THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

– FROM THE EDITOR –

This issue of *WLN* focuses on tutor training and offers challenging questions for tutors to debate. Noreen Lape starts us off with her explanation of the importance of tutors being skilled in understanding emotional intelligence, and she offers methods for helping tutors acquire this skill. Erika Spohrer introduces the Zen principles that stress the immediate process rather than the ultimate goal, and Danielle Sahm reflects on how a tutor should respond when faced with writers who write outside of standard academic conventions. Are all three authors reinforcing each other by exploring intertwined aspects of tutoring? Or offering differing motives and perspectives? Or taking contradictory positions? Or taking differing paths towards the same goals?

Susan Mueller has undertaken the important task of reviewing the new *MLA Style Manual and Guide for Scholarly Publishing,* soon to be available, and she details some of the major changes from previous editions. While this version of the MLA guides is for those of us who write for scholarly purposes, it also hints at what will be in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* when that appears next year. For tutors, this review can help them learn about the changes that are likely to appear in the *MLA Style Manual.*

To add to the focus on tutor training in this issue, on p. 9, you'll find some URLs for tutor training videos that have been offered on WCenter. We hope this issue offers much to enliven tutor training discussions.

✦ *Muriel Harris, Editor*

INSIDE

TRAINING TUTORS IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF EMPATHY

✦ *Noreen Lape*
Columbus State University,
Columbus, GA

As a Writing Center Director, I have learned that when it comes to tutoring, emotional intelligence is no less important than knowledge of discourse conventions and the writing process. Daniel Goleman, psychologist and author of the groundbreaking book *Emotional Intelligence,* identifies five key aspects of emotional intelligence: the ability to "recognize a feeling *as it happens"*; to "soothe oneself" so as to manage distress; to "marshal emotions in the service of a goal"; to empathize or "attune to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want"; and to "manage emotions in others" in order to create effective relationships (43). Emotional intelligence is something that concerns my tutors, as several have admitted to feeling "like a psychologist" after certain sessions. They have shared with me their worries about how they dealt with tearful writers who revealed their vulnerabilities: anxiety, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence in their writing.

I sensed the same concern from Lauren Bisson, who wrote the "Tutor's Column" for the December 2007 issue of *The Writing Lab Newsletter.* In her very thoughtful essay, Bisson asks, "What are we as tutors supposed to do when a student bursts into tears in the lab?" (14). After contemplating

the options of listening to the student or leaving him alone, she concludes that the best solution is to ask the crying student what he wants the tutor to do. Yet her conclusion betrays a certain anxiety or mistrust about the motives of tearful students. She reasons that her "foolproof" plan would prevent "offending any type of person" and "shut down any romantic hopes" of students seeking "attention" or an inappropriate type of comfort. She then cautions her readers: "Just remember that as writing tutors, it is not our job to counsel students through rough patches in their lives" (15). I hear the truth in this. It would not be wise for tutors to "counsel" or, worse, offer psychological advice to distraught students. Still, reaching out in a human way to a person in need is not the same as presuming to offer therapy. Bisson's question reverberates in my mind and sends me searching for my own answers. How can I best train tutors in the human art of working with a writer's emotions—not just tears but the full range of feelings—in a consultation?

I turned initially for answers to tutor training manuals. I noticed that most manuals concentrate far more on cognitive than affective skills, which tend to be addressed in one chapter. There is also a tendency in manuals to prepare tutors for encounters with distressed writers by defining or categorizing the problem types and suggesting how to approach them. *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* invites the consultant to act as a "gracious host" to writers "who may be nervous, upset, or under pressure" or who "may feel defensive or apologetic" (8). *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* has a chapter on "Coping with Different Tutoring Situations" in which the authors address "The Writer Who Comes at the Last Minute," "The Unresponsive Writer," "The Antagonistic Writer," "The Writer Who Selects an Inappropriate Topic or Uses Offensive Language," among others. And *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One-to-One* offers separate essays on "Tutoring in Emotionally Charged Sessions" and "Engaging Reluctant Writers." I personally have used all of these manuals, and if this essay were a review, I could sing their countless merits. Yet without theories and concrete strategies for responding to emotions in a session, some tutor training manuals employ a rhetoric that may place new tutors in a defensive position—on alert, waiting for the inevitable problem person to arrive.

And when the upset (or defensive or antagonistic or unresponsive) person finally does arrive, and perhaps even does a little "emotional vomiting," what happens to the tutor, to the consultation? Olivia Frey's comments critiquing the adversarial tradition in academic discourse apply to tutoring as well: "[I]f we are worried or distracted, . . . we will not attend very well to what we are writing or reading. Other attitudes—like anger, trust, or skepticism—will directly affect these processes in more complex ways." She goes on to explain that "a reader who distrusts a writer will be less likely to attend to details that a writer considers important, less likely to make the same distinctions between significant and insignificant details, less likely to follow a complicated train of thought to closure" (53). Emotional turmoil not only undermines the efforts of a struggling writer but also derails the interventions of an otherwise well-intentioned and conscientious tutor. The complications that arise from emotionally charged sessions are a two-way street, threatening to sabotage both the tutor's and the writer's efforts.

