THE WRITING LAB
N E W S L E T T E R

– FROM THE EDITOR –

To close off this volume of the *Writing Lab Newsletter,* Barbara Kyle reflects on the cultural difficulties of a main campus writing center establishing satellite writing centers on regional campuses. Nicole Kraemer Munday and Meg Carroll review a new book of writing center scholarship on creativity and play in the writing center: *Creative Approaches to Writing Center Work.* Looking back at the principles and practices at work in medieval literature, Christopher LeCluyse notes the similarities to current writing centers, suggesting that writing center theory and practice has interesting historical connections. Kim Zabel's tutor's essay sketches for us what she learned about how cultural misunderstanding between tutor and student can derail some tutorials.

As WLN completes Volume 33. we look forward to starting up Volume 34 with the September issue. In the 2009-2010 volume (Vol. 34), you will find articles that range from discussions of podcasting, to guidelines for designing writing-across-the-curriculum guides for tutors, to a college writing center's involvement in helping to start up high school writing centers. And we will begin a new column, "Geek in the Center," written by Jackie Grutsch McKinney, who will be writing about some of the technology issues involved in writing center work. Please be sure your subscription stays current for next year so that you can read, enjoy, and learn from these and other articles and columns.

Until September, when we reconvene, I wish us a summer that's both pleasantly relaxing anad also productive.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

ℐNSIDE

THE HYBRID WRITING CENTER: COLONIZING THE REGIONAL CAMPUS

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Others came before me. Embarking from the main campus in Orlando, the University of Central Florida (UCF) first crossed the St. John's River and established a satellite campus at Brevard Community College in Cocoa, in 1968 and by 1983 had built a permanent presence. Other settlements followed, and UCF now boasts eleven colonies, or regional campuses. Back in the homeland of the main campus, writer-adventurers established the University Writing Center in 1997. They laid the groundwork for expansion of the center long before I made the crossing.

The regional campus faculty had been asking for student writing support for years, and they welcomed the main campus's 2005 introduction of KnightOWL, our online and phone consultation service, which made writing feedback available from a distance (Carpenter 10). It quickly became popular—30% of 2006 KnightOWL writers were from the regional campuses, which account for only 10% of the total student population—but students were soon calling for face-to-face sessions. In 2007, I was commissioned to start up centers on our two largest regional campuses, Daytona Beach and Cocoa, campuses we share with community colleges. The main players were ready, and the indigenous group in Cocoa—Brevard Community College (BCC)—had a ready-made

facility in the form of a writing lab that was eager to partner with us. Our destination was set, but I'd not yet realized that my compass was pointed toward Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone; I was headed toward a space that would be inhabited by campus cultures quite different from the culture of the homeland, a space that would challenge my writing center blueprint.

Pratt's contact zone, like postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha's "in-between" space (2), is the uncomfortable touch point "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 4). Because this grappling usually involves a power disparity, the idea has long resonated for writing center scholars, such as Janice Wolff, who have critiqued the idea of bringing basic writers up to academic standards (43). Whose standards, we increasingly ask, and at what cost? The contact zone I had entered raises these same questions of academic culture, but because my contact zone also lies at the intersection of two campus cultures within academia itself, and includes faculty and staff as well as students, the postcolonial cautions go beyond requesting a hearing; they demanded it.

Unaware of the cultural differences that would test our plans, we made preparations back in the Orlando metropole. We named the centers to reflect their connection with the main campus: the regional centers would be the UWC (University Writing Center) Daytona Beach and UWC Cocoa. We mapped them out on our website as Britannia mapped the Orient. I knew we'd adapt many of our procedures to unanticipated regional needs, but the basic structure and policies would be the same, and we'd share the same training and resources. Flyers and e-mails announced our arrival, and I met with local chieftains. The pre-committed site at Cocoa allowed me to imagine we'd be set up as soon as I found and trained local writing consultants.

As I prepared to build the UCF outpost within BCC Cocoa's preexisting writing lab, I found that we had differences, the community college and I. They made appointments by hand; our students self-scheduled online. They offered remedial services for underprepared undergraduate writers; we worked with dissertation writers as well as undergraduates. Their tutors were faculty; we employed peer consultants. Theirs was a quiet study room; ours was the noisy writing center. These, however, were but details, and our first meeting was encouraging. We coveted this quick start-up kit: a room already familiar to our students, most of whom had completed associate's degrees right there; a well-equipped space; an existing writing lab that promised backup consultants. BCC was happy to share their underused space in return for the upgraded university image, and they, too, were glad for the backup consultants. As we did, they refused to edit for students; like ours, their sessions were non-directive and kept the responsibility with the student. We hadn't yet worked out the size of the seam between us—would we be one writing center or two programs housed together?—but we were all confident that we spoke the same language on the essentials. They offered to convert some storage space into an office, and we talked about carpet.

Our planning of space and hours seemed to go well. We of the UWC had some particular needs, however. Because the lab was located in one of the community college buildings, not on UCF or neutral territory, we wanted to make our affiliation clear. We needed a sign—a flag—to establish our outpost on foreign turf. My BCC colleagues nodded; but in my communication back to the main campus, I recognized, for the first time, some of the implications of moving into another's space. I jokingly referred to the move as "our colonization."

