WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

This month's newsletter begins with an apology--and a warning:

AN APOLOGY goes to those peer tutors who read the Tutor's Corner. As you noticed, the column was missing from last month's newsletter because a rash of last-minute announcements had to be included. I was forced to delete some material scheduled to be printed, including that column. For those of you who read the Tutor's Corner as a means of exchanging ideas with other peer tutors, you'll be relieved (I hope) to note its reappearance. And, if you think such an exchange is useful, why not contribute your own thoughts on tutoring?

A WARNING goes to members of our newsletter group who have not sent in a donation recently. The newsletter mailing list has expanded so rapidly that we can no longer send out issues to the hundreds of people who haven't contributed their share of its cost. Thus, within the next month or two, we will be deleting names of non-contributing members. I wish we had the resources to send you reminders or to inundate your business offices with official-looking invoices and bills, but in this one-person operation, that's just wishful thinking. We'd like to keep in touch with you and to keep you in contact with the rest of us, so please send in your contribution soon--or tell your purchasing office that you're being pressured into prepayment (or whatever inventive excuse you can come up with to force their hand).

And for everyone else, a reminder to keep sending in those articles, announcements, reviews, queries, names of new members, and yearly $5 donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University and sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

One question has dominated my thinking as a writing lab director for the last six years: Is the writing lab a viable long-term educational strategy? For the past decade, writing labs have been growing through a period of self-definition, managing to survive if not exactly prosper in an educational household increasingly strapped by tidal shifts of tax money away from education and social welfare programs towards national defense and what is mysteriously called "the private sector." In spite of the unpromising environment, two publications, the Writing Lab Newsletter and The Writing Center Journal, have helped us to talk to each other about who we are and what we are doing, and a number of books and articles have been published with a writing lab audience specifically in mind such as Muriel Harris' Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs. Moreover, writing labs have become a common feature at conferences of writing teachers around the country. We are, it would seem, a fairly lively educational phenomenon, and perhaps I should stop worrying about our long term aspirations. But I can't.

One of the reasons writing centers and labs have survived as well as they have-- though there have been casualties, to be sure--is the emphasis in most centers on one-to-one tutoring. Tutoring is the most important educational contribution we have made to our institutions. In a culture that perceives education as one teacher working with many, many students, writing labs, with their one-to-one emphasis, have provided students and faculty with a more intimate view of teaching and learning. Interestingly, this intensity of instruction has been frequently reserved for "remedial" students, a shoulder-up for the educationally underprivileged, and the necessary funds for tutoring, "soft money,"

(it sounds like a good name for a rock group made up of unemployed academics) was made available for this purpose. Increasingly, this is no longer the case. In any event, as a result of the social and educational activities of the 1960's and 70's, the concept of one-to-one tutoring has become an axiom of writing lab thinking, the strategy that best seemed to satisfy certain educational problems.

Soon after I began working as a writing lab tutor in the mid-seventies, first at Kishwaukee Community College and now at the University of Maine, I became convinced that one-to-one tutoring was the only approach that actually made sense in the teaching of writing. I wrote off the composition classroom (perhaps for reasons at least partially self-serving) as of little educational value other than to keep the English Department busy enough to earn the Chaucer courses, the occasional seminar in Donne. I also remember (and with some bitterness) the futility of my own experience as a student of freshman English back (way back) in 1964. In my more objective moments, I suspected that my own students had not done all that much better with me as their classroom teacher than I had fared 10 years previously. But in one-to-one tutoring, where I could focus on one individual, adjusting my pedagogical approach to that person's needs as a writer, I felt I could see and verify improvement in my students' writing. Tutoring works, I told myself, and I still believe that it does.

And yet, successful and fulfilling as tutoring can be for both the tutor and tutee, there are major problems with a one-to-one approach as the primary and often the only pedagogical strategy for writing centers. First, tutoring is, as we all know, labor intensive--my labor, your labor,--and thus it is expensive from the unavoidable point of view of educational administrators, who seem to see costs differently than I do. Second, an exclusive emphasis on one-to-one tutoring reinforces the notion--the deadly notion--that writing labs and centers are strictly an educational supplement like vitamins, and not structurally a part of the main educational diet. Third, one-to-one tutoring continues a tradition of isolating students from each other, exchanging one narrow sense of audience (the teacher) for another (the tutor).

Let me as briefly as possible illustrate what these problems involve. The financial considerations of one-to-one tutoring need not take up much time since most of us are certainly more familiar than we probably care to be with the competition for funds within our departments and colleges, familiar also with how difficult it is to find the philosopher's stone that turns soft money into hard, into funds you can depend on from one year to the next. A bit of history may be useful here. Many writing labs were born out of a marriage between a surplus of willing enough teachers of composition and the need to do "something" about writing in the colleges and universities (especially in regards to the writing of minority students). This marriage was more often than not sealed with a dowry of soft money. The question many of us faced after the honeymoon was over was "What next?" How could we continue to serve the needs of the students for whom writing labs were frequently begun and for whom one-to-one tutoring had largely been developed, when money was increasingly difficult to obtain or so uncertain that anything resembling planning for the future seemed an act of enthusiastic naivete. Yet, as I have mentioned, writing labs have been relatively successful in the survival business but often under highly restrictive and uncertain budgets and often at the expense of creating a remedial clientele to justify our own existence. And, of course, some labs have disappeared and more will disappear.

