THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Volume 22, Number 6 Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing February, 1998

...FROM THE EDITOR...

In her article in this month's newsletter, on ESL students in the writing center, Katharine Purcell recalls Ann Berthoff's view of writing as dialectical—the circling back to ideas as the writer moves forward. The same can be said of issues in our field.

As I put together this newsletter, I realized how often we engage in this dialectical movement— returning to familiar issues such as working with ESL students (in Katharine Purcell's article) while re-considering new directions such as online tutoring (in the contributions by Elizabeth Boquet and Paula Gillespie to the group article collected by Al Deciccio). In the Tutors' Column, Evonne Carroll returns to "re-visioning" tutors' work with ESL students and Michael Pemberton leads us into re-examining the question of proofreading students' papers. And a step ahead. Al DeCiccio asks us to consider a forward movement—to expand our national organization by including an international component. It's an interesting intellectual dance we engage in: we step back as we consider our forward motion.

Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Making sense of the meaning: ESL and the writing center

Writing center tutors often approach their work with ESL students in much the same way a crash unit team functions in an emergency room. Rather than an exemplary portrayal of the writing process in action, a tutorial with an ESL student becomes a race against time to sew up gaping voids of syntax or meaning and quickly shock some life back into the paragraphs. In these cases, unfortunately, the ESL student leaves the writing center with a patched draft that more often resembles a multicultural Frankenstein's monster than an essay that is acceptable in the confines of North American academia.

While there are time constraints that limit writing center sessions as well as semesters, less invasive methods of working with ESL writers can be explored. To enable ESL students to continue to grasp a new written and spoken language and tutors to maintain their allegiance to the writing process, a viable method of working with ESL writers and their drafts can be found in returning to Ann Berthoff's view of writing as dialectical rather than linear.

Berthoff explains that in order to learn to write by writing, students and instructors must be aware of the ever-present "circling back" to ideas and words in the draft as the writer moves forward through the writing process. For ESL writers who are hesitant of their grasp of written English, beginning a session by circling back to the beginning of the writing process will force tutors and writers to shift their focus from rather daunting surface features to more flourishing components that lie within. Conference sessions devoted solely to brainstorming from drafts will enable writers and tutors to locate a common ground on which to explore the ideas in the draft as well as examine notions of discourse that occur in academic writing.

Much of the problem in working with ESL clients lies neither in the experience of the tutor nor student's familiarity with a language but rather with the location from which the tutor and writer enter into the writing process. Tutors who have worked more with students whose native language is English often find essays written by ESL students to differ in the development and support of ideas as well as word choice and tense structure. Unfortunately, tutors find that their eyes are drawn first to the mechanics of the ESL writer's draft. Missing verb endings and incomplete sentences are often too tempting to ignore, and because these surface-level errors may appear to be the easiest problem to tackle, this is where the sessions often begin.

Conference sessions with ESL clients may also begin with this attention to surface detail because tutors sometimes find that these drafts are constructions of direct translations from a writer's native language or strands of ideas trailing from a few familiar terms of the instructor's assignment. As a result, direct objects are found in odd places and nouns from instructors' directions often are the only element holding the paragraphs together. At other times, drafts by international students appear to be little more than jigsaw puzzles pieced together from translation dictionaries. Worse, if the drafts involve any research, they may be more of a connect-the-dots image of quotations lifted directly from sources.

Such problems as enigmatic word choices and plagiarism are indications of issues that lie deeply within discourse patterns of tutor and client. The conventions of production and presentation of ideas differ from culture to culture (Grabe and Kaplan; Leki), and work that violates codes of academic policy in this country may be perfectly acceptable in others. In cultures where it is assumed that the audience is well versed in the topic, there is little need to cite sources. Because writer and tutor meet with only limited shared assumptions of written and spoken discourse, chaos often ensues not only in working with material in the ESL client's draft but also with elements that are part of the very foundation of the tutor/client relationship.

The issue of where to begin a session is further complicated when considering the relationship between the tutor and the writer. A number of ESL instructors, including Judith Powers and Joy Reid, have written that when tutors encounter ESL clients, they feel that a role that they have been trained for—that of collaborator—is not sufficient. Often tutors feel as if they are cheating while they are working with ESL clients simply because there is so much that these clients need to learn. Rather than prompting the writers to arrive at answers to their own questions, tutors find that they are either "giving away" answers for thesis development, verb endings, and more appropriate nouns or that they are focusing on only microscopic areas of the drafts. It is much easier to provide a needed word than to explain such elements of the English language as the tricky usage rules for articles. Because tutors have been trained to begin at the introduction and analyze the development of the topic, then the organization of the support and the paragraphs, and finally the mechanics within the draft, part of the discomfort of not knowing where to begin a session with an ESL writer is complicated by the question of the way in which to begin.

ESL writers, in their turn, challenge the direction of a writing center session because they often expect tutors to function more as grammatical experts rather than as fellow writers or students. This expectation is due in part to

The Writing Lab Newsletter, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the National Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779.

Editor: Muriel Harris; Asst. to the Editor: Mary Jo Turley, English Dept., Purdue University, 1356 Heavilon, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356 (765)494-7268.
e-mail: harrism@cc.purdue.edu
mjturley@purdue.edu

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of $15 (U.S. $20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the editor. Prepayment is requested from business offices.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

many ESL students' unfamiliarity with an academic relationship that is centered in collaboration rather than a teacher/student hierarchy. In addition, because ESL students often write complete drafts before they visit the writing center, they thus want guidance only with word choice and sentence structure. And as genuinely nice people, tutors in the writing center acquiesce and quickly fall into the role of healer of sick and injured drafts.

Sessions with ESL clients are further complicated by the way many instructors envision the task of the writing center tutors. Many faculty members have invested in what Vivian Zamel terms "the myth of transience," or the idea that issues that arise in ESL writing can be quickly remedied with a few strokes of the pen or several handouts. As a result, writing centers can experience sudden influxes of ESL clients who have been provided with long lists of syntax ailments from their professors. While this problem is of course a university-wide issue that deserves discussion, one problem that tutors can tackle in a conference session is the way in which they view their roles in relation to how they conduct sessions with ESL clients.

Yet such new roles and new entrance ramps are more easily discussed than implemented. As Judith Powers indicates, tutors need an attitude adjustment to be of any use for their international clients. Powers and others advocate that tutors reshape their role into that of an informant rather than solely the role of a collaborator. As informants, tutors find themselves more directly involved in an ESL client's formation of ideas and the manner in which these ideas are presented. Tutors inform ESL clients not only about new language but also about new cultures. Tutors should remember that many linguists agree that no one can ever be truly fluent in more than one language, for fluency calls for a cultural immersion that is lifelong. Thus the role of the informant is significant in the learning process of the ESL client. The task of an informant gains multiple layers when we consider James Briton's explanation that languages differ from one another in the way that they divide objects into categories. In these sessions, ESL writers are learning not only new ways to communicate, but also new ways to think. As informants, tutors can bridge the way they organize their thoughts and spoken and written communication with those of their ESL clients by examining the ways in which they as tutors shape discourse and the ways in which discourse is shaped in ESL writers' drafts.