After a night's sleep, my initially receptive community college colleagues caught the colonial glimmers as well as I had, and it was no joke. They were being invaded, and they balked. My regional UCF administrators startled me into awareness of the difference, also, between the first and second generation of colonists. For them, the university-community college partnership, not the connection with the main

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campus, was primary. For them, the writing center must be seamless and serve all students equally, and if that meant setting aside our online resources and building anew from local teakwood, we would build. Our name, containing "university," was out. My perspective was Orlando-think, and I was advised that what I'd been referring to as the "main campus" was merely the Orlando campus.

With different customs, chiefs, and constituencies, the campuses of my own university seemed as distant from each other as lands separated by oceans in past eras. I learned the regional language of location, but I continued to read their rejection of the "main campus" as evidence of a provincial sense of inferiority. Feeling not unlike Ben Franklin in Paris, I looked to the main campus for my grounding, and I shook my head. Is not the administrative and departmental seat of a 48,000-student university the main campus? And why were my regional administrators so willing to reject the advantages we offered?

My second regional writing center, at Daytona Beach, gave me perspective. There, the community college partnerships were not as pressing, but the language was the same, and eyebrows still rose when I, not yet having kicked the habit, mentioned the "main campus." In his study of the Spanish colonization of the Americas, Benedict Anderson observes that, as bonds with the mother country weakened through social status disparity as well as distance, Creoles began to identify with the indigenous populations and "consciously redefined their non-Spanish speaking populations as fellow nationals" (50). We did think of the new writing centers as franchises and children, and the relationship as one-directional. Our regional faculty, administration, and staff are, like the Creoles, in many ways more kin with the community colleges than they are with Orlando; their procedures and resources are localized, they share initiatives as well as space, and, for many, Orlando is only a distant administrative center. They pull for "their own," for students who had their own Student Government Associations and, in many cases, have never known Orlando. The regional campuses are their main campuses.

I did expect to encounter some differences in this indigenous student body. UCF's regional students have a profile closer to that of community college students than to those on the Orlando campus. More likely to have full-time jobs and families, only half are full-time, as compared with two-thirds of UCF's total population. Regional students are more often non-traditional—58% are over 23 and 30% are over 30, twice the all-UCF percentage. They choose from a narrower range of programs, the strongest of which are applied, career-oriented programs such as education, social work, public administration, nursing, and health administration. Only seven percent are graduate students, less than half the proportion for all-UCF. No one lives on campus (U.S. Department of Education).

While regional faculty champion their students' motivation, they're not as positive about their writing and critical thinking skills. In fact, fewer regional students—58% as compared to 68% all-UCF—use the libraries and learning labs, and they are less likely to solicit outside feedback (U.S. Department of Education). Perhaps the resources appear to them insufficient: the libraries here are smaller, and they've had no writing center until now. Perhaps they're shy or unaware. Or perhaps, as they are older and more life-experienced, they are simply more self-reliant.

> *❝ We began our expansion not only with a limited appreciation of regional differences, but also with a powerful differential and a universalizing sense of our advantages. ❞*

But like most imperialists, we tended to overlook indigenous strengths. We began our expansion not only with a limited appreciation of regional differences, but also with a power differential and a universalizing sense of our advantages. It's not much of a slide to "other" the regionals, to exacerbate the

differences and to seek to acculturate them to our "better" way. Regional campuses do try to emulate the main campus, and often find themselves coming up short, just as "othered" students attempt to assimilate. But these students' writings, as David Bartholomae notes, are often "chronicles of loss, violence, and compromise" (630). Benevolent as it was, our writing center's unintentional imperialism was bringing about the natural blowback, the unavoidable defensiveness that Bhabha sees in the glance between the settler and the native (63). Translation and rethinking became our new imperatives, and the small size of the outpost writing centers made paying close attention possible.

While I began to appreciate the intimacy of a 1,500 versus 48,000 student population, I worried about its effect on our standards for peer consultants. A small population size means a small hiring pool; and our regional students in this smaller pool also have multiple commitments and have to travel greater distances, and none of them is an English major. Being an English major is not a requirement for employment, as we seek an academically diverse staff, but diversity as necessity was another matter. In the end, the neighborliness of the small campuses resulted in faculty recommendations from an array of programs and produced excellent writing consultants. It was with these consultants, however, that the colonial inferiority complex resurfaced. They are individuals whom Bhabha calls hybrids, those who are products of, and who continue to straddle, two cultures; they live in the contact zone "in-between" academia and the working world.

The UCF consultant training program is multifaceted, and like any good Creole governor, I sent the new consultants back to the capital for their initial education. But the weekly meetings of our ongoing training—even if we'd met on the regional campuses—were not going to work for these overcommitted and geographically dispersed students. So we stepped up our online segment, a discussion board that's generally overflowing with insights. Participation was spotty, and I didn't have the depth of staff to demand it. So, I listened to them more closely. Despite our efforts to forge a connection between the campuses, the St. John's River proved just too broad: the consultants lagged in participation because they felt disconnected from the metropole.

They suggested more communication. In order to determine campus needs and satisfy indigenous rulers, I'd chosen a broad but thin schedule that first semester. The limited coverage allowed only one or two consultants to work a given shift—making them lone lookouts at the fort. I gradually realized that the arrangement crippled two of the writing center community's best training resources: the overheard session and the easy availability of others' input. My consultants were missing a support group, but they did not want to drive to Orlando, not to meet with thirty consultants they barely knew. We increased phone contact, but their online presence in our discussion board did not much improve. Split-identified hybrids that they were, they wanted connection but resisted assimilation.

