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A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

MATTISON | DIXON | EFTHYMIOU | FINOCCHIO | WILLIAMS

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From the Editor

Muriel Harris

Whether you're preparing to go to the IWCA or another conference, reading this after a conference, or haven't attended any, Mike Mattison's article may cause you to think about how you introduce tutoring to your new tutors. After listening to presentations at the 2016 IWCA conference, Mattison offers his thoughts on how he plans to change the direction of his tutor training classes. The theme of reconsidering approaches that have guided tutoring practice continues in Elise Dixon's article as she thinks through how she and her tutors aim for student-centered tutorials and how that impacts the long-standing assumed binary of directive vs. non-directive tutoring.

If you're looking for recommendations on how to use *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* (*OGWT*), Andrea Rosso Efthymiou's review offers a close look at the book's contents and suggests how you might use it in your tutor training—if you aren't already doing so. In our Tutors' Column section, the author of the first essay, Nicole Finocchio, explains how *OGWT* offers strategies to work with students writing in a genre the tutor is not familiar with. Next, Heidi Williams brings us into her tutorial as she works with a student writing about a very emotionally charged situation. Her essay's title, "Validation," offers the key to how to help such students.

Finally, along with conference announcements and our Conference Calendar, you'll find more information about our forthcoming online workshop project designed to assist potential *WLN* authors. The *WLN* Associate Editors working on this are Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julie Prebel. In a later issue, you'll find information about yet another project to help authors, a mentoring program that will offer one-to-one help. Clint Gardner, Chris LeCluyse, and Karen Jackson are the *WLN* Associate Editors structuring this program. Stay tuned. . . .

Heading East, Leaving North
Thoughts from the 2016 IWCA Conference
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There's a Bob Seger song entitled "Get Out of Denver," and it is running through my head as the plane taxis away from that city's airport. Admittedly, I'm mentally singing the Blues Traveler version, but there's no mistaking the up-tempo, driving imperative: "Go, get out of Denver, baby. Go, go, get out of Denver, baby." The singer's reason for leaving is criminal, as he and his partner are being chased by the police, and though I don't share that situation, I'm still dogged by the feeling that someone, or something, is right behind me. Yes, I am excited and exhilarated to implement all the ideas that were shared and prompted by the conference—so many possibilities. But, this time, unlike other departures, there's also a note of loss. A shadow of something, "something heavy," as the song warns. It's a feeling that will follow me all the way back to Ohio.

After any writing center conference, I bring my backpack to the office and empty out all the notes; ideally they would all be contained in one notebook, but they never are. Instead, I have a stack of notecards, conference program pages, hotel stationery pads, occasional napkins—random items that together create my conference experience. In this collage, there are several jottings about English 242, which is the peer tutoring course I teach every spring. The structure of the course was especially on my mind in Denver as we had just finished our hiring process and had selected the students who would be in the class. One of my scribbles reminded me that after hearing the presentation by Gita DasBender entitled "Metacognitive Opportunities for Enhancing Tutor Knowledge of Multilingual Writers and Writing," I wanted to think about framing the course around threshold concepts. I also reminded myself that I wanted to start off by reading *The Bat-Poet*, by Randall Jarrell, which was a

title suggested by a previous conference talk by Chris Anson—I wanted to use it along with Isabelle Thompson's "Scaffolding in the Writing Center." The two texts, to me, seem to be a productive pairing that will allow the class to talk about ways of responding to writers, and I was pushed to that insight by Kathy Rose and Jill Grauman's Denver presentation, "Boundaries of Directiveness."

Granted, both Jarrell's and Thompson's texts have been in previous versions of English 242, but they had never opened the course. *The Bat-Poet* was positioned in the second or third week, and Thompson's article was in the last third of the course. It was a work that we built towards rather than began with. Now, I wanted it to be the starting point. Such a change, though, means that something else must be moved, or eliminated.

I have chosen to get rid of Stephen North.

Or rather, his work, specifically "The Idea of a Writing Center." No doubt I am a bit late to the party in some ways. Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner have articulated some of the difficulties that our field has experienced given the prevalence of North's work, but his "Idea" essay is a piece that has always been on my syllabus. It has been the opening salvo for incoming advisors, the introduction to the course and to writing center work—and it is not neutral. We know that the piece was written out of frustration, and the emotion comes through in the work. Partly, I believe, my attachment to the essay has been due to how well that emotion transfers over to the students. There's always a little charge when you see them light up with indignation, and they echo North's words—we're not a "fix-it" shop! That phrase is spit from their lips in class and onto the pages in their journals. Some are ready to storm an English department meeting, raising signs and slogans to drive home the point. They also continue to cite the essay in future work logs after the class, critiquing faculty who send students to the Writing Center without fully realizing the value that we can have—we create "better writers, not better writing." The essay attaches them to the work of a writing center in a way that no others do, and there is some value in creating that connection.

Yet I am attuned to Boquet and Lerner's claims of the "imbalance" of the field given our reliance upon this work. The reliance has, in their argument, given us research "dominated by lore and speculation" rather than "richly textured accounts that

are concerned with the full scope of literacy studies" (185-186). Also, I am aware that not that many faculty are calling for us to focus on grammar anymore. Some are, yes, but more and more faculty come to college teaching with a solid understanding of writing center work (and more and more young faculty have worked in writing centers at some point). Writing centers are ubiquitous nowadays; students come up to me and tell me of their high school centers and how they appreciate being able to continue their writing conversations (or to continue working as a writing advisor). To give incoming advisors North's anger can be counterproductive. As Boquet and Lerner say, the righteousness of the article "became an ossifying force for the assumptions inherent in writing center work" (183). Perhaps I've known that for awhile.