In a sense, both tutor and writer become informants of sorts, for both must be willing to provide information about discourse. This said, tutors should consider their role to be not only one of an informant, but also one of an explorer who examines what a client is trying write about and how he is attempting to present it. As explorers and informants, tutors can begin to examine the boundaries of American academic discourse as they model the ways in which ESL writers can shape their ideas to better respond to their assignments.

To ease the tutor into a new role and the student into a new language as well as a new academic relationship, conference sessions should begin with a considerable amount of exploring ideas rather than tackling errors in a completed draft. In other words, brainstorming from the draft will open a space in which the tutor-student relationship will be supplanted by a relationship that allows more for the roles of explorers. In order for the tutor and the writer to adopt these roles and not the more medical ones of ER technicians and patients, conference sessions with ESL students should be divided into three parts of re-interpreting the assignment, shaping a dialogue around key words that are repeated throughout the draft, and ordering the ESL writer's responses. This circling back into writing and thinking processes requires tutors and writers to employ the completed draft as a jumping off point rather than as a piece that requires only a bit of polish. Because this brainstorming may appear to nullify the work in the draft, tutors should reassure writers that they have not incorrectly completed an assignment; instead, they have laid the foundations for their paper and now need to continue the construction project.

As with most clients who enter into the doors of the writing center, it is particularly important to read the assignment with the student in order for tutor and writer to understand the instructor's expectations. Because the ESL writer has probably looked up the key words in the professor's instructions, the tutor must remember to provide examples for these key words and thereby build upon the sometimes sparse definitions provided by translation dictionaries. In addition to interpreting the directions of an instructor, a careful examination of the assignment will also allow both writer and tutor to set goals for the session.

Once the tutor is certain that both tutor and client understand the assignment, the tutor should read the draft aloud to the student. The words rendered to sound enables the writer yet another entrance into a new language. Because the writer has already worked with the new language at the written level, the oral presentation allows for further comprehension. The tutor's reading of the draft also allows the writer to locate a place as creator of meaning within this new discourse. The writer jumps from the role of outside examiner to an inside participant in the English language. Likewise, the tutor gains a clearer sense of her task when she reads the draft to the writer. When tutors read silently, their eyes are drawn more to the errors than to the meaning the writer is attempting to construct. Thus both writer and tutor can begin to join ideas and words together in order to construct meaning from the draft.

As tutors finish reading the drafts aloud, they should control the urge to tackle surface features and instead step away from the draft to begin to draw upon the client's ideas. For the client, this step away from the draft underlines the tutor's role as fellow explorer and not one of corrector of drafts. At this point, the tutor's task is to search for the student's touchstones or words that are repeated throughout the draft. These words are signs of the new language entering into the writer's inner speech and can thus be used to induce new ideas. From these key words, tutors can then begin to formulate questions in order to draw more information from the student. Muriel Harris and Tony Silva remind tutors to fashion questions in such a way as to elicit direct answers from ESL clients. Tutors should refrain from placing before ESL writers open-ended questions such as why they wrote a particular word or phrase; instead, tutors should ask their ESL clients to please explain key ideas and words that are present in the draft.

Tutors should then take notes as the ESL clients expand upon their key terms and shape their ideas through speech. These notes will function as memory touchstones for writers once they return to the more solitary work of revision. Tutors should continually remind themselves that they are recording the writer's ideas and not shaping them. To reinterpret the writers' ideas would result in completing their assignment for them. While these notes keep ideas from being forgotten, the tutor's notetaking also establishes the ESL writer's position as an authority on a topic—a role that many international students are not familiar with. In addition, the notes also function as a record of what information an audience needs from the writer.

While a writing center cannot usually provide the time or space for cultural exchange, writer and tutor should discuss the differences in expectations in various audiences, whether these audiences are instructors or the reading public. Tutors should discuss with their clients the need to carefully explain points to an audience; for, even as tutors find with native writers, there is a general assumption among students that the audience—often the instructor—is already familiar with the subject and does not need general information.

As this writing center session models methods of exploring ideas and considering the roles of writer and audience, it also reflects part of the process for second language acquisition. Like dialogue, rehearsing thought aloud in a new language enables that new language to become part of an individual's thought process. Writing center sessions emphasize Russian psycholinguist Lev Vygotsky's understanding that learning is a social activity. Just as Vygotsky examined children developing their problem-solving abilities by verbal rehearsals, ESL students can also bring English into their thinking by talking in English about their ideas. Tutors help ESL clients rehearse their ideas aloud in order for English to become part of their problem-solving processes.

Once the student's idea are down on paper, the tutor should spend time with the student in ordering the information. Because many international students are not familiar with the method of direct presentation that is required by American academics, they will need a little guidance in considering the structure of their essays. ESL writers present a veritable challenge to the direct method of discourse prescribed by audiences in this country because many shape information around a topic rather than employ information to support ideas. While native writers of English are trained to present step-by-step accounts of facts, writers from other cultures consider this recounting of information as patronizing to an audience. The collaboration between tutor and client can become a fascinating look into how the needs of an audience are interpreted by a writer. As tutor and writer negotiate the ordering of ideas, issues of further definition and even verb tense come into focus. Such a discussion enables ESL writers to develop insights into multiple layers of discourse organization. Defining and supporting topics are integral parts of the direct method of presentation, and verb tense not only orders information but also can help establish the writer's connection to the topic. By presenting models in which information can be organized, tutors can better assist even the writer who is reluctant to invest more time in an assignment.

If the tutor provides a place for the ESL writer to invest a newly found understanding of a language into his writing and thereby breathe life into the essay, scalpels and the like are no longer needed. By brainstorming from a draft, writer and tutor can interpret language and ideas, negotiate meaning and order, and begin to examine the various foundations of cultural discourses. In addition, both writer and tutor can locate and then build from strengths found in the original draft. Surface level errors may still be present, but the essay can survive on its own, and unlike Shelley's monster, it can be integrated into its new community.

Katharine C. Purcell
Lander University
Greenwood, SC

Works Cited

Berthoff, Ann E. *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/ Cook, 1981.

Briton, James. *Language and Learning*. Coral Gables: U of Miami P, 1970.

Grabe, William and Robert B. Kaplan.

"Writing in a Second Language: Contrastive Rhetoric." *Richness in Writing: Empowering ESL Students*. Eds. Donna Johnson and Duane Roen. New York: Longman, 1989. 263-283.

Harris, Muriel and Tony Silva. "Tutoring ESL Students: Issues and Options." *College Composition and Communication* 44 (1993): 525-537.

Leki, Ilona. "Twenty-five Years of Contrastive Rhetoric: Text Analysis and Writing Pedagogies." *TESOL Quarterly* 25 (1991): 123-143.

Powers, Judith K. "Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer." *Writing Center Journal* 13 (1993): 39-47.

Reid, Joy and Judith Powers. "Extending the Benefits of Small-Group Collaboration to the ESL Writer." *TESOL Journal* 2 (1993): 25-32.

Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, Ellen Souberman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

Zamel, Vivian, "Writing: The Process of Discovering Meaning." *TESOL Quarterly* 16 (1982): 195-209.

The Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association

CALL FOR PROPOSALS
Oct. 8-10, 1998
Salt Lake City, Utah

Proposals are welcome on all aspects of writing center work. Sessions typically include three or four presenters who speak for 15-20 minutes each. Submit proposals by snail mail, e-mail, or fax. Proposals (abstracts of 150-250 words) are due Feb. 15, 1998 to Jane Nelson, Director, University of Wyoming Writing Center, Center for Teaching Excellence, Coe Library, Laramie, WY 828071. E-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu; phone: 307-766-5004; fax: 307-766-4822

Writing Center Assistant Director/ Lecturer in Writing University of Houston—Clear Lake

UHCL seeks a Lecturer with a dual assignment assisting in the Writing Center and teaching writing courses, beginning in August 1998. M.A. in English with an emphasis in Composition/Rhetoric or writing required. Writing center and teaching experience essential. Experience with electronic learning communities highly desirable. The Asst. Director's responsibilities will include 20 hrs/week assisting the Director with WC supervision, tutor training, and record keeping, and helping to implement an on-line tutoring component for the Writing Center. Lecturer responsibilities will include teaching two courses per semester of either advanced writing, business writing, or technical writing. Salary competitive. Nine month renewable contract; possible summer teaching or additional writing center responsibilities.

UHCL is an upper-division university with junior-, senior- and master's-level students. Proof of eligibility to work in US required. Send letter of application, vita, graduate transcript, 3 letters of reference to Dr. Chloe Diepenbrock, Search Committee Chair, Box 416, UH-Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058-1098. AA/EOE. We will begin reviewing applications Jan. 31, 1998. We reserve the right to extend this deadline. (Note: Adjunct teaching positions are frequently available in business and technical writing.)

New Book on Learning Disabilities

Accommodations—Or Just Good Teaching? Strategies for Teaching College Students with Disabilities. Eds. Bonnie M. Hodge and Jennie Preston-Sabin. Westport: Praeger, 1997. 155 pages. $49.95 (ISBN: 0275956067)

(Order from Praeger, 88 Post Road West. P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881-5007; phone: 1-800-225-5800; fax: 203-222-1502)

Mildred R. Steele, a retired writing center director at Central College in Pella, Iowa, and a contributor to this book on teaching students with disabilities, suggests that the book may be of interest to others in writing centers. The twelve chapters discuss the following topics: making an accommodation; legal issues concerning faculty; integrating reasonable accommodations as part of good teaching; teaching students with attention, concentration, or memory difficulties; teaching students with chronic health problems, hearing impairments or deafness, integrative processing difficulties, mobility impairments or motor control difficulties, social behavior disorders, or visual impairments or blindness; forming a coalition to promote student growth and success. Appendices include key federal legislation, accommodation decision making processes, and rights and responsibilities.

Responsible practice in the writing center

"Responsible Practice in the Writing Center: Tutoring in the Center, in the Disciplines, and in Cyberspace"—Albert C. DeCiccio

At the 1996 Conference in College Composition and Communication (CCCC), in her "In Focus" session, "Turning Boundaries Into Frontiers," Muriel Harris described the writing center as a place in the academic institution where educators can observe not only writers writing but also various ways of teaching, thinking, learning, and researching. Citing Ernest Boyer, Harris argued that writing center professionals must continue to disseminate their stories about what takes place in the center. Next, using Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the "contact zone"—the space in which different cultures meet—Harris argued that we must "go to our neighbor's field" in order to maintain the writing center as a vital site of teaching and learning that is supported by many cultures.

What Harris demonstrated is what writing center professionals have come to acknowledge: the teaching that takes place in the writing center is transforming the way we learn in the academy. First, the writing center does not advocate employing tutors who make it known to their tutees that they are in possession of an important body of knowledge, nor does it demand that tutees remain passive recipients of that knowledge. Instead, the writing center is that place in the academy where tutor and tutee are nudged into a collaborative effort that results in effective writing. Second, writing center practice has been buoyed by developments in the social construction of knowledge, which have helped direct such practitioners into constructive conversations with members of the academy's various discourse communities. In this way, the writing center is vital to new and ongoing curriculum-based programs. Third, writing center practitioners have recognized the advantages of on-line tutoring. More and more writing centers are learning that collaboration can be engendered in cyberspace without detracting from the vital interaction that sparks face-to-face tutoring.

In the special interest group session at the 1997 CCCC convention, Beth Boquet, Deb Burns, and Paula Gillespie, buoyed by the provocative responses of Joan Mullin, led a stimulating panel presentation and follow-up conversation about the positive consequences of collaboration between writing center professionals and writing center tutees in the center, across the disciplines, and on-line. What follows are the texts in the order that they were presented. The conversation is centered on the importance of establishing a vibrant physical space, the writing center, before branching out to, say, curriculum-based programs and OWLs. It is a working out of the concerns that North first publicized in his 1984 article and that Valerie Balester highlighted in her response to the CCCC "Statement" in 1992.

On behalf of my colleagues who were part of the panel, I want to express our appreciation for the opportunity to relate our narratives to you in your "field," so to speak. We know that your responses to what was presented in this session will enliven the conversation we started.

"Responsible Practice in the Writing Center: Teaching and Tutoring in the Center"—Elizabeth Boquet

My task, as I interpret it, is to discuss the ways that responsible practice in the writing center differs from responsible practice on-line or in the disciplines. What becomes evident from talking to people who administer and work in on-line writing labs and in curriculum-based programs is that what constitutes responsible practice during a session does not change, no matter where the site is.

However, and I say this at the risk of sounding hopelessly naive or terribly retro or unfailingly Northian, there are larger issues that we must consider, that, in fact, I am considering at my own institution, as we think about how and where we locate ourselves in the university community. I say this having visited writing centers filled with state-of-the-art computer equipment and no, absolutely no, spaces for writers to talk about writing. I say this having talked to directors whose contracts were not renewed despite the hours upon hours they spent training tutors to work with professors. I say this because I want us to be cautious about the assumption that making ourselves more visible by design makes us more indispensable to our universities.

I would like to advocate two possible courses of action for writing center professionals to consider. First, I am going to ask us to consider the need for a vibrant, locatable writing center before branching out with services like these. Next, I am going to ask us to consider that such a vibrant, locatable writing center might, on its own, be enough, in fact might just be preferable.

I am going to do the thing that I moan and groan and roll my eyes about

when I hear other people do it: I'm going to bring up North's "Idea of a Writing Center," not to single-mindedly endorse it, as we often do, as I often do. In fact, I am going to take issue with North's condemnation of the widespread literacy maneuvers that writing centers feel compelled to undertake ("Idea" 446). There may be nothing inherently wrong with placing tutors in classrooms or at keyboards in their work with students. (I'm not convinced of that, but I'm willing to entertain it as a possibility.) And there is no doubt that there are interesting and exciting developments in initiatives like on-line writing labs and curriculum-based programs. There are universities where distance learning is a necessity, where it's an on-line writing center or no writing center at all. But many writing centers–-and I include my own among them—do not need, in fact are not ready, to make this move.

In considering whether you and your center are ready to make such a move, I would suggest that you assess where you and your center stand now. For example, does the director have adequate job security (tenured or permanent contract)? Is the release time from teaching sufficient and is the work in the center recognized as teaching? Is the work of the writing center considered academic and intellectual on the campus? Does the director have control over budget and staffing? Does the writing center have adequate resources? Adequate staff development and incentives (in terms of hourly wages, resources in the writing center, resources for professional development)?