My second problem with tutoring as the exclusive activity of writing labs is that with it goes the assumption that labs are exclusively a supplement to the writing classroom. Under the present set-up, students having difficulty in the classroom are sent to the lab or drop-in on their own for some "additional" help, and that is what writing labs are for, period. I think this is a fine and necessary service for labs to provide, though it can be a lot more complicated than it sounds, but if that is all that we are about then we will forever find ourselves in an essentially emergency room atmosphere, working with students only in crises situations and usually only with "diseased" students, to push this analogy to its ugliest extreme. So much of what goes on in my lab is piecemeal and of short duration. A student comes once, twice, perhaps five or six times at most to the lab, so that often it is difficult to say what one has actually

accomplished. None of us likes to think of ourselves as first aid for writing problems, but, like it or not, that is a great deal of what we do when tutoring is the mainstay of lab pedagogy.

Finally, an exclusive concentration on one-to-one tutoring continues a tradition of isolating students from each other, reinforcing the erroneous idea that writing is always something that takes place on demand between those who already know how to do it--teachers and tutors--and those who don't--students. In our writing classrooms there are usually at least twenty students, probably more, working with one teacher. It could be argued that the classroom situation is analogous to the tutoring relationship except that the teacher is split into twenty or more different directions. Each student is trying to satisfy this one teacher, is writing to that teacher, and is unavoidably in competition with his fellow student for that teacher's attention and approval, since the economics of university education demands a grade curve, formally or informally derived: there are only so many A and B students, many C students and some must fail. In the writing lab a similar situation is likely to occur, except that the sense of competition is eliminated or subverted because the tutor's attention is wholly focussed on one student at a time. In both cases, however, the student writer experiences composition as an activity designed to please someone else further up the educational hierarchy. Tutors, even though they may not be grading the student, are still seen as the surrogate teacher who happens to hang out in the writing lab instead of the classroom. Nowhere in the course of their writing education are students likely to experience writing to their peers as I am writing to you, my peers.

I can imagine two objections to what I have just said regarding the limitations of traditional classroom approaches and writing lab tutoring. The first would be to cite the increasing use of peer editing in classrooms. Certainly this is a useful step towards a genuinely collaborative process in which students learn that writing is a means of informing each other as well as a means of satisfying a superior of some kind. But, at least in my experience, most of the teaching of composition remains focussed on the idea of the teacher as the

only active reader and critic of student writing. In cases where peer editing is used in classrooms it is my guess that it tends to be sporadic, and students see intermittent group work as merely a change of pace in the classroom routine.

The second objection might center on the increasingly widespread use of students as tutors in writing labs. Here, one might say, is one-to-one tutoring and the establishment of a peer writing relationship. I would agree, but it has also been my experience that once students attain the status of peer tutors, appear in the writing lab at fixed times, are paid for their services, they are identified by other students--often in the lab by order of the teacher--as part of the educational hierarchy. Although peer writing tutors do share with their tutees a common student culture, the tutors' training, position, and the relatively short working relationship inevitably isolates student tutors from "student" students. At the same time, the tutors remain in the eyes of the faculty as simply "student helpers." It is no wonder that many peer tutors feel uncomfortable in their roles; no matter how much we want them to remain students, their tutees insist on them becoming teachers.

It is ironic to me that I became more acutely aware of the limitations of one-to-one tutoring as a result of my work as a Fellow of the Brooklyn Institute on Training Peer Writing Tutors. I originally attended the Institute because I was being pressured at my institution to tutor more and more students with fewer and fewer faculty tutors. I hoped that peer tutoring would supply my lab with a plentiful and inexpensive source of tutors, which to some degree it has done. Yet, like so many of our other experiences, in setting out to do A we discover we are more interested in B. In the process of learning to teach peer writing tutors, I found that the method of training tutors to be tutors more educationally interesting than the use to which the training was to be put. This training process involved a considerable emphasis on group work, a number of people all trying to solve the same sort of problems together. Students worked in pairs, acting out the tutor/tutee relationship, but also in groups of five and six, during which the students increasingly created a sense of communal involvement with the writing tasks that were set for them. The sense of com-

mitment to each other's writing that these student tutors developed as a result of spending an entire semester almost solely working in groups was for me the most powerful educational experience I have known as a teacher. As I was training the peer tutors to be peer tutors, they were training each other to become members of an audience that in its collective power rivalled and complemented my own as professor. When the students finished the course and began tutoring in the lab, fitting into our usual one-to-one set up, they have done very well, but they report to me and I feel myself a keen sense of loss.

I have taken up a great deal of space detailing the problems with tutoring. It is time I offered a possible solution to these limitations.

First, it is necessary for us to identify a more institutionally viable, more permanent territory of our own in addition to the supplemental work we are familiar with; and, second, to organize this territory around the complementary concepts of tutoring and small group work.

There are two categories of students that I think would most immediately benefit from courses instructed wholly within the writing lab: the least experienced and the most experienced student writers. The former is a clientele we are all probably experienced with. Basic, developmental, remedial--whatever the rubric and the level appropriate to specific institutions, these students are those who simply have not had enough appropriate writing experience. The second group of students we should look on with covetous eyes are the advanced or honors students within the freshman English population. What I am proposing, then, is to "lop-off," if you will, the weaker students and the most articulate students from the main body of the Freshman English class, and organize them (separately, of course) into credit courses taught wholly within the administrative boundaries of the writing lab. Such a division will enable the freshman English staff to deal with at least a slightly more homogenous group of students and, at the same time, give those students who would most benefit the opportunity to work in the unique situation that a writing lab environment can offer. Also, bringing the honors or advanced students into the lab will serve to remove the stigma that only "remedial" students work in the writing lab.