How, I began to wonder, might even the most emotionally fraught tutor-writer relationship be reframed so as to open up the potential for learning? For an answer, I turned to service-learning theory. After all, both tutor training and service-learning courses place students in the role of service provider and facilitate learning through collaboration (The National Service- Learning Clearinghouse). The rhetoric of service-learning, as evidenced in textbooks like Thomas Deans's *Writing and Community Action,* opposes the idea of "unequal, vertical relationships" between servers and served:

> Rather than adopt a mindset of paternalistic charity or consumerist service, ethical social action seeks to recognize the human dignity of all participants. The prevailing spirit should be that of *partnership*. Sound partnerships are premised on reciprocity; all sides give and receive, all open themselves to learning and growth. Mature social action is built on such presumptions of equality and exchange. (254)

The cognitive theoretical basis of writing center pedagogy, particularly Kenneth Bruffee's notion of non-foundational collaborative learning, echoes Deans's formulation of a "partnership." In a perfectly rational,

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

unemotional session, tutor and writer forge a lateral and nonhierarchical collaborative relationship in order to construct knowledge about the writer's processes, her burgeoning ideas, and the conventions of her discourse community.

Yet in some training manuals, the collaborative partnership breaks down in the face of an emotional writer. *A Tutor's Guide* cautions against identifying with the writer and showing too much concern: "it is tempting to want to make the writer feel better by responding sympathetically—patting him on the shoulder, sharing a personal experience, or allowing the session to become therapy instead of tutoring." *A Tutor's Guide* then posits that it is "awkward to analyze someone's paper in a professional manner when raw emotions" pervade the writing (and the writer) (18). Emotion gets a raw deal with the implication that it sabotages analysis and undermines professionalism. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide* counsels tutors to "try some Rogerian techniques" with a crying student, but then warns tutors that the writing center is "not the counseling center" (176). I want to suggest that responding to an emotional writer with feeling need not be likened to therapy or temptation. In fact, a tutor who implicitly embraces the "human dignity of all," part of which involves not shying away from emotional encounters, will cultivate the bond of trust that Frey contends undergirds the development of "cognitive processes," like reading and writing (53).

At the same time, emotions are tricky things. I ponder how a person can train others to embrace emotions, to develop equal working partnerships, and to respect the dignity of all people. Research in counseling, adult learning, and motivation has taught me not only to view empathy as a teachable tutoring skill and a "requirement for motivating instruction" but also to understand how an emotionally intelligent tutor is best suited for the mission of making "better writers." As Raymond J. Wlodowski explains, empathy "is a constant desired awareness of what our learners are living and experiencing with us as they know it and feel it" (40). Wlodowski imagines empathy as a way of being that he recommends practicing in unstressful encounters with learners so that it becomes internalized and "accessible . . . during the emotional heat of conflict or controversy" (41). Using scripted scenarios, improvisational role-playing techniques, and reflective journaling, directors can instill a pedagogy of empathy that tutors can employ with every writer, not just the so-called difficult ones.

As a first step, the tutor learns to identify feelings: both her own and the writer's. Then she must label those feelings correctly (frustration, anger, nervousness, contentment, satisfaction, etc.). Tutors can practice identifying feelings by discussing scripted dialogues, like this one from *The Bedford Guide*:

> *Tutor*: Hi! [Smiles.] My name's Chris. We can just sit over here. Grab that chair. [They sit.] What can I do for you?
>
> *Writer*: Well, I'm Jeremy, and I have this paper [hands it to tutor], and, uh, my teacher said, I had to come here and, uh, get some help 'cause my last paper . . . [looks down] was a D.
>
> *Tutor*: Then maybe we should just begin by reading through it out loud. Do you want to read, or would you rather I did?
>
> *Writer*: [Motions to tutor and mutters "You," then folds arms across chest and gazes off into space.]

The scenario continues with the writer's frustration escalating as he "occasionally sighs, taps fingers on desk and feet on floor," ultimately insisting that the tutor "check [his paper] and fix it." The tutor explains that the writing center is not a proofreading service, but the writer "snatches" his essay back, leaves exasperated, yet assures the tutor that it is "nothing against you" (98-99).

> *" [T]he tutor's understanding of the writer's needs . . . better enabl[es] the tutor to strategize about how to intervene in the writer's processes. "*

By doing a close reading of the feelings in this exchange, tutors could discuss the writer's possible range of emotions: shame in receiving a D, defensiveness in having a stranger read his essay, embarrassment in realizing the tutor cannot read his writing, frustration in learning the writing center does not "fix" papers, and hopelessness resulting in his quitting the session. In fact, the writer's emotional turmoil makes him unable to engage intellectually in a conversation about his writing. As Egan explains, identifying emotions is crucial because when "perceptions are inaccurate," then "communication skills are flawed at the root" (127). In the above scenario, the besieged and deflated tutor is left "star[ing] in disbelief" and apologizing for not tutoring in the way the writer wants (99). While the tutor does an admirable job of establishing professional boundaries, he flounders in the face of the writer's emotions.

True, developing the ability to interpret correctly each writer's emotions would take time and patience, and some tutors, given their temperament and level of sensitivity, would learn this skill more easily than others. Also, tutors may never achieve emotional understanding with their one-time clients; more likely, they would develop an empathetic connection with their repeat visitors. Nevertheless, identifying emotions is a habit of mind and being that tutors can cultivate with practice over time, resulting in deeper intuitions and sharper emotional instincts.

Second, in *The Skilled Helper,* Egan prompts helpers to listen for the "core message" by focusing on verbal and nonverbal cues. In training tutors to let the writer set the agenda, directors already urge tutors to listen to the "core message" regarding the writer's cognitive concerns or learning goals. ("I never seem to back up my points good enough.") Listening for the affective "core message" only enhances the tutor's understanding of the writer's needs, better enabling the tutor to strategize about how to intervene in the writer's process. Tutors can then practice framing an empathetic response and articulating their understanding of what the writer has communicated via the formula: "You feel . . . because . . ." (131). When the writer confirms his feelings and their root causes, the tutor can determine how to support the writer. Thus, in discussing the *Bedford Guide* scenario, trainees can imagine themselves in the tutor's role and apply Egan's formula:

> *Tutor:* Do you feel frustrated because you don't understand why you received a D on your paper?
> *Writer:* I suppose so. She grades so hard.
> *Tutor:* I can help you decipher the professor's comments and see what we can discover about her expectations.