Although all had found the initial Orlando training stimulating and the group supportive, the regional consultants were glad at the end of the day to return to their home campuses. Camaraderie faded over weeks of fuzzy televised meetings, and online, my group felt like outsiders. Although the UWC on the Orlando campus's fringes is hardly imposing, they'd been blinded by Paris's lights. Things were bigger there, busier, and the language was a barrier. It was more sophisticated, they admitted—even pretentious, they accused. Online discussions were conducted in the language of English majors, and they felt not only inadequate in ideas, but also intimidated lest they make a grammatical error. My dismay passed only as I recalled the two hundred years it took American writers to feel the equal of Europe's.

It was important that Franklin stayed attuned to Paris, and I'm committed to maintaining the connection across our pond. We'll keep the Orlando initiation, and we'll read the same literature. But

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while Bhabha was stimulated by London, he sniffed out Indian "street food" (x) to feel at home; the regional writing centers need to separate a bit from the old world to feel at home and become their own nations. As Pratt suggests by making her course a "safe house" where students can enjoy "mutual recognition" (17), the regional consultants and I have started our own cozy discussion forum, and we're holding separate weekly chats. Our talk is freer, and participation is up. We will take what we need of the big campus and the big writing center, but we will attend to what we need and what is working in Cocoa and Daytona Beach. Our culture-straddling is often uncomfortable, but as Pat Bizzell praises Pratt's contact zone model, the model "treats difference as an asset, not a liability" (483). The need for continual reinvention is one those assets.

Building our own nation in the contact zone, we have begun to give back. By our second semester, we'd invited speakers from regional campuses to half of our televised training seminars . The BCC-UCF center has begun a three-year information literacy collaborative project that we foresee as a model for Orlando, but I can take only partial credit, as it was initiated by a Cocoa administrator; the long-term colonists can teach much to us fresh off the boat, if we have the patience to learn the customs. Perhaps most importantly, we are helping make visible to Orlando the perspective of the transfer students who form an increasing proportion of UCF's population.

We have learned much. The early negotiations on our BCC-UCF joint writing center stalled, troubled, in part, by the language of in-between spaces, where, as Bhabha observes, "meanings and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated" (50); we grappled on signs and websites, on the equitable scheduling of our students, and on the use of peer and faculty consultants. But they also stalled because the community college came to see advantages of a non-remedial writing center separate from their remedial writing lab. I like to think that I've influenced their perspective; they have broadened mine. These are among the joys of the contact zone.

I've come to better understand the strengths of the community-embedded campuses, and to appreciate regional ownership; I've picked up the local accents and less frequently refer to a "main campus." But along with my diminished sensation of foreignness, I find increasingly an instability in my pronouns. Anderson notes that the word "we" is a critical part of the nationalistic glue (32), and I observe that my "we" and "they" fluctuate as I cross the St. John's. Pointing to this fluid identity of the hybrid, and suggesting that we all have mixed identities, Bhabha asks, "What does a working woman put first?" (42). Is it my membership within the English Department? With the regional campus? With which regional campus? My allegiances shift and my double-vision sometimes disorients, but Bhabha and Pratt help me to refocus. I, too, am hybrid; I am "we" with the many who define my role, connect with me, and to whom I have responsibilities. This hybridity, demanding self-reflection and reassessment, invigorates my commitment to academic inquiry, inquiry that rejects unsatisfactory compromises and reaches, instead, toward new solutions.

We, the community college and I, now have a new collective vision and are ready to begin our first semester in the appropriately hybrid space of the joint-use library. Wiser now, more respectful and alert, we more often recognize, anticipate, and negotiate openly when we sense cross-purposes. We are working through the details with a plethora of hybrid-generated ideas, finding solutions that will benefit our students, and learning more about who our students are. As Pratt notes, the game is not always the same for all players (13).

Anderson observes that nationalist movements have always been led by language people (74). Developing a sense of identity is one of the things a regional writing center can do in the already-hybrid and transient space of the regional campus. Our writing centers are safe houses on these

campuses where students rest briefly between their academic, family, and work commitments, places where very rough drafts are welcome, places that value half-conceived ideas and conflicting impressions. We are hubs for campus-cultural exchange; we encourage all to drop in to share our resources and conversation and to stage their own events in our in-between space. We can do things not so easily accomplished on the big campus. As we embrace our hybridity and establish our identities, as postcolonial writers have embraced and established theirs, our differences, too, will be our assets. ✦

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REVIEW OF *CREATIVE APPROACHES TO WRITING CENTER WORK.* ED. KEVIN DVORAK AND SHANTI BRUCE. CRESSKILL, NJ: HAMPTON, 2008. $27.00 (PAPER), 277 PP.

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As a longtime writing center director (Meg) and a fairly new one (Nicole), we decided to write our review of *Creative Approaches to Writing Center Work* as a reader-response journal via e-mail.

From Nicole:

I thought Elizabeth Boquet and Michele Eodice's chapter was a good way to open the book. They argue that play is a critical component to creating a learning culture, which extends many of the themes you discussed, Meg, with your co-authors in *The Everyday Writing Center (*Geller et. al.), I also saw clear connections to Andrea Lunsford's ideal of a writing center as a Burkean Parlor. One of the greatest challenges presented by Lunsford's Burkean Parlor, in my opinion, is in maintaining a collaborative approach to writing center administration. I wear so many hats as director of the Writing Center, and answer to so many stakeholders, that I often find it difficult to remember that decisions, both big and small, are best made through "conversational negotiation and collaborative decision making" (Boquet and Eodice 12) with the Writing Center staff and the writers we serve. Boquet and Eodice's chapter provides another lens for thinking about what it means to be collaborative administrators: instead of acting as conductors of bands or orchestras, we can think of ourselves as jazz musicians who look at errors as opportunities to learn (for ourselves and for those with whom we work). Just as Margaret Marshall argues elsewhere that writing center administration should be valued as an "intellectual project," this chapter makes a strong argument that it should be valued as a creative endeavor.

