THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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...FROM THE EDITOR...

Tutor training is surely one of the most popular topics for articles, WCenter conversations, and conference presentations. Logistically, discussions might focus on credit courses vs. other options, syllabi, selection criteria, etc. But from another perspective, tutor training discussions are really about how we enact our theories.

This month's newsletter articles are an illustration of this as Ben Rafoth and his tutors focus on issues of gender considerations and how they can affect tutoring, Ellen Mohr demonstrates how seeking certification for a tutoring program raises questions of what tutors should learn and how they learn it, Julie Kluth shares a tutoring experience that enlarges our vision of what tutors can offer their students, and Dean Ward and Jodi VanWingerden explain the potential of using a social-work model to train tutors.

Tutor training embodies both the core of what we do and the ways in which our theoretical commitments and goals are accomplished. No wonder so much of our professional conversation continues to probe this crucial, complex, always fascinating topic.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Sex in the center: Gender differences in tutorial interactions

Gender is a topic that is often on everyone's mind but difficult to talk about. When the subject comes up, it is usually in the form of a joke or teasing remark like "That's a guy thing" or "Women don't like it when he says that...," followed by a smile and a change of subject. There is often the concern that something we say in the abstract may offend someone present at the moment. And while gender can be a sensitive subject, discussions about it are necessary and helpful, especially among tutors. It is possible, and vital, to talk about the topic in staff meetings and one-to-one in a realistic and non-threatening way. Tutors need to have opportunities to discuss sessions in which gender had an influence on what took place—or maybe not.

When people talk about gender it is often in ways that mask their true feelings or put themselves at risk. As one of the female tutors in our writing center observed, a person who brings up the subject of gender in a class discussion may be viewed with suspicion as others try to guess where the person stands and then pin a label on him or her. If one tries to avoid the subject, he

or she can come across as insensitive or insecure. The truth is, the topic is so risky that many are afraid of it. Our goal in this essay is to pose a question about gender that arises in our own writing center and to share with readers some of the ways that researchers and our tutoring staff have addressed the question, "Does gender make a difference in tutorial interactions?"

Awareness of Gender

When it comes to working in the writing center, the tutors in our writing center say they are aware of gender. This is revealing. People have many characteristics—religion, place of birth, hair and skin color—that are personally important, but gender is among the most easily noticed. As one tutor wrote during a staff meeting,

> Do I think about gender a lot? Yes. I think about the way people look, their eyes, their body, what they're wearing, how they smile, and things like that. When I'm around other people, I probably notice people of the opposite sex more, but it's not like I just think about their sex—I notice little things about them, and I think anyone who is interested in people does this. It's partly about gender, yes, but that's not all of it.

And this leads us to the first point we'd like to make. The awareness of gender that we have on a day-to-day basis is grounded not just in some abstract stereotype which society or the media has taught us about what's masculine and what's feminine but in the small yet very real characteristics of individual people—the way they wear their hair, how they relate to others, things they like to do, clothes they buy. These characteristics are as varied and complex as individuals are. At the same time, it cannot be denied that most people tend toward a masculine or feminine identity based on similar characteristics. As the tutor above said, "It's partly about gender, yes, but that's not all of it."

There are plenty of research studies showing examples of gender bias that seem to favor males over females right from birth. According to a recent article, in one study researchers examined greeting cards that people send to congratulate parents on the birth of a new baby. They found that more female babies are pictured sleeping or still, and more male babies are shown to be actively playing. According to the researchers, this is consistent with the gender schema in our society where females are considered passive and males active. In another study, a group of college students was shown a videotape of a crying baby. Some were told the baby was male and others were told it was female. Those who were told it was male labeled the baby as angrier than those who were told it was female (Valian 19).

These studies show that people operate with certain ideas about males and females, yet the findings are open to some interpretation. How strong is the influence of this gender schema on the thoughts we have about individuals? What does a person have to do to overcome it? These are important questions in the writing center, and they need to be talked about in relation to the actual day-to-day experiences that tutors have. It is not enough just to read about gender research. A writing center is its own research site, and tutors need to create their own understandings about the basis for notions of gender.

Does Gender Make a Difference?

The core, primary responsibility of any writing center, Muriel Harris writes, is working one-to-one with writers. "When meeting with tutors, writers gain kinds of knowledge about their writing and about themselves that are not possible in other institutionalized settings" (27). In other words, there is a unique intensity about interpersonal communication. It opens us up to others like nothing else.

As writing center people, what interested us most about gender was its possible effect on tutoring. Imagine that you are a fly on the wall watching all of the tutorial sessions in the writing center. What differences would you see in male-male tutorials vs. male-female tutorials? Does the gender of the participants influence the amount of talking, or who does the talking? Does it affect whether or how the tutor gives advice? How the writer responds to advice? The way they sit, or hold their heads? Does it make a difference in the way they feel when they have to scoot closer to read something together?

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When we posed these questions in a staff meeting, not every tutor in our writing center felt that gender makes a significant difference in the session, and those who did wondered whether the others were really being honest with themselves! And there you had it—the suspicion that surrounds this sensitive topic can hinder even an attempt to conduct research on it. Keeping in mind Harris's observation that tutorial interactions are about gaining knowledge, not drawing conclusions, we tried to remain open to any possibility. So we agreed to consider the idea that just because someone may be aware of gender does not necessarily mean they are behaving differently as a result.

How can such an idea be investigated? One way to examine issues of gender and communication as they relate to the work of tutors and writing centers is to consider what two popular authors have written on the subject. Deborah Tannen, author of several books on the subject including *You Just Don't Understand* and *Talking from 9 to 5*, has some of the best research and perhaps the most widely known scholarly reputation in this area. A more popular author is John Gray, author of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, a writer who does not have Tannen's research background but who has influenced popular notions about gender differences. Each writer deals with gender in a different way, and one that is relevant for the research we undertook.

Two Perspectives

Deborah Tannen is a linguist, and her approach reflects this fact. She believes that communication is a kind of ritual. Men and women talk the way they do because they have been taught, one generation to the next, to talk that way. For example, Tannen says that a common male conversational style is to avoid the one-down position, which occurs when one participant exposes some vulnerability or weakness. Asking directions when lost is an example of placing yourself in the one-down position. Another example might be asking a tutor for help when you're "lost" on an assignment. A common female conversational style, on the other hand, is to maintain equality and avoid any obvious show of power. A wife deferring to her husband when a decision must be made is an example of this. In the writing center, it might occur when a tutor offers a suggestion and then remarks, "But that's just an idea. Feel free to ignore it if you want." In this case the tutor is trying to communicate a level of equality with the student and head off any notion that because she's the tutor he ought to do what she says. Conflicts between people of opposite gender arise, says Tannen, when they are not using the same rituals. The problem is compounded because these rituals are just about always invisible. They live in the minds of the participants at the subconscious level and rise to the surface only when they are broken in some way or deliberately made to be the focus of attention.