But it's taken this last conference for me to acknowledge where I am and where we are as a field, as well as to acknowledge the possible ineffectiveness of the article. What I might have known in theory has now been placed into practice. My syllabus has changed. Those changes I can trace directly to specific conference presentations, as well as to conversations with other directors. Mark Hall shared his syllabus with me, based on a conversation in Denver, and he highlighted his use of Laurel Johnson Black's work for writing center advisors. Now her writing is another addition for my course, and hers is a richly textured account of conversations between writers and readers. It, and Thompson's work, is indicative of valuable research, research that can help incoming advisors understand and appreciate the intricacies of their sessions. Through such work, the class can, I believe, move "beyond mere assertion of identity," as Boquet and Lerner urge us to do (185).[1]

Of course, the break in the relationship is not easy, and I want to acknowledge again the difficulty and suggest at least one possible reason. When Boquet and Lerner lay out the "imbalance" in our research, they call on "those who are directly involved in writing center work—directors, tutors, or researchers" to counteract it (185). For me, that's a spurious parallel structure. The advisors (tutors) in our writing center are undergraduates, and none of them is majoring in writing studies (we don't have such a major). Writing centers are not in their futures. The students are, instead, biology majors on their way to being physical therapists, marine scientists, or doctors; political science majors on their way to being lawyers; history

majors on their way to being museum directors; English majors on their way to being high school teachers. They are transients in this field—incredibly valuable, insightful, compassionate, and dedicated transients, but visitors nonetheless. So too with many writing center administrators, at least if we can judge from the emails on WCenter that pop up and tell us that someone else has just been "given responsibility for the writing center." Ours is not usually a long-term field.

So perhaps we have had this long attachment to North given how transient the writing center field can be. What better place to start than "The Idea of a Writing Center"? It's understandable. It's a shot of adrenaline to the heart, an immediate attachment made through emotion and catchy slogans. It's a shorthand that cuts to why many of us enjoy the work. If someone asked why I like Bob Dylan, I could have them listen to *Blood on the Tracks*; or if they asked why I watch college basketball, I could have them watch the last five minutes of the 1983 championship game between North Carolina State and Houston; or if they asked why I am drawn to Salvador Dali, I could show them *The Persistence of Memory*. None of those examples would articulate exactly why I like what I do, in the same way that reading North does not give a clear picture of the work done in writing centers. But, the examples can be explanatory in an immediate, visceral way.

Losing that emotional entrance worries me. Will the incoming advisors, these students passing through our field, now see their roles in the Writing Center as less of a calling and more of a, well, job? Will an immediate dive into something like Thompson's research put them off? (Students have found it a dense, difficult piece.) The change in approach will certainly mean that I need to work harder, and more deliberately, to help the advisors establish a sense of themselves as advisors. Perhaps, though, we can accomplish more deliberate research in our center, with a new focus. Again, that is not the primary importance for the advisors, but they might feel better equipped (and more eager) to undertake such projects.

This essay, however, is not another call for more critical research in our field. We have those. Rather, this is my admission (confession) of how I have introduced the field to my advisors, and my desire to change. What do I want them to begin with? What first steps do I want them to take into the world of writing centers? What first impression do I want them to have? Those are always questions that I ask when preparing for the course,

but previously, I always came back to North's article. Somehow, my time in Denver was the tipping point for me. The conference, and the conversations there, freed me. I have been unlocked from whatever obligation I thought I had to North's work. To North's idea. We can have other starting points.

For the first time in fifteen years, North's article will not be on my syllabus. Heading east that day from Denver, I realized I was leaving North. I needed a new direction. My class and I do not need to begin with frustration, with anger, with ire. We can instead dive straight into the research on the conversations.[2] To return to Bob Seger's song, in my class this semester, we are heading out of the fog. We are moving away from North, away from an identity claimed through frustration and ideals. We are, instead, starting with the talk, with research that targets specifically the words exchanged by writers and readers in a one-to-one setting. That's what I got out of Denver.

NOTES

1. There is perhaps an interesting conversation to be had at some point as to whether or not the writing center field was guilty of the same emphasis on identity that Richard Rorty claims the Left has in *Achieving Our Country*, and whether we can notice the distinction between agent and spectator in our roles. His is a provocative argument, but one that needs much more space for unpacking.

2. And as Boquet and Lerner remind us, that was probably North's original idea anyway, given his other 1984 article, "Writing Center Research: Testing Our Assumptions."

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Strategy-Centered or Student-Centered: A Meditation on Conflation

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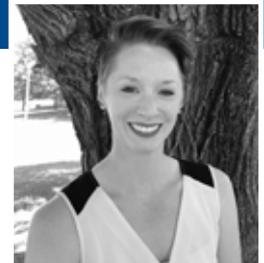
Despite the possibility that non-directivity is no longer considered best practice among writing center directors and scholars, I continue to see consultants in my writing center attempting to use only non-directive methods in their sessions. In fact, in every one of the four writing centers where I have worked since 2007, I have found myself either consoling consultants who felt they had been too directive or trying to convince consultants that it is OK to sometimes write on students' papers. In each writing center, despite tutor training that did or did not push for non-directive tutoring methods, consultants (myself included) have expressed anxiety around the directive/non-directive binary. I believe that these anxieties remain, not because of a lack of clear training or scholarship on the topic, but because tutors (and perhaps their directors) are conflating the concept of student-centeredness with the concept of non-directivity.