These questions are important because, contrary to what we might want to believe, initiatives like these, I would argue, are not a way to gain respect. And many writing centers would do well to try to imagine other possibilities for conducting the work of the center—possibilities that bring people to the center, rather than possibilities that bring the center to people.

This brings me to my second point: that maybe the space of the writing center, with few exceptions, is all we really need. Since I accepted the position at Fairfield, one of the most difficult things about shifting from the role of a tutor to the role of an administrator has been what I'll call, for lack of a better description, shifting advocacies. Advocating for students, working with them to figure out assignments, to negotiate academic terrain, all the while testing the boundaries of my own philosophy, was an exciting challenge for me as a tutor. It has been harder for me, as an administrator, to learn to advocate in ways that are consistent with the critical educational call that I believe writing centers issue to students, to faculty, and to administration. Maybe I miss the boundaries of my work space. A two-person table and a couple of maroon chairs seemed pretty clear to me. Now my work space extends to faculty offices, deans' suites, academic council meetings and beyond. And I find more and more that I see the value of reining things in, of pulling back, of providing services that, to quote North again, "match our resources and our needs" ("Revisiting" 17).

So on my own campus, I look for ways to enact a pedagogy of critical administration (which occasionally, but not necessarily, means a pedagogy critical of administration). What I've discovered, by looking to possibilities other than the ones that might have seemed most obvious, is that I've come to a renewed understanding of the value of the space of the writing center.

I'd like to offer here an example from my own university and our writing center in order to highlight two issues which are, to my mind, related and cause me to think we need the space of the writing center now more than ever: We are in the process of instituting a university-wide diversity requirement for all undergraduate students. As a result, interested faculty, supported by in-house grants, have been meeting to discuss ways of implementing this requirement in a manner that is consistent with a critical multicultural approach rather than a contributory multicultural approach. This critical multicultural approach investigates power and privilege in a way that I see as complementary to the critical intellectual potential of the writing center. I am working on a grant to fund a program which will begin a dialogue between these faculty and those of us who work in the writing center.

At the same time, students on our campus are searching for intellectual conversations and complain loudly and often (as do faculty) of general student apathy and lack of interest in this kind of talk. (I'm reminded that Bruffee long ago noted the impact that student comfort and need can have on the workings of the writing center.) My plan, using the core group of faculty gleaned from the diversity initiative, is to work to portray the writing center as the kind of space on campus—the only space maybe—where these kinds of conversations can, and do, occur.

So I ask you to be certain you have looked at all the possibilities for your writing center, not just the ones that may seem most obvious or most talked about. I ask that your alliances—whether they be with faculty, with students, with technology—be strategic and well-planned, a good use of your limited time, energy, and resources as well as theirs. And I ask you to keep in mind that setting up any kind of worthwhile initiative—whether it be an OWL or a curriculum-based program or a program like the one I have described today—is slow and difficult. It is long-term and it is a big investment, which brings me back to the questions I asked earlier, questions that force us to look at administrative support for any kind of program.

The respect, security, and stability of the writing center must come first, and it is well documented how hard-won these are. But it is only by virtue of gaining respect that we stand a chance,

in the face of high-profile moves (a huge administrative money-dump into hardware, for example), of maintaining the critical space (literally and figuratively) that our writing centers would do well to occupy.

Works Cited

North, Stephen M. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46.5 (September 1984): 33-46.

North, Stephen M. "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center.'" *Writing Center Journal* 15.1 (Fall 1994): 7-19.

"Responsible Practice in the Writing Center: Teaching and Tutoring in the Disciplines"—Deborah Burns

When I was hired as a new Assistant Professor and Director of the Writing Center at Merrimack College, I was asked to initiate a program that would integrate the services of the College's Writing Center into its First Year Seminar Program. Before I came to Merrimack, I was Director of the Writing Center at the University of Rhode Island, where I administered a Writing Fellows Program with Linda Shamoon, Director of URI's Writing Program. Because the Writing Fellows Program at URI was very successful, my new colleagues and I decided to create a similar program at Merrimack, using the First Year Seminar Program as the site for a Pilot Study.

The discipline-specific tutoring practices in Merrimack's Writing Fellows Program are informed by social theories articulated by scholars such as Patricia Bizzell. Bizzell stresses the importance of discipline-specific knowledge: "Students need composition instruction that expresses and demystifies the institutional structure of knowledge, rather than that which covertly reintroduces discriminatory practices while cloaking the force of convention in concessions to the 'personal.' The cognitive focus of process-oriented composition studies cannot provide the necessary analysis" (112). Merrimack College's Writing Fellows program takes the position that writers learn to enter a discipline by talking about their writing with tutors who have experience writing in that discipline. It has been our experience that tutors with disciplinary knowledge can provide the necessary rhetorical analysis that can lay bare disciplinary practices for less experienced writers. Discipline-based tutors can engage in the ongoing conversation about the rhetorical practices of a discipline that occurs in the rhetoric of the discipline with faculty members and less experienced writers. Discipline-specific tutors can talk about disciplinary knowledge not readily available to novice writers. They can help beginning students learn to speak the language of academic culture.

Let me be specific now by turning to a discussion of how social theory has helped to shape Merrimack's program. Merrimack professors select their own writing fellows when at all possible. They choose students who have demonstrated outstanding writing abilities, exceptional interpersonal skills, and a high GPA; are majors in the field; and have previously taken classes with them. If professors are not able to choose one of their own students, they are matched up with an experienced tutor from the Writing Center—an advanced student with a great deal of tutoring experience and one with knowledge of the discipline. These tutors are attached to appropriate sections of the First Year Seminar Program and remain with the professors for as long as they teach within the program, or until the tutors graduate.

New tutors are trained by me and by Professional Tutors who have worked in Merrimack's Writing Center for a number of years. New tutors enroll in a course entitled "Theories and Practices in the Tutoring of Writing" in which they read training manuals, watch videos of tutoring sessions, engage in practice tutoring sessions, observe more experienced tutors, and keep a journal recording their experiences in the program.

Before the semester begins, professors, fellows, and I meet to discuss the nature of the fellows' participation within their First Year Seminars. Professors and fellows negotiate a number of things. They talk about the kinds of writing assignments that will be required in the class, they discuss whether or not students will be required to consult with the fellows on writing assignments, or whether consultations will be optional. They are given a copy of the professor's syllabus and texts for the course. They discuss the appropriateness of fellows contributing to class discussion and any other issue that the professor and fellow deem important.

Writing fellows have a number of responsibilities. Before the first class, they prepare a short handout for the seminar, giving their name, hours available for tutoring, telephone number, and a general description of their expertise. Fellows must attend the class at least once a week. They bring an appointment book to class with them every time they attend so that students can make appointments before a writing assignment is due. Fellows read all class materials and have regular consultations with the professors. Fellows often help students interpret assignments, and let professors know when students are confused about assignments, class requirements, or course content.

