an avenue to share our knowledge and skills with others. Consequently, our skills and ability to navigate institutional parameters for success renders us more likely to develop that grade-oriented mindset. I experienced this one day as I was meandering through our campus and ended up having lunch with a group of friends, one of whom was a former student. It was strange to see a student in a different context, where I was not "instructing" but rather acting 100 per cent as a peer. He said the session had helped him, and I was glad, surely smiling. Then I made a fatal mistake. Being the grade-centric, non-tutor student I was, I asked him what grade he received on the paper. He laughed and said with no resentment, "B+."

When I walk into the Writing Center, I want to help my students make the grades that I find so important to academic life. There is a confidence attained from knowing I am part of a unique community that makes strong papers stronger, that makes writers out of students. At times, however, we are presented with papers that feel unmanageable, and we become overwhelmed. When I can't visualize how a student can re-envision a paper, I feel like a failure. It is irrational, an emotion stemming from my projection of success onto another person that is nonetheless assuaged by my understanding of the Writing Center's pedagogy. We are not a "fix-it shop," I repeat to myself, a mantra to encourage me to embrace the fact that I am in the Writing Center to help my student grow, not to promote my own, perhaps negative, grade obsession.

Although I too often define student success on my terms, I want to respect the ideology of the Writing Center. While Stephen North says, "our job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (50), notions of academic success posit that better writers are those who get that "perfect" golden A on a paper. While my student-self would argue the same, my tutor-self seeks to break down this perception, explaining to students that the 'perfect' grade is the grade you get when you've learned something about yourself as a writer. While it may seem that these two go hand-in-hand, an A does not necessarily prove that a student has learned something about his or her writing, just as an F does not denote failing to learn. I am then caught in between roles, torn between the student-self and the tutor-self, two identities that have the potential to work together, but that are mostly separate.

Tutors want students to grow as writers; we want to help them find their success. Through evaluation surveys, we are able to get a sense of what they take away from their sessions as a part of themselves, but not as a part of their student-selves in classes. While we can read the tutor evaluation forms that students write at the end of the session to see what they gained from the session, it is only rarely that we ever get the opportunity to hear what grades our students actually earn on their papers. Our reviews tell us what writers got out of the hour, but what about them as institutionally-bound students? In asking my friend whom I had how the session went, I was able to gauge better what he took away, but it wasn't the reaction I wanted to hear. Reality struck as I realized, more than my student looking for the A, it was me seeking it for him. I had projected my sense of a student-self unto him. Despite knowing that the true value of the session was in what he learned and not in his grade, I became immediately discombobulated. Who am I to assert that the student-self of those I have tutored holds the same academic transparency that my student-self holds? Yet it still nags at me. What could I have done to help him reach that "perfect" A? I constantly find myself struggling between deciding when to be directive or non-directive, and deciding

what questions to ask because my actions as a tutor are important. What could I have done to make the session better? I couldn't have because my student walked away feeling good about himself as a writer, and that is more valuable than any grade. I realized that perhaps that feeling of disappointment came from my own inability to fully embody the Writing Center's pedagogy, an inability to differentiate my student and tutor identities.

As tutors we are placed at a crossroads. We are, as author Bill Ransom describes, the "master student" who "[r]ecognizes that evaluations are important, but they're not the only reason she studies. She does not measure her worth as a human by some instructor's one-page dictum." As a tutor, I acknowledge this fact. I see the ideology behind Ransom's "Master Student" agree with it and respect it. As a tutor I try to ask questions, to lead the student to answer the questions for himself or herself, maybe putting a little black ink in the margins of a student's page. And yet, my compulsion to have my students maximize their institutional academic potential would push the student towards an A, being directive to the extreme, with red ink filling the margins of the page. But my student didn't have the same obsession. When my tutor identity merged with my sense of self and academic standards, I was doing the opposite of what Ransom suggests, valuing my worth as a human and a tutor in relation to the grade that my student received. On the other hand, the student did not seem to place his worth in the grade he received. He was one of those students who valued the improvement of his paper and not necessarily the push towards perfection.

To further complicate the issue, students often come into the Writing Center without understanding that tutors are not meant to re-write papers for students. Students are likewise influenced by the grade-centric mentality; after all they come into the Writing Center for help. Because of the selection process and training process of our tutors, we can provide students with that academically rigorous environment that is needed for them to feel comfortable with the help they are getting. They know then that we can help, that we are a credible source. Moreover, having a successful academic background means that tutors are able to intelligently lead students. We can see the overarching institutional necessities of the paper and use our identity as peers to lead students towards that goal. The academically based mindset thus gives tutors the ability to construct sessions where improvement and not perfection is the ideal.

While I believe in the pedagogical values of our Writing Center and adopt them when in a position of power, my student-self values institutional success more. It is then important for me to differentiate my student and tutor identities in the rare case that I learn what grade a student receives on a paper. The shock I felt at hearing this student's grade wasn't shock regarding the paper, it was shock regarding myself. In being able to understand that the goal of being a tutor is not to make students "like me," I can stifle the shock, the surprise of non-A grades. In extracting myself from a perspective of perfection, I can more effectively meet the student and embody the non-directive ideal that comes along. Indeed, it is as Wilhelm van Rensburg writes, "[t]he Writing Center is the best place that these students can use as 'rehearsal space' to develop an alternate 'discourse of selfhood' while negotiating their academic writing." As tutors with multiple identities, we have the responsibility to re-evaluate the "transparent discourse" of academia to better evaluate our students as writers. By approaching each session as though the entirety of our academic selves lies within the writing center, we encourage progress and not perfection. We encourage students to embrace themselves as writers and not as the grade on their writing. ♦

Works Cited

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- Ransom, Bill. "Definition of a Master Student Handout." <academic.evergreen.edu/c/curtzt/CurriculumMaterials/Master.html>. n.d. Web. 1 May, 2013.
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THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER IS ABOUT TO CHANGE NAMES!

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

November 7-8, 2014: Middle East/North Africa Writing Centers, in Dubai, UAE

Contact: Nadine Ashkuri <Nadine@tud.ac.ae>; Kathy O'Sullivan <Kathy@tud.ac.ae>; Conference website: <menawca.org>.



February 12-14, 2015: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Austin, TX

Contact: <abatt@austin.utexas.edu>; Conference website: <scwca.net>.



February 19-21, 2015: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Nashville, TN

Contact: Stacia Watkins <stacia.watkins@lipscomb.edu>; Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>.



February 28, 2015: Southern California Writing Centers Association Peer Tutor Conference, in La Jolla, CA

Contact: Madeleine Picciotto: <mpicciotto@ucsd.edu>; Conference website: <sandbox.socialwritingcenters.org/2015-tutor-conference/>.



March 7, 2015: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Fresno, CA

Contact: Magda Gilewicz: <magdag@csufresno.edu>; Conference website: <www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/writingcenter/ncwca2015.html>.



April 10-11, 2015: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Notre Dame, IN

Contact: Matthew Capdevielle: <matthew.capdevielle@nd.edu>;

Conference website: <www.ecwca.2015org>.



April 10-11, 2015: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Harrisonburg, VA

Contact: Jared Jay Featherstone: <feathej@jmu.edu>; Conference website: <mawcaconference.wix.com/mawca2015>.



April 18-19, 2015: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Hackettstown, NJ

Contact: Richard Severe: <severer@centenarycollege.edu>; Conference website: <www.centenarycollege.edu/collaboratory>.