As indicated in varying scholarship and WC listserv discussions, the non-directive/directive tutoring binary has been debated in scholarship, lore, whispered conversations between consultants, and tutoring training sessions. This binary focuses what is perhaps one of the writing center community's longest conversations. Stephen North's (1984) seminal work pushing for "better writers, not better writing" may have been the impetus for consultants and directors alike to see non-directive tutoring as the best means for developing self-sufficient writers and avoiding a "fix-it-shop" assumption of the center. Further, texts that advocated strategies for non-directive approaches like Jeff Brooks (1991) were likely at the root of the push for non-directive tutoring that guided my own initial tutoring strategies as an undergraduate writing center consultant. However, since North's and Brooks' pieces were published, multiple scholars have complicated and questioned the initial assumption of

non-directivity as best practice (Shamoon and Burns, Latterell, Carino, Corbett, Sloan, Sentell, Clark). Most writing center directors and scholars would likely agree that the non-directive/directive binary is no longer useful (Sentell), and that most sessions require a "shuttling back and forth" between directive and nondirective approaches based on the client's needs (Grimm 22). Still, I believe that some consultants see non-directivity as the only means with which to have a truly student-centered session, despite evidence (as I have presented above) that suggests otherwise. I also believe that this conflation leads them to 1) try to tutor in an exclusively non-directive manner and/or 2) feel guilty when they cannot sustain non-directive assistance in a session.

In this piece, using personal narratives from my undergraduate, masters, and PhD tutoring experiences, as well as data collected from a small study conducted in a mid-sized Midwestern university, I will illuminate the ways that non-directive and student-centered tutoring are conflated, and I will provide some insights for how I hope to address this conflation in the future as a writing center director.

STUDENT-CENTERED AND NON-DIRECTIVE: A BRIEF MEDITATION ON TERMS

Student-centered education, at its core, refers to teaching methods that shift the focus from the teacher to the student; often this shift in focus aims to give students more agency and independence. The writing center's peer-to-peer model offers just such a student-centered model, "help that [is] not an extension of but an alternative to traditional classroom teaching," according to Bruffee (637). The writing center often provides students with more agency over their work; they gain that agency not through working with an "expert" who tells them what to do in order to get a good grade, but rather through collaboration with a peer.

Non-directive tutoring strategies likely stem from the push for collaborative, student-centered learning in a writing center consultation. Indeed, if consultations are supposed to shift the focus from the teacher to the student, it would be logical to develop consultation strategies that center on the client; those strategies might include asking more questions than providing answers. It may also look like Brooks' concept of "minimalist tutoring," which includes the suggestions to not write on the client's paper or hold a pen, sit further away from the paper than

the client, and have the client read the paper aloud (3). These strategies, according to Brooks, are crucial because "the less we do to a paper, the better. The object in the writing center session is not the paper, but the student" (4). When I first read Brooks' concept of minimalist tutoring as an undergraduate tutor, I immediately connected non-directivity to student-centeredness. I wanted to serve my clients the best I could, and it seemed that non-directivity was the only way I could keep the focus on the client instead of on myself. What follows is a personal story about my own conflation of the terms to illuminate the motivations behind such a conflation.

NON-DIRECTIVE = STUDENT-CENTERED: UNDERGRADUATE YEARS

Perhaps because they seemingly provided the clear-cut rules I craved as a new tutor, my initial uninformed readings of texts like North's and Brooks' led me to believe that my efficacy as a tutor was wholly reliant on my ability to foreground the power of the client with whom I was working. I believed the only way to put the agency in the hands of my client was to be as non-directive as possible. I (incorrectly) believed that being non-directive was the best way to embody the main ethos of the writing center because non-directive tutoring facilitated collaboration, and collaboration was student-centered. This understanding first caused me to conflate student-centeredness with non-directive tutoring. I tried for months as a new tutor to follow the rules: I never held the pen, and I never made suggestions.

However, as I gained experience, I learned the nuanced connection between hands-off methods and more forthcoming ones. I learned that it was possible to ask leading questions but also to provide straight-forward answers, to let the client write on their own paper but to feel comfortable writing my own notes where necessary. I began to see that student-centeredness, at its core, was about serving the needs of the individual student, even (and perhaps especially) when they would benefit from some directive tutoring. Despite the apparent efficacy of my consulting skills, I felt that I was not tutoring the "right way." By the time I began my master's program, I had three years of experience contending with my own perceived sense that, because I used directive strategies, I was unable to be student-centered.

GUILT= NON-DIRECTIVE + STUDENT CENTERED: A STUDY

Working as a tutor at two different writing centers during my master's program, I noticed a similar preoccupation with

non-directivity among my fellow consultant colleagues, new undergraduate consultants especially. When asked about their concerns as practicing consultants, many expressed varying levels of guilt or shame following sessions where they felt they had been too directive, and therefore, unhelpful in their mission of being student-centered. Or they felt that, in an attempt to be non-directive, they had not helped the client enough. Seeing my past shame reflected in my undergraduate colleagues, I implemented a small study to investigate whether students in this center were feeling guilt about their tutoring styles, and if they were, whether that guilt was connected to a fear of directivity.

I modeled this study on Jennifer Nicklay's "Got Guilt?: Consultant Guilt in the Writing Center Community," in which she examines the responses of eleven writing center tutors in a survey geared toward understanding when and why tutors in her center felt guilty about their tutoring practices. Nicklay found that tutors who valued collaboration (as interpreted from Brooks and North) often felt guilty when they deviated from what they believed to be the embodiment of collaboration: non-directive tutoring. My own pilot study, then, borrowed heavily from Nicklay's initial example: I surveyed, in written, open-response form, seventeen tutors from the two writing centers in the university I worked at, asking students to list some of the concepts they had learned in writing center training or in texts they'd been assigned, what they knew about the non-directive and directive binary, what tutoring "principles" guided their tutoring (e.g. non-directivity, student-centeredness, better writers not better writing, etc.), and whether they ever deviated from those principles. Nicklay's findings suggest a correlation between tutors' guilty feelings and a valuation of non-directivity; in particular, she found that a strict adherence to non-directive tutoring was too limiting and caused guilt. My results were similar, and indicated a further correlation between guilty feelings and a *conflation* of non-directivity with student-centeredness.