From Meg:

It's an ambitious project to put together a collection like this. After reading the introduction, I kept wanting to visit a coffeehouse. I thought it was pretty cool—Kevin and Shanti watching all of the different kinds of writing going on around them. Very inviting. Pieces that stick out as particularly valuable—almost touchstones to read the others by—are Boquet and Eodice's (which you've already mentioned), Harry Denny's "Writing Centers and Politics of Community, Identity, and Social Justice," and Anne Ellen Geller's "Drawing the (Play) Spaces of Conferences."

From Nicole:

The Denny piece alone might make this book worth reading/buying. It felt like he was opening up a lot of important questions for writing centers, as a field, and the questions he raises about what "we mean" by the term "creativity" (56) were significant. Throughout his essay, he asks, "If we're focusing on play, what else are we NOT attending to?" When we spoke earlier, you raised the question of whether the authors had a chance to read one another's work. Denny was one of the few who explicitly addressed some of the pieces in the book. In his closing section (66-68), Denny seems to challenge some of his fellow contributors' unexamined positions: "Well-intentioned readers might wish for recipes or a shopping list of activities to create occasions and spaces for creativity and for those who occupy our margins. I oppose these sorts of requests because they are not pedagogically sound (especially for teachers and tutors): The best learning that is internalized and that results in substantial growth happens from inquiry, talk, and experiments" (67).

Also, I am struck by the way that Geller validates silence and ambiguity during the staff education sessions that she describes in her chapter. Because the parameters of Geller's reflective drawing activity are loosely defined and collaboratively negotiated, staff members have the opportunity to develop their own rich identities as writing consultants. I hear clear echoes of Denny's chapter in Geller's, particularly when she argues that writing center administrators must theorize carefully before engaging in creative tutor-education activities (164). She raises a series of questions that all readers of this collection might consider before implementing the activities described in Parts II or III. Geller writes that writing center administrators should ask themselves pointed questions: "Why is this creative exercise valuable for where my staff and I are right now in our thinking? How—and what—will this exercise help us all learn from one another right now? What could we take from this creative exercise back into our work with student writers?" (164). These questions could serve as a heuristic for interpreting many of the essays included in *Creative Approaches*.

For example, I used Scott L. Miller's metaphor activity in my tutor class (with good results), but in several parts of his chapter I kept writing marginal comments like "Is this true?" I wish he had more fully explored the implications of his list of the "pedagogical aims of play" (37). For example, he writes, "Play socializes" (37). If it's true that play socializes language, then even more reason why we need to examine how we are employing play in our writing centers. Does play really "teach a utopian, egalitarian vision of life?" (37). What if all writers and consultants do not feel equally free? Miller talks about how play has rules, though the rules aren't bound to "real-life" conventions. Who gets to set the rules for WC play? What does abnormal discourse within the context of play look like, and how can we invite more of it? I'm concerned that this anthology is mostly a collection of fun tips and that there are very few articles that problematize "play."

From Meg:
The book does seem largely comprised of "fun tips." There's a danger in simply listing activities whole without reflecting carefully on how those activities might actually function in the context of diverse populations. I think we need to emphasize readers' need to use the theoretical pieces in Part I as touchstones. The activities need to be chosen/adapted wisely in terms of creating a culture of learning that recognizes the complexity of tutoring in the real world.

I agree with what you say about Miller's piece, and although he points out that these activities should be used cautiously when he says that play will be dangerous (22), a further discussion of that point would have been helpful. Play is always risky, but it's worth it if the risks are understood and there's a support system for everyone, diverse tutors and writers. If we apply some of the theory from Part I to the activities in Parts II and III, then, I think, readers can come to an understanding of the risks involved. For example, Miller cites Huizinga's notion that play is free (31), that it creates community, and he later complicates that with Piaget's assertion that play is essentially accommodation and assimilation into one's culture (32). So what about the writer or tutor who isn't from the dominant culture? Where does play leave that person? On the outside.

I think we all need to take Denny's warning seriously: "Creative Pedagogy that ignores the ubiquitous dynamics of social and cultural divisions risks blindness to re-inscription of bitter practices of racism, sexism, and class bias in America" (56). Many of the authors seem to look at play as neutral, not as contextualized by race, gender, and class. And although it appears as if most of the sixteen selections are just fun tips that anyone can use, a reflective practitioner will need to take a hard look at what play and creativity mean in the context of the given activity. For example, although I love the fact that Sandee K. McGlaun brings her expertise in theater to the writing center ("Putting the 'Play' Back into Role Playing"), there are some things that worry me. She says that "In tutor training as in acting, the more real a role-play becomes to the role-player, the more real and engaging it will be to the audience—and the tutor is more likely to learn from that which feels akin to a 'real' experience" (119). I wish that she'd involved her staff in the writing and production of

these plays (in other words, in an experience that was more real to them because they had a hand in its creation) and that, together, they had examined the stereotypical characters they created.