Wlodowski adds that the tutor's listening should be free of judgment and aimed at discovering how a writer "make[s] meaning out of ideas and experience" (41).

Some writers might feel vulnerable and defensive towards a tutor who calls attention to their emotional state. A writer who is wrestling with frustration and anger might not want his emotions mirrored back to him. Through role-playing, trainees can learn when to validate writers, letting them know "we can accept how they are feeling given what they have experienced or how they understand the world." Validating a writer does not mean that the tutor agrees with the writer's perspective. The tutor need not assent to an angry writer's condemnation of a beloved professor. Instead, validation "denotes understanding and acceptance of the *person"* (Wlodowski 139). The tutor can acknowledge that the writer's interaction with the professor was indeed frustrating and confusing. In so doing, the tutor builds rapport by making the writer feel "understood and respected" and thus more likely to listen to the tutor (Wlodowski 41). As Egan explains, a genuine empathetic exchange "encourages and facilitates dialogue. It thus encourages collaboration in the helping process." When a tutor is accurate in his empathetic response, the writer is prompted to "mov[e] forward and explor[e] her problem more fully" (135-136). Thus, solid affective training supports and furthers the cognitive goals of writing center pedagogy—namely, conversation and joint problem-solving.

Last, the tutor must be aware of her own reactions and attune her responses to the writer, modulating "tone of voice, body language, and words." A tutor who reacts to a tearful writer with nervous laughter or averted

eyes ends up diminishing the writer and unsettling himself. Role-playing exercises can aid the tutor in becoming more aware of her self-presentation. I invite experienced tutors to role-play writers they have encountered, focusing their re-enactments on different writing concerns and behavioral styles—for example, the tearful writer who cannot understand the professor's feedback, the passive writer who cannot get started, the frustrated writer who has difficulty incorporating sources into this paper, etc. The trainees observing the role-play then analyze the body posture, eye contact, and vocal tone of the tutor. Afterwards, the class, including the experienced tutors, critiques the demonstration and discusses the nuances of self-presentation. Experienced tutors usually have a store of successful strategies for attuning to writers. For example, some have reported success working with an over-weening writer by using a confident voice and steady eye contact. ESL students, they say, often seek validation concerning their level of language acquisition. For these students and others who need a boost of confidence, a quiet and gentle voice and open body language conveys understanding and allows the tutor to "connect with [the writer] emotionally" (Wlodowski 41).

Besides role-playing, discussion, and careful observation, reflective journaling also supports a pedagogy of empathy. In the internship phase of many tutoring programs, trainees are asked to keep an observation log. Trainees can develop their emotional intelligence by focusing some of their log entries on how experienced tutors respond to writers' emotions, modulate their voices and body language, and validate writers. In this way, tutors move from practicing affective skills in artificial scenarios to analyzing them in real-world interactions.

I am not advocating training tutors to practice empathy with no exceptions. There are times, of course, when empathizing puts a real strain on tutors, as when they must deal with students who have written some version of hate speech. There are also times when writers need to be referred to the counseling center, such as when they threaten to harm themselves or someone else—or even when they self-disclose too much. The emotionally intelligent tutor follows her intuition, draws a boundary, and reports such interactions to her director. In my experience, however, cases in which empathizing makes tutors vulnerable to abuse or forced to play psychologist have been rare.

More often, a self-conscious empathetic response pattern is a useful—even self-empowering—alternative for tutors to potential (or realized) defensiveness. I learned this a few years ago from one of my tutors who wrote a research paper for the tutor training course in which she grappled with the issue of dealing with "difficult people." During her writing center internship, the tutor—I will call her Ally—worked with a writer who exhibited a "sardonic attitude and demeanor." This writer vented anger toward a professor who, the writer perceived, demanded nothing less than a perfect paper. Ally paints their encounter in martial metaphors: "Wielding attitudes and words like swordsmen, these clients can bruise and batter us until we are forced into waving our psychological white flags." Although she wrangled with the writer, Ally ended up having a "crushed spirit." She indicts herself for "mak[ing] all the wrong moves" and facilitating a session that was "thoroughly unproductive." Ally's self-examination leads her to guilt, perhaps even a little shame, as she assesses the psychic assumptions of the encounter.

Fortunately, rather than cower in defeat and renounce tutoring all together, Ally had sense enough to learn from this difficult experience. To her credit, she avoided psychoanalyzing the possible motivations of the hostile writer and, instead, focused on her own reactions. Whereas she had originally recoiled from the writer as if she had been attacked, Ally's research on working with difficult people and her self-reflection led her to understand the power of empathy. She admits that if she had understood her feelings for the writer during the session, "I could have dictated my behavior by what I wanted to have happen, rather than by what I was feeling." She proffers a strategy that is "empathetic

ANNOUNCEMENTS

and understanding": "[M]any people just want to feel important and listened to," she admits, because "some people may act difficult if they feel hopeless or powerless." Then she arrives at an implicit plan of action when she ponders the possibility that "maybe the only thing this woman wanted from me was to understand and sympathize with her frustration." She also concludes that validating a person's feelings may "help improve a person's attitude." In the end, she achieves a valuable insight: what she perceived as a battle with a bully, on deeper reflection, she now sees as a cry for human understanding.