One of the eight interview questions provided the most insight into the shame and guilt tutors sometimes felt. This question asked consultants how they felt when they deviated from the principles they used to inform their sessions (most tutors cited non-directivity). Though this question did not explicitly ask about guilty feelings, many tutors mentioned feeling guilty when deviating from non-directive tutoring practices. Tutors also often cited feeling either as though they had failed their

clients by (1) being too directive (and therefore causing the client to learn nothing) or (2) being non-directive but feeling as if the client did not learn anything through these methods. Here, I saw consultants assuming that being directive took agency away from the client, and so they would consult with non-directive methods, even when those methods did not seem to help the client. If tutors "accidentally" veered into directive territory, even when the session seemed to go well, they worried they had commandeered the session. This guilt manifested itself in two often combined ways: tutors felt guilty because they broke what they saw as a major "rule" of the writing center when they turned toward directive strategies, and/or they felt guilty because they worried their directive style had taken the focus off the client (essentially, I argue, they believed their directivity was the antithesis of student-centeredness).

Two of these consultants' responses seemed particularly fraught with self-reproach. One consultant's response may indicate that she views her tutoring as correlating to her own self worth. She writes,

> . . . I feel like a bad tutor when I just give students the "answer," because there usually isn't one "answer"—it makes me feel like I'm not good at my job, that the student would have been better off with another tutor, or that I'm not particularly smart.

This consultant's guilt suggests a fear of only offering one of potentially many answers, a legitimate concern. However this tutor's anxiety also appears to be a symptom of giving any answer at all, instead of posing a question or merely offering up some suggestions. Her concern that providing the "answer" does a disservice to her client is similarly reflective of Brooks' argument: "A student who comes to the writing center and passively receives knowledge from a tutor will not be any closer to his own paper than he was when he walked in. He may leave with an improved paper, but he will not have learned much" (2). A directive session, implied by Brooks, is not just unproductive; it is *harmful* to the client. A consultant like the one above may see the act of giving an "answer" as taking a learning opportunity from a client, thus focusing more on the consultant's ideas than the client's. In this way, the consultant may believe that the only way to provide student-centered instruction is to be non-directive. Similarly, the tutor in my pilot study believed that she herself had in some way done such a disservice to her client that the client should have seen someone else.

Another tutor compares her divergence from non-directive tutoring as failure. She writes,

> I attempt to use non-directive methods, but I am currently not very good at it. I try to use questions and if I inadvertently frame the question wrong, the session turns directive [. . .] I feel like I ~~fail~~ let down the student, because I want to help them, not tell them what to do.

This consultant crossed out the word "fail" on her response, but the word remains on the survey as an indicator that she does not just feel guilty—she believes she is a failure as a tutor. This tutor's thoughts are similarly reflective of North's oft-cited dictums: "Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (438) and "in a writing center, the object is to make sure that writers, not necessarily their texts are what get changed by instruction" (38). These two dicta have become shorthand to express a value of student learning over paper improvement. It was easy for me as a new consultant to believe that "better writers, not better writing" meant that the *client* should be doing the work, not me. I (mistakenly) believed that being student-centered meant not being paper-centered; directive tutoring meant focusing on the paper, while non-directive tutoring meant focusing on the client. When I took the reins in a session, offering a suggestion instead of a set of leading questions, I felt I had failed the client, just as the consultant above does.

SO WHAT? REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Leaving my master's program behind for a PhD program at a Midwestern R1 institution, I wondered if consultants would express similar feelings of guilt. In the semester-long training course, this writing center's directors are clear about the complexities of non-directive and directive tutoring, advocating for consultants to use a multitude of varying strategies throughout a session as needed. Still, I recently had a conversation with a new undergraduate consultant who indicated she refused to write on a client's paper: "I don't want to give any answers. That's not my job." Her response mirrored a conversation I had last year with our associate director who lamented overhearing consultants announce to clients, "we don't *do* grammar here," even though our directors advocate for grammar-based consultations if clients request them. Both of these statements from consultants in this center remind me of Jay Sloan's contention that the writing center's identity is often "defined first and foremost in

terms of what they are *not*. We do *not* proofread. We are *not* fix-it shops" (3). The consultants in our center, in adhering to what they believe is the student-centered model, enact non-directive strategies, sometimes directly opposing the requests of the client. Indeed,

> When a student asks for line editing, extensive hands-on direction, or micro-level grammatical instruction, the tutor is thrust into the unenviable position of balancing these requests with our process-driven, facilitative ideals. . . those tutors who adhere to the order of concerns and our non-directive principles risk ignoring the desires of the student—who, ironically, is supposed to be at the very center of our practice. (Sloan 5)

While the two consultant examples I have provided do not mirror the guilty feelings of the consultants I surveyed at my master's institution, they do embody the description Sloan provides. At the heart of this description is a conflation of student-centeredness with non-directivity that leads some consultants to privilege non-directivity in the interest of "improving" the students but "not necessarily their texts" (North 438), a dictum that could be construed by a new tutor as student-centeredness. Inevitably, this conflation of terms is harmful because acting upon it can lead consultants to feel guilty about their tutoring strategies or ignore the desires of the clients who are supposed to be at the center in the first place (as is the case for Sloan's consultants).

I hope the next step in my writing center journey will be to take a position as a writing center director. In that position, I hope to address the conflation of these two terms by facilitating conversations about the complexities of the non-directive/directive binary, and by addressing the distinct differences between the concepts of non-directivity and student-centeredness. Such conversations that put some much needed space between the two terms can allow consultants (particularly those who are new) to develop their own consulting strategies and practices free of guilt or perceived mandated agendas. Making the client the top priority of a session comes in many different forms; acknowledging this point allows tutors to have more autonomy and to claim ownership over their own tutoring instead of feeling like an enforcer of rules mandated from above. This space can allow tutors to discern which kinds of tutoring methods they might be best at, which can in turn allow them to develop multiple strategies for various students' different needs. Developing nuance in

the concepts of non-directivity and student-centeredness opens a new kind of space for tutors to claim their own agency and free themselves from unnecessary guilt.