John Gray is a couples therapist, and his approach focuses on men's and women's underlying "needs." He claims that men need to be needed and women need to be cherished. For example, when a man discusses a problem he is having, he wants a solution. When a woman discusses a problem, she may not want a solution so much as she wants to build rapport or get emotionally closer to the person she is talking with. According to Gray, problems arise when the members of both sexes forget that the other sex has a different purpose in mind.

One obvious difference between Tannen and Gray is that Tannen focuses more on outward behaviors while Gray is more concerned with the inner being. With Tannen, it is possible to give fairly clear examples of the rituals she describes. With Gray, it is harder to identify the inner needs of a person and how these needs relate to gender. This doesn't make one author right and the other wrong. They just look at gender from opposite points of view.

Tannen and Gray represent different perspectives, and whether we believe one or the other makes a difference in how we understand a tutoring session in which communication differences based on gender arise. Tannen says that communication problems are based in conversational styles, while Gray says they are rooted in the underlying needs men and women have. For Tannen, ritual is part of culture and what we learn growing up as a male or female. If you believe Tannen, then these conversational styles are something like writing styles, suggesting that one can learn to change or revise either one. But if you believe Gray, then the communication differences are like gender itself, implying something that is deeply rooted and difficult if not impossible to overcome. As he says in the title of his book, men are from one place and women are from another, and that's the way it always will be.

And this leads to the second main point we'd like to make. Whether gender differences in tutorial interactions emanate from learned rituals or deeply felt needs, differences are something we have to deal with. A tutor who believes that gender has nothing to do with tutoring, like one who believes it has everything to do with it, are both taking an extreme view. They would probably be more effective tutors if they were open to contrary evidence and left more room for their ideas about this complex subject to grow. One of the best ways to accomplish this is through dialogue.

Nancy Grimm advocates articulating practice as an alternative to the confrontational way of approaching human difference. The word "articulate" has two meanings. It conveys the idea of speaking clearly and carefully, as well as the notion of linkage, as in an articulated set of concerns or issues.

"Articulated practice does not seek to close down understanding but to maintain openness. Systems and relationships renew themselves by incorporating differences and maintaining open-endedness" (543).

There is a female physician in rural western Pennsylvania who often makes hospital rounds to patients she is seeing for the first time. Some patients mistake her for being a nurse, even though she wears a doctor's coat, not a nurse's uniform, and has her name and M.D. degree clearly marked on her lapel. She would have good reason to protest the mistake when it happens, but instead she turns the mistake around by treating it as a compliment for nurses which she, a "mere doctor," doesn't deserve. The sentiment is genuine: she has great respect for the nurses. Something that grows out of a clear-cut case of gender bias becomes, through her outlook, not only neutralized but positive. And for patients who still don't get it, she winks at the visiting relatives, knowing they'll explain it to the patient later.

Confident in who she is, this doctor says that if a patient wants to insult her, he or she will have to find another way. She finds it is more personally rewarding to look at any interaction as having the potential for multiple interpretations, and to respond accordingly.

What Tutors Say About Gender-Based Behaviors

We wanted to investigate our topic in more ways than just reading what Tannen or Gray had to say, although they provided a start. We asked tutors in our writing center to demonstrate through role-playing "classic" male or female behaviors. The scenarios were spontaneous—no script and no rehearsal, but we did videotape them for later playback. The role-plays were exaggerations. Our purpose was to see what factors the tutors would choose to dramatize and what issues our viewing audience would identify in them. First, we offer a brief description of what happened. Then, we will talk about how others reacted when they saw the videotape of the role-plays, which went something like this:

Male tutor—Male writer:
In this scenario, two males greeted each other. "Hey, how ya doin'?" they began. They started to work without any warm-up conversation and with little exploration of the assignment. They nodded their heads at each other and said "okay" a lot. They seemed intent on getting through it and then out to play mud football.

Male tutor—Female writer:
In this scenario, the male tutor and female writer chatted briefly at first and got to work fairly quickly. The male tutor appeared to speak most by asking many questions of the female writer. She seemed slightly nervous and uncomfortable. He interrupted her twice, and the talk tended to move off-task.

Female tutor—Female writer:
Both participants said hi to each other and seemed eager to cooperate. They made frequent eye-contact, picked up on cues from the other person, and seemed to feel a need to keep the conversation going. Near the end, the writer told the tutor she got the help she wanted.

Female tutor—Male writer:
In this scenario, the male writer appeared to be less than interested in the female tutor's help. He looked at his watch and at the ceiling, and straightened his hair while the tutor tried to decipher his handwriting.

We showed these videotaped sessions to our own staff and in our conference presentation at the East Central Writing Centers Association in Pittsburgh in 1997. While these were fictional, they created the opportunity for critical perspectives on issues of gender by using the tutorial context tutors are most familiar with. As Nancy Grimm points out, it is not easy for writing centers to attain levels of critical discourse because they are limited by the language of power, and yet these limitations can be overcome when tutors can draw their language from the plentiful concrete cases that occur in the writing center (541).

In our conference session, which was attended by 43 people, an overwhelming majority agreed that gender influences tutoring sessions. Some felt that its effects were inescapable. Others felt that while gender does affect tutorials, these effects can be overcome with knowledge and awareness. Perhaps the most telling sign was that when members of the audience raised their hands in response to the question, "How many of you feel that gender influences tutoring sessions?" nearly everyone wanted to explain their answer.

Responses to the videos presented an opportunity. Viewers pointed out that both participants were responsible for a tutoring session and that the tutor, in particular, can at any point try to change the direction of a session that is not going well. This was a point that viewers of the videotape made in various ways. In the first scenario, for example, the male tutor was faulted for allowing the session to become perfunctory. Even if the male writer just wanted to get through it, they pointed out, the tutor should have told the writer that it would take time and they couldn't rush through things. In the scenario between the male writer and the female tutor, they felt that the tutor needed to let the writer know that he needed to be more engaged if he wanted her to help him. And in the session between two females, viewers felt that both participants needed to slow down, relax, and try to have a more meaningful conversation about the paper.

What is interesting about these responses is that the tutor audience responded to the videos in ways that showed they felt that what the participants said or did as tutors was more important than the gender-based communication characteristics being displayed. Time and again, members of the tutor audience pointed out that each person in a tutoring session is free to say or do what he or she wants, including the tutor's prerogative to refuse to tutor someone who is behaving inappropriately.

Our third main point grows directly out of this, and it is that understanding confers the power to accept some things and to change others, and this acceptance or change can be done confidently and without feeling a loss of self or control. If tutors learn anything in the course of their training in the writing center, it is that one always has the power to change the status quo in a communicative event. And where possible, they can teach writers the same lesson if given the opportunity.