Empathy builds trust and both empathy and trust, as Frey and Wlodowski contend, motivate learning. The skillful tutor moves from understanding to action, building on genuine and accurate empathy by helping to strengthen the writer's self-efficacy or sense of agency. The strategies tutors can employ include pointing out the writer's successes, calling attention to role models or others who have struggled and prevailed, countering disabling self-talk, encouraging writers to take risks with their writing, soothing their fears and anxieties, and teaching writers the skills they need to succeed (Egan 99-100). In light of the writing center mantra, empathy leads to self-efficacy in much the same way as better writers create better papers.

The writers I have worked with throughout my career have been overwhelmingly sincere. While manipulative tears have on occasion been shed in my presence, the vast majority of students—even the ones who cry—are simply seeking human understanding. There is no single, fail-safe plan when it comes to dealing with a writer's (complicated) emotions, his humanity. Directors who adopt a true pedagogy of empathy nurture emotional intelligence in tutors through heightened awareness, practice, and reflection. Within the often competitive and adversarial academic community, an empathetic writing center may be the best place to cultivate the understanding, connection, and agency writers—and tutors—need to grow. ✦

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

REVIEW OF *THE MLA STYLE MANUAL AND GUIDE TO SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING* NY: MLA, 2008. $32.50.

Out With the Old, In With the New

✦ *Susan Mueller*
St. Louis College of Pharmacy, St. Louis, MO

The Modern Language Association of America will release the third edition of its *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* this fall. It is important to remember that this edition and the revisions it presents are aimed at a professional and graduate student audience. (The next edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, the guide for undergraduates, is due to be released in 2009.) MLA's scholarly guide was last revised ten years ago, when the online universe was less pervasive than it is now. As a result, MLA users might have expected an expanded section on online sources, but they also might have expected simply an updating of the traditions that MLA has promulgated for almost sixty years. Those users would be wrong. This edition moves MLA's scholarly guidance into the twenty-first century in ways that most of us would never have expected.

The change begins with the title page. The venerable Joseph Gibaldi, who authored the previous editions as well as several editions of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, isn't listed. Nor is there a new author/editor in his place. What is shown instead is "The Modern Language Association of America." Like APA's *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, this edition of the MLA guide has a corporate author. In his preface, David G. Nicholls, who replaced Gibaldi as the editor-in-charge, explains that the collaborative nature of the revision process led him to this decision: "I decided that the new edition should be considered a product of corporate authorship. Although I was responsible for revising or writing the entire volume, I had a great deal of assistance with my work" (xxiii). This decision demonstrates both humility and foresight on his part because it resulted in a new vision and a substantially restructured guide.

The major change? The third edition recognizes the extent to which the Internet has permeated our lives, down to the way we perceive information. The book is formatted much like Web sites, with headings and subheadings shown in visually different ways, with bulleted lists, and with short, summary introductions to detailed sections and sub-sections. As a result, it is more user-friendly than the previous guides were. The new guide also assumes that the computer is the user's main tool for writing and for accessing information. This is true both in small ways—no references remain to arcane typewriter keys—and in large ones. Books, and print matter in general, are no longer the primary aegises for publication or documentation information. This edition puts Web sources on an equal footing with print ones; print is no longer viewed as the major medium.

The chapter that readers will probably access most is chapter 6, "Documentation: Preparing the List of Works Cited." This is also the chapter that has been the most radically restructured. Rather than introducing documentation with a lengthy explanation of how to document books, then shifting to periodicals, and finally to electronic sources, this edition begins with a thoughtful discussion of the purposes and ethics that underlie documentation, which it follows with a description of the list of works cited itself. Using no single type of source as a benchmark, it examines issues common to all: authors' names, location and formatting of the works cited list, and the overall arrangement of entries within it. After this, the chapter is divided into sections on print sources (periodical and non-periodical), on Web sources, on "additional common sources" (221), and on works available in multiple media. This structure is quite different from previous editions, but it is a logical, easy-to-follow schema and should be easy for both brand-new users and veterans to master.

While the organization of this chapter differs substantially from previous editions, the changes to MLA documentation style itself are not as radical as we might expect, given the global changes to the guide. The documentation changes reflect this overall philosophy, but they are rational and modest in scope. This example was taken from page 177 of the guide:

> Williams, Linda. "Of Kisses and Ellipses: The Long Adolescence of American Movies." *Critical Inquiry* 32.2 (2006):288-340. Print.

This works cited entry is for an article taken from *Critical Inquiry,* a print journal with continuous pagination. Note that the issue number is now included. Note also the word *Print* at the end. Because the preponderance of research is now done online, the third edition requires that *all* sources be designated as either Print or Web. (This includes books.) Print is no longer the default medium. This uniform treatment of online and print sources also explains the presence of the issue number. Issue numbers enable easier retrieval of articles online, even if they are from continuously paginated journals. An entry for an online journal article follows the same format except that *Web* replaces *Print*, and the date of access is included at the end of the entry. The example below is from page 220:

> Wood, Michael. "The Last Night of All." *PMLA* 122.5 (2008):1394-402. Web. 22 Jan. 2008.

These examples reflect other changes to usage and documentation in general. Note that underlining and italics are no longer considered equivalent. All longer works are shown in italics rather than underlined. In addition, URLs are not customarily included in entries under this new edition, either for periodical sources or for non-periodical sources (i.e., Web sites). URLs are considered to be ephemeral, and most users are sufficiently comfortable searching on the Web to be able to locate a source without them. URLs can be included if there is a need, such as a publisher's requirement.

This edition also acknowledges the problems of documenting new types of sources that emerge from one MLA edition to the next, which its predecessors did not. Note this addition to the introduction to "The List of Works Cited": "You may need to improvise when the type of scholarly project or the publication medium of a source is not anticipated by this manual. Be consistent in your formatting throughout your work. Choose the format that is appropriate to your project and that will satisfy your readers' needs" (168). How many times have you struggled with documenting a complicated online source that wasn't covered in your manuals? Did you feel unsure about the entry you finally used? Or frustrated that you didn't have better help? Think of all the tutorial time you spent trying to help students format citations for material for which MLA offered no guidance! This may not resolve those issues, but it does support your efforts to deal creatively and resourcefully with difficult sources.