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Book Review: *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research*

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The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research by Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta. New York: Oxford UP, 2016. 597 pp. Print. List Price: $44.95

There's no doubt that writing center researchers and practitioners have benefitted from guides, handbooks, and sourcebooks that focus on supporting the writers who visit our centers. What sets Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta's *Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research* (*OGWT*) apart from these other models of tutor education is that, in addition to introducing tutors to best practices in supporting others, the *OGWT* ultimately positions tutors as researchers. By dedicating its final two sections to an introduction to research methods, as well as to scholarship published largely by tutors themselves, the *OGWT* enacts its commitment to supporting tutors' research and makes a convincing case that writing center administrators should do the same.

As a writing center administrator who uses the *OGWT* in a tutoring pedagogy course, I strongly recommend Fitzgerald and Ianetta's book. In writing this review, I hope to offer examples of how administrators could use the *OGWT* in their own pedagogy courses through narrating some of my experiences using the text. Students in the pedagogy course where I used the *OGWT* for the first time became tutors who possess an understanding of writing center pedagogy and have a strong motivation to research the work they do in the center. Inspired by the tutor-authored research they read in the *OGWT*, one undergraduate tutor went on to submit his research to the journal *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric* and many others went on to propose panels at local conferences. Beyond a pedagogy course, the *OGWT* can easily be adapted for ongoing tutor education. Each section of the guide,

and the chapters they contain, can be isolated for consideration at a staff meeting or assigned as a writing prompt for a writing center's blog or tutors' online discussion board.

In many ways, *OGWT* is an extension of work that Fitzgerald and Ianetta began during their time co-editing *Writing Center Journal* (*WCJ*) from 2008-2013. In 2012, Fitzgerald and Ianetta published a special issue of *WCJ* titled "Peer Tutors and the Conversation of Writing Center Studies," dedicated exclusively to research conducted by tutors themselves. Building on this foundation, Fitzgerald and Ianetta acknowledge in their preface to *OGWT* that their work joins established fora committed to undergraduate research, citing *Young Scholars in Writing* and the regular Tutor's Column in *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* (xiv). In the same way that writing centers redistribute the authority of a typical classroom, the *OGWT* focuses on tutors' creation of knowledge through and about the work that they do, thereby revising notions of who is authorized to perform research in the field of writing studies.

Section III, "Research Methods for Writing Tutors," is specifically dedicated to preparing tutors to design a research plan. This section is particularly useful for administrators and students. For example, as the instructor of a pedagogy course, this section offers me a structured way to introduce research design and methods to my tutors. Within this section, Chapter 8 "The Kinds of Research—And the Kinds of Questions They Can Answer" provides administrators with accessible language to discuss institutional review and teach tutors how to recursively design a research plan. Likewise, tutors using the *OGWT* will find templates at the end of this chapter—one each for brainstorming, planning, and gaining informed consent—which serve as practical guides for moving them forward in their own research. Section III concludes by offering tutors an introduction to theoretical, historical, and empirical methods for grounding their research questions and answers. As the authors indicate, this chapter prepares tutors "to create original research that both responds to and furthers the conversations in writing center studies" (197).

By collecting scholarship from undergraduate and graduate tutors as well as faculty in the field of writing center research, Fitzgerald and Ianetta choreograph Section IV, "Readings from the Research," as a mini-anthology of writing center scholarship. In my own pedagogy course, we read and discuss Sections I, II

(more on those sections in a bit) and III, while each tutor selects an article from Section IV to present to the rest of the class. Pairing tutors' readings about writing center pedagogy and research design with the articles in Sections IV offers concrete examples of scholarship to orient tutors to work in the field. For example, Fitzgerald and Ianetta include Natalie DeCheck's article "The Power of Common Interest for Motivating Writing: A Case Study," written while DeCheck was an undergraduate writing tutor and originally published in *Young Scholars in Writing*. An administrator using the *OGWT* in a pedagogy course could usefully pair DeCheck's article with scholarship written by faculty, like Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson's article "Motivational Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring," originally published in *Writing Center Journal* and also collected in Section IV. This pairing of undergraduate and faculty research allows administrators to demonstrate a range of research methods— case studies, coding for linguistic markers, and theory-based concepts in education—related to a general topic that tutors think about often in their own writing centers: motivation. In representing diverse research projects and diverse researchers, *OGWT* invites tutors into the conversation of writing center scholarship, not merely as spectators, but with the possibility that tutors themselves can participate in that conversation.

Fitzgerald and Ianetta's emphasis on tutor research does not sidestep a more nuts-and-bolts approach to tutoring. In fact, the *OGWT* opens with Section I, "Introduction to Tutoring Writing," and Section II, "A Tutor's Handbook." Section I offers prompts that ask tutors to reflect on their own writing education. This is a useful starting place for writing center administrators who value empathy in tutor education; we understand the value of sharing our educational histories for discovering where those histories intersect and diverge amongst our staff members, and among tutors and students. Likewise, as a "Handbook," Section II contextualizes tutors' learning experiences within writing center history, theory, and practice. For example, Chapter 3 "Tutoring Practices," saliently identifies "foundational advice for writing tutors" (49), where Fitzgerald and Ianetta indicate a tutor's need to be specific, flexible, ethical, and professional. Section II also contains chapters devoted to indispensable topics in writing center studies, like authorship, identity, writing in/ across disciplines, and tutoring for online sessions. Here, the authors offer best practices in writing center sessions and cross-reference, as evidence, the scholarship anthologized in Section

IV. For example, when communicating to tutors that "overdoing questions [in a session] might make the writer feel interrogated or frustrated, especially if the tutor responds to the writer's questions with more questions" (59), Fitzgerald and Ianetta cite tutors Alicia Brazeau's and Molly Wilder's articles collected later in OGWT. In constructing a "Handbook" portion of the *OGWT* that references research collected in the text itself, Fitzgerald and Ianetta demonstrate their commitment to tutor-authored research in all aspects of their text. This integration of practice and research, particularly from the point-of-view of tutors, extends the writing center ethos of treating tutors as colleagues.