An Informal Survey

Some people believe women are more talkative than men. Men are thought to be more interested in competition, while women are more interested in personal relationships. These are common stereotypes, and they were among the first to be mentioned when we asked our own staff to name differences people typically associate with men and women. Then, for a one-month period in our writing center, we surveyed tutors and students from 41 tutoring sessions on several points related to gender and its consequences for tutoring. The survey was based on notions about males and females. One question asked who did most of the talking during the session. In 71% of the responses, the tutor—whether male or female—was identified by both tutors and students as the one who did most of the talking. We also asked participants to characterize the tutor-writer relationship in their session as being personal, professional, or competitive. A majority of respondents said it was professional; in female-female sessions, 29% of respondents said that it was personal.

Finally, we asked writers and tutors two questions that were designed to phrase the question as directly as possible: (1) Does it matter whether the other person is of the same or opposite gender in the tutoring session? A majority of both writers (62%) and tutors (74%) indicated that it does not. (2) Would the tutoring session you just finished have been different if the other person had been of the same gender, the opposite gender, or a different tutor/writer. Eighty-six percent of respondents (both tutors and students) said the session would have been different with a different tutor or writer. Respondents were about evenly divided on whether a change of gender would have made a difference.

In a recently published adaptation from her latest book, *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue*, Deborah Tannen says that we live in an argument culture that puts us in an adversarial frame of mind. Ideas are cast in terms of for or against, and every issue has two and only two sides. Even the metaphors we use to talk about issues are posed as battles: the war on drugs, the war on cancer, politicians' turf battles, and the battle of the sexes. Tannen believes that the argument culture affects our lives in specific ways. It makes people distort facts by focusing attention more on the conflict than anything else, it makes people waste time by mixing up priorities, it limits thinking with military metaphors that skew the way we perceive a problem, and it encourages lying by forcing people into extreme positions they feel compelled to defend.

This is often what happens to the issue of gender, and one reason why we believe that tutors need to find non-adversarial ways to talk about it. One-to-one communication is too important for the topic of gender to be left to the tabloids and Howard Stern.

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Certifying a peer tutor program

One of the most rewarding aspects of directing a writing center is working with peer tutors. Close to 200 students have tutored in our Johnson County Community College Writing Center during my 18 years as a director there. We have been incredibly lucky in that nearly all of those students have been outstanding tutors and have helped thousands of students become more confident, skilled writers. I like to believe that our tutor program is the reason for our success.

The rationale for hiring peer tutors requires first a definition of the name. Peer, of course, means equal and implies that the students are all on the same level. Equality may, in turn, imply that the peer tutors lack knowledge (theory) and experience, causing concern from instructors outside of the writing center community. However, this inference is not completely true because our tutors must prove a level of writing expertise that many of our tutees do not have. We select the tutors on the basis of recommendations from their freshman composition instructors and a written exam. Furthermore, we have found that tutees like the idea of working with a peer, someone who has recently written similar assignments, experienced classroom and instructor conflicts, and definitely has a student viewpoint and speaks the same language. Peer tutors may (in the tutee's eyes) be more empathetic to student concerns, having been there themselves, than the Writing Center instructors who sometimes tend to be authoritative, even pedantic. Still, even though we understand these positive views of peer tutors, the concerns remain: Are the peer tutors skilled enough to truly help our students with their writing problems? How can the tutors be trained adequately before actually working with students? In a community college where students are enrolled for only two to three years, is the training investment worth the hassle?

Universities and colleges combat their concerns by hiring graduate students for their centers; others, community colleges included, may employ professional tutors from the community. Still others place their composition instructors as the sole staff in their centers.

I think these centers are denying a wonderful resource by not hiring peer tutors. Peer tutors help create the comfort level of our center. They work well with students at all levels; they are creative, energetic, and fun. Furthermore, what they gain in confidence—in their own writing improvement and other communication skills—is immense. Many of these students change their major and become teachers; all are provided with new opportunities. That fact, in itself, makes the investment in peer tutors worthwhile. We have helped place some of our tutors in writing centers at their chosen transfer university or college. One such student recently visited us while on vacation, and she excitedly related to us her "new" writing center experiences and how working at the center has smoothed her transition to the four-year college.

From the beginning, we have known that any training program for our tutors would have to be on-going during their employment. We did not have the option to require a class for several reasons: one, our students do not want to take courses that do not transfer or apply toward the Applied Arts Degree or a career program certificate; second, our selection criteria includes certain prerequisites for the tutor position which precludes a time factor; and third, the financial aspect must be considered for the student who would rather be paid than pay-out and from the college's view of cost-effectiveness (instructor/student ratio).

Since the selection process is key to our program, we set high expectations. We solicit our tutor pool from our Composition 122 (second semester freshman composition) and upper level English courses so that our students must have completed the JCCC composition program. We prefer that the prospective tutors have attended JCCC for their composition because our English Department instructors are very consistent in their teaching philosophy, in that they teach writing as a process, that collaboration and peer review are important to the process, and that the Writing Center supports the process stages. Instructors recommend for application students to apply who not only excel in their writing ability but also in their peer reviewing skills. Our tutors, then, are familiar with the English Department standards and objectives, definitely a plus. The fact that our instructors have a say in who works in the Writing Center gives them some ownership in the quality of the center.

To best address any other concerns that instructors and administrators might have about the competence of peer tutors, a strong training program must be in place. Furthermore, if that program is certified by a national organization, the credibility issue becomes practically nonexistent.

Several years ago when I was on sabbatical leave to research tutor training and then develop our own program, I read in the literature about the College Reading and Learning Association's

tutor certification. At that time I could find no evidence of any community college writing centers certifying their tutors when I surveyed twenty-two league colleges (all members of the League for Innovation in Community Colleges, which is a prestigious organization of community colleges). However, some colleges and universities had certified programs for their writing centers: the University of Wisconsin, College of Charleston in South Carolina, to name several. Thus, I included the CRLA program in my study and noted that it might be adaptable to our center. Several years later I attended a CRLA conference where I participated in a session about tutor certification. Next, I enrolled in the training workshop, bought the certification booklet, gathered the application forms and directions, and began applying the outline to our newly developed tutor program. Our first group of tutors was certified by CRLA in 1993.

CRLA suggests the general topics that should be included in the program applying for certification. We discovered we already covered many of the topics, such as learning styles, tutor etiquette and procedure, and questioning strategies. Because tutoring writing has specific needs, we revised and added to the list. Briefly, I will discuss some of the theories and rationale for the various categories of our training and some of the specific elements and strategies in each, and include some of the resources which serve as a base for our tutoring rationale. The amount of training hours for each component designates the level of certification.