Some experienced fellows have made suggestions to faculty about the construction of writing assignments; for example, one fellow suggested that a faculty member require a series of drafts for her assignments, a suggestion that was followed by the professor. Fellows offer advice on content and form to students, and because they are familiar with the discourse conventions required in the local community of their seminar, they lay bare these disciplinary practices for students. They keep detailed records on each tutoring session, noting problems worked on and problems that still need addressing in a text. Writers leave a tu-

toring session with a better understanding of the disciplinary practices required within the context of their seminar. They also leave knowing that they need to continue work on their drafts. After a paper is graded, fellows meet with the seminar professor to talk about each student's text. The fellow shares her notes on the tutoring session with the professor, and the professor helps the fellow further refine tutoring techniques, if necessary.

So far, the program seems to be successful. During the first semester of the program, 9 faculty and tutors participated. During the second semester, we had 19 faculty and tutors participating, a more than doubling of the participation in one semester! This academic year we have 27 faculty and tutor participants. Merrimack is a small college (not quite 2,000 students), yet we expect to conduct more than 1,400 tutoring sessions this year, and a great majority of these sessions are a result of the Fellows Program. Faculty have been very supportive of the program; in fact, we were not able to accommodate every faculty request for a fellow. One faculty member recently remarked, "If I could have a writing fellow every semester, I would participate in the First Year Seminar Program every semester for as long as I could."

A number of faculty members have commented on how students who consult with writing fellows had significantly better texts than those who do not. One faculty member saw a marked improvement in organization, development of ideas, and appropriate use of style and tone in the texts of his students who had worked with the writing fellow. When we asked students to assess the discipline-specific tutoring of the Writing Fellows Program, 47% felt they were better able to interpret and understand writing assignments, 71% felt they were better able to generate ideas for writing assignments, 76% felt they were better able to focus their ideas, 77% felt they were better able to organize and develop their ideas, and 60% felt they had more confidence in their writing abilities.

To date, we haven't had many problems, but I think that is due, for the most part, to the fact that we have the support of a Dean who was a former Director of the Writing Center and who convinced the Academic Vice President to support the program with MONEY. Naturally, administrative support is one of the keys to a successful program—and ours is an expensive program. Even though there was a sizable amount of money budgeted for the program, the figure didn't adequately cover the cost of running the program, as a number of fellows had to participate for course credit (an independent study taken with me) rather than for pay. The issue of course credit is problematic in itself because it is an additional task for me as the Director of the Writing Center.

In addition to the problem of financing the program, there is the issue of tutor workload. The tutors work very hard in the Fellows Program, sometimes logging as many as 15-20 hours a week. Because they are all good students, they seem to be able to balance their own work with their work in the Fellows Program. However, tutors show concern when students do not make appointments with them; they also become annoyed when students do not show up for scheduled appointments. Any professor can probably relate to these experiences.

Nevertheless, at Merrimack College, daily conversations occur among writing fellows, faculty, students, and me about the demands of writing within specific disciplines. Faculty not trained in the teaching of writing learn proven techniques for incorporating effective writing practice into their classes from tutors and me. Tutors and faculty share their disciplinary knowledge with students, and Merrimack College's Writing Center has moved to the center of academic life on our campus.

Work Cited

Bizzell, Patricia. "College Composition: Initiation into the Academic Discourse Community." *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness.* Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1991. 105-128.

"Responsible Practice in the Writing Center: Teaching and Tutoring On-line"—Paula Gillespie

"Yes, I have tried on-line tutoring, and, yes, I did inhale." I'm quoting my tutor, Joe Sommers, who did a fair amount of it during his semester in my peer tutoring class. I've inhaled, too. I've had a number of on-line sessions, and I am here to say some contradictory things about them, but mostly I'm here to open the discussion of successes and experiences with the highs of on-line tutoring. Here are my contradictory claims: in universities like mine, students are not ready for on-line tutorials, but we must learn how to do them because the demand is coming and because on-line tutoring will be good tutoring. And I want to argue that in the on-line tutorial, like the face-to-face tutorial, what we see is not always what we get. We need to be aware that our standard lore and standard theories might need to be re-thought and re-tested. We need to think of ourselves as starting a new learning curve.

Richard L. Nolan, in his *Harvard Business Review* article, "Managing the Crises in Data Processing," describes a six-stage theory of data processing growth, and he claims that organizations need to experience each stage of evolution fully because of the learning process associated with it.

His first stage is initiation, when new systems are introduced. Writing centers have reached this stage when they are able to use simple email or more complex tutoring technology.

The second stage is called "contagion." This is a stage of proliferation, of wild experimentation. Controls are virtually nonexistent. Costs often skyrocket. This is an all-important stage which Nolan insists we cannot skip or shorten. This is where I believe we

find ourselves now, experimenting with new and better technologies and new tutoring strategies. We have the on-line munchies.

The third stage is called control. In business, this is brought about by a desire to control expenditures, but applications might be upgraded. In this stage in business, top-level managers step in. In writing centers this may take the form of directors setting training and scheduling guidelines, administrators setting limits, or budgets constraining what we can do. The final stages involve integration of new technologies into our operations.

But let's go back to stage two: it's hard to proliferate in our stage of contagion if we have few students to work with. I have invited students from selected classes to take part in on-line sessions, but have had no takers, aside from some faculty colleagues and some former students, who found me on their own. I wanted a recent session with a real student to use as a jumping-off point for our discussion. So two weeks ago, when one of my graduate tutors was bemoaning her tendency to procrastinate on a paper that was due the next day, I asked her if I could tutor her on-line. She logged on to one of our computers down the hall from me, and I logged on in my office. And here is where I'm going to argue that what we see is not always what we get.

It took Tracey (a very experienced emailer, file attacher, and net surfer) a half hour to try to download her draft and her questions to me, and in the course of doing it, she lost her message entirely. She felt really frustrated, and since the paper was due the next day, I wondered if her time would have been better spent working on the paper. But just before she left for class, she popped her head in my door and said, "Could you forward a copy of my email message back to me? I think I said some really good things in there." She sent me a description of the assignment (an analysis of a Rossetti poem), a few questions (when and how to get past the criticism and into her own ideas), and a nice long paragraph of very articulate brainstorming on the poem.

I thought immediately that this was one of those ah-ha moments, when Tracey had discovered something important she'd wanted to say by typing it out. My post said, "Tracey, it looks as if you've already found the focus you were hunting for. Is that right? You make a number of interesting points in the post you sent to me. What do you want to do next?" This is exactly what I would say to a student sitting across from me in my office if she had come to me with the kind of description Tracey had typed.

After Tracey taught her class, she got back on-line with me. She sent an elaboration and expansion of what she had said before. "Ah-ha!" I said. "She's writing." Her post was much more detailed, a statement that she was too mired in criticism of the poem to work on her own ideas, but then she explained in detail what those ideas were. She concluded, "I know this is just dribble . . . but it felt good to type it out . . . ."

I was happy she was dribbling. At home that evening I emailed her again.

"Tracey, I hope that by now you're hammering it out. You seem to know what you want to say, and you seem to imply an organization for it, too, in what you wrote to me in the last post. Did writing things out on email help in some small way to help you clarify things for yourself? I'll be around and on-line tomorrow morning, so if there's anything I can do electronically, do email."

At about 11:00, Tracey emailed me.