Readers might also take special note of chapter 5, "Preparation of Theses and Dissertations." It has undergone substantial revision as well. Electronic publication of dissertations and submission of electronic files are discussed in more detail, with a section called "Publishing the Dissertation Through ProQuest" replacing the second edition's "Publishing the Dissertation Through University Microfilms International." This extended chapter focuses on bringing the general themes of the third edition to bear on dissertations.

Beyond the shift in documentation style, another major change in this edition is the emphasis on copyrights. The section on copyrights has almost doubled in length from the second edition to the third. Like this edition as a whole, it reflects the needs of publishing in an increasingly complex online environment. Much more detail is included throughout this section, especially about the history and development of copyright law and practice. The descriptions of Fair Use and of the rights of copyright owners are expanded as well. A specific section on copyright notice and credit has been added. As an example of this shift, this edition describes plagiarism as "a moral and ethical offense, rather than a legal one" (166), exemplifying how tangled the writing and publishing environment has become.

Again, readers should remember that MLA's two guides are related but not the same. Because they address different audiences—one professional, the other student—not all the changes laid forth in the scholarly guide will necessarily appear in the revised MLA handbook due out next year. As much as I like this revision of the guide, I know that some people accustomed to MLA documentation in its older forms might be disappointed with these changes. What sometimes seemed rigid about the traditional guidance was also reliable and familiar. If you are saddened by these changes, think of it this way: MLA has long been focused on adapting documentation to the needs of its users, and this is yet one more example of that. It is comforting to know that we are moving into the fast-paced, digital future with an old and comfortable friend by our side. ✦

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*T*AKE NOTE

TUTOR TRAINING VIDEOS

(Ed. note: After a request appeared on the WCenter listserv for tutor training videos available online, several people offered the following. Assuming that others would like such a list, I've compiled the responses I found in the WCenter archives. There's some overlap, but the various comments are valuable. MH)

From Jane Kokernak:
I once went on a search for such resources, and here's what I found. (The first one has some great clips/scenarios that show real tutors working with real students, that are great for training purposes. When I was at Simmons College, we used the NC State videos to train peer writing assistants.)
• NC State tutor training course, on video and DVD: <http://www.ncsu.edu/tutorial_center/video.html>.
• Texas A&M Writing Center's podcasts on various writing topics: <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/podcasts>.
• The Writing Across Borders training film is wonderful and worth getting; I'm not sure, however, if it would be useful to a writing center outside of the U.S., because it's aimed at teachers and tutors of ESL students dealing with American academic English: <http://cwl.oregonstate.edu/wab/index.html>.

From Heather Robinson:
• Rutgers has a Minimalist Tutoring video, here: <http://plangere.rutgers.edu/center/minimalist_t.html>. It's oldish (2003), but the tutors make good talking heads.

From Kimberly Toms:
• Our ASU West campus tutors made vids of Writing Tutoring the Wrong Way and the Right Way. You'll find them on our YouTube channel called StudentSuccessCenter at <http://www.youtube.com/user/StudentSuccessCenter>. Some of our other tutor training vids appear there as well, like Time Mgmt and Learning Styles. They're good discussion starters.

From Erec Smith:
• Michigan State University has a pretty good video: <ttp://writing.msu.edu/interactive/humanities/reloaded/index.php>.

From Daphna McKnight:
It has been fun learning about other videos out there. Dartmouth has an online tutor training video, and Oregon State has a DVD called Writing Across Borders for only $12.50, which ships quickly. There is an online tutor discussion guide to go with it.
• Dartmouth Tutor Training Video: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/tutor/videos/training.html>.
• Dartmouth Academic Skills Videos: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/videos/index.html>.
• Writing Across Borders DVD by Wayne Roberts of Oregon State Univ. ($12.50) Info and discussion guide: <http://cwl.oregonstate.edu/wab/>.

FROM GOALS TO INTENTIONS: YOGA, ZEN, AND OUR WRITING CENTER WORK

✦ *Erika Spohrer*
Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL

A tutor, let's call her Maxine, sits next to a tutee, let's call him Josh. Maxine has warmly introduced herself to Josh— and vice versa—and the two chat informally for a few minutes. When Josh pulls an essay from his backpack, he suddenly gets very quiet and appears nervous.

> *Maxine*: So, Josh, tell me about your essay.
>
> *Josh*: It's for Marine Biology.
>
> *Maxine*: And what's it about?
>
> *Josh*: Marine Biology.
>
> *Maxine*: Okay. So what did the professor ask you to write about Marine Biology?
>
> *Josh*: It's just supposed to be about Marine Biology.

Maxine continues to probe, attempting to get Josh to talk about his essay. But he won't; he just won't.

Steeped in writing center theory that has told her that effective writing center sessions are dialogic and based on conversation, Maxine begins to feel that she is failing; she can't coax her tutee to open up about his writing, no matter how friendly she is or how many different ways she asks questions. When Josh pleads with her not to read his essay aloud, Maxine thinks she has two options: (a) she can read it aloud against his wishes, or (b) she can capitulate and read it silently. Because she so vehemently subscribes to the theory she's learned and (therefore) sees the latter option as unacceptable and an admission of failure, Maxine might choose option (a). Miserable, Josh would listen as she read his essay aloud, glancing furtively at the others in the room. When he hurried out the door at the end of the session, Maxine would know the session hadn't been her most successful. She would also be miserable—but unable put her finger on why. On the other hand, Maxine might choose option (b). She could "give in" (as she sees it) to Josh and not read the essay aloud; as the session progressed, she might find herself being more directive than she'd like. When Josh would leave the session seemingly happy, she might nonetheless give a slow groan, believing she had failed as a writing tutor because she had failed to live up to her theoretical ideals. While these two scenarios might look drastically different, they are crucially similar in Maxine's response to them: when the session doesn't look or sound as she hopes, she feels she has failed.