Orientation to the college and to the writing center are included in the initial training which is eight hours of the program and precedes any actual tutoring. The college's mission, especially how the community college philosophy embraces the community with a service-oriented, open-door policy, is connected to the writing center mission which is to serve students at all levels of writing expertise in a supportive environment. We apply good customer service to writing center policy. We also describe the college community and its culture, explaining how the tutors work as employees within that community and what other student services are available to students. An orientation guest speaker list includes the college's American Disabilities Act administrator, the counselors for special services, the sexual harassment officer, and a member from our security force. The initial training also includes general procedural information such as scheduling, attendance, and rules and responsibilities. We model by role-playing the proper process for record-keeping, and greeting and meeting new students coming to the Center. *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, edited by Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood, is another excellent resource which we give each of the tutors soon after they are hired. This booklet contains pertinent essays that connect theory to practice and provide groundwork for future tutor sessions.

The profile of the community college student provides the basis for the next component of tutor training: the general methodology and elements of tutoring. After discussing the demographics of our students (traditional and non-traditional, non-native, learning disabled, and physically impaired), we bring in a learning styles specialist who gives the tutors a learning style inventory (McCarthy/Kolb) and explains various strategies for working with a variety of learning styles, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile. We have added to this discussion some background on brain research to include the multi-sensory approach to learning and left brain/right brain study. We apply some of this theory to the strategies and techniques of tutoring. We talk about active learning, critical thinking, affective and cognitive domains of learning, and the role of the writing center tutor. We review Bloom's taxonomy emphasizing evaluation and application. Also, included in this component of the tutor training is enhancement of communication skills. We ask one of our speech instructors to give a workshop on listening and non-verbal communication. Then we look at specific strategies to enhance those communication skills.

Numerous sessions allow the tutors opportunities to model a variety of strategies for working with students. Videotapes from the University of California at L.A. provide overviews for discussion. We especially use one-on-one questioning techniques based on Aristotelian dialogue. We practice using probing questions and then the six-step process outlined in the *Bedford Guide for Tutors* by Leigh Ryan: reader reaction, request for more information, clarification, critical awareness, refocusing, and prompting (20-22). We talk about paraphrasing a student's ideas, the rule of no writing on a student's paper, and the hierarchy of concerns which is an inverted triangle moving from the assignment's goals to organization to development to paragraphing to sentences to word choice. We discuss the no-proofreading rule and what that means, and we suggest ways to help students become better proofreaders of their own work. We emphasize that the role of the tutor is to build confidence and independence in the tutee. Other strategies and views we discuss are based on Kenneth Bruffee's three kinds of response reading: descriptive, evaluative, and substantive (76-80); the six-trait analytical model designed by Vicki Spanel and Ruth Culham at the Center for Classroom Assessment in 1992; various observations about revision, such as Donald Murray's internal and external revision (56-60), Nancy Sommers' revision strategies of student writers (121-124), and global revision; the writing process with stress on prewriting and revising. (Note the resources at the end of this essay.) In each of these sessions we allow the tutors time to talk about their experiences, so we can apply the methodology to the reality of tutoring. Ethics issues, problematic students, and discipline-specific questions can all be addressed.

Although I do not want to use this essay to discuss tutor training strategies and activities, I do want to mention an article published in the December, 1996, *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Roger Munger, Ilene Rubenstein, and Edna Burow apply Bloom's taxonomy to a hierarchy of training activities. In the article they connect tutor observation to the first two levels of the classification, knowledge and comprehension; interaction is connected to application and analysis; reflection involves tutor synthesis and evaluation. Applying their theory to our program, I see the tutor videotapes, the guest speakers, and the tutor notebook and other reading material as the knowledge and comprehension levels. The tutors then interact with one another and with the tutees applying the learned information to the tutoring sessions and connecting appropriate resources to student needs. Finally, as the tutors reflect and discuss their tutoring experiences in the tutor meetings they compare and share useful tutoring techniques. Ever-evolving, the taxonomy shifts from a hierarchical to recursive stance.

The third component of the tutor training program includes the resources of the Writing Center. We demonstrate the computer software programs, talking about when and how to use the computer-assisted instruction as an enhancement to the tutoring sessions. We look at the handouts, models of assignments, instructor files, reference books, and the Internet with its many WEB sites as all possible resources for the tutor. We emphasize the people who work in the Center as the best resource. We have developed catalogs and inventories to help the tutors best learn what the resources are, how to use them, and in what instances to use them. As Martha Maxwell features in her source book *Evaluating Academic Skills Programs* (1991), case studies become a model for the training with resources. She stresses the importance of collecting qualitative evidence along with the quantitative information to measure success and improve programs. Writing Center stories are the basis for tutor discussions.

Additional components of our tutor program help add to that credibility of the Writing Center and its staff and are included in our certification components even though they are not required. We produce a newsletter each semester. Each tutor must write at least one article which is writing-related for the newsletter. We plan and participate in a community service project, which for the past several years has been collecting books for homeless and foster children, providing a holiday party on campus for the children, and entertaining and caring for the children during the party. Last year we had one hundred fifty children; this year we are expecting two hundred. The project is coordinated with the JCCC Organization of Black Collegians. Finally, the last component is the tutor training notebook which is a compilation of our writing center history, philosophy, and methodology. The notebook is a three-ring loose leaf notebook so that it can be individualized/personalized for the tutors each semester. As we change, add, or delete training information, the notebook changes.

Corresponding with the training workshops is the on-going evaluation. Based on Maxwell's research on assessment and evaluation, Janice Neuleib's suggestions on evaluation (Harris 227) and the numerous evaluation samples found in Muriel Harris' *Tutoring Writing*, the Cambridge Stratford Study Skills Institute *Tutor Evaluation and Self-Assessment Tool*, and Reigstad and McAndrew's NCTE report, *Training Tutors for Writing Conference*, we developed a self- assessment and evaluation tool. Each semester tutors fill out the assessment, and then, I conference with each showing them my evaluation of their tutoring skills. To document my assessment, I sit in on tutor sessions, observe behavior and attitude throughout the semester, and frequently dialog with the tutors at meetings and during light times in the Center.

Equally important to the tutor training program, although not part of the certification, are the opportunities to socialize. We, like many centers, emphasize food. Food assures attendance and, of course, so does pay. Thus, all meetings have food, and the tutors are paid. We, also, have special opportunities for the staff to socialize, usually away from school. These opportunities further strengthen us as a community, a family, and a team.

What I have outlined is covered in a year's time. Our initial training begins with a get-acquainted session in the spring when the tutors are hired. Before classes begin in the fall, we have a day-long orientation which includes the first component of the training: information about the college and the writing center. After that, we have a workshop/meeting every other Friday at 2:00 when the Writing Center closes for the day. The meetings usually last two hours, sometimes shorter or longer depending on the content of the workshop. As required by CRLA, this totals the minimum number of hours required for the first level of certification. Students who return for a second year of tutoring earn the second level of certification by assisting in the training, even directing some of the sessions, and mentoring the new tutors. We do not attempt the master or third level of certification because we rarely have tutors for more than two years and the level denotes a mastery of the discipline and of teaching theory and methodology which for sophomores would be difficult to attain. However, it certainly is a level desirable for professional tutors. All levels require that six criteria be reached for certification: (1) the amount and duration of tutor training, (2) the modes of training, (3) the areas or topics covered in the training, (4) the number of hours of actual tutor training, (5) tutor selection criteria, and (6) tutor evaluation criteria.