Other contributors seem to fall into the same trap. For example, although I applaud Lisa Zimmerelli's impulse to liven up her staff education, I wish she had included her tutors in helping her design all of the activities. In that way, she would learn more about their interests and backgrounds. More important, they might learn together about the value, or lack thereof, in learning brief catch phrases about important scholars in the "Identify the Writing Center Theorist" game. By building a community of learners who design and interrogate such activities, there's opportunity for deep learning.

From Nicole:

There are a few gems to be found in Part III. Carol Severino and Cinda Coggins Mosher's chapter about the University of Iowa Writing Center's "Invitations" program provides a rich history of how one writing center found creative ways to adapt to the changing needs of writers while maintaining the center's sense of mission over a span of more than 40 years. Severino and Coggins Mosher report that the "Invitations" essays provoke thoughtful discussions about race and class because of their "interactive nature" between the writer and tutor, as well as between the writer and a wider audience—the "Invitations" essays can be read on the IU Writing Center's website (246-7).

From Meg:

Another essay in Part III that strikes me as particularly valuable is Wendy Goldberg's "Center Stage: Performing the Culture of Writing at Stanford." The Stanford model is an exciting one, one that ebulliently celebrates writing in the writing center. I think the section about hosting a poetry slam is illustrative of the kind of thinking and revision that might serve as a model for readers who want to try exciting activities and who also want to honor difference, to create a learning culture, and to be open to the risks that all of that implies. For example, one of Stanford's successes (among many) is the poetry slam, and it is interesting to see the honesty with which Goldberg describes the first attempt at hosting what appears to be a cultural event that is foreign to the staff. Through a bit of trial and error, the staff learns that slams never start on time, that lights should be dim, that clapping is soooo not OK. The staff risks saying the improvisational "Yes" to the invitation to host a slam, but they also are ready to be taught, and subsequent activities grow in that organic way Geller illustrates. The staff listens deeply to the participants in their activities, it seems, and they have added celebrations that are a natural outgrowth of the early slam events—Parents' Weekend writing events, the advocacy for Hip-Opera (about three generations of African-American women) which is written, staged, and acted by a student, Debbie Burke. Through all of this activity, the staff has had many opportunities to discuss with students, faculty, and parents the complexities of identity and rhetorical situation—a sometimes tension–filled learning situation, but one that is real, one that is collaborative in the best sense.

Conclusions from the Two of Us

We would caution anyone using this book not to simply Xerox activities, but to read and reflect on the entire sixteen essays and to evaluate the activities based upon the theoretical frames presented in Part I of the text. In some ways, the early chapters are a warning, and the front end of the text isn't necessarily reflected in Parts II and III. Play is not neutral. The realities of race, class, and gender are just as real in the writing center as they are in the rest of the world. The many interesting activities in the book can certainly be adapted to other contexts in responsible ways that support both tutors and writers in the construction of their own knowledge, ones that interrogate what it means to be other(ed). Perhaps one of the greatest values of *Creative Approaches* is as a reminder to listen to the voices and needs of all those who live in our Burkean Parlors, so that decision-making in our writing centers is truly a creative collaboration. ✦

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MEDIEVAL LITERACY IN THE WRITING CENTER

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As an erstwhile medievalist who administers a writing center, I am struck by the fact that a seemingly disproportionate number of us who have studied the Middle Ages are also drawn to composition studies and writing center work—not merely by default but as a conscious choice. One factor might be that the study of medieval texts cultivates and requires approaches similar to those used in the writing classroom or the writing center: a sensitivity to language, a willingness to identify with others, and a constant focus on how texts are produced and who produces them. However, I believe that the writing center in particular attracts medievalists because it reproduces modes of literacy that are in fact centuries old. Looking for the medieval in the writing center reveals the pedigree of some of our most common attitudes and practices: the treatment of composition as a collaborative act, the utilization of multiple modes of literacy, and, most importantly, the values-driven concept of writing as a personally transformative process.

I examine the parallels between the medieval and the modern not so much to offer writing center practitioners another metaphor for our work (our field is rich in metaphors already) but to challenge the common tropes of writing centers as (1) inherently innovative in their practices and (2) marginalized and necessarily counter to the predominant modes of academic discourse. We have typically relished the practices that distinguish writing centers from traditional classroom pedagogies and institutional cultures—a contrarian stance that Melissa Ianetta, drawing on even older perspectives on literacy, terms Socratic (45). I believe that questioning these common self-perceptions is necessary, however, because they ultimately limit our effectiveness by cutting off fruitful areas of collaboration and denying us a sense of groundedness. As thoughtful writing pedagogies take hold within the disciplines and post-process writing teachers focus on individualized instruction, what happens in the center may not be that different from what happens in the writing classroom. Recontextualizing our practices historically likewise shows us that our practice extends well beyond the conventional birth date assigned to it in the late twentieth century. Viewed in a medieval light, writing centers in fact return to a discourse even older than the founding of the first university at Bologna in 1088. Recognizing the old in what we do, therefore, perhaps paradoxically, takes our work out of the margins and recognizes its place in the centuries-old continuum of writing instruction. Seeing the medieval in our work is also downright counter-cultural, since it flies in the face of the modernizing narrative that has so governed Western culture since the Renaissance: every day, in every way, we are not necessarily getting better and better.