Maxine's is an experience we writing center folk have likely all encountered: those sessions that challenge all of our training, all of the important theory that has inspired us to become writing center tutors in the first place. And while her emotional response to the experience might not resemble your own, it nonetheless highlights a potential tension between the abstractions of writing center theory and the realities of writing center practice.

In the article that follows, I bring Zen meditation and yoga to bear on this potential tension. My desire to do so follows from my own response to writing center theory as a tutor. In particular, when introduced to Marilyn Cooper's wonderfully compelling and rigorous "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers," I read with great interest the notion that

> [tutors] need to help students understand that if they are to achieve agency in writing, they must learn how to challenge . . . constraints productively in the service of their own goals and needs. Agency in writing is not a matter of simply taking subject positions offered by assignments but of actively constructing subject positions that negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs. (59)

While reading these words, though, I wondered, "What does that actually look like? How do I achieve

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

agency in the space of the writing center, among two material bodies—and in a 30-minute session?"

The best answer I've found—so far—is that you don't: as a goal for any 30-minute session, "actively constructing subject positions" is both unrealistic and undesirable (just as in the case with Maxine, engaging in dialogic exchange with Josh was simply not possible). Yoga and Zen can teach us that a fixed goal, even if theoretically and ideologically laudable, can hinder flexibility. Replacing our goals with intentions—as implied by Zen practice—can help make often-abstract writing center theory relevant to our writing center practice.

YOGA AS PROCESS

As we have all probably realized, yoga has swept the country (again) in popularity. Michael Nagler writes in the March/April 2004 issue of *Yoga Journal* that "yoga, as Patanjali [the father of yoga] defines it, is nothing more than stilling the mind, so we can see that longed-for beauty and let our life be flooded by those largely unsuspected resources" (69). In the same issue of *YJ*, though, Anne Cushman writes that "the desire to generate good feelings and avoid bad ones is a powerful—if largely unconscious—motivator for our [yoga] practice" (64). In other words, especially in the U.S., we want things from yoga: we want more calmness; we want a better body; we want to stretch out the hamstrings we tighten from running four days a week. So we often go to a particular yoga session with goals; like Maxine, we enter our daily practice with a desired outcome in mind. Cushman, though, suggests that we practice yoga with equanimity, meaning that "our effort is fueled not by obsession with the outcome but by the integrity of the effort itself" (64).

It is important to note that Cushman does not claim that we do yoga incorrectly by imbuing it with a goal. Rather, she suggests that we miss things as we strive—even struggle—to achieve our goals; we miss all of the subtleties that a less goal-orientated practice can teach us. Likewise, while I would not claim that it is wrong to help a student improve a particular essay or to use theory to steer a session to a particular end, we do miss the subtleties of a writing center session when we focus solely on its outcome.

ZEN AS PROCESS

Zen practice also teaches us about subtlety. Zazen, or seated meditation, is the heart of Zen and parallels yoga practice in many ways. Just as Cushman encourages yogis to "just practice," so does Zen encourage the meditator to "just sit." Ideally, a Zen Buddhist does not sit at any particular time with a specific goal in mind. In other words, sitting for thirty minutes on June 24th is not meant to achieve pointed concentration *so that* I might write a compelling journal article. Surely, clarity and efficiency may be a by-product of sitting that day—a sitting that falls into a pattern of sitting daily—but a particular sitting is not meant to "get results."

Specifically, the teachings of Shunryo Suzuki, a vital figure in bringing Zen to the U.S., give us a way to address subtlety, goals, and, finally, our approach to theory and practice in our writing center sessions. The heart of zazen, in fact, is goalless. Suzuki writes that "usually when you practice zazen, you will set up an ideal or goal which you strive to attain and fulfill. But as I have often said, this is absurd. When you are idealistic, you have some gaining idea within yourself" (71). This "gaining idea" means that we are striving—and often struggling—to attain some ideal, striving to gain something. And in the process, we miss what's here: "A mind full of preconceived ideas . . . or habits is not open to things as they are" (88). Suzuki's claim, then, is that we lose openness and flexibility when we are too goal-oriented in our practice.

In the case of Maxine, her preconceived theoretical ideals kept her closed to the possibility that a session that looked and sounded different than planned might indeed have immense merit. Her dilemma in fact echoes scholars' fears about writing center theory—that in its attempts at comprehensiveness and unity, it loses flexibility. Eric Hobson writes that "totalizing paradigms" and theoretical "unity" are too limited

TAKE NOTE

("Writing Center Practice" 7) and that "current theory does not accommodate the flexibility we need in practice. The theory behind writing centers assumes that practice is static rather than dynamic" ("Maintaining Our Balance" 44).

Yoga and Zen might offer some insight into keeping our practices from becoming rigid. A yogi's body is a flexible, mobile entity; similarly, in Zen, a clear, open mind is a supple mind—a flexible mind that is able to respond with spontaneity and grace to situations as they arise: Suzuki writes, "Our mind should be soft and open to things as they are. When our thinking is soft, it is called imperturbable thinking. This is mindfulness" (115). So zazen is not about control; Suzuki writes, "[W]hen you are practicing zazen, do not try to stop your thinking. Let it stop by itself. If something comes into your mind, let it come in, and let it go out. It will not stay long. When you try to stop your thinking, it means you are bothered by it. Do not be bothered by [it]" (34).