The application process requires the director of the tutor program to submit a detailed outline describing the selection and evaluation criteria and proce-

dure along with the components of the training, including content resources, methodology, and pedagogy. The outline is presented with a time schedule, similar to a course syllabus. The first year of application, if accepted, is probationary with reapplication the following year which, if accepted, covers three years. A certificate for the program is awarded along with the official individual certificates which go to the individual tutors upon completion of the training. Our program is certified until 1998 when we will need to reapply showing any changes which have taken place during these last several years. An application fee of $50.00 must accompany the three-year tutor certification renewal. After the first three-year period, a program can apply for five-year certification.

Some colleges require tutors to register in a tutor course. For a community college where tutors are generally employed for only a year, a credit course is not a viable option. For the past several years I have run an informal survey and discovered that most of our tutors prefer attending a training program for which they are paid to taking a credit course. Unfortunately, many writing centers have no formal tutor training programs. I would like to reiterate my earlier thesis of the value of peer tutors in a writing center environment and encourage my counterparts to consider adopting a formal peer tutor program for their writing centers.

Ellen Mohr
Johnson County Community College
Overland Park, KS

Resources for a Writing Center Peer Tutor Program

(This list includes works referred to in the paper. It is not a comprehensive listof tutor training resources.)

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Two Related Issues in Peer Tutoring: Program Structure and Tutor Training." *College Composition and Communication* 31 (Feb. 1980): 76-80.

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Manger, Roger, Ilene Rubenstein and Edna Burow. "Observation, Interaction, and Reflection: The Foundation for Tutor Training." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 21.4 (Dec. 1996): 1-5.

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Murphy, Christina and Steve Sherwood. *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Reigstad, Thomas J., and Donald A. McAndrew. *Training Tutors for Writing Conferences*. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1984.

Ryan, Leigh. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Guide, 1994.

Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." *The Writing Teachers Sourcebook.* 2nd ed. Ed. Gary Tate and Edward P.J. Corbett. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. 119-127.

Spanel, Vicki and Ruth Culham. Center for Classroom Assessment. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1992. (Conference Workshop).

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"Tutor Certification." College Reading and Learning Association. 20 Feb. 1997. <http://www.chemek.cc.or.us/crla/Tutor%20Cert.html> (29 Oct. 1997).

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Wlodkowski, Raymond J. *Enhancing Adult Motivation To Learn*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.

Northeast Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
March 25, 2000
Keene, NH
Keynote: Elizabeth Bouquet

We seek proposals exploring the intellectual space of the writing center, though we welcome proposals on any topic. Proposals must contain the proposer's name, status (peer tutor, director, etc.), educational institution, telephone number and e-mail address. Include presenters' names, status, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses, type of session (interactive, workshop, panel discussion), intended audience (administrators, directors, peer or professional tutors, general), specific audio-visual needs, title of presentation, one-page description of presentation, and 75-word abstract. Proposals must be received by Dec. 1, 1999. Send four copies to: Anne Szeligowski, Gateway Community-Technical College, 60 Sargent Drive, New Haven, CT 06511. Proposals may be sent via e-mail to: ASZELIGOWS@aol.com with hard copies to follow, by fax (203-789-6976) or regular mail. Conference web site: http://www.mcp.edu/as/wc/wc.html

TUTORS' COLUMN

Thanks for not laughing

Leah wasn't a stranger to the writing center. In fact, I had come to think of her as an enthusiastic patron of our writing establishment. She started nearly every paper with a brainstorming session and religiously followed up with her first and final draft. That is—until she wrote the poem.

I arrived at the center at 7:40 on a drizzly, dark Monday morning knowing there would be a number of dedicated coffee consumers hovering about the door before our official 8:00 A.M. opening. I don't usually have eager students pursuing conferences at that time of the day. It's usually silent faculty, seeking a cup of java to jumpstart their week of academia. Leah's presence startled me. She overheard me chastising the consultants from the night before who failed to dump the dead coffee grounds left in the coffee filter. I smiled sheepishly at her and said, "You caught me having a highly confidential conversation with Mr. Coffee."

I expected Leah to playfully comment on my abnormal behavior. She surprised me by saying, "You're not the crazy one in the room, I am." I turned to find her shame-clouded eyes surveying the floor in front of her.

"That sounds like a serious statement. Are you all right, kiddo?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. I have a paper I want you to read. Well—it's not a paper, it's a poem. For one of my classes, but I don't want anyone else to read it."

"That's no problem, Leah. As soon as Crystal gets here we can go into the Lodge and work on it there." Leah's countenance brightened momentarily, and she suggested I switch the decaffeinated for the real stuff so the psychology professors would have a buzz for the entire morning. Although I was sorely tempted by the idea I refrained and filled the thermos pots with their proper brew.

After Crystal showed up, Leah and I went into the adjoining room, Leah silently closing the door behind us. I plopped down on the gold floral sofa. Leah remained standing until I suggested she sit down. She reluctantly agreed. She then reached into her back pocket with trembling hands and pulled out a folded piece of lined notebook paper. Not knowing exactly how to start the conference, I simply said, "So what can I help you with?"

"I'm supposed to write about an addiction of mine. There are no restrictions as to the genre, so I decided to write a poem."

I nodded in response, sensing a comment might cause her to shut down.

"My professor usually has some of us read our papers in class, and I guess—well, I want to know if this is something I should keep to myself?" During her statement, Leah continued folding and unfolding her paper. In all of our past conferences, Leah always felt free to have me read her papers out loud. She wasn't ready to give this one up, though, so I waited.

"I mean," Leah said, "I guess I would like to hear your opinion before I hand it in. I want to know if I sound like a sick-o or something."

Reaching over to pat her shoulder, I said, "Leah, I am not qualified to make a statement about a person's mental state. Besides, I'm the one who talks to coffee pots, remember?" My comment drew a weak smile from my friend.

"But all kidding aside, Leah, I want you to know I represent the college when I am working in the Writing Center, and I'll report any behavior I think might be illegal." Leah nodded in agreement while she continued to stare at the crumpled piece of paper in her hand. I remained silent and waited for what seemed like ten minutes before she spoke. Then she finally looked up at me and said, "I have a poem I'd like to read to you."

"Great, I'm ready to listen." In a timid voice she began to read the poem with a wealth of emotion. She never identified her addiction but referred to it as her Security Blanket. The Security Blanket provided her with a sense of safety and was a method by which she could control her world. She read of her desire to break away from its consuming comfort. When she finished reading her poem, silence once more surrounded us. Her poem had a palpable effect on me.

She whispered, "What do you think?"