Medieval approaches to creating and reproducing texts offer an immediate corollary to the kind of dialogue that writing centers cultivate. That word *dialogue* is key, in that it indicates both the production of texts through conversation and the blending of oral and literate modes of communication. In the writing center, a writer speaks with a consultant and revises his or her text in response to that dialogue. As Wesley Houp describes the work of the writing center in his recent *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Writing tutorials externalize the interpretive paraphrase—the inner dialogue; tutors listen to a student's text and offer alternate readings . . ." (12). Medieval writers, too, engaged in such conferences—particularly, as Cheryl Glenn explains in her examination of the fifteenth-century *Book of Margery Kempe*, in cases when the "writer" was in fact illiterate. Margery, whose visionary autobiography has become a staple of medieval literature courses, dictated her work in succession to two scribes rather than writing it herself (Glenn 501–02). The final narrative, then, was produced

as the result of negotiation among Margery and her scribes, fraught with the same issues of authority and intervention that plague writing center practitioners. The second scribe, for example, took it upon himself to correct the "evil written" document left by the first, in the process appropriating both it and Margery's story—an example of how, in Glenn's words, "an expert scribe can intrude into the author's narrative" (502).

This sort of scribal intervention could lead to a more protracted form of dialogue, not in space but in time. In a culture that prized faithfully repeating one's precedents over original creation, the medieval writer was expected to collate the work of other *auctores*—both authors and authorities. At the same time, the individual scribe was free to alter the works he copied, superficially by respelling or substituting words or more substantively by emending texts. Even copying another's work therefore involved reading and responding to it. Jean Leclerq points out, "Each text transcribed required very careful revision, correction, collation, and criticism" (122). Marginal glosses—commentaries written on the edges and between the lines of the medieval page—offered another form of dialogue-across-time. Commentators added their explanations alongside canonical texts, and individual readers marked manuscripts to inform those who came after them. The result, as Stephen Nichols observes, is a text that is "culturally and historically composite" (48).

The modern academic paper can be considered an extension of these medieval scholarly practices. While altering a source text is strictly outside the bounds of modern textual culture, in which an author's words are considered her property and therefore inviolable, academic writing still engages writers in a similar dialogue-across-time. Like medieval readers, academics expect writers to collate the work of other authorities and consider those writers masterful who make their sources work for them. David Bartholomae describes such successful student writers as being "able to enter into a discourse but, by stylistic maneuvers, to take possession of it at the same time" (605). By situating themselves within a discourse, effective academic writers produce texts that are as historically composite as any medieval commentary, producing works whose history "is not the history of a thought being worked out within an individual mind [but] of work being done within and against conventional systems" (Bartholomae 641).

Writing centers make that dialogue-across-time explicit by having the consultant maintain one side of the discussion. The consultant, whatever her sense of being a peer, is also the mouthpiece for academic writing "as it is done," and may very well help introduce the writer to the work of others in the field. The writer is therefore able to situate himself within the historical conversation both on the page and in the room. By taking classes and conducting research, the writer has discovered individually some of the voices in an ongoing dialogue. The consultant lends her (nonmetaphorical) voice by presenting the perspective of a discipline and encouraging the writer to participate further in the discussion.

If this exchange over time represents a way in which medieval writers operated like writing consultants, it also reveals an aspect of writing center pedagogy that would have been quite at home in the Middle Ages. By promoting spoken dialogue about written texts, writing centers reintroduce an oral component to writing. These two modes of communication are frequently kept apart in academic writing, and indeed much of what instructors flag as "grammar" errors mainly stem from applying or misapplying spoken modes of discourse in a formal written context (see, for example, Bartholomae). The writing consultation, according to Daniel T. Lochman, joins the two modes: "The dialogue between [writing] counselor and student forms a bridge between orality and academic literacy" (28). In Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe's adaptation of Walter Ong's terms, this combination of the spoken and the written is a form of "transitional literacy." Medieval texts were considered written records of spoken acts; reading those records required speaking them again. As best we understand it, medieval reading

involved subvocalizing, sounding out words under the breath. In her study of Marjory Kempe, Glenn likewise points to "the preference, even among the educated, for listening to a statement rather than scrutinizing it in script" (498). This oral and aural component is of course lost in the modern practice of silent reading, as well as in conventions of academic writing that privilege the written over the spoken. As Don Bialostosky explains, "In academic writing it is conventional to revise oral presentations for publication by suppressing those figures of thought through which speakers register the presence of their auditors and the remarks of participating colleagues" (11). The writing center returns such auditors to the room, as it were, in the person of the consultant. Through conversation with another, the writer complements the written with the spoken, pushing against the modern practice of silent literacy and returning to a transitionally literate balance of spoken and written communication.

The intended outcome of such dialogue—at least as many writing center practitioners and medieval commentators have framed it—is personal transformation. The sixth-century monastic scholar Cassiodorus lauded what he called the "apostolate of the pen." This theme was adopted by later monastic writers such as Alcuin of York, Charlemagne's educational reformer, who had inscribed over the doorway of the scriptorium at Fulda, "It is more meritorious to copy books than to tend the vines" (Leclerq 123). The tenth-century educator Abbo of Fleury argued that writing came second only to prayer and fasting in tempering carnal desire (Lawrence 113). Continuing this theme of personal transformation, Johannes Trithemius expounded on the spiritual benefits of writing at the end of the Middle Ages as the printing press threatened to make the scribe obsolete. In his *De laude scriptorum*, "In Praise of Scribes," Trithemius argues as follows:

> In no other business of the active life does the monk come closer to perfection than when caritas [love for others] drives him to keep watch in the night copying the divine scriptures…. The devout monk enjoys four particular benefits from writing: the time that is precious is profitably spent; his understanding is enlightened as he writes; his heart within is kindled to devotion; and after this life he is rewarded with a unique prize. (O'Donnell 81)

All of these commentators present the work of the writer as the supreme embodiment of monastic values: spiritual devotion, chastity, caritas. The act of writing itself changes the individual. For Abbo of Fleury, the writing monk is more chaste than the one who does not write. For Trithemius, the scribe becomes enlightened and more devout and, as a consequence, better suited for heaven.