As a busy writing center administrator, I imagine that many readers may ultimately be asking themselves, "Why should I consider using a different guide in my center?" It is with that same mindset that I encourage you to consider how fostering undergraduate research could support the work that you and your tutors do. Compelling tutors to view their work as research-worthy helps them understand the writing center as part of the larger discipline of writing studies. This can ultimately have a positive, recursive effect on tutoring: if tutors are researching their work and implementing results of their research in the center, the center presumably will improve supporting its local, institutional populations. But fostering undergraduate and graduate research in our centers may have larger institutional implications as well. In addition to the number of students and faculty writing centers support, a writing center that is committed to producing research—and can eventually demonstrate that commitment through its own tutors' research projects—becomes an even greater institutional asset in conversations with higher level administration that involve resources. When I speak to administrators on my campus, I point to the research my tutors submit to journals and conferences as evidence of our center's contribution to the field, but also to the intellectual lives of our undergraduate and graduate tutors; when institutional support for undergraduate research becomes available, I have an entire staff of tutors who have projects at the ready; designing their own research projects helps tutors become more deeply committed to their writing center work. In short, *OGWT* offers administrators like me a way to expand our narratives beyond reporting numbers of sessions and students served; Fitzgerald and Ianetta encourage us to build writing centers that are sites for tutors' research, as well as our own.

Tutors' Column: Not Yet a Specialist?: Overcoming Genre Phobia in the Writing Center

Nicole Finocchio

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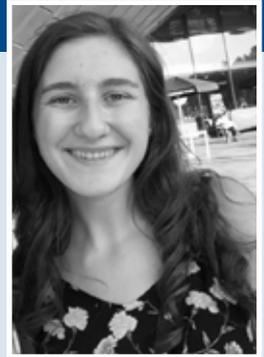
Although writing center tutors may be viewed as experts to many genres of writing, tutors are not specialists in every genre. Sometimes students bring in an assignment for a genre of writing that the tutor does not know how to approach. I am currently in a Writing Center Pedagogy course, so I attended a writing center staff meeting at my university. The focus of the meeting was how to assist students who bring in papers in genres the tutor is not comfortable with; the genre of particular focus at the meeting was creative writing. Two staff members—one faculty tutor with an MFA and one graduate tutor in our institution's MFA program—led the meeting. When the meeting leaders asked the tutoring staff how they felt about working with poetry, one tutor immediately shared her discomfort. Another tutor suggested creative writing students work with a tutor more familiar with the genre. Why do unfamiliar genres make tutors so uncomfortable? The collective response was that the tutors did not want to let writers down or waste their time because of the tutor's lack of expertise with the genre. Tutors said they felt they did not know enough about the technical aspects of poetry—such as rhythm, word choice, and structure—to effectively support creative writers. One of the meeting leaders encouraged unsure staff members by saying that tutors already used strategies to help writers working in an unfamiliar genre. By having the writer or tutor read the poem aloud, the tutor will most likely be able to identify questions they have as a reader of the poem. The specialist MFA tutor also said that simply sharing the tutor's reaction to the piece is helpful to creative writers because it can help them clear up a possible issue for another reader of their writing. Tutors, students, and faculty members all have genres that are foreign to them, but all in all, the writing strategies for all genres are similar.

So, how should tutors handle a session involving an unfamiliar genre? The tactics discussed at the writing center staff meeting and in chapter 6 of *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* overlap. In the *OGWT*, Fitzgerald and Ianetta use the term "generalist tutors" for tutors who do not have the knowledge of the writer's assignment's discipline and genre (148). It is important to be honest about genre and subject knowledge of the assignment the client has brought in. Experts suggest that when tutors disclose their lack of familiarity with the topic, they should follow up with the question, "Could you describe [the genre of the assignment] to me?" (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 153). Asking this question allows tutors to get an understanding of the discipline they will be working with during the session. During our staff meeting, one of the takeaways was for tutors to ask writers what they are writing about. Not only does this question provide tutors with the subject of the session, but it is also gives tutors a sneak preview of what they are about to read. As a result of unfamiliarity with the genre and asking one of the questions above, tutors are putting the writer in control of the session. This role reversal is beneficial to writers because by having to teach the tutor about the assignment, such writers might realize they know more than they thought they did about the topic (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 148). Having the writer act as a tutor allows them to guide the session and talk about what they want to achieve. The writer may ask for the tutor's opinion on grammatical matters, but the tutor's lack of expertise in the genre allows the writer to take the lead in developing his or her work, thus removing the directive tutoring attitude that may arise when tutors are familiar with a genre. Some other questions tutors may ask clients when they are acting as generalist tutors are what the writer's own goals for the paper are and where they are in the writing process. Tutors can share their thoughts on the piece, such as what they find is good or what was unclear (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 155). Asking any of these questions will start a conversation and is an informative moment for the tutor and writer. Tutors will feel more at ease with a session after hearing some background information about the writing from the client.