I smiled and said, "Before I answer that, could you tell me what you felt when you were reading it to me?"

A knowing grin spread across her face. "I love this poem—I love it because it is my heart talking. It is the voice of the person who lives deep within me."

"When was the last time the person deep within you was able to speak?"

Leah allowed a tiny bubble of laughter to escape and said, "Very seldom." There was another pause before she asked, "Do you think counseling could help me?"

"I don't know, Leah, but I do know when I was struggling with personal issues, it sure helped me out." I watched as she once again folded up her poem and stood to leave.

"Thanks for not laughing."

"There wasn't anything to laugh about, Leah. You were sharing your heart, and I feel honored that you would let me hear it."

"Yeah, well, I need to get going, I guess I'll talk to you later."

After Leah left, I remained in the room for an extra fifteen minutes so I could calm myself down. I tried to process what had just taken place, but I couldn't take it all in at the moment. As for the poem, Leah decided to keep it to herself. She said she was beginning to understand how much writing can help a person gain self-understanding. Her decision both delights and saddens me. It delights me that Leah is able to use her poem as a catalyst for growth. It saddens me because I see it could help a lot of people who, like Leah, are trapped in an addiction. But of one thing I am certain: Leah's poem is the best thing she has ever written.

Julie Kluth
Coe College
Cedar Rapids, IA

Northern California Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
February 26th, 2000
Berkeley, California
"Writing Centers: Centers of Transformation"
keynote: Cherrie Moraga

For further information, contact Liz Keithley or Luisa Giulianetti at ncwca@uclink4.berkeley.edu. Phone (510) 643-7442; http://slc.berkeley.edu. We will be putting up a web page for the conference with a way to submit proposals on-line. Deadline for proposals: December 3rd, 1999.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

November 5-6: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in San Bernardino, CA
Contact: Carol Peterson Haviland, English Dept., California State University, San Bernardino, 5500 Univ. Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407; phone: 909- 880 5833; fax: 909-880-7086; cph@csusb.edu

February 3-5: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Savannah, GA
Contact: Christina Van Dyke, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy, Armstrong Atlantic State University, 11935 Abercorn St., Savannah, GA 31419-1997; phone: 912-921-2330; fax: 912-927-5399; vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu

February 26: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Berkeley, CA
Contact: Liz Keithley or Luisa Giulianetti at ncwca@uclink4.berkeley.edu. Phone (510) 643-7442; http://slc.berkeley.edu

March 24-25: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Fort Worth, TX
Contact: Jeanette Harris (j.harris@tcu.edu), Texas Christian University or Lady Falls Brown (L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu) Texas Tech University.

March 25: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Keene, NH
Contact: Anne Szeligowski, Gateway Community-Technical College, 60 Sargent Drive, New Haven, CT 06511. E-mail ASZELIGOWS@aol.com; fax: 203-789-6976. Conference web site: http://www.mcp.edu/as/wc/wc.html

March 30: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI
Contact: J. Pennington. Conference website: http://www.lansing.cc.mi.us/~penningj/ecwca2000.htm

November 2-4, 2000. National Writing Centers Association in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Assocation, in Baltimore, MD

NWCA News from Eric Hobson, President

As NWCA President I field phone calls, e-mails, and letter from colleagues across North America and the world wanting to know how to do this or that, where to turn to for X, and how to establish/save/remodel/relocate/budget/staff/upholster a writing center. Likewise, as a semi- participant on several writing center, composition, and faculty development electronic bulletin boards, I observe a continuous stream of queries on issues large and small, many of which reappear with tidal regularity. Admittedly, some of the requests that make it my way become monotonous and are answered with less vigor than they should be, given my position as an official representative of the community. On the whole, however, I am left wondering if in the world of computer mediated, ongoing, twenty-four hour a day "conversations," anyone researches the questions they ask before they go online or to the phone to ask someone else about what to do?

Several recent events lead me to my current soapbox, not the least of which is the recognition that as this is my last month to write the NWCA News column (I soon hand the President's gavel to Michael Pemberton), I am about to lose my bully pulpit. My concern focuses on the habit I witness across the writing center community to rush into both conversations (particularly online) and action without pausing and assessing the situation and alternatives. I am often struck by the image of the writing center community running pell-mell, reacting to current events and moving almost immediately on to other topics rather than trying to ascertain if and how these ideas and activities might fit into a larger history, what cycles that history might contain, and what has been learned and recorded in the aftermath of previous events.

As an active academic community, the writing center community has a wealth of readily available resources that deserve the careful consideration of those of us wondering about how to approach the tasks facing us in our home setting. There is very little new under the writing center sun (paradigmatically speaking), and thus there is much sage advice to be had with relatively little leg work. While dropping a call for advice onto a listserv can generate numerous and immediate responses, I would like to remind us all of several salient facts about these responses, facts that might (possibly, should) temper our seemingly growing (co-)dependence on responses in twenty minutes, or fewer:

1) Most of the material/advice that we can elicit from electronic discussion lists and over the telephone is decidedly first draft; it is reactive, and offered with very little reflection. Given that many of us respond to e-mail in the ten minutes available between other, pressing engagements, careful consideration of the request's nuances, contemplation of the issue, and hypothesis testing and revision is atypical. Ironically, much of the advice facilitated by the immediacy of e-mail, telephones and fax machines is of a genre we do not accept from our students as credible.

2) Most of the advice/material generated online and over the phone is both decidedly anecdotal and context specific. Working off-the-cuff as we typically do in these media, we resort to narrative structures that find their most convenient illustrations and frames of reference in our immediate, localized, and idiosyncratic contexts. Put simply, most of these messages are writer-based, not reader-based. Because of the many gaps that exist in hurriedly inscribed texts (scripted or oral) one is unlikely to get the detail needed to place that information within its home context with enough vertical and horizontal positioning to offer the hope of useful transferability.

3) Little, if any, of the material undergoes careful third-party scrutiny and adjudication (e.g., peer review); therefore, what the responses we receive to our queries make up for in immediacy and empathy, they lack in credibility, methodological consistency, and academic currency afforded to that gold standard known as "intellectual rigor." Well-intentioned doesn't necessarily equal applicable.

Three years ago Christina Murphy, Joe Law and Steve Sherwood gave the writing center community a gift with the publication of *Writing Centers: An Annotated Bibliography* (Greenwood, 1996), their comprehensive review of one hundred years worth of writing center(ish) literature. Likewise, *The Writing Center Resource Manual* (NWCA Press, 1998), is a veritable treasure trove of advice, strategy, and "how to" crafted to the needs of novice and experienced writing center administrators. These resources now sit alongside fifteen to twenty previously published books about writing centers that cover a wide range of topics. *Writing Centers in Context* (NCTE, 1993), for example, introduces its readers to the physical and administrative look and feel of writing centers in various settings serving various missions. Add to these sources a working knowledge of the information available via the ERIC database and the annual CCCC bibliographies, and one is likely to be able to find answers to most questions about writing centers and the decidedly quirky realities they occupy. For a mere $35.00 per year,

NWCA membership brings the *Writing Center Journal*, *Writing Lab Newsletter*, and the *NWCA Newsletter*, all of which are designed to provide readers carefully constructed, up-to-date summary, analysis, and critiques of writing center history, theory, and practice.