While many writing center theorists may not share the spiritual aims of these medieval writers, they do similarly present both writing and writing consultation as transformative.[1] One of the most thorough applications of this trope is Mary Abascal-Hildebrand's "Tutor and Student Relations: Applying Gadamer's Notions of Translation." Abascal-Hildebrand applies the language philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer to posit tutoring as a translative process not merely textually but personally. She explains, "Tutoring that enables both tutors and students to leave a tutoring event thinking and acting differently as writers enables them **to renew themselves as persons**" (172, my emphasis). The key to such personal transformation, Abascal-Hildebrand argues, is reflection: for the writer, ruminating over what she has written; for the consultant, considering his own consulting practice. As a result, "Both students and tutors . . . make new judgments about themselves, think and act differently than before, and develop the potential to write differently" (174). Joan Mullin expresses a similar sentiment: "Instead of merely substantiating a separatist ideology inherent in academic literacy, tutoring can provide a space where students see writing and reading as reflective processes." Synthesizing the work of William Covino, Mike Rose, and Richard Rodriguez, she presents "such tutorials" as contributing to "not only an acquisition of skills, but . . . a translation of self" (167). Recent scholarship continues to apply this notion of writing center work as personally transformative. As the authors of *The Everyday Writing Center* state, "We feel ever more

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

convinced that it is important for our tutors to have the opportunity **to write their way to becoming certain persons**. . . . " (Geller et al. 86, my emphasis).

These theorists' focus on reflection offers a final way in which the writing center returns to the practices of medieval literacy. For medieval monks, reading was an inherently reflective process. Its aim, as Leclerq explains, was *meditatio*, or contemplation, and *oratio*, or prayer (72). Texts were meant to be ruminated over (monastic writers themselves equated reading with a cow chewing its cud). Stipulations for *lectio divina* in the Benedictine Rule illustrate the importance and deliberateness of this kind of spiritual reading. Benedict allotted three hours a day to reading in the summer, more in the winter (Lawrence 32). This kind of reading, focused on contemplation and prayer, is what Trithemius had in mind when he presented writing as a *form* of reading. Recall that the scribe's "understanding is enlightened as he writes"—the result of *meditatio*—and that "his heart within in kindled to devotion"—a form of *oratio*.

Reflective reading in the writing center context is a similarly deep process, though here the benefit of reflection is increased consciousness of the acts of reading and writing themselves, in Mullin's words an understanding of "the purposes lodged in communicative acts" (168). In the writing center, students are encouraged to read over what they have written, often with the aural reinforcement of either speaking the texts out loud themselves or hearing consultants read them as they read silently. Reading therefore becomes part of the recursive process of writing, encouraging writers to think of their work from a reader's perspective, to hear it "out there" in the world rather than silently on the page, and then to revise according to the critical insights gained through individual reflection and a consultant's feedback.

In this last aspect of reflection—the critical turn—modern practice invokes an intellectual movement that dominated the later Middle Ages: scholasticism. In a tell-tale phrase, Mullin promotes "tutorial practice based [not] on manipulation, but reliant on reflection and ***critique***" (167, my emphasis). Thinking about writing conventions and evaluating them from a critical distance is quite natural to modern liberal education but not to monastic reading. Instead, such a practice maintains the focus of scholastic reading: *questio*, posing questions to the text, and *disputatio*, considering possible interpretations. As Leclerq explains, the scholastic "reader puts questions to the text and then questions himself on the subject matter" (72). In this case, writing center practice is not far from the scholastic roots of the university—reflection may begin as a way of raising consciousness but becomes a means to critique, not an end in itself.

Given the meaning we moderns derive from defining ourselves against the Middle Ages, seeing (or, perhaps more appropriately, hearing) medieval literacy in the writing center may seem like a tall order. Tracing these points of convergence, however, puts us in the position of the writing consultant or instructor called to engage in a humanizing encounter with the other. In this case, that other is our own cultural and academic past. Reflecting on our approaches to writing therefore shows us that in many ways writing centers have "gotten medieval" on the modern university. ✦

Endnote

[1] See, however, Dave Healy's formulation of the writing center as church, which focuses primarily on the status of the writing center and its staff within institutions of higher education and draws on American Protestant analogues.

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*T*UTOR'S COLUMN

YOU FIX IT FOR ME: A LESSON IN WOMEN'S WORK AND CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

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After a tutoring session in which I clearly outlined the nature of my role as a writing center tutor, my student—a six-foot tall, particularly large, imposing Sudanese immigrant—stood up, pointed his finger at me, and bellowed, "You humiliate me!" Our tutoring session had not gone the way he had expected. He had wanted me to write the bulk of his paper for him and proofread what he had already written, and my refusal to comply with his expectations was insulting to him. By the time he verbalized his anger, I was already engaged in another tutoring session. The student I was working with at the time tried to defend me by letting him know that I was, indeed, quite helpful, and other students in the writing center tried to assuage him as well. I respectfully reiterated the policies that we have established at our writing center: we do not proofread, edit, or do the work for our students. Much to my dismay, this Sudanese student became belligerent and disruptive because he found these very policies to be humiliating and disrespectful. His outright anger was inspired by cultural misunderstandings, specifically regarding the work women should do based on his native culture.