This three part division of freshman English is precisely what we have done at the University of Maine at Orono. At the beginning of the year we invite those students with exceptionally high and exceptionally low English Achievement and TSWE test scores to write a placement essay. The best of the best may then enroll in a special "advanced" section; the students who would have considerable trouble with the regular college composition course are required to take our developmental course, The Writer's Workshop. Both courses are taught within the locus of the writing lab and on essentially the same pedagogical pattern. First, students are broken into relatively small groups of eight to ten, and they meet together once a week as a group for the entire semester. The purpose of this group meeting is to read their own work aloud to each other, either in small groups of two or three or, later in the term, to the entire group; and, second, to learn methods for giving each other useful feedback on their work (I use a combination of Peter Elbow--for oral feedback--and Ken Bruffee--for written feedback). The only real difference between the advanced and the developmental sections is the nature of the writing tasks, more sophisticated for the advanced section. In addition to the hour of group work, each student is scheduled for a tutorial in the course of the week. The purpose of the tutorial is to work one-on-one on individual writing problems and to prepare students for the group meeting when they will be presenting their work to their peers. Students are also required to spend a third hour a week in the lab working on their own, making use of lab materials when necessary.

There are any number of variations that could be played on this theme to fit the particular writing lab situation at various institutions. (Peer tutors could certainly be useful, both as tutors and, if properly trained, as group leaders.) The main motif, combining individual tutoring and group work into courses offered through the writing lab, is a way of solving some of the problems associated with exclusive one-to-one tutoring.

1. By offering credit-bearing courses through the lab, staffing the lab becomes less problematical. Instead of having to explain that certain faculty members are being "detailed" to the lab to work as supplementary tutors, additional staff can now become part of

-4-

the lab staff because they are needed to cover "courses."

2. By offering credit-bearing courses through the lab, the lab ceases to be merely a supplemental service, although it should maintain its service tradition of walk-in tutoring.

3. The presence of on-going groups of student writers within the lab gives the staff a sense of shaping student writing, not just bandaging it.

4. By developing a pedagogy of group work to complement our expertise in tutoring, we can provide our students with a more complete and useful sense of what it means to be a writer in a pluralistic and complicated world.

For years I have resisted the assumption that pedagogy and campus politics had much to say to each other. As a graduate student, when I heard my professors talk about this colleague or that as being "political," I always assumed that such a label was demeaning and derogatory. Now, slowly I admit, I am beginning to learn that the way learning is organized in our institutions has a political as well as a theoretical base. If we are to make the writing lab a long term educational success, I think we are going to have to move politically within our departments and our institutions to assure that our assumptions about who is taught, what is taught, and how it is taught remain educationally viable.

Harvey Kail
University of Maine at
Orono

A READER COMMENTS . . .

The Newsletter continues to be informative and lively. I particularly liked the New Directions piece Tom Nash wrote in the September issue. Excellent perception and perspective.

Donald Gallo
Central Connecticut
State University

A READER ASKS . . .

I am particularly interested in the activity of Business Communication Laboratories and would like to contact persons who have that same interest.

Barbara Lemley
Dept. of Business Ed. and
Office Admin.
College of Business &
Public Management
University of the District
of Columbia
900 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004

A READER COMMENTS . . .

I enjoyed reading the September and October issues of the Writing Lab Newsletter, and they're now making the rounds of our tutors, who seem to like the "Tutor's Corner."

Our problem just now is getting customers. We have a good staff and plenty of space. We've sent out many flyers to faculty and students, and we've had articles in the college newspaper; here we are in the sixth week of the term, however, and we've had a total of sixteen undergraduate clients. Even though several of these have been back as many as half a dozen times, we find the lack of response worrisome.

Richard Hankins
Baldwin-Wallace College

1984 Writing Lab Directory
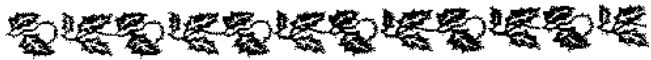
The 1984 Writing Lab Directory is a compilation of two-page questionnaires completed by writing lab directors. The questionnaire answers describe each lab's instructional staff, student population, types of instruction and materials, special programs, use of computers, and facilities.

Copies are obtainable for $6.50 each, including postage. Prepaid orders only. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send them to Muriel Harris, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

The Journal of Basic Writing has resumed publication. One issue has been published for 1984, and two issues are in place for 1985, all edited by Sarah D'Eloia Fortune whose term has ended.

Lynn Quitman Troyka has been appointed editor starting with the 1986 semiannual issues. Manuscripts of 10-20 pages on any topic related to basic writing will be welcome as of January 1985, in the new MLA style in MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 1984 (also MLA Handbook for Scholars, coming 1985); and for the referee process, in quadruplicate with identifying information on a cover page only. Prospective authors can send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to request the new JBW "Editorial Statement" and the JBW "Style Sheet." Subscriptions for one year (two issues) are $8 for individuals and $12 for institutions. Foreign postage $2.50 additional.