To assuage any guilt I feel at not giving a thoughtful reply to another query along the lines of what forms to use in a writing center, I now tell everyone upfront that the best advice I can give them is to start working on the issue plaguing their thoughts at the moment by investing wisely in the building of the library they need to support their ongoing writing center administrative activity. Then I give my annotated "must have" list, which includes the resources listed above, and try to make it clear that although I will be glad to help them out in whatever way I can, I doubt that what I offer them over the phone or via e-mail will compare to the collective wisdom that writing centers have amassed over the past thirty-plus years.

A social-work model for writing centers

A model for social work, a "solution-building" model that shares fundamental assumptions and goals of writing centers, offers training tools and systematic interviewing procedures that may help us to better accomplish our goals.

This social-work model is articulated in a new book by Insoo Kim Berg and Peter DeJong (*Interviewing for Solutions*, Brooks/Cole, 1997); it is also being developed in other venues—Berg, for example, has recently been granted a three-year government contract to retrain social workers in the new interviewing strategies. The model stands on two assumptions that it shares with current writing center theory and practice: (1) social-work clients know more about their problems than do their social workers, and (2) those clients know more about their problems than they realize they know. Consequently, the task of the social worker is not to diagnose and prescribe cures for clients' problems (the medical, problem-solving model that has long guided social-work practice). Rather, the social worker elicits clients' active participation in "building solutions" for themselves.

These two assumptions are already widely accepted among those who work in writing centers[1], and principles of non-directive tutoring have long been a focus of the training in our writing center. But our tutors, especially when facing students who seem unwilling to work collaboratively, often fall back on instincts that drive them to prescribe cures for students' rhetorical ailments. The strategies of Berg and DeJong's social-work model grow out of years of inductive studies, and their model suggests a methodology that writing center staff can use to shape their instincts to the dynamics of collaborative learning. What follows is a sketch of the model and our experiments with it.

General strategies and questions

In general, the model proceeds through five steps; the bulleted items under each step exemplify the kinds of interviewing strategies used. Although the strategies of the solution-building model can be used in brief sessions, the model presumes multiple meetings. (Knowing this will help to make sense of the following description.)

1. *Describing problems*: the goal is to get clients to describe, in detail, their problems.
   - The "not-knowing" posture—interviewers must ask questions as if they know nothing about a client's problems.
   - Echoing key words—simply repeating a client's words will usually elicit elaboration.

2. *Developing goals*: with a description of problems on the table, interviewers encourage clients to develop concrete, realistic goals for solving their problems.
   - The "miracle question"—"If a miracle were to happen while you sleep tonight (the miracle being that all your problems were solved), what specific differences would you notice in the morning that would tell you the miracle had occurred?" This question (about which whole seminars are now being held) asks clients to focus on concrete changes that they want to establish as goals.
   - The vacation planning metaphor—if clients think of solution-building as going on a trip, they can ask what's at their destination that they want, again voicing goals.

3. *Exploring for exceptions:* recognizing times at which problems were nonexistent or less severe can open possibilities for constructing solutions.
   - Scaling questions—asking questions such as "On a scale of one to ten, how bad is your problem now? How bad was it before you came in?" helps draw clients toward recognizing exceptions.
   - The vacation planning metaphor—as a follow-up question to "What's there that you want?" ask "How do you get there?"
   - The who, what, when, and where of exceptions—interviewers should encourage clients to specify as much as possible about each exception, which may enable clients to realize what they can do to repeat the exception.

4. *Devising feedback*: in addition to reinforcing ideas or summarizing the content of a session, feedback can suggest tasks for clients to complete on their own.
   - Compliments—vocal applause, even for the smallest thing,

sharpens clients' focus on their strengths.

- "Bridges"—these are comments that connect a compliment to a task, e.g., "Because you are clearly able to build a good outline, let me suggest that you ___ before our next meeting."
- Tasks—these may be observational or behavioral, depending on the working relationship between client and interviewer (examples appear in the next section——"Types of Clients").

5. *Measuring progress*: measurement allows clients to evaluate successes, and it encourages continued work on solutions.

- Recognizing progress—assessment begins with recognizing progress, focusing on clients' successes and strengths.
- Scaling questions—in the same way scaling questions illuminate exceptions, questions such as "What happened to allow you to move up a point on your assessment scale, and what could you do to move up another point?" can shed light on progress.
- "What's better?" questions—these are simpler versions of scaling questions, asking clients to identify an area in which something is better than it used to be.

The stages above indicate that this model anticipates a patient, often lengthy, process. In writing center work, a strong point of such a process is that it emphasizes long-term improvements more than improvements on a single paper.

Types of clients

In addition to the techniques outlined above, the model suggests specific approaches to different kinds of clients. The staff of our center became interested in this model when we were discussing some especially difficult kinds of students who visit our writing center. The model attracted us because we had to admit that we sometimes fall back on instincts that grow out of a need to provide expertise or to escape trouble. When we asked each other what we do when, for example, a student comes in spitting venom, we swallowed our pride, regurgitated our shame, and admitted that we might:

- read the paper, decide how it might be "fixed," and start outlining a new organization for the student—tutor as divine physician;
- retreat to the relative safety of grammar and mechanics, plodding through obvious sentence-level errors and ignoring more significant global problems—tutor as coward;
- point out problems and tell students that they simply must come up with their own solutions—tutor as tough lover;
- attack selectively, "fighting the battles you can win"—tutor as military strategist.

As we practiced working with the solution-building model, we developed a greater commitment to avoiding these negative responses and more confidence that we could work w*ith* even the most resistant students.

Two particular types of difficult clients in our writing center—students who are forced to come to the center even though they do not believe they need help and those who know they have problems but tend to blame them on bad teachers and assignments—are essentially the same as those that Berg and DeJong identify as "visitors" and "complainants."

V*isitors.* These are people who are not willing or able to identify their problems; typically, they have been coerced into visiting a social worker or writing center, and they can be reluctant or even hostile. To begin working with such individuals, Berg and DeJong suggest paying attention to their perceptions of themselves, their circumstances, and what they want (e.g., ask questions such as "What would it take to get what you want?" or "What will your teacher say has to happen for you to get what you want?"). These people should then be held accountable for their perceptions; in other words, if a student disagrees with his teacher's suggestion that his organization needs revision, he may say something like, "I'd be better off if I didn't think about organization at all"; the tutor might then ask, "What tells you that you'd be better off by doing that?" The question does not challenge the student's perception of the truth; rather, it asks the student to project the consequences of believing what he or she claims to believe. Tutors should not assign tasks to work on before the next tutoring session until student and tutor can jointly identify a problem. The tutor can only listen carefully, respect the student's perceptions, and offer compliments when possible.