Importantly, "enlightenment is not some good feeling or some particular state of mind. The state of mind that exists when you sit in the right posture is, itself, enlightenment" (28). Thus, the meditator's effort is not attached to a particular goal. The sitting is not getting her something; it is a process rather than a product: "[T]he result is not the point; it is the effort to improve ourselves that is valuable," Suzuki writes. "There is no end to this practice" (45).

FROM GOALS TO INTENTIONS

Without a particular **goal** in mind, the meditator has instead a less immediate, less ego-driven **intention** for practice generally. Whereas a goal, focused on the short-term, would drive an individual session, an intention takes a longer view, envisioning all of our acts as moving us slowly in a certain direction. This longer-term, more patient notion of intention makes zazen an on-going practice, a path of lifelong travel rather than a doorway of immediate entry.

Given this idea of intention, Zen can be of use in our writing center work, in this case regarding the relationship between theory and practice. Rather than using some abstract, theoretical ideal as a goal for our practice, for a particular writing center session, we can view our theoretical paradigms as intentions. Specifically, theory can give our writing centers an intention and vision—a philosophy that motivates our tutoring and underlies the way we interact with our tutees. But theory does not work as a short-term goal: empowering students as writers and critical thinkers, de-centering the authority of academic discourse, and disrupting colonial imperatives are unrealistic goals for any 30-minute session—but they are realistic as intentions for writing center practice. So, returning to Cooper's article about writing center work and cultural studies, while it may be difficult to get a tutee to "negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs" as she sits there deciding where to add statistics to her essay on birth control, we can conceptualize this theoretical position as informing and motivating the practices we can see—asking questions, not writing on papers, reading aloud. In effect, our theory (whatever that may be) becomes our long-term intention for our writing centers rather than an immediate, definitive goal for any single writing center interaction.

For Maxine, this change in attitude would mean that she would feel justified and therefore more comfortable choosing option (b): she could honor Josh's wishes not to read his essay aloud. As the session continued, she would pay careful attention to his needs, which may, in fact, mean being more directive. What would change, though, is that Maxine would not see this kind of session as a failure. Rather, she would conceive of that particular session as one facet of an ongoing process; dialogic, writer-centered and writer-empowered exchange would be her *intention* for her practice generally but not her *goal* for that particular session. Ideally, this could mean that Josh would come to the writing center again in the

future, and that, *over time*, he might very well open up about his writing and feel more comfortable having his essay read aloud. And even if he did not return to the writing center, her session with him would have planted enough seeds to empower him as a writer—over time, perhaps even over a very long period of time. Essentially, having intentions rather than goals encourages us to be more patient—and more realistic about what we can accomplish in any single session.

And vitally, with intentions rather than goals behind our sessions, we can avoid controlling those sessions. Our own ideological positions as feminists, libratory pedagogues, and postcolonialists inform our sessions, but they do not control them; like the yoga and Zen practitioners, we keep our minds open to what *is* happening rather than fixating on what our ideological positions might imply *should* happen. In concrete terms, this means listening to our tutees to determine which directions our sessions will take rather than pushing them into directions that meet our theoretical goals.

In "Whispers of Coming and Going: Lessons from Fannie," Annie DiPardo writes about a well-intentioned tutor whose feminist theories became less about intention (process) than about goals (product). She writes,

> [W]hen Morgan returned from the CCCC with a vision of "collaboration" that cast it as a set of techniques rather than a new way to think about teaching and learning, the insights of panelists and workshop leaders devolved into a fossilized creed . . . . Morgan had somehow missed the importance of continually adjusting her approach in the light of understandings students make available. (114)

In other words, Morgan's practice, like the perfect-pose aspiring yogi's, like the goal-seeking meditator's, and like Maxine's, lost it suppleness. It lost flexibility.

DiPardo suggests that Morgan's tutoring sessions would have benefited not necessarily from Morgan's talking less but from her listening more. Indeed. And listening implies responding to the experiences within the tutoring session rather than controlling them. A yogic and Zen mind of intention avoids control: by keeping a Zen mind of intention rather than one fixed on goals—by seeing theory as a long-term intention rather than a short-term goal —we as tutors acknowledge that, as Cushman writes, "we can't manipulate much of any experience worth having" (67). In turn, we become learners and listeners, and our tutoring sessions belong to our tutees. ✦

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Tutor's Column

TO CONFORM OR NOT TO CONFORM:
ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT UNCONVENTIONAL WRITING

✦ *Danielle Sahm*
Messiah College, Grantham, PA

I read the paper over, sit back, and come to the conclusion that, for this client, half-an-hour will not be enough. As I read, I am amazed to discover that there is not a single period until the eighth page. Additionally, the client seems to have composed the entire piece in stream of consciousness, and the progression of his argument (if, indeed, an argument exists) is impossible to identify.   I am suddenly faced with a question that many writing center tutors face at least once during their careers: how does a tutor explain the rudiments of scholarly discourse to a client who doesn't even seem to have firmly grasped the English language? I do my best, but at the end of the half-hour we both come away discouraged. As I return his folder to the filing cabinet, I glance briefly at his name and shake my head. Whatever his major or vocation, this William Faulkner could use a lot of improvement in his writing.

Go ahead and laugh. But honestly, what would you do if a young, undiscovered William Faulkner came to your writing center? Or, to state the question another way, what would you do if you met a client with a writing style like Faulkner's? The tutor in such a position faces many concerns: how to help the client achieve intelligibility while at the same time retaining a unique voice, how to guide te client into producing *his or her* best work while avoiding inserting the tutor's particular privileges and writing preferences into the piece, and how to tell the difference between effective use of unconventional writing techniques and ineffective uses. Faulkner's writing style is, perhaps, a bit of an extreme example, but it serves as a useful way to initiate the discussion on individuality of voice, style, and technique which tutors at all writing centers face on a regular basis.