I learned two important facts about this student's cultural expectations from his academic advisor. This knowledge helped me understand how this student ended up so angry and frustrated with the typical writing center policy and helped me to understand why he felt that I was not helping him. First, I learned that the student's culture of origin had clear gender roles established, none of which I was adhering to in our session. Sudanese women are the ones who work outside of the home, purchase goods at the market, clean the house, make the meals, care for their parents, children, and sick relatives, and take full care of their husbands. Second, I learned that the women in Sudanese culture do not have any authority over men, nor should they dictate any rules or orders. This restriction would include, of course, teaching or any form of instruction. Another student of mine, a Sudanese woman, told me that this is truly the expectation. She affirmed that women do the vast majority of the work in their culture. As Mary Anne Fitzgerald writes in one of her books focusing on the lives of women in Africa, *Throwing the Stick Forward: The Impact of War on Southern Sudanese Women*, the civil war in Sudan has "penalized women when it comes to the division of labor" (qtd. in "Sudan"). One Sudanese woman told Fitzgerald that three-quarters of the work is done by women, even the work that used to be done by men. The woman explains:

> If you only have sons, then you do all the work. If any of the tasks is not performed, the man will fight you. Men are meant to cut wood and smear mud on the walls. Now they leave the work and tell us to do it. Women are now even fishing. We are now making fishing nets. That used to be the work of men. Men go to the forest, thatch the roof. Their other job is to meet with ladies and produce children. The rest is done by the women. (qtd. in "Sudan")

Because my student was a very recent immigrant to the United States, he was not accustomed to having a female instruct him. With this in mind, I found it much easier to understand my student's resistance to my tutoring session, especially when I refused to do his writing for him. My response to his requests for help seemed foreign, insulting, and, to use his word, humiliating.

In my session with the Sudanese student, he was clearly demanding that I take over his paper, produce a grammatically correct version of it, and hand it back to him error-free. "You make me very sad," he said, expecting that his emotional state would somehow prompt a more nurturing attitude from me. I did concede that writing can be a difficult process and explained that to help him in the way he wanted would taint his work with my words. Like most tutors, I believe that students have a responsibility to do their own writing, and my role is to help those students in the discovery process. He became agitated and said that I was not helping him. "You fix it for me!" he demanded, shoving one of his knuckles into his paper. At this point, the language barrier was clear, and his aggressive knuckle-shove

was a threatening gesture. He either did not comprehend what I was saying to him or simply refused to do his own writing. He was taught through his own cultural background that a woman should be doing the work that I was asking him to do, and he perceived my job as that of fixer and helper based on his own cultural understandings. Consequently, he became quite irate and confused when his expectations were not met.

When communication initially fails between tutor and student, communicating through other people (academic advisors, instructors, and counselors) can help move the process in a positive direction rather than shut the door to further dialogue and assistance. Luckily, this student's academic advisor worked closely with him after the incident to explain my role and purpose in our writing center. It is important to note the gender of this student's advisor (male), so taking instruction from him was met with much less resistance than taking instruction from a female writing tutor.

Communication is also facilitated when writing centers have clear policies in place about what is allowed and disallowed. In addition, writing center tutors must adhere to their beliefs about what is acceptable and what is not. Self-preservation is important for female writing center tutors, and standing firm in these personal policies sends a clear message about professionalism, respect, and status. It also tells students that the work of a tutor consists of assisting writers in their own pursuits to become better at the craft instead of doing the work for them.

The downside of this encounter was that the conflict with the Sudanese student did not end with another tutoring session in which he was fully aware of my role as a tutor or with an agreement that he would do his own work on his paper. He did not return to our writing center for further sessions with me, as his advisor decided it would be best if the student dealt with him directly. The upside was that, despite cultural differences, I learned that writing center tutors can take steps to create a bridge between a student's and a tutor's expectations of what a female tutor should do or not do for a student. An important step is to understand that many of the misconceptions about the role of the tutor, specifically the female tutor, come from other cultural ideas about the roles of women. For example, once I learned from his academic advisor that the Sudanese student came from a country with a standard for women's work that is different from my own, I was able to understand the student's reaction based on his cultural background. I was also able to use this information to understand possible responses of other African male students who frequent our writing center. Undoubtedly, this kind of understanding between cultures is a key component to resolving the conflict I experienced.

Ultimately, this conflict with the Sudanese student ended with a positive result for me. This is because most of the resources to handle such a student were available. I wasn't left to my own devices to deal with a threatening student who demanded services from me that go against our policies. I also learned more about the student's background and beliefs and was able to use this information to understand his reaction to our writing center policies. Although situations like these are not frequent occurrences, sometimes these cultural expectations are larger than the tutoring sessions themselves, and it causes more harm than good to continue working with a student when expectations go against writing center policies. Tutors in other writing centers may want to learn more about their students' cultural expectations—especially expectations connected to gender roles. This very knowledge can create an environment where the student no longer expects the female tutor to do all the work. ✦

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

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