Address: Journal of Basic Writing, Instructional Resource Center, Office of Academic Affairs, The City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021

"If I write what you know, I bore you;
if I write what I know, I bore myself;
therefore I write what I don't know."

-Robert Duncan

THE WORKSHOP SKILLS CENTER:
A CROSS DISCIPLINARY FULL
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Writing, we know, is more than a skill--though skill is necessarily involved in being able to write, and certainly to write well. Janet Emig has shown us that writing is a mode of learning; Ira Progoff has demonstrated writing as a means of self actualization, growth, and development. Ann Bertoff explains how writing is both a means of discovering meaning and of making meaning. And we don't need anyone to teach us that writing is an important mode of communication.

In our research and inquiry we have also posed the important interrelationships between writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Risking a hasty, but not completely unfounded generalization, I want to include all the language processes -- listening, speaking, reading, and writing -- within the scope of the definitions I just posed for writing. That is, I want to say that "languaging" is more than a skill, though skill is necessarily involved. I want to say that "languaging" is a means of learning, growing, and communicating. The development of all our language abilities then, including thinking, forms the basis of our development as human beings, as social beings, as learners, as professionals. But what do these truisms have to do with writing centers?

Several articles, such as Muriel Harris' and Karen Spear's, which appeared in the Fall 1982 Writing Center Journal, delineate the history of writing centers as "Grammar Weigh Stations," "Skills Labs," as the "EMT Units" (Emergency Medical Technical Units) of many colleges and universities. But many articles, such as Harris' and Spear's, as well as the articles which appeared in the February 1982 issue of The CEA Forum, point to the new direction that writing centers have taken, or should be taking. Karen Spear, for instance, writes:

> To reach their full potential, writing centers must use their flexibility to perceive more clearly what is and anticipate more imaginatively what is possible. Foremost is the need to move out of the business of putting bandaids on students' basic skills problems and to assume a greater role in their overall language development.[1]

Further, some articles, such as Phyllis Sherwood's or Jeannette Harris' which appeared in the September and November 1982 issues of Writing Lab Newsletter warn us that writing centers which are too narrowly defined by their work with basic skills or remedial students are finding themselves out of work, along with the rest of Reagan's unemployed.

Taking a lead from these directors of writing centers I would like to describe one model of a language center whose aim

is to work with students of all academic levels and from all disciplines and to provide for these students the means to develop, not just writing, but all their language abilities. It is the assumption of this center that working to develop all four language abilities forms a basis for students' self and social development, as well as their academic development and professional preparation.

The Workshop Skills Center at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut serves these aims by -- as Karen Spear suggests in her article -- using its "inherent flexibility to experiment." (p. 37) Not unlike many of us who are human, The WSC (as we are nicknamed) finds it inherent integrity and identity fulfilled by its ability to satisfy more than one role. In our view, if language development involves both skill and process, then it is our work to be involved with both skill and process; if language development is more than just writing development, then it is our work to be involved with the development of thinking, listening, speaking, and reading, as well as writing abilities. And if students, from different disciplines and at various levels of ability, need or seek language development then it is our work to provide the instruction they need or want. For, it is our assumption that, at our University, the Workshop Skills Center is connected to every department that uses language to teach and learn, to every academic program that is rooted in and operates through language, to every formal intellectual pursuit and enterprise that is based on and develops within language.

The Workshop Skills Center is staffed by one full-time Director, seven adjunct faculty tutors, three peer tutors, one part-time secretary and five student-aid secretaries. The Workshop Skills Center has an operating budget which includes funds for its own academic and office supplies, materials, and books, its own xerox machine, faculty development program, A.V. hard and soft ware, and publicity. Though Sacred Heart University is a small, private commuter institution, its generous support of the Workshop Skills Center comes from its recognition of the Center's integral place within the University.

What first ensures our integral place within the University is our curriculum.

We provide individual tutoring for students on the papers, projects, and assignments they bring from all their courses: biology, sociology, psychology, business, English, etc. The student may have a paper or a report, an exam to study for, an incomprehensible text to read and decipher, an oral presentation to prepare. In these instances our curriculum is at least initially determined by the immediate needs of our students. We do not teach the subject, we teach the language skills and processes needed to master the subject.

We also provide individual tutoring for students who are referred or who drop in and need help in any area of writing from punctuation to publication, in any area of oral communication from pronunciation to public speaking, in any area of reading and study skills from PQ3R to problem solving and reasoning skills. Individual tutoring may be short or long term. A student may come for one or thirty sessions.

We also develop curriculum for the small group workshops that we offer during the year. Some of our workshop topics are: Improving Your Academic Self Image, Developing A Positive Attitude, Time Management, Listening Skills, Developing Class Discussion Skills, Pre-Writing Strategies, Editing and Revising Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing, Punctuation, Sentence Skills, Paragraph Skills, Reading Skills, Memory Skills, Vocabulary Development, Writing Business Reports, Writing Lab Reports in the Natural Sciences, Writing Case Studies for the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Developing Thinking and Reasoning Skills, Writing the Critical Essay, Library Research Skills, Writing The Research Paper in the Humanities, Writing an Experimental Research Paper, and Basic Principles of Technical Writing. These workshops, which are offered at all different times to meet the schedule needs of different students, are intended to provide students with an overview of the topic. Each workshop is scheduled for one to two hours, and we offer twenty-one workshops a semester. Again, we teach the language skills and processes needed to master the topic.