In some cases, the tutor may be an expert in the genre the writer is working in; they are therefore referred to as a specialist tutor. The benefit of working with a specialist tutor is that they will look at the writer's work and address the overall problem

with the client's piece. With the tutor's advanced knowledge, they can inform the writer about what to look for in their assignments for that genre (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 148, 149). Specialist tutors have been viewed as being directive and somewhat restrictive in the assistance they give to their clients; it is suggested that they take the stance of "provisionalism," acting as an audience member. Tutors should phrase advice with a slight uncertainty so that the writer knows there are options beyond a tutor's suggestion (Fitzgerald and Ianetta 152). Phrasing a suggestion in this way can begin a conversation that inspires new ideas from writers and makes them active participants in the writing process. In sessions with a specialist tutor, writers become aware of the way they should go about working with an unfamiliar genre. They walk away from the center with a bit more confidence and understanding of the once fearful assignment.

The writing center is about communicating ideas, whether it is the tutor or writer in control of the session. As long as the purpose of the conversation is clear, the writer will most likely move closer to accomplishing his or her goal. Even when tutors are not comfortable or familiar with a genre, their experience as readers, their knowledge of strategies, and their opinions will be helpful to the writer. Both tutors and writers gain some sort of knowledge from writing center sessions. Whether a tutor is considered a generalist or specialist tutor in a session, the tutor's input has more value than he or she may think.

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Tutors' Column: Validation

Heidi Williams

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"Holy hell," I whispered as tears filled my eyes. The words of the personal essay, sitting between the author and me, painted a painful experience of a teenage girl loving a drug addict. I couldn't keep my voice from quivering as I read about the suicide of the young author's first love and first experience with death. When I finished, I didn't know what to say. "Wow. You have a powerful story." I paused, staring at the essay on the table, moved by the intimate emotions fixed on the pages, "I give you major props; that is not something easy to write about. I can't fathom." I paused again. She smiled nervously, playing with the strings on her sweater. She wasn't planning on writing this story at first. It just came out, flowing from page to page until it was finished. She said she just couldn't stop writing. It needed to come out; she needed to tell it.

The young woman's essay exceeded the required number of pages and contained grammar mistakes, mediocre diction, and far from perfect formatting; however, the content of the writing was alluring. In my opinion, content is more important than getting the technical stuff right; writing is more than just getting a grade. As writing tutors, we can encourage students to explore their experiences on paper as a way of self-discovery and healing.

When I expressed to the writer that the hardest things are often the most important ones to write about, she absolutely agreed. She told me how she simply could never talk to anybody about her experience. Despite the essay being a required assignment, the student wrote it for herself. Writing her story meant seeing her altered Prince Charming for the first time from beginning to end without people judging her for loving him. She discovered that no matter what hell he had put her through, she would

always love him. Accepting these discovered feelings helped ease the agony she felt. I often tell my writers that when you don't think anyone will listen, your pen and paper always will. Even if you crumple up the paper or burn it afterwards so you never have to look at it again—it is freeing to get the thoughts out of your head, to explore them on paper, or to symbolically rid yourself of them. For writing tutors, it is vital that we teach students the power of writing for oneself.

Louise DeSalvo teaches in her book *Writing as a Way of Healing* about the therapeutic methods of writing to clinically improve the writer's health. In order to do this, DeSalvo explains that the writer must describe in detail the traumatic or distressing events and connect present and past feelings with the details of what happened. It's not therapeutic writing if writers only state their emotions or experiences alone on the page (DeSalvo 25). Instead, writers must write to explore their feelings and examine why they are feeling a certain way. By representing themselves and their experiences on the pages, they connect these feelings with the plagues of their life tragedies. Only with critical thinking can writing become a true act of healing. As tutors, we can bring these elements into the tutoring session as techniques for expressive writing with magnificent depth of content. Writing in such a way helps the writer psychologically, and it helps them write a powerful essay.

It is vital that tutors first react appropriately to the context of the student's paper in these types of situations before tutors approach writing techniques. Only then, after the story itself has been addressed, can tutors move to the fundamentals of writing. It can be stressful for some students to share their deepest darkest secrets with a complete stranger. Sometimes when young authors place their essay in the tutors' hands, they are metaphorically placing themselves in the tutors' hands. Thus, many of these young authors may need validation from their reader.

Ben Rafoth's *A Tutor's Guide* tells us that in these types of emotionally charged tutoring sessions "it is best to acknowledge rather than ignore the burden of the writer's task. The writer needs to hear it. Human beings need to hear that they are being listened to and understood; taking a few minutes to empathize will establish a degree of trust" (36). Addressing ways to improve their writing without validating the experience may shut writers down by making them feel rejected.

After validating the writer's life experience, recognizing the process it took the writer to write it, and sharing enthusiasm for the therapeutic healing power of writing about traumatic events, a tutor must maintain the purpose and focus of the writing center session. This can be accomplished by giving the writer reassurance that their emotions are valid while asking questions that focus their attention on the writing and on what they ultimately want to achieve with the essay. Imagine a situation where the writer is expressing her experience being molested as a child by her much older cousin, but the paper is lacking purpose; it is purely raw, painful emotion. The tutor can recognize the student's efforts by saying: "Wow... I want to congratulate you on being able to put this on paper. Many people go their entire lives bottling up and suppressing emotional trauma, when the best thing is often to let it out. Writing can be very therapeutic" (Rafoth 36). Then, the tutor can refocus the task by framing a thought provoking, reinforcing question such as, "What do you want to share with your story? Do you want to help others who have been in similar situations? Do you want to create awareness and warn others that this kind of stuff really does happen? If you could tell someone something through your experience, what would it be?" Formulate the questions in a helpful, encouraging manner. Saying something invalidating such as, "So what's the point you're trying to make?" would definitely make the writer shut down and discourage their sharing. Be conscious of the writer's emotions because it is our job as writing tutors to create a respectful and safe environment for our peers to learn and grow as writers.

If these heartening tactics fail and the author is unable to concentrate or take the necessary step back to approach the paper from an appropriate perspective, then the writer may not be ready to address the experience. In such cases, validate the student for writing the experience and express the healing process of connecting past and present emotions to tragic events, but suggest that the writer take time to heal and gently encourage another approach for the graded assignment. As tutors, we could offer alternatives by brainstorming different ideas instead of trying to tackle something of that grand scope without appropriate clinical experience.