"I'm hammering away—I have this obsession for secondary sources and the 'history' of a text that makes me resist my own readings. I suppose it is the repressed historian in me . . . . Working things out on email was helpful. It forced me to explain myself in a textual form. As a perfectionist, I usually resist writing until I completely understand what I'm thinking about. I know that I usually learn it once I write, but the impulse to reject the keyboard and/or paper is strong . . . .

"What the email lacks, in my estimation, is the immediacy of one-on-one communication. I like being able to see facial expressions. However, regular tutoring sessions seem to help me avoid writing. If I have to explain it in writing, the writing gets done.

"I should get back to the paper—and use my writing energy on it." She thanked me and signed off, ready for a long, long night.

I had thought that there were several moments when the uniqueness of the on-line session was benefiting Tracey, and in my heart, I still do. But the following things happened that made me question my gleeful optimism about this and about other kinds of tutorials:

I ran into Ray, one of our tutors and a Rossetti expert. He and Tracey had met several times, and she had already worked out with him the interpretation she sent to me, the one she asked to have me send back. He had told her that she was more than ready to write, and that she should. So what I'd identified as the ah-ha moment was only one small bit of a much larger process, a process with lots of people, encouragement, face-to-face talk. When I spoke to her after her class about her conference with Ray and what came out of it and the on-line session, Tracey said she'd have to wait for the right mood to strike: Probably, she said, at 3:30 a.m. She proceeded to play on the web. Reality check.

But what about her in-progress report she sent me at eleven at night, saying that it had helped her to get her text down on paper? Later she told me that she threw out virtually everything she wrote to me and re-thought it. But I feel that knowing what to reject, what

to move beyond, is an important part of the drafting process. Would she have gone as far with revising if she had not had an on-line session? I don't know, but I think we need to be careful about the claims we make for our methods.

So: to me the crux of this is that Tracey had to articulate questions first, rather than respond to questions of mine; and although as a tutor she was more articulate with questions than most first year students would be, she had to tell me in writing what she wanted from the session, rather than fill out a form. Our form would never have allowed her to write the questions she did, though she might have articulated them as we began the session. But I think that the *writing* of her questions made her move to the next level of writing. And I think that on-line tutoring can offer wonderful benefits for procrastinators, among other writers. It raises an issue, though, about the immediacy of the response we are able to offer. Tracey, of course, is a different kind of writer than we usually tutor, but she offered the advantage of someone keenly, and in her case painfully, aware of her own writing processes and needs.

I hope we can get opportunities to see more on-line sessions, maybe on the NWCA website, so that we can all learn together from this stage of proliferation and experimentation.

Work Cited

Nolan, Richard L. "Managing the Crises in Data Processing" (1979), *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1979): 115-126. In *Management Information Systems: The Management View*. Ed. Robert Schultheis and Mary Sumner. Chicago: Richard D. Irwin, 1995. 368-69.

• Albert C. DeCiccio, Merrimack College, North Andover MA;
• Elizabeth Boquet, Fairfield University, Fairfield CT;
• Deborah Burns, Merrimack College, North Andover MA;
• Paula Gillespie, Marquette University, Milwaukee WI

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 26-28: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Oklahoma City, OK
Contact: Kevin Davis, East Central University, Ada, OK 74820; e-mail: kdavis@mailclerk.ecok.edu

March 6: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Belmont, CA
Contact Marc Wolterbeek, English, College of Notre Dame, 1500 Ralston, Belmont, CA 94002-1997. Phone: 650-508-3708; e-mail: Mwolterbeek@cnd.edu

March 6: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in New York, NY
Contact: Steven Serafin, Writing Center, Hunter College—CUNY, 695 Park Ave. New York, NY 10021. Phone: 212-772-4212; fax: 212-650-3953

March 7: New England Writing Centers Association, in New London, CT
Contact: Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Freshmen, Connecticut College, New London, CT 06320; e-mail: tpamm@conncoll.edu

April 2-4: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in San Antonio, TX
Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 English Dept., Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs1.ttu.edu

April 18: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Largo, MD
Contact: Richard Profozich, Writing Dept., Prince George's Community College, Largo, MD 20774-2199. Phone: 301-322-0598; e-mail: rlp@pgstumail.pg.cc.md.us

April 23-25: South East Writing Center Association, in Macon, GA
Contact: Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan College, 4760 Forsyth Road, PO Box 8463, Macon, GA 31210-4462. E-mail: peggy_ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu; phone: 912-757-3904; fax 912-757-4027.

May 8-9: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Youngstown, OH
Contact: Sherri Zander, Writing Center, One University Plaza, Youngstown State U., Youngstown, OH 44555. Phone: 330-742-3055; e-mail: sdzander@cc.ysu.edu

Oct. 8-10: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Salt Lake City, UT
Contact: Jane Nelson, U. of Wyoming Writing Center, Center for Teaching Excellence, Coe Library, Laramie, WY 828071. E-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu; phone: 307-766-5004; fax: 307-766-4822

TUTORS' COLUMN

Tutoring as re-vision

"I'm sorry. I can't correct your grammar," I said bluntly.

Her jaw dropped. I was surprised that it wasn't bruised on impact. "What do you mean you can't fix my grammar?" she said, slightly taken aback. "I thought that's what you guys did."

With two semesters of tutoring under my belt, I had learned to anticipate this sort of reaction. I patiently explained to the student the creed by which we tutors live: theory, example, practice. Once I stepped off my grammatical soapbox, I assured her that yes, I would help her with identifying problem spots in the paper, and that yes, I would teach her how to fix these errors; however, I stressed that I would not complete fragments, relocate misplaced modifiers, or solve pronoun disagreements. That, I told her, was her job.

We tutors are guilty of one thing: aiding and abetting the thinking process. We challenge and aid students in looking back at their own writing and thinking critically about their work in terms of content, organization, style and grammar. But sometimes we need to evaluate our own tutoring method. The concept of re-vision not only applies to writing but to tutoring as well.

While my past experiences have prompted me to slightly vary my tutoring style, working with ESL students has caused me to adopt a entirely new approach. When working with students whose first language is English, I rely on their familiarity with the language. If there is an awkwardly worded sentence in a student's paper, I simply have the student read it aloud, and the error is usually caught. Foreign students do not know what is grammatically correct because they are completely unfamiliar with the nuances of the English language. Therefore, as a tutor, I need to explain to ESL students exactly why something is grammatically incorrect.

Jun, my MBA student, would construct sentences such as, "Also, there is possibility of environmental group in U.S. will attack us from ethical reason." I explained to Jun that he had missed an article, misused a preposition, and forgot to pluralize a noun. Thankfully and ironically, foreign students appear much more at ease with grammar jargon than their American counterparts; however, when I verbally explained the rules to Jun, he would nod his head vigorously and say, "Uh huh," over and over again. Since the grammar was not being encoded properly, I had to revise my strategy. Rather than speaking with Jun, I began to type out the rules and examples. Although this is contrary to my method of tutoring, I discovered that Jun responded much better to written instructions.

I have also had to resist the urge to edit a student's paper. It is fairly easy to skim a student's paper, make the necessary grammatical changes, and send that student on his or her way; it is quite another matter to empower that student to do his or her own work. While I did my best to avoid the "quick fix" approach to tutoring, there were a few times when both a student and I became so exasperated over an awkwardly worded sentence that I would blurt out a solution.