The anecdote of Faulkner's visit to the Messiah Writing Center is fictional, but in reality I have found myself in similar positions, albeit less extreme. I once had a client who attempted to save the thesis as a last, glorious flourish at the very end of her paper. In vain I looked for it in the first, second, even third paragraph, and had all but given up on it when it suddenly manifested itself in the middle of the conclusion. This affliction—I privately call it the "thesis deferred"—is common enough, and can usually be pointed out to the client and corrected by moving the thesis to the introduction. But when I pointed the fault out to this particular client, instead of the docile acceptance with which I usually meet, she agreed that the thesis was clearly in the conclusion and then went on to inform me that she had intentionally placed it there. For a moment, I was stumped. On the one hand, as a sophomore English major she was aware of the conventions she broke by moving the thesis and had put thought and intention into her paper, which is always to be commended and encouraged. But on the other hand, the disapproving voice of the professor, always looming in the back of my mind, berated me for even considering allowing this transgression against all that is holy in the five-paragraph essay to go uncorrected. I felt conflicted between the desire to help the client meet the professor's expectations by conforming to conventions and the wish to avoid ruining her style or replacing it with my own. How could I mediate between these two desires?

First of all, I considered the question of intentionality. I have often thought that the difference between writing badly and writing unconventionally lies in intentionality; the weakness in one person's writing may be the strength of another's simply because it serves a definite and deliberate purpose. One of my primary concerns as a tutor should be how the work will be read in an academic setting. "Think of your audience!" we tell our clients. Since professors decide the grade the paper will receive and are also the most familiar with what they hope to achieve through the assignment, professors' reactions should be taken into account above the feelings of a writing center tutor. However, as a writer, I can't help but gauge the client's status in the great evolution of writerly maturity. In high school we are all taught that it is absolutely wrong

to begin a sentence with 'but.' But, as we begin to dip our toes a little further into the vast sea of literature, we see that many writers realize that starting a sentence with 'but' can't be completely wrong because most of the Pulitzer-prize-winning, million-copy-selling authors are beginning sentences with 'but' and getting away with it. This realization is, for many writers, the first step along the path of rule-breaking. The end of the path—the rule-breaker's Nirvana—comes with the recognition that it is often precisely by breaking the rules that anything new, interesting, or ground-breaking is achieved in the field of writing. The difficult part for the tutor, of course, is measuring how far along clients have traveled on the path and whether they have a strong enough grasp on the rules to go about bending and shattering them. William Faulkner, for instance, stands as an example of a writer who grasped the concepts and then purposefully broke them. There are few who would argue that Faulkner did not know exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it. So, as I ponder my advice for my client, one aspect that I must consider is whether or not she realizes that she has broken a rule.

As I have already mentioned, she did realize that fact; she understood where the thesis should be and decided to put it somewhere else instead. My next question, then, would not be whether her decision is right or wrong, but whether it is effective or ineffective. Though few could argue about Faulkner's awareness and intentionality, many can and have argued over whether his techniques are effective. Similarly, as a tutor, I must ask myself whether the argument of the paper would be more effective if the thesis were in the introduction or the conclusion. My job as a writing center tutor is not to create client-machines capable of harvesting an A on every paper, but rather to produce good writers who understand the basics of writing and are able to explore its boundaries according to their own abilities and development. Often the two go together, but if it is a question between pleasing the professor and serving the client's writing, the decision seems clear. All of this plays into the suggestions I will give to the client.

There are a lot of things to keep in mind when faced with a writer like William Faulkner who defies conventions. In the situation I described, and in many similar situations in which I have found myself at the writing center, the question has arisen: is there anything I, as a writing center tutor, can do to avoid violating the individual voice of my clients? Two concepts to consider are whether the client intentionally made decisions about his or her writing, and even if those decisions were made consciously, whether or not they are effective. But even when keeping these things in mind, the tutor may not always make the right decision about whether the client should correct and conform or continue to defy conventions. And in such cases, whether the tutor gives sound advice or not, the client is at all times completely free to ignore the advice that is given. Most importantly, the tutor should try to help clients take a step forward on their path of writing development. If clients are at a point where they wish to experiment—to bend or even break accepted conventions – then it is the tutor's job to guide them in that experimentation to the best of his or her ability. When faced with unconventional writing, perhaps it is time for tutors to adjust their approaches accordingly. ✦

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

Oct. 4, 2008: Michigan Writing Centers Association, in Livonia, MI
Contact: Ann Russell; arussel@madonna.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.miwriting-centers.org/>.

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Oct. 30-Nov.1, 2008: International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Las Vegas, NV
Contact: Claire Hughes: clairehughes@weber.edu. Conference Web site: <http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter/IWCA.htm>.

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March 27-28, 2009: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in York, PA
Contact: Cynthia Crimmins (crimmin@ycp.edu) or Dominic Delli Carpini (dcarpini@ycp.edu). Conference Web site: <www.ycp.edu/lrc/maw-ca2009>.

✦

April 2-4, 2009: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Georgetown, TX
Contact: Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton (piedmone@southwestern.edu) and Cole Bennett (bcb00b@acu.edu).

✦

April 4-5, 2009: New England Writing Centers Association, in Hartford, CT
Contact: Katherine Tirabassi; 603-358-2924; e-mail: ktirabassi@keene.edu

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April 17-18, 2009: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Ellensburg, WA
Contact: Teresa Joy Kramer, kramert@cwu7.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.pnwca.org>.

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