In such cases where clinical expertise may be needed, as tutors, we can gently encourage students to seek professional guidance. We should recommend the school's counseling center and

provide the necessary contact information. Most universities provide free clinical psychological services for their students. Tutors may also seek advice from a supervisor or writing center director. The author's psychological state should not be ignored.

Sometimes it's not the author who is unable to step back from the situation and look at the experience from a healthy distance. Occasionally the story is too close to the tutor's own emotions so that he/she is unable to tutor the session. Perhaps the essay is portraying the student's exhausting experience growing up with a drug-abusing brother, while the tutor's own brother recently passed away from an overdose. In situations like these, it really is okay to ask for a substitute tutor to take over the session. Both lives involved "include much more than the writing assignment at hand, and often other issues and concerns interfere with getting the assignment done" (Ryan 24). It is important to acknowledge these types of situations in writing center meetings so that tutors can plan how to handle emotionally charged sessions (Rafoth 39). Acknowledging and planning for such emotional incidents and essays can make all the difference for both individuals involved in the session. We must be honest with our emotions, because both the tutor and the writer's life experiences deserve validation.

Give students validation for their hard times, for writing about them, and for exploring themselves and their emotions on the pages of an assignment. Discuss possible emotionally charged situations in writing center meetings. Be conscious of the student's emotions and your own emotions as the tutor. Allow for therapeutic writing while maintaining focus on writing skills. Words are powerful healing tools, so encourage them to be used as such by creating a safe environment in the tutoring session by validating the writer's experience first.

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Announcements

East Central Writing Centers Association
March 23-25, 2018
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
"Occupational Hazards: Writing Center Labor, Self-Care, and Reflection"
Keynote: Dana Driscoll

Colleagues, including graduate and undergraduate tutors, K-12 teachers, and community college administrators and staff are welcome. Spread the word to those in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Northern KY, West VA, and Western PA. Suggestions for proposals and additional information about the conference are available on the conference website: <ecwca. org/conference/current-cfp/>. Conference chair: Genie N. Giaimo: <Giaimo.13@osu.edu>.

Northeastern Writing Center Association Conference
March 24-25, 2018
Worcester, MA
College of the Holy Cross
"Closing the Circle: Theorizing Practice, Practicing Assessment, and Assessing Theory"
Keynote: Harry Denny

This year's NEWCA conference calls for writing center tutors, administrators, and practitioners to consider how writing centers are working to understand the relationships between three essential activities: theorizing, assessing, and engaging in tutoring practices with writers. The full CFP and more conference information can be found at <newcaconference.org>. Proposals are due December 15, 2017.

Southern California Writing Centers Association Tutor Conference
March 3, 2018
Thousand Oaks, CA
California Lutheran University
"Connecting with Purpose"

In addition to sessions for tutors, there will be a parallel set of meetings for writing center administrators. For further information, contact Scott Chiu

<chchiu@callutheran.edu> and
Tanvi Patel <tanvipatel@callutheran.edu>; conference website: <sandbox.socalwritingcenters.org/2018-tutor-conference>/.

WLN Workshop Program: UPDATE

As announced in the September/October, 2017 issue of *WLN*, we are moving forward with new online workshops to support writers in the early stages of their thinking and writing as they engage in writing for publication in *WLN*. We will have a *WLN* table at the upcoming IWCA annual conference in Chicago, November 10-13, where conference attendees can complete a short survey that will help the associate editors identify and design workshop topics that most interest writers. A flyer announcing the workshop program with a link to the survey will also be available on the *WLN* website.

The first workshop is planned for February 2018. In the meantime, the associate editors are glad to answer any questions: Elizabeth Kleinfeld (ekleinfe@msudenver.edu); Sohui Lee (sohui.lee@csuci.edu); and Julie Prebel (jprebel@oxy.edu).

Help us help you! Please take our short survey to help us identify topics that most interest you, consider factors that will make the online workshops easy for you to attend, and make the workshops inclusive and accessible. The survey will be available through November 30 and can be accessed here: <tinyurl.com/wlnworkshop-survey>.

GET INVOLVED WITH *WLN*

Interested in serving as a reviewer? Contact Kim Ballard <kim.ballard@wmich.edu> or Lee Ann Glowzenski <laglowzenski@gmail.com>.

Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the WLN blog, "Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders" (photos welcomed)? Contact Brian Hotson <brian.hotson@smu.ca>.

Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice? Contact Muriel Harris <harrism@purdue.edu>.

Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to *WLN*? Check the guidelines on the *WLN* website: <wlnjournal.org/submit.php>.

Conference Calendar

November 10-13, 2017: International Writing Centers Association, in Chicago, IL
Contact: Lauri Dietz: <ldietz@depaul.edu> or Andrew Jeter: <andjet@d219.org>; conference website: <writingcenters.org/annual-conference-2>.

February 22-24, 2018: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Richmond, VA
Contact: Brian McTague: <bjmctague@vcu.edu>; conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org>.

February 28-March 3, 2018: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Omaha, NE
Contact: Conference website: <www.midwestwritingcenters.org>.

March 3, 2018: Southern California Writing Centers Association, in Thousand Oaks, CA
Contact: Scott Chiu <chchiu@callutheran.edu> and Tanvi Patel <tanvipatel@callutheran.edu>; conference website: <sandbox.socalwritingcenters.org/2018-tutor-conference>.

March 23-25, 2018: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Columbus, OH
Contact: Genie Giaimo: <Giaimo.13@osu.edu>; conference website: < http://ecwca.org/conference/current-cfp>.

March 24-25, 2018: Northeast Writing Center Association, in Worcester, MA
Contact: Conference website: <newcaconference.org>.

WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

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