We also provide another kind of small group workshop. This workshop is developed for groups of four to five

students who have similar needs or requests, and who commit themselves to meet five or more sessions to work with a tutor. Topics for these workshops include any language skill or process the group or an instructor has identified as their need. For instance, a small group from a Philosophy 101 class was sent in for five sessions on reading and interpreting their textbook; the basketball team was sent in for fourteen sessions on study skills; a small group from Honors 91 was sent in for six sessions on writing a research paper in the Humanities; a group of ESL students was sent in for extensive work in written and oral communication skills for foreign students; a small group from Constitutional Law came for ten sessions on reading and understanding their text and preparing for essay exams in this course.

At the Center we develop what we call Independent Learning Modules or Packets. These modules, which are prepared by our faculty tutors, are self-help or self-learning guides which can also be used in tutorial or in a workshop. These modules average anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five pages; they all follow a uniform format, and they represent significant and substantive research. So far we have modules on: Elements of Punctuation, Paragraph Development, Listening Skills, Note Taking Skills, Writing Lab Reports, Writing Business Reports, Writing Case Studies, Writing Sociological Research Papers, Problem Solving Strategies for Writing, Thinking and Reasoning Skills, Writing an Experimental Research Paper, Principles of Technical Writing, and Writing Research Papers in the Humanities.

The Workshop Skills Center has developed, and continues to develop, an impressive library of books, handouts, programmed texts, dictionaries, A.V. hard and software, and its own faculty resource library. Our entire library includes material on all topics of writing, speaking, listening, reading and study skills; it includes cross-disciplinary material such as writing for business, technical writing, writing in the social or natural sciences; it includes tape recorders, record players, film projectors, slide projectors, overhead and opaque projectors.

Students of all academic levels and abilities and from all disciplines come to the Workshop Skills Center. About 37% of our students are freshmen, 28% are sophomores, 18% are juniors, and 17% are seniors. We work with basic skills students as well as with students in our MBA program. In a given semester, we schedule about 675 student appointments, excluding cancellations or no shows; and we have up to 350 students participate in our small group workshops. We have our students evaluate their tutoring sessions and workshops as well as their tutors and workshop leaders.

Our peer tutor training program includes--besides reading and writing about being a peer tutor, and role playing as a peer tutor--an apprenticeship with a faculty tutor. Our faculty tutors have had the good fortune to have, as their workshop leaders, such eminent guests as: Janet Emig, Lee Odell, Donald Murray, Elaine Maimon, and Ann Berthoff.

The Workshop Skills Center in conjunction with the University Faculty Development Program and the University's NEH Writing across the Curriculum Committee has offered a series of workshops for faculty in all disciplines on Journal Writing and Responding to Student Papers: Part I - Assignment Making, Part II - Strategies for Responding to Drafts, Part III - Evaluating the Product.

We try to publicize our work on campus through brochures, flyers, memos, posters, and school newspaper ads. Our best publicity, however, is word-of-mouth: the student who learns; the referring faculty who sees improvement.

We continue to use our imagination and flexibility to define and redefine our role, but for now, we believe that our responsibility at the Center is to provide for our students at all levels and from every discipline a place for them to try out, develop, expand, and strengthen all their language abilities.

Michelle Carbone Loris
Sacred Heart University

---

[1]Karen Spear, "Toward a Comprehensive Language Curriculum," The Writing Center Journal, 11 (Fall/Winter 1982), p. 34.

TUTOR'S CORNER

DRAWING THE LINE

Peer tutoring is a challenging, and rewarding experience for the motivated college student. It is difficult to match the feeling of satisfaction which comes from watching a tutee grasp a skill or some knowledge that you, as a tutor, have communicated. By the same token, situations can arise in the tutoring session which can create awkwardness and misunderstanding between the tutor and the tutee. Any tutor, particularly the new tutor, will find these situations difficult, and perhaps unpleasant, to deal with. From a tutor who has been there (and back), here are a few examples, warnings, and hopefully, some helpful advice.

The most important advantage that a peer tutor can have before he/she begins tutoring is to be absolutely sure of the role of the writing center. The Writing Center at the University of Vermont offers free tutoring for students who are having problems with their writing. The student tutors are concerned with the actual process involved in writing, including organization, development, style, coherence, etc. The Center is definitely not a proofreading or editing service - a fact of which my fellow tutors and I are keenly aware. Naturally a tutor should be willing to work on grammatical problems, but not to the point that he/she is correcting every mistake in the paper for the tutee. A tutor who has a sound understanding of the writing center's function will be more comfortable and effective when faced with a difficult tutoring session.

What exactly constitutes one of these dreaded tutoring sessions? They can occur under a variety of circumstances, but usually they occur because the tutee is not aware of the actual services offered by a writing center. Often students think that the center is a place where a paper can be dropped off and corrected by a tutor and picked up later. It is important to inform a student that the center is definitely not a proofreading service. I have found that the best way of accomplishing this task is to come right out and tell the tutee exactly what services the center does offer as well as the services it does not provide. It can often be difficult to tell this to the tutee, since he/she is almost innocent in the misunderstanding. I have found it helpful to suggest that the tutee return to the center while he/she is writing the next paper. The bottom line is that it must be made clear to the tutee that the center is not a proofreading and editing service.

The element of time can also be a problem which hinders effective tutoring sessions. Many times, students will come to the center wanting help with a paper that is due in half an hour. For the tutor, these situations are very frustrating since there is not a great deal that can be done to improve the writing skills of a student in that short a time. Any college student who has ever written a paper can attest to the fact that it is always left until the last moment, and a tutee in this position represents a difficult, and sometimes impossible challenge for the tutor. When time is a factor, it is important to try to accomplish as much as possible and to try to give the tutee something that he/she can leave the center with. If a tutee is having problems organizing thoughts, it might be helpful to suggest note-taking or outlining techniques. Another possible solution is to set up an appointment for a later and lengthier session with the student. Unfortunately, this is often futile since the student is likely to be concerned only with _that_ particular paper.

One of the most difficult tutoring sessions that I have encountered involved a tutee who came to our Writing Center with a paper that had already been graded. The professor had circled many grammar and spelling errors in the paper, but had neglected to address the larger problems with the student's writing - namely organization and thesis development. He merely wanted the student to correct the grammar mistakes and hand in a "clean" final draft. I was quite shocked that a professor of American literature was not more concerned with this student's writing problems. I felt that it was not my responsibility as a tutor to proofread her corrections for her, and I made certain that the student was aware of this. The difficulty which I encountered in this particular situation was that I was not sure if I should alert the student to the major problems in her paper. She solved the problem for me since she did not have the time to engage in a tutoring session. I suggested that she come back to the Center while writing her next paper. Looking back on this experience, I realize that I should not have hesitated about addressing the

major problems in the student's writing, even though the professor had chosen not to. If the true function of the tutor is to improve the student's writing process, then he/she should always do so, regardless of the circumstances in the classroom. We don't tell the professors how to teach their classes, and we should not be inhibited by a few red circles on a tutee's paper.

As a seasoned veteran of the "Oh, you mean you can't just correct the paper for me" syndrome, the best advice I can offer is to be up front and honest with your tutee. After all, you are the boss. It also helps, and saves a lot of time, if you immediately determine the nature of the tutee's visit to the center, before you read a sixteen-page paper on Plato's Republic.

Susan McGrath
Peer Tutor
University of Vermont

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Writing Centers Association: East Central announces its Seventh Annual Conference, to be held on May 3-4, 1985, at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania. The theme of the conference is "Writing: Centers Coping with Crisis." Papers, panels, and workshops should address current concerns of writing centers, including changing student populations, budgeting, writing across the curriculum, and using computers. Persons interested in participating should submit a substantive one-page proposal (plus 3 copies) by December 15, 1984.

In addition, writing centers and labs are invited to set up tables to display their materials and services. There will also be Materials Exchange Tables available for those who wish to share instructional materials from their writing centers. If you plan to participate in the Materials Exchange, please send us, by April 1, a brief description of the types of materials you wish to submit and the amount of space you will need to display these materials.

Please send all proposals, requests for display space and inquiries regarding registration to:

Sally L. LeVan
Gannon University
University Square
Erie, PA 16541

RESEARCH IN THE WRITING CENTER
What to Do and Where to Go to Become Research Oriented

Eight years ago when I planned the writing center at Illinois State University I had grandious dreams for research in that center. I had done statistical research in sentence combining and in cloze testing and thought it would be easy to pre- and post-test students who used the center. These tests would prove that we were truly changing their writing abilities. You all know how it worked out. Some students dropped by just to ask if commas were in the right places. Others wanted help in writing job application letters. Still others didn't want to be bothered with long-term instruction even if we thought they needed it. I, of course, was delighted that the center was the multi-purpose facility that I had wanted it to be. I do still encourage tutors to take writing samples during the first meeting with those students who seemed to be likely to spend considerable time in the center. The experienced tutors remembered to do so about three-fourths of the time. The inexperienced tutors never did remember and always apologized. At the end of the semester, all the tutors forgot to get exit samples of the student's writing, unless I remembered to nag them. I soon had to admit that research modeled on that so frequently reported in Research in the Teaching of English just wasn't working in the writing center.

This problem didn't bother the fiscal agents at ISU. They were all delighted that business was booming and that the teachers who sent students to the center were pleased with those students' progress. That gave me another idea. I asked my secretary to send out evaluation forms to all teachers who had referred their students to the center, just simple little notes asking those teachers to comment on the progress of those students who used the center. Of course, all the teachers raved. I was pleased at the affirmation of our achievement, and I put all the glorious comments in my year-end report. But I knew that it wasn't research and I knew that glowing reports solicited from satisfied customers are only advertising copy. No one would believe that anything had been proved.

My frustration was mounting. Justifiably or not, I had become the director of a

writing center to do more than keep records and train tutors. I was convinced that writing centers were the place where real change could be effected in students' writing abilities and where, therefore, the profession could be directed towards better teaching. So far it wasn't happening.

Slowly, through interaction with my colleague, Maurice Scharton, and through watching what was happening in writing research throughout the profession, I began to see what could be done in a writing center and how that research could be carried out. The following remarks and suggestions will summarize my conclusions at this time about writing center research. I know that I am by no means at the end of the possibilities, but I know also that I am closer to successful research than I was eight years ago when I thought that we could simply pre- and post-test every student who came into the center in order to show the world that students improved after a few tutoring sessions.

The first thing that a writing center researcher has to admit is that not every student who comes to the center is going to be a subject for research. Some will be merely numbers that we count, record, and add to our list of how much we can do with limited time and resources. But Mina Shaughnessey had much to tell us about what we could do to help students; she could also tell us about meaningful research that is possible. Those students who come to the writing center for help over an extended period of time may not fit into a post-test/pre-test pattern, but they provide ideal subjects for case-study research. It is this direction that some writing center research should go. My colleague Maurice Scharton has developed a writing questionnaire that helps a tutor assess the writing needs of the student. The questionnaire is quite extensive, but a simple model might look something like this:

1. Do you like to write?
2. How often do you write?
3. What kinds of writing do you do? Assignments? Diaries or journals? Short stories or poems? Letters?
4. Did your parents write as you were growing up?
5. Did you have teachers in school who talked about their writing?
6. What do you expect to achieve from your work in the writing center?
7. Do you share your writing voluntarily with others?
8. How long does it take you to finish a 500 word paper?
9. Where is your favorite place to write?
10. If you have the chance, do you rewrite your work?
11. Do you make an outline before you write?
12. If you have two free hours, would you rather read, watch TV, play video-games, or participate in a sport?

Experienced writing center directors can see that these questions grow from the research on writing that has been done recently. They also give the tutor working with the student an idea of what sort of attitudes to expect from him or her. By taking into account the attitude and experiences, the tutor can better plan an approach to working with the individual student.

The questionnaire cannot, of course, be used alone without a writing sample, or preferably several samples, of the student's writing. During the initial interview, the tutor can ask the student to write, but he or she should also ask the student to return on the next visit with several sample papers already completed. From these papers the tutor can begin to assess the needs of the students. At this point I will assume that we are talking about a student whom the tutor is using as a case study. That is to say, that not every tutor can practically write up every tutorial experience in detail. The tutor now has both the answers to the questionnaire and samples of the student's writing. The tutor will, at this point, first assess the needs of the student and will also plan an approach to tutoring. The tutor must certainly use his or her knowledge of error analysis, but the process demands far more than just an analysis of error. The tutor must analyze all the data available so that as many of the student's writing needs can be assessed as possible.

In our staff meetings in the writing center, we spend much time discussing which problems to approach first. We pretty much agree that problems with invention and problems with organization are primary. Problems with dialect or punctuation come last. We also realize that teachers across the university tend to see the problems in just the opposite order. Thus when the tutor begins to plan work with the student's writing, he or she has to decide how, if the student is a referral, it is possible to respond to the suggestions of the referring

teacher and at the same time plan a tutorial approach that will cope with first questions first. The solution is generally a compromise. We end up with a pattern that includes working with invention first, organization second, sentence patterns third, and error fourth.

In a case study the tutor is now at point three. First, the tutor has analyzed the needs of the student. Then he or she has planned the tutorial pattern to be used in helping the student. The next step, of course, is the tutoring itself. For the case study, the tutor must keep a careful account of what happens in each session and must decide how closely the actual tutoring is approximating the original plan. Where practice varies from plan, the tutor must rearrange the plan to fit practice and work from that point.

Step four of the process is to assess outcomes at the end of the tutoring sessions. In the case study the tutor must look back at the original assessment of the student's needs, view the whole of the tutoring experience, and decide how closely the tutoring fit the plan. The tutor must also report on the progress of the student as recorded in the detailed records of the tutoring sessions. Finally, the tutor should suggest any future plans for working with the student, possibly in a succeeding semester.

These case studies can tell much about what does happen in writing centers. They also offer the profession a chance to view in detail what happens in student writing in general many times over in composition classes. The difference is that few teachers of one hundred and twenty or thirty students have the time to look closely at the processes of one individual student. This case study research done in a writing center can reveal valuable information about students' writing practices and development that is unavailable in the ordinary classroom. Doing and writing the case studies also give the young tutor/researcher his or her first taste of composition research and involves him or her in the profession. This year's spring staff meetings in the writing center centered around the fall's case studies. The tutors developed new insights into each other's methods and were able to offer suggestions and to invent new ideas through discussions of the case studies.

A form of research that goes one step beyond the case study as outlined here is protocol analysis. I will not describe this method in great detail here but will refer the reader/audience to Muriel Harris's article in College English (45, Jan. '83, 74-84). In that article Professor Harris combines two tools useful in the conference setting, tools that she has acquired from the psychologists, protocol analysis and modeling. The methods are not complex, in fact are methods that tutors use every day. Protocol analysis involves asking the student to tell the tutor what is happening as he or she is writing. The tutor intervenes at an appropriate moment and simply asks the student to explain at that point what is happening in the writing. Professor Harris gives two examples, one of a student who explained that he had learned about free writing and simply used it for all writing. She was able to suggest and implement other forms of instruction once having learned what was happening as the student wrote. In the second example, as the student composed aloud she was able to see that he was not implementing her suggestions for improvement, and she was able to develop different strategies that would work for that student.

She goes on to illustrate that modeling works in much the same way. When the tutor sees that the student has a particular problem, in her example lack of fluency, the tutor models free writing for the student and asks the student to work alongside the tutor. This method may seem fairly obvious to us who work in writing centers, but imagine how revolutionary it might seem to many traditional composition teachers. It also provides insights into the student's writing that no other method could evoke.

One of the main conclusions that I draw from Professor Harris's research is that we are often doing research in composition by what we do daily in writing centers. We just don't remember that it is research.

Another kind of research that is beginning to take shape for some writing center directors and their tutors is survey research. It seems simple, and perhaps it is. We should not forget that many a successful career has been built on survey research. The reason for this success is that people are always interested in the results of survey research. We always want to know how many people eat pistachio ice

cream or how often the average American brushes her teeth. Humans are eternally curious. At the moment, one of my doctoral advisees, Alan Brown, is doing a survey, trying to find out what makes a successful writing center and what makes an unsuccessful writing center. To his questions I might just as well prefer not to know the answers, but I am insatiably curious about what those answers will be. I will read his dissertation with enthusiasm.

Still another kind of research is a rhetorical study. This research again is a doctoral dissertation that I directed. This one really made me nervous. Jeanne Simpson designed a study to show how a writing center director could and should defend rhetorically the center in times of trouble, financial exigency or whatever. I felt that we should not publish the research in her dissertation but should keep it to ourselves, but like the secret of atomic energy, all valuable defense information simply has to go public.

My next to last area of research is computer assisted instruction. Probably every writing center in the country either has a computer and is trying to figure out what to do with it or is planning to buy a computer. That generalization of course excludes those writing center directors who are writing programs for publishers already. My own response to this area of research is that the director is doing himself or herself a severe disservice if the CAI is merely putting on a computer the exercises that do not work in books. If grammar exercises do not teach students to write in grammar workbooks, they are unlikely to do so on a computer terminal. I am, of course, still ready to be persuaded otherwise if someone can show me the pre- and post-test research that does show an improvement in writing after work with these kinds of exercises.

What the computer can do is to free up the writer and teach him or her that writing really is meant to be revised and changed. When the page changes when I simply type over the copy that I see or when I can cut and paste by merely pushing a button, then I am far more likely to see my writing as a living and growing phenomenon rather than as finished copy when the words hit the page. Students whom we have worked with at Illinois State find themselves more free and more confident when writing on a CRT than they ever have been before. This area of research is just opening to the researcher.

We in writing centers have access to the students and can start them on this valuable tool now, and we can observe and describe changes to the profession. This area of research is wide open to us.

Finally, one last example of research that can link to writing centers is the research done by Irene Clark and Les Perelman at the University of Southern California. At the time that Professor Perelman give me the research report it was not in print. The title of the article is "Writing Labs Do Make a Difference." What the researchers did was to link the record keeping of the writing center into a larger research project involving the testing program at USC. Writing center visits and their purposes were two of the variables built into this study of what effects improvement in the writing of college freshmen over the semester spent in freshman composition. The number of visits spent in the writing center working on invention proved to be one of three central variables necessary to improved writing. (Reading the papers aloud in small groups and the number of papers written outside of class--the more the better--were the other two most important variables in improving writing).

At the moment Professors Maurice Scharton and Ron Fortune and I are embarking on an extended research project that links into our testing program. We are planning to follow two hundred students from the point at which they take their tests this summer as they enter Illinois State through their writing experiences at the university, including their experiences with the writing center. We plan to discover which experiences affect their writing progress and which experiences do not. This project is more ambitious than the one at USC, but it builds on the precedent of that research as well as on the case study research mentioned earlier.

Writing center directors can take advantage of this kind of research or of any of those mentioned in this paper. I have come a long way from those first days when I thought that I would merely pre- and post-test all the students who came to the writing center. I am still convinced that the writing center is the best place to do research in writing, but now I know how to do that research.

Janice Neuleib
Illinois State
University

A READER ASKS . . .

Del Mar College is exploring the possibility of charging a lab fee to generate funds for the English Learning Center. This fee would be paid by all freshman composition students. If any Newsletter readers know of any labs that are partially funded by lab fees or student activity fees, I would appreciate hearing about them. Please send any information to:

> William Demaree, Director
> English Learning Center
> Del Mar College
> Corpus Christi, TX 78404

Writing a Research Paper, intended for advanced level ESL students, is a paperback text written by a member of our newsletter group, Lionel Menasche. Special features include the use of ESL peer models, cross-cultural awareness, simplicity of language of explanation, and an extensive specialized glossary. The text, which can be used in any course with students inexperienced in writing a research paper, will also be a useful addition on writing lab reference shelves.

Copies, at $5.95, can be ordered from the University of Pittsburgh Press, 127 N. Bellefield Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

JOB OPENING

Bucknell University invites applications for the position of Tutor in the University Writing Center associated with a program of writing across the curriculum. Full time, 1 year, renewable professional staff appointment beginning September 1985. Duties include tutoring student writers one-to-one; training and supervising undergraduate tutors; conducting faculty workshops in the teaching of writing and the design of courses to fulfill the University writing requirement. Salary range $19,000-$21,000, depending upon qualifications and experience. Qualifications: Excellent teaching abilities. Require two years or more experience teaching writing, college-level or the equivalent. Prefer tutoring experience. Prefer familiarity with writing in several fields, not only English. Seeking candidates prepared in rhetoric and composition, computers for writing, communications, or English-as-a-second-language.

Send letter of application, resume, and two recent references by November 28 to Professor Catherine F. Smith, Director, Writing Program and Writing Center, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837.

SEASON'S GREETINGS