After some reflection, I realized that I was not taking my own advice. Rather than helping students learn to recognize errors and revise their mistakes, I was bearing the grammatical burden with them. This called for a revamping of my tutoring style. Instead of telling myself, "Let the student do the work," I began telling the students, "This is not my paper; this is your paper." While some students were disgruntled at the thought of taking responsibility for revising their work, others began to take their papers more seriously. Oddly enough, many never saw papers as actually being theirs: they saw them as assignments to be churned out or arguments to be rehashed.

Coaxing a student to discover and/or organize his or her own thoughts on a subject can be difficult. This is particularly true of older students who have been out of school for years and feel insecure in their ability to write. "I must be stupid or something," the woman said waiving her paper menacingly in front of my face. She slapped it down on the table and began reading the comments which dotted her text. "He says that I'm disorganized, but I don't understand. Everyone else in the class manages to get A's. Will you read the introduction and tell me what you think?"

My initial assessment was that Mercedes was extremely enthusiastic about her assignment, so enthusiastic that all of her thoughts had tumbled out of her head without a frame to which to cling. Experience has taught me to try a little tenderness with anxious students so as to quell their insecurities. In a soothing tone usually reserved for shrinks, I praised the validity of her ideas. Once the comfort zone was es-

tablished, I suggested that the reason her paper was disorganized was that there was no identifiable thesis. I asked her to write two or three sentences about what she was writing; then I asked to write a few sentences about why she was writing about this subject. From there I asked her if any tensions existed with the subject. As a result of our question and answer session, Mercedes was able to focus her paper and create an outline.

Although I think my rapport with the students is one of my strengths as a tutor, there have been instances when it has undermined the tutorial. Philip called the Writing Center one Monday night to verify that one could indeed bring in just a panicked look. He was experiencing technical difficulties with an Education paper. Initially, he seemed apprehensive and insecure about his abilities as a writer. I praised the strengths within the paper and was about to move onto the "however" statement when he asked me where the students go to eat when the cafeteria closes. "Westover," I replied. Five minutes later, we were still talking about good places to eat in Lynchburg. When I realized this, I told him that we needed to get off the tangent train. The same thing happened twenty minutes into the tutorial.

Obviously, our cheerful banter was not helping Philip improve his grammatical skills, and I resolved to exert more control over the situation during subsequent tutorials. Whenever he would veer off track, I would surreptitiously lead him back to the world of "theory, example, and practice." Philip sensed a change in our tutorials and began to focus more on his paper. One night, I asked him to proofread his own paper and look for errors so that he could get used to doing this on his own. As he was writing down a semicolon rule and generating sentences, Philip looked up at me and said, "Hey, are you trying to get rid of me?"

I could only nod.

Evonne Carroll
Peer Tutor
Lynchburg College
Lynchburg, VA

NWCA News from Al DeCiccio, President

Writing center workers have long been concerned with the issue of getting big. In our schools, the issue seems to have been resolved for us because, by degrees, writing centers have become big: they have been associated with writing across the curriculum programs; they have been responsible for more and more in-class tutoring programs; they have become the backbone of many an academic support center charged with enhancing student retention.

Organizationally, writing center workers established NWCA, and that organization gained affiliate status with NCTE. With two publications—the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal*, the NWCA Press, the website, the WCenter listserv, and the three national conferences in addition to all the conferences of the regional groups, NWCA has grown. Just before the recent holidays, members of the Executive Board of NWCA voted unanimously to get even bigger. Acting upon the formal proposal sent by Anna Challenger, English Department Chair and Writing Center Director for the American College of Thessaloniki in Greece, Board members took the first step toward becoming international.

Should the next steps in the process result in granting affiliate status to our European colleagues, there will be much for us to consider—from our organizational name to our evolving idea of a writing center. Of course, many of us will be buoyed by the idea of conferencing, say, in Greece or Italy or France or Germany or the U.K. More importantly, the research and practice of our European colleagues should extend what we have been concerned with in the U.S.A. and Canada. Ultimately, the writing center community should be strengthened by our European colleagues.

I wish to thank Michael Pemberton and Penny Bird for their assistance in moving us closer to having a European affiliate to NWCA. As I assume this issue will need to be ratified by the membership of NWCA, your comments are welcomed.

Albert C. DeCiccio
Merrimack College
adeciccio@merrimack.edu

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Student agendas and expectations for writing center conferences (Part I)

Lots of students think they know what a writing center is and what it does, and their impressions are probably drawn from equal measures of previous experience and educated guesses. If they have been to a writing center at another campus, they often believe that all writing centers everywhere must be configured in roughly the same way. One doctor's office is just about the same as any other, one grocery store is pretty much like any other, so why shouldn't the writing center at Stimpy University be more or less the same as the one at South Park High School? And just as they fail to realize that different writing centers will have different priorities and different policies that govern their operations, they often fail to understand the *reasons* why those differences exist. Why should the ethics of a writing center in a four-year state university be any different from the ethics of a writing center in a high school or two-year regional community college?

If students have never been into a writing center before, they will still have some strong impressions of what goes on there, what its purpose is, and how tutors interact with students and their texts. Oftentimes these impressions will be highly metaphorical, relating the work of the center to that of other institutions with which they are familiar: a laboratory, a hospital, or a prison, just to suggest a few (Pemberton "The Hospital"; Carino). Each of these metaphorical constructs carries with it a whole range of assumptions about the function and operation of the writing center, and these assumptions will influence many of the interactions that students have with tutors. Students embracing the "hospital" metaphor, for example, will envision the writing center as a place where their linguistic "illnesses" can be "diagnosed" by tutors and "cured" through the proper "prescription" of revision or grammar exercises. Many times these metaphorical constructions will determine in advance the attitude students have about themselves, their writing abilities, the kinds of help they need, and the activities that tutors are expected to engage in. Though these expectations can occasionally be enabling, such as when they predispose students to be receptive to tutorial help, more often than not they generate interference in tutorial conferences until the "new rules" for appropriate conduct and appropriate discourse are mastered.

Students frequently carry with them a number of misperceptions about the writing center and the work that is done there, and these misunderstandings—because they shape students' initial attitudes about the center—can strongly affect the dynamics of a tutorial conference. Rick Leahy and Roy Fox refer to these beliefs as "myth-understandings about the writing center" (7), and they include in their list of myths such long-standing pieces of common wisdom as "The writing center is a remedial service for poor writers," and "The writing center is only for students in English classes" (7). Given these misguided views about the work which takes place in writing centers, it seems only natural that the students surveyed by Paul Ady in 1988 exhibited a substantial degree of trepidation and anxiety about the prospect of going there:

- They [the students] do not expect to get much out of the experience. They think tutors are all English majors coolly ready to lord their superiority over the tutee.
- All assume that the tutor will control the discussion and show them how they should have done it.
- All are seeking approval, any kind.
- The large majority, convinced they are poor to terrible writers, are ashamed to reveal this failure to another.
- Above all, for at least 90% this *is* a place that inspires fear and trembling. (11)

But the agendas and expectations students bring to the writing center reach beyond their own fears and perceptions of the center's mission; they also extend into the domain of the tutorial conference itself. In and of themselves, these expectations do not necessarily provoke ethical dilemmas. A student wanting to drop off a paper for proofreading, for instance, will not present a problem in those writing centers where such a service is provided. However, when student expectations conflict with established writing center policies or tutorial guidelines, ethical questions will quickly arise. And even where fairly explicit writing center policies exist (as with strict prohibitions against proofreading), it is possible to conceive of situations or scenarios where extenuating circumstances might persuade a tutor that the best and most ethical means to help a student would be to temporarily ignore the standard policy.

In my next several columns, I will try to identify a number of the common expectations students have about writing center work and consider why they may or may not present ethical conflicts for tutors or directors. In most of these columns (as exercises for the

reader), I will offer a few contrastive scenarios which may highlight the relatively contingent nature of the ethical standards which might be upheld in each case.

Proofreading

Students often expect that tutors in the writing center will proofread their work. The paradigm case for such a request is the student who walks into the writing center and says, "I've got a paper I need to have checked. If you could give this to one of the tutors, I'll be back in a couple of hours to pick it up." As much as this attitude toward the writing center chills me, I know for a fact that there are some writing centers that provide such a service. We might ask two questions about this practice, then: (1) is proofreading student papers in the writing center unethical, and (2) if we determine that it is, how should we contend with this set of student expectations when we encounter it?

To begin with, proofreading itself is a rather slippery concept. It is rather difficult to define, for one thing, and it is rather difficult to avoid completely, for another. When tutors sit down with students and read through their papers with them, they are certainly doing a kind of proofreading. They are making mental notes about where students are succeeding with their writing and where they are having problems, and the mental notes they take run the gamut from higher-order concepts such as argumentation and development to lower-order concerns such as paragraphing and punctuation. Even though tutors may choose not to convey all this information to students, the reading and assessment process they engage in when they look at student texts is unquestionably a kind of "proofreading." Its main focus is the search for textual problems, and its main goal is to discover possible solutions to those problems. The critical difference between a full-fledged proofreader and a tutor in the writing center (most writing centers anyway) is a matter of which person is responsible for making textual changes.

Proofreaders are generally asked to discover problems in texts and then do the fixing for the clients. They are "consultants" in purest sense of the word—knowledgeable experts who can bring their expertise to bear on a client's project and provide solutions to perplexing questions. Students can certainly learn from proofreaders if they have a mind to. They can examine the textual changes and corrections made, try to understand the reasons for those changes, and then apply those reasons to the next piece of writing that they do. But the lessons students might learn in this way are likely to be quite limited in scope and less helpful than other types of writing assistance. Since proofreaders do not often interact directly with the writers of the text they are examining, and since they almost always have pressing demands on the amount of time they can spend on a given text, they tend to limit their area of concern to surface features and sentence-level problems. Editorial corrections can be made rather quickly, and higher-order difficulties can be mentioned in passing, if at all.

Tutors, on the other hand, generally believe that students have the responsibility to make changes to their own texts and that the role of the tutor should be to help them discover where changes need to be made. They see themselves as teachers rather than editors. Further, tutors are generally taught that the primary focus of writing conferences should be higher-order rhetorical features rather than lower-order features, and the deeply interactive nature of tutor-student discourse facilitates an exploration of such abstract issues in a way that the impersonal practice of proofreading cannot. If a writing center ascribes to the notion that its mission should be to make better writers, not just better writing, then it may wish to take an active role in curtailing the kind of proofreading and correction services that some students expect. Both Dossin and David, et al. advocate this sort of proactive strategy with students, spelling out a variety of pedagogical techniques that can help novice writers learn to proofread their own work.

But this brief analysis of the ethics of proofreading oversimplifies a more complex issue. There may, for example, be circumstances when proofreading by the tutor, scanning a text for surface-level errors, is less inappropriate than we might believe. In such instances, a writing center needs to decide how firm and unyielding its ethical line should be. Should no exceptions be allowed to the rule? A few? Under what conditions? Julie Neff believes that "a final proofreading by the writing advisor is also appropriate for the learning-disabled students because these students may not be able to see the mistakes until they are pointed out to them" (92). Would this be considered ethical in all writing centers under all circumstances? What should be the policy if a student has come into the center several times before with a draft of his paper, and now he's bringing in a copy of the final revision? What if he doesn't need any more conferencing work on organization and development but just wants to make sure that the final text is free from minor problems that he might have overlooked? Should the writing center's policy against proofreading (assuming such a policy exists) be flexible in this case or not? What should this student be told? Consider the following scenarios suggesting several situations in which the ethics of a firm proofreading policy might be re-evaluated against particular student needs.

1) A student comes into the writing center as a walk-in to see if there are any tutors available for a short meeting. There are. He explains to the tutor that he is a good writer and virtually always gets A's on his papers, but—like most people—he has a hard time proofreading his own work. He tends to "see" what he *intended* to write and sometimes overlooks stupid little mistakes and typos that other people can catch more easily. He had just printed out his paper and was on his way to

turn it in, but thought he'd take a couple minutes to drop by the writing center and have somebody give it a quick scan.

2) A student comes into the writing center as a walk-in to see if there are any tutors available for a short meeting. There are. He explains to the tutor that he has dyslexia and sometimes has difficulty seeing places where he's made spelling or typographical mistakes in his papers. Proofreading is especially hard for him, so he's hoping that someone in the writing center can help out by reading his text and indicating where he needs to correct his errors.

3) A student comes into the writing center as a walk-in to see if there are any tutors available for a short meeting. There are. He tells the tutor that he has a paper that is due in two hours—not enough time to make any major revisions, but time enough to correct any grammar or spelling mistakes with his word processor and get the paper turned in by the deadline. He knows he should have come in earlier with his draft, and he promises to do so the next time, but just this once, please, please, please, could someone proofread his paper and help him fix any simple errors?

4) A student comes into the writing center as a walk-in to see if there are any tutors available for a short meeting. There are. He tells the tutor that he is not a native speaker of English (he is from Japan) but that his fluency with the language is generally pretty good. He feels he writes well, overall, but he still has occasional problems with idioms, definite and indefinite articles, and prepositions. He doesn't want to take up too much of the tutor's time, but he would like someone to look over his paper briefly, just to make sure that he hasn't made any unfortunate errors in these areas.

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois
Urbana, IL

Works Cited

Ady, Paul. "Fear and Trembling at the Center: Student Perceptions about the Tutorial." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 12.8 (April 1988): 11-12.

Carino, Peter. "What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Our Metaphors: A Cultural Critique of Clinic, Lab, and Center." *Writing Center Journal* 13.1 (Fall 1992): 31-42.

David, Carol, Margaret Graham, and Anne Richards. "Three Approaches to Proofreading." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 13.2 (October 1988): 10-14.

Dossin, Mary. "Helping Students to Proofread." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 11.2 (October 1986): 3-4.

Leahy, Rick and Roy Fox. "Seven Myth-Understandings about the Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 14.1 (September 1989) : 7-8.

Neff, Julie. "Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center." *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*. Eds. Joan A. Mullin and Ray Wallace. Urbana: NCTE, 1994. 81-95.

Pemberton, Michael A. "The Prison, the Hospital, and the Madhouse: Redefining Metaphors for the Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 17.1 (September 1992): 11-16.

THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
1356 Heavilon Hall
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356

Address Service Requested

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Purdue University