C*omplainants.* "Complainants" may recognize problems in their writing, but they do not see a role for themselves in building solutions because the problems come from outside themselves (e.g., "My teacher's expectations are unreasonable." "My teacher is unclear." "My teacher doesn't like me." "The assignment is stupid."). Once again tutors must respect students' perceptions, but they should also try to shift the focus from the things that students blame for their problems to possible actions that students might take to effect positive change, such as getting a clearer idea of the assignment from a teacher. When students recognize their problems, tutors can suggest observational tasks. These tasks should focus on positives, on exceptions to the problems that normally exist (e.g., "During this week try to identify a time when the problem is better or worse than it is now").

Eventually, any student can move into the category of "Customer"—those people who realize that they need to help in both identifying their problems and constructing solutions. They have often given thought to what they need to work on before coming to a session, they participate in the work of the session, and they can be given behavioral tasks (e.g., to practice strategies to achieve the goals the student has defined).

The model at work in the writing center

The two transcripts included below demonstrate our attempts to use solution-

building techniques. The student in the first example came to the writing center dripping visual and verbal signs that she was not happy about being there; she seemed both angry and defeated.

Joel (the tutor): "What would you like to work on today?"

Karen: "I'm just a bad writer."

Joel (echoing Karen): "You're just a bad writer?"

Karen: "Well, yeah, like the organization—I just don't know how to organize it."

Joel (echoing): "You don't know how to organize it?"

Karen: "Yeah, I just kinda threw all my stuff into it—I didn't put it into any kind of order."

Instead of reading the paper and telling Karen that she need to work on organization, Joel let Karen direct the agenda for the session. Instead of challenging Karen's perceptions of her poor writing skills, Joel's echoes led her to explain what evidence she had for believing she was a poor writer. That made her focus on organization. She could then work with Joel to identify what she called "any kind of order," which in turn led to her thinking about options for reordering.

This next session also started with signs of ill-will, directed toward the student's teacher, who had commented on a draft and assigned a visit to the writing center as penance; the student made it clear that he thought the session would be a waste of his time.

Becky (the tutor): "Ok, what exactly would you like to work on today?"

Tom: "Well, I don't know."

Becky: "Well, do you have an assignment with you?"

Tom: "No, but we basically had to write a research paper about education at the college level."

Becky: "So what did you write about?"

Tom: "Teacher motivation."

Becky: "Well, your professor commented here that you needed more paragraph development; do you know what she means?"

Tom: "No."

Becky: "What do you think she might mean?"

Tom: "I don't know—maybe to make my paragraphs longer?"

Becky: "How might you make the paragraphs longer?"

Tom: "I don't know—maybe by giving more examples."

Becky: "That's a good idea. Let's see what we can do with this paragraph."

(After several minutes of generating ideas for examples, Tom changed the subject.)

Tom: "Maybe we could work on the other comment my teacher had about making the paper more lively."

Becky: "Ok, how do you think you could make the paper more lively?"

Tom: "I don't know."

Becky: "Well, when is the paper due?"

Tom: "Tomorrow at noon."

Becky: "Well, if you woke up tomorrow morning and a miracle had happened, making your paper more lively, what would be the first thing you saw that would tell you that your paper was more lively?"

Tom: "I don't know . . . maybe more lively words."

Becky: "Ok—good. Would there be anything else?"

Tom: "Maybe some exciting examples?"

Becky: "Ok, let's work with those two ideas in your paper."

(They then worked on verb choice and concrete examples.)

The example shows how solution-building questions, including the miracle question, nudged the student to think about concrete revisions, even though the student wasn't willing to do so at the outset.

Limitations and possibilities

Our experiments yielded cautions as well as promises. The model's use in writing centers seems to be limited in a number of ways:

- The process can seem too scripted, too artificial. It takes a lot of practice to make the method instinctive.
- The model seemed to be especially good for beginning sessions and for work on global matters (e.g., focus and organization), but making transitions to concrete work, on individual paragraphs, sentences, etc., could be awkward.
- The model requires patient questioning, and that takes time; while giving students room to build their own solutions, 30- or even 60-minute sessions can fly by, and students may leave with the feeling that they have not accomplished much.
- The method raises the stakes for students; they quickly see that their answers indicate the need for major revisions, and they may unexpectedly retreat. One student began a session with a clearly cooperative spirit, but five minutes later realized, as the tutor later said, that "he needed to have a point"; he refused to answer the tutor's next question and instead said, "Please just read my paper."
- We wonder if students will come back to the writing center if we typically give them long-term rather than immediate help. Solution-building makes them work to teach themselves lessons that will improve their writing, but they may not leave a session with a polished paper. A recent cartoon in the *New Yorker* pictures a lifeguard passively sitting on his perch reading a book while a person is drowning; people on the beach look at the lifeguard as if to ask why he's doing nothing. His

response: "We're encouraging people to become involved in their own rescue." Sometimes our students may feel that they are sinking while we are asking miracle questions.

- The most serious difference between the model's use in social work and in writing center work is that writing center staffers cannot always adopt a "not knowing" posture. Often we do know more than the students we help. In one session a tutor spent ten minutes trying to encourage a student to understand why he might choose active rather than passive voice before realizing that the student had no idea what active or passive voice is. We in writing centers have so sanctified the concept of ownership that we sometimes forget to ask w*hat* our students actually own. They do not own their grammar and punctuation rules, disciplinary traditions, or teacher's requirements; and if we possess such knowledge, we are responsible for sharing it.

Despite the limitations of the model we have been pleased with its results, and we will continue to use Berg and DeJong's book in our training. We began our study of the social-work model assuming that it would help us with difficult types of students—"visitors" and "complainants." As it turned out, however, we learned the model's usefulness for all students, and our most serious students were especially positive in their responses. Furthermore, our most skeptical tutors—those who thought the model oozed too much touchy-feely psycho-babble—became the model's strongest advocates. As they became more comfortable using the model, they realized that it made them more flexible, less scripted, and more likely to listen carefully and work with individuals.

It is possible that the model was more successful at encouraging collaborative work than former training methods simply because we developed it in collaboration—our entire staff owned this entire project. But we do not believe that is the case; we believe that the model offers a harmony of principles and practices that enriches our training and practice.

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[1]See, for example, Muriel Harris's paraphrase of Charles Duke: "The role of the counselor in a nondirective conference is to allow clients to relax and talk freely about how they might solve their own problems" (*Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* [Urbana: NCTE, 1986], 70) and Kenneth Bruffee's "A good deal of learning to write . . . requires us to become actively aware of what as native speakers we already know" ("Collaborative Learning: Some Practical Models," *College English* 34 [1973], 640).

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