THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

– FROM THE EDITOR –

Happy 2009 to us all. And as we launch into the new year, this issue of *WLN* offers articles that will focus on tutor training. When Julie Simon plunged into seeking tutor certification, she learned about the benefits to the tutors by involving them in the process rather than imposing requirements from above. Katherine Schmidt, with the help of the tutors in their Writing Center, shares what they have learned about how to effectively tutor students who are deaf. Bonnie Devet and the tutors in her Writing Lab discuss methods and outcomes when developing a DVD for tutor training. And Karen Gentry reflects on working with students whose writing exhibits less-than-mature thinking.

In addition to the emphasis on tutoring here, you'll also see demonstrations of collaboration in action—directors working with tutors to create knowledge and to share that knowledge when writing for the profession.

And you'll also find that the calendar for writing center conferences (page 16) is filled with listings of meetings to attend—meetings where we can interact with and learn from fellow writing center specialists. (If I've omitted any writing center conference from this listing, please let me know.) The next few months will find a lot of us trekking off to meetings from coast to coast. And for the adventurous, with lavish travel budgets, there is also a writing center conference in the United Arab Emirates.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

"TUTORIZING" CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

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Not all unintended consequences are negative. I discovered this when the writing center I direct adopted a program giving our undergraduate writing assistants the opportunity to certify with a national organization. Based on this experience, I am convinced that even certification programs designed to "professionalize" tutors can provide them a systematic way to "tutorize" our profession. More specifically, I have found that tutors completing certification requirements tend to re-define academic writing in ways that sometimes challenge our disciplinary conceptions. When those re-definitions take the shape of public events planned by tutors to fulfill certification requirements (and, not incidentally, to earn substantial pay raises), interesting ideas about the place of student writing in academe emerge. Moreover, when tutors enact their ideas in public forums such as workshops, readings, contests, and conferences, they provide an effective antidote to the "fix-it shop" image still plaguing our discipline despite the more than two decades that have passed since Stephen North's famous rejection of that metaphor (22-23).

Although one of my purposes here is to explain the nuts and bolts of the way our particular certification program extends North's "idea of a writing center" as student- and process-focused, my second major goal is as much theoretical as practical. That goal owes much to Joyce Kinkead

and Jeanette Harris's important observation that "writing centers . . . change from context to context" and "that, in fact, it is their environment, academic and otherwise, that most directly shapes them, giving them form and substance and the impetus to define themselves in certain ways" ("Introduction" xv). Because our center defines its work within a distinct institutional context, I will avoid the temptation of providing a template for other programs, each with distinctive needs, to follow. Instead, I suggest a set of questions that administrators and tutors considering entering, adapting, or altering a certification program might answer together to create a process that answers their particular needs: How will a certification program further our center's practical and theoretical goals? What should certification offer tutors beyond a line in their credentials file? How might it benefit our individual program and our discipline?

Perhaps the first question is the most important, the most difficult, and the most tightly connected to institutional context. In answering it, a center also makes certain responses to the other two questions possible or impossible, as I hope to show in a discussion that, out of necessity, keeps circling back to the issue of definition. Perhaps a brief description of our own center will serve to make it clear that individual contexts should shape the kind of certification tasks tutors should be asked to complete. Our Southern Utah University's (SUU) Center, for example, enjoys certain advantages even though it also must cope with challenges unique to our institutional context. The center I direct is housed in an English Department classroom remade into a computer lab, and that has served to help us hang onto our place on a campus where space is at a premium. We operate on a budget supported by composition course fees, a situation that gives me the luxury of a relatively stable budget over which I exercise a great deal of control.

Although we offer consultations—a total of about a thousand sessions a semester—to anyone who walks through the door, our departmental affiliation means that we give priority to meeting the needs of composition students. Our departmental affiliation also means that, in addition to offering consultant services to novice writers, we want to support our English majors and minors in pursuing their professional goals. In our unique context, such support means helping our majors stay in school in a state where the minimum wage doesn't offer workers a penny more than the federal standard.

Faculty and university administrators alike understand how essential the availability of "meaningful work" is to our institution's ability to attract and retain students. At the same time, because so many students on our campus need work in a climate of scarce resources, I must regularly defend my decision to offer an hourly wage much above minimum wage. Therefore, for me, the question of how best to define our certification program has to be answered in a way that would allow tutors to earn pay raises above a $7.50 base pay rate, which is already high enough to raise administrative eyebrows.

Certainly, such a definition also strongly implies an answer to my second question—what should certification offer tutors? However, as I tried four years ago to create a certification program reflective of our center's needs, the obvious response—the training to perform meaningful work and the credentials to convince upper-level administrators that tutors deserved considerably more than the minimum wage— struck me as insufficient. As tutors began putting our program into play, they taught me to recognize both the practical and the theoretical difficulties of limiting our program to the requirements, as thoughtful and rigorous as they were, of a national certification process.

The practical shortcoming was rooted in time—more specifically, my time. Although it is true that I enjoy privileges not available to every center director (chiefly, the stable source of funding mentioned earlier), my situation as a part-time director who is also a full-time faculty member is problematic. Like most of the readers of the *Writing Lab Newsletter,* I don't have nearly enough time to get everything done. And yet, again like the readers of this publication, I have high aspirations. Rather than simply adopting national standards and devoting a chunk of my limited time to supervising their fulfillment, I

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wanted to invite tutors to carve out individual paths to certification. At first, I thought that a home-grown certification program would be the answer. I simply gave the tutors the opportunity to engage in what I called "professional development activities" by paying them for the hours they needed to keep reflective journals, to observe each other's sessions, and to work on writing center projects. The extra pay, though, lost its motivating power about mid-term as the tutors tried to balance work with the need to prepare for tests and write major papers.

The next year, I decided to add the incentive of formal certification through the *College Reading and Learning Association*'s national program. The move from informal tutor-centered professional development to a training regime that listed specific and sequenced goals was such an easy one for me logistically that I failed to notice the problematic theoretical shift I was making. Since there was an SUU staff member authorized by the *College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA)* to approve tutor training programs and to offer certification at two levels, gaining access to the national program was relatively easy. Liking much about the *CRLA,* I created a list of certification requirements adhering to the organization's guidelines. (More information about *CRLA* is available on the organization's Web site: <http://www.crla.net>.)

However, I did not realize at the time how much the insertion of national certification standards into our center's culture would push our center's training philosophy towards what James Trimbur has identified as the "apprentice" model—a model that, by stressing professional development, presents "peer tutoring as an arm of the writing program, a way to deliver state-of-the-art instruction in writing to tutees" (26). The trouble with this model, Trimbur explains, is that it worsens the writing assistants' tendency to think and act like administrators and faculty, thus encouraging them to abandon their true authority as writers who are also students (25).

Keeping Trimbur in mind, I decided that I needed to customize the *CRLA* model to create a certification process that would encourage tutors to resist a "Mini-Me" identity. As Trimbur explains, "Tutors need . . . to develop confidence in their autonomous activity as co-learners, without the sanction of faculty leaning over their shoulder and telling them and their tutees when something is learned and when not" (27).

To give certification a "co-learner" flavor, I asked tutors to help me create an approach to certification that would allow them to move from the margins of academic life to the center of our center. Toward this end, tutors and I decided to augment the *CRLA* list of requirements with a set of tasks that would invite those working on certification to take the initiative in creating and conducting activities designed to support campus literacy in any way they wished to define that literacy. As a result, I ended up with a definition that characterized certification as a process through which tutors would insert themselves into the system not as a mere cog, but as something akin to a wrench. [1]

> " *By giving tutors the incentive to act and then getting out of their way, directors can acknowledge their abilities and their rights to shape the institutional spaces all of us share.* "

Has my attempt worked? As I prepared an earlier version of this paper for the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference, I asked our tutors why they were pursuing certification. Their answers, perhaps predictably, focused on the practical matters of being able to earn a higher hourly wage—50 cents per hour for the first level and $1 an hour for the second. All of them also mentioned the importance of being able to claim the honor of certification on their résumés. However, they also specifically mentioned the pleasure they felt in learning by doing, getting involved, having an influence. Their pleasure in those activities has been manifested not so much by what they say, but what they have done

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to shape the certification process to their own ends.

I say this quite mindful that many certification projects benefit me more than they do the tutors who initiate them, thus answering my third question—how might a certification program benefit our center and our discipline?—in an embarrassingly director-centered way. For instance, when tutors generate tipsheets and workshops—those tried-and-true staples of writing center pedagogy—they save me time and labor that I would otherwise have to invest in keeping our offerings fresh. However, when tutors create a handout or a workshop, they not only make my professional life easier, they exercise agency by identifying a double-sided problem—not only a *writing* problem that many of our clients are trying to solve, but a *consulting* problem that needs clearer articulation by and for our center community. In other words, they recognize that some of the struggles in their consultations result not so much from a client lack, but from a dearth of tutor certainty about how best to support the writer seeking help.

I should note here that many of those problems are not ones that I myself would have recognized as needing the formal recognition of a tipsheet or some other outreach effort. For example, tutors have created handouts on ways to figure out what faculty members want as readers and how students can overcome writer's block. Other topics explore how imagery works in literature and what dialogue can add to fiction. Even more standard topics, such as applications of MLA style, take on a student-inflected view of the world when tutors present them in workshops that offer participants not only the usual guidelines, but insider information on which professors insist on italics and which ask for underlining and who is "picky" and who is not. Often delivered in a locution that uses the expressions "you guys" and "like I said" (despite my railing against such deviations from Edited American English), the tutors offer up perfectly useful academic material that hails from Planet Student.

In doing so, tutors seeking certification seem to demonstrate an alternative to Trimbur's suggestion that the center take a developmental approach to training tutors by preserving the insights they hold as students as long as possible. He argues that administrators can refrain from professionalizing our tutors too soon by first training them to recognize the power of collaborative approaches to learning and writing and their own ability to tutor not as an "expert," but as a partner in inquiry (26). I endorse these ideas as sound in a theoretical sense. However, on my planet, there is not a lot of time to enact the two-part approach to training that Trimbur advocates—at least not if that approach is construed as a linear one. Perhaps, though, the kind of certification program I advocate makes it possible for students to comfortably and productively deal with the problems, sometimes subtle, that leave both writing assistants and their clients frustrated. By giving tutors the incentive to act and then getting out of their way, directors can acknowledge their abilities and their rights to shape the institutional spaces all of us share.

In our center, tutors have exercised this right and this ability in events that I like to think of in terms of what Donna Haraway might call "modest interventions" meant to readjust cultural systems from the inside out. A few brief examples of the way our writing assistants have "tutorized" their certification requirements may serve to illustrate my point. When I suggested that our center sponsor a reading by a regional nature writer, tutors agreed with excitement and then promptly planned a panel discussion that featured not only the writer, but a professor and a student, all engaged in producing various forms of nonfiction. A similar process unfolded when a different set of tutors agreed to take over our contest for composition students. Yes, of course, they followed the template of the shopworn, faculty-directed version of the contest to some degree. However, once they were in control, tutors made several changes meant to highlight student writing in more concrete terms than before. Deciding that a once-a-year contest was insufficient, tutors set up a system of early deadlines so that awards could be given to students currently enrolled in our composition classes. Furthermore, they rejected our old print journal as too expensive and decided on publication in the form of our snazzy but inexpensive on-line journal. They invested the savings in larger cash prizes and in a reading and reception for the winners,

complete with an elegant dessert table. The reading no longer featured an invited professional author, but the winners themselves, who were introduced with the sort of brief biographies usually reserved for those with formal credentials.

A similar re-emphasis on student experience and knowledge asserts itself in almost every project the tutors plan. Weary of professorial pronouncements on graduate school, tutors planned a workshop featuring a recent writing assistant graduate who had entered the University of Utah's graduate school. Organizing our center's participation in the annual *NCTE* African American Read-in, tutors made a productive connection with the campus Multicultural Center. Asked to facilitate small group workshops in our new basic writing program, tutors created a survey that asked students detailed questions about their experience. They also created a panel discussion for the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference on the ways in which their experiences had influenced their writing center work. Furthermore, the leader of the panel wrote an article on the topic that was published in an on-line peer tutoring journal. Last fall, a tutor organized a reading of excerpts of challenged books when she realized the local library had not planned any events in connection with Banned Book Week. As a follow-up, she researched the library to create a long list of challenged books that had been "lost" by patrons, a list that another tutor plans to use as the basis for a project designed to get those volumes back on the library shelves.

Now I come to my last point: invited to certify by taking innovative actions of their own choice, writing assistants have found ways to insert themselves into the academy and to remind me that training should not be a matter of setting tasks and then pronouncing judgments on them. Instead training—and thus certification processes—should offer opportunities for tutors to make their own way though the academy and, in doing so, to leave paths for other students to follow. By the not-so-simple acts of creating such personally-inflected events, they have answered that third question—"How might certification benefit our individual program and our discipline?"—in ways more complicated and more interesting than I first thought. Rather than getting work done that I don't have time to do, writing assistants who are certifying often get work done that I wouldn't *think* of doing myself. Moreover, in doing so, they demonstrate to the university at large that writing is not just a professor-driven activity, but one that students find valuable, exciting, and amenable to the furthering of student (not faculty) purposes. A fix-it shop surely would have no interest in checking library shelves for the presence or absence of banned books. Nor would it bother to survey basic writers about what they were getting out of a required class. However, a writing center staffed by tutors certifying in a way that asks them not only to complete tasks, but to create them, is interested in a variety of projects and programs designed to make institutional life better. As the late, great Donald Murray, whose death was announced the week I began this essay, was eager to remind us, writing is about surprise and discovery. If this statement is true, certainly any writing center endeavor, including certification, should offer avenues into the unexpected joy of unintended consequences. ✦

Note

[1]To view our certification checklist: <http://www.suu.edu/hss/english/writingcenter/pdf/certification.pdf>.

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LESSENING THE DIVIDE: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HEARING CONSULTANTS AND DEAF STUDENT-WRITERS

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INTRODUCTION

Casey, who has frequented our Writing Center for as long as our most seasoned consultants can remember, is deaf. Over the course of nearly four years, she has steadily worked to improve her writing by resorting to a not-so-unusual routine for deaf writers: Casey has made it a habit to seek assistance for each writing assignment over a period of time and via multiple sessions, sometimes reaching half a dozen in-person appointments over a three-week period.

Because of her unique position as both a deaf student and a long-time Writing Center client, Casey has developed a refined sense of what works for her during tutoring sessions, what doesn't, and why. Thus, we began to solicit targeted advice from Casey on a regular basis with two goals in mind: to immediately improve our services to suit her and other deaf students' particular needs and to ultimately incorporate Casey's suggestions into our ten-week tutor training program.

Our discussions with Casey were well under way when we received a call for proposals for the regional writing centers conference, and we were thrilled by the thought of sharing our work (i.e., suggestions from Casey and existing research in the field) with colleagues in our region. The program keynote, however, was "Let's Talk about Talk," and we immediately realized that our work did not easily fit the year's theme. We were suddenly positioned as outsiders. In "Transcending 'Conversing': A Deaf Student in the Writing Center," Margaret E. Weaver argues that faculty and staff tend to possess false assumptions about deaf learners that are directed by *audist perspectives* (224), which include the following:

- a language is comprised of a set of arbitrary sounds that possess conventional meanings and are used in conventional ways (i.e., spoken language is legitimate language);
- when a student lip-reads and possesses the ability to orally communicate in English, she is fluent in English written conventions and English is her primary language;
- a deaf student is not a "beginner" in English (i.e., she is not viewed as a non-native learner) but rather a counterpart to the native writer who possesses an ability to write but fails to invest "thought" into her work;
- the catalyst for the writing problems of a deaf learner is simply "lack of motivation" (223-4).

Talking is not always an option in tutoring sessions, yet audist-directed presuppositions minimize the complex nature of this reality. The audist perspective is so prevalent in academia that even writing centers fall under its spell, and deafness remains relatively uncharted territory in our work.

While deaf students have been utilizing writing center services for several decades, Deaf students' needs continue to receive peripheral, if any, treatment in tutor training programs because little scholarship exists on the subject. While Brenda Jo Brueggemann, a deaf woman herself, offers direction with regard to general composition and deafness, the scholarship of Rebecca Day Babcock specifically pairs deafness and writing centers; unfortunately, much of Babcock's work is still forthcoming.

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Ultimately, writing centers continue to struggle to meet the needs of deaf students in theoretically sound ways because of presuppositions that exist in general academia along with the lack of intersections between writing center and deaf scholarship.

<u>d</u>EAF AND <u>D</u>EAF: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There exists a substantial difference between the terms <u>d</u>eaf and <u>D</u>eaf. When "deaf" is written with a lower case "d," the term refers to actual hearing impairment. For example, an individual who once possessed full hearing function but, as an adult, lost her ability to hear is deaf. She may not identify herself as part of the Deaf community because she is not familiar with ASL and does not have Deaf social networks; however, she is considered deaf based on her hearing impairment.

"Deaf" written with an upper case "D" refers to embracing, participating in, and being accepted as part of Deaf culture, regardless of hearing ability (Cook and Learner). Deaf culture may include those who attend deaf schools, the children of deaf parents, and some sign language interpreters (Baker and Padden). For example, a hearing child who is raised by deaf parents often self-identifies with Deaf customs, actively associates with other members of the Deaf community, and is familiar with sign language; thus, she belongs to, and self-identifies with, the Deaf community.

While Deaf individuals do not regard deafness as an impairment, they are often at a disadvantage to hearing people because everyday society tends to be structured around, and for, hearing individuals. Additionally, deaf individuals construct their identities in a variety of ways, are exposed to a variety of situations and environments, and learn via complex and varied pedagogical contexts; thus, the aforementioned definitions of <u>d</u>eaf and <u>D</u>eaf serve an operational and transactional function and, by no means, do justice to the wide range of experiences that deaf people possess.

WHAT IS ASL?

American Sign Language, or ASL, is the native language of 550,000 to 1 million individuals (Cook and Learner). Contrary to audist-based beliefs, ASL is not simply English in signed form; rather, English and ASL are completely discrete language systems (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington). Signed English, on the other hand, consists of the lengthy process of signing the individual nuances of an English sentence.

Because there is a lack of one-to-one correspondence between ASL and English, switching between the two can be extremely difficult (Bober); ASL is pictorial/visual and three dimensional while English is audible and linear. In ASL, a signer uses the physical space she occupies to assist her in communicating; facial expressions also serve a primary role in communication exchanges. In English, the Deaf writer is limited to and by words; when vocabulary is limited, ideas in written English are automatically limited as well.

The literal structures of the two languages are also different, and these differences are often evident in deaf students' writing. For example, to express the idea that a movie was seen in the past, a deaf student may write the following sentence: *Yesterday movie I see.* Offering an uninflected verb is common because verbs are not conjugated in ASL. While a verb in English is conjugated to indicate the tense of the action, who is doing the action, or both, tense is indicated through a sign separate from the verb in ASL. The sentence "I saw a movie" can be expressed in ASL by first indicating the tense of the situation using a sign such as "finished" or "yesterday" followed by the direct object " movie," the doer of the action " I," and finally the infinite verb "see."

ERROR PATTERNS FOR DEAF WRITERS

One of the most fundamental differences between hearing and deaf writers of English is that hearing writers have an advantage in an audist world: they have the convenience of writing in their first language while deaf writers must learn how to write in a second language in a manner similar to non-native English writers. However, the language disparity is much greater for deaf individuals than for non-native hearing individuals simply because the former populace possesses little access to written and spoken English (Antia, Reed, and Kreimeyer). Because audible English immersion is impossible for deaf students, deaf writers face much greater difficulties in overcoming English writing barriers and meeting American academic standards than their non-native hearing counterparts. Due to possessing little, or no, access to audible English, typical error patterns do emerge in the written work of deaf students. Notably, ASL is void of punctuation; thus, this absence engenders many errors.

MOST COMMON ERRORS

• *UNCONVENTIONAL SUBJECT-VERB ORDER*

On a large scale, most of the structural patterns between English and ASL are different (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington). Discrepancies between structures such as subject/verb order and explicit/implicit meaning are perhaps a primary reason why deaf writers have difficulties writing. In English, a grammatically correct sentence typically places the subject before the verb and requires both constituents to be overt. However, in ASL, the verb or verb tense may precede the subject, if either is explicitly given at all. For example, the signs that would convey "I go to the store" would include the following:

"store" + "I" + "go"

Thus, deaf writers may confuse conventional order for the subject and predicate. Additionally, some ideas in ASL are expressed through body movements and facial expressions and do not require distinct signs.

• *ABSENCE OF "TO BE" VERBS*

ASL writers may tend to drop "to be" verbs in their writing (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington). In ASL, ideas are expressed by giving context and the idea that applies to that particular context, which does not always make verb usage necessary. For example, the idea of a girl being pretty may be signed with the following:

"she" + "pretty"

This speech pattern is often transposed to deaf students' written English. Instead of "she is pretty," they might write "she pretty." While the idea is expressed in the phrase, the construction is not grammatically correct according to English-based conventions.

• *ABSENCE OF POSSESSIVE MARKERS*

Deaf writers may fail to use possessive markers (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington). Again, possessive markers are not a necessity in ASL, so deaf writers may omit possessive markers when writing in English. Instead of saying "Nicole's dog," a deaf writer may simply give the signs in spatial relation toward Nicole's direction:

"Nicole" + "dog"

When writing, deaf students may fail to include the possessive "s," the possessive apostrophe, or both.

• *ABSENCE OF PLURAL MARKERS*

Plural markers may be absent for a reason similar to the absence of possessive markers (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington). In ASL, if the idea of "more than one" accompanies an object, the sign for the object will not change (be made plural). The number or amount would be indicated before the noun. For example, "apple" would be signed the same, regardless of the number of apples; the amount of apples would be indicated with a number sign prior to the sign for apple:

"10" + "apple"

Thus, when there is more than one apple reference in a written sentence, the plural marker on the noun may be absent.

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• MISUSE OF VERB TENSE

Deaf writers may have a problem giving appropriate verb tense when writing because tense is not a concept utilized in ASL (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington). If someone were to say "I crossed the street," the clause would be translated into ASL by giving the following signs:

"finished" + "street" + "person walking across"

Thus, a deaf writer is more likely to write verbs in their infinitive forms.

• ABSENCE OF DETERMINERS/ARTICLES

Another common error is the periodic absence of determiners/articles (Michaud, McCoy, and Pennington) because determiners/articles are simply not necessary in ASL. The phrase "I want an apple" would be signed as follows:

"I" + "want" + "apple"

The nonessential nature of determiners/articles in ASL often transfers over to deaf students' writing as exemplified by the absence of determiners/articles in sentences.

COMMUNICATION BASICS FOR HEARING CONSULTANTS

A writing consultant has the ability to engender profound changes in the writerly development of a student who uses writing center services regularly. Traditional tutor training, however, rarely includes theoretically-grounded guidance in the area of working with deaf writers, who possess extremely limited exposure to discourse features of conventional English and whose primary language (ASL) includes no written form. The gap in training often leads even the most experienced of consultants to become more directive and less collaborative while working with deaf student-writers.

Based on our experiences with deaf-student writers and our conversations with Casey, we have devised some useful tips to improve basic communication between deaf student-writers and their hearing consultants.

COMMUNICATION 101

• BE COMFORTABLE FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE

Feeling out of your element the first time you work with a deaf student-writer is not only normal—it's expected. For you as a hearing consultant, the experience can evoke the same kind of anxiety that working with a senior-level student-writer on a paper in a discipline with which you are completely unfamiliar evokes: fear may overtake your ability to read, speak, and think like a writing consultant. Thus, you should simply expect to feel uncomfortable at first; also, keep in mind that the deaf student-writer is likely to feel uncomfortable as well, especially when the session marks one of her first tutoring experiences. The awkwardness, however, will soon subside, and the writing—as opposed to the unfamiliar situation—will become the focal point of the session.

• VISUALLY STIMULATE THE CONVERSATION

To initiate conversation, make direct eye contact with the student-writer or use some sort of visual indicator (e.g., wave or learn to sign "hello") to invite her to begin the session.

• FOCUS ON THE STUDENT-WRITER

Always look directly at the deaf student-writer throughout the session. Do not allow your eyes to wander, and do not converse with an interpreter if one is present. Instead, speak directly to the student-writer and remain focused on him during the entire exchange: the interpreter conveys your message in sign, the student-writer replies in sign, and the interpreter conveys the student-writer's response in spoken English. It is imperative to remember throughout this exchange that you are having a conversation with the deaf student-writer, and your attention should remain on him, as if no third party is involved.

• INVITE THE STUDENT-WRITER TO DECIDE

The term "deaf" includes both complete and incomplete hearing loss, and each deaf student-writer may differ in communication needs based on her particular degree of hearing loss. Thus, always ask the student-writer who is without an

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interpreter to identify the type of communication with which she feels most comfortable: writing to communicate, lip-reading, or both. For the student-writer who opts to write, offer the option of sitting at a computer together.

GROUND RULES

1. Sit in a well-lit area to enable a deaf student-writer who is lip-reading to easily see your mouth and the words you are saying.
2. Do not chew gum or eat candy at any point during the session.
3. Speak clearly, without physically overemphasizing words.
4. Use short sentences.
5. Avoid jargon.
6. Use universal gestures (e.g., waving, head nod, thumbs up) in communicating, especially if the deaf person does not lip-read. Even for a deaf person who does lip-read, gestures can be helpful by keeping the conversation lively and interesting.
7. In Deaf culture, several conversation-related actions can be interpreted as rude; thus, avoid breaking eye contact with the student-writer, leaving the conversation too abruptly, or rushing her while engaged in conversation.
8. Do not say, "Never mind," or "It's not important." Such phrases often make a deaf student-writer (and hearing student-writers, for that matter) feel excluded or that you are frustrated with him. More than likely, the client will appreciate the effort you take to share the information with him, no matter how trivial you may believe it to be.
9. If you improvise a visual aide, do not talk at the same time or it will force the student to choose between attending to the example and lip reading, or watching an interpreter.

• *PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH: WRITE IT*

If problems arise when verbally communicating with a deaf student-writer, use a writing utensil or sit at a computer together to get your message across. Remember that when you resort to written exchange, short phrases will suffice (i.e., do not worry about writing every single word).

DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Much has yet to be explored with regard to tutoring writing in situations where talk is not always possible. Fortunately, however, our long-time client Casey placed us in a unique position, as her solicited advice engendered permanent changes in our environment. As a direct result of our work with her, our writing center has taken steps to place the writerly needs of deaf student-writers in an ordinate position in our training and daily workings: an ASL major has joined the tutor crew for the 2007-08 academic year, we have developed a unit on deaf student-writers for our training manual, a deaf-literacy expert is scheduled to serve as a guest speaker during fall training, and the director plans to enroll in the Deaf-culture class offered by the College of Education.

Additionally, however, Casey recommends that writing consultants consider the following: attempt to learn a few basic signs; become familiar with Deaf culture and the nuances of ASL itself; allow for extended time when meeting with deaf student-writers, especially those who work with interpreters; and coordinate with the office of disability services to post schedules in the writing center that advertise interpreters' schedules of availability and contact numbers.

On a more global level, however, writing center practitioners need to vigorously construct intersections between writing center scholarship and deaf-literacy research. By exploring how we can best serve deaf clients and by learning how we can position ourselves as cultural informants for colleagues who view deaf writers through audist lenses, we begin to lessen the divide which currently exists between hearing consultants and deaf student-writers. ✦

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

KEN BURNS IN THE WRITING LAB: MAKING A TRAINING DVD OF A CONSULTATION

✦ *Bonnie Devet, Joanne Cinense, Kaylee Rogers, and Chris Snyder*
College of Charleston
Charleston, SC

Should we or shouldn't we? This Hamlet-like question arose when our Writing Lab was deciding if it should make a DVD showing the movement and tone and tempo of a consultation. While other centers have, informally, videotaped bits of sessions (such as dealing with a recalcitrant client, coping with the crying student, or helping a student write a literary analysis), these short segments often have a whiff of staginess and do not capture a complete tutorial with its false starts and reversals and peaks and valleys and hesitations. So, with little experience but much enthusiasm, three consultants and I ventured into the land of documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, deciding to film and edit a full consultation, making it as natural as possible. While all tutorials are unique, and no recorded session can capture every nuance arising in each session, consultants—especially new ones—can at least see one real tutorial complete from the initial greeting of the student writer to the exit of the client. For other centers planning to make a training DVD, my consultants and I would like to provide insight into the options, decisions, and, yes, even difficulties, that will arise.

CHOOSING THE CAST AND THE SAMPLE PAPER

Our lab chose not to film an actual tutorial. Although a release could be secured to allow a session to be filmed, the privacy of clients is paramount. Instead, we decided to cast our taping with two consultants. While experience is, of course, vital for the consultant-actor, I chose a consultant based on enthusiasm proffered during observed consultations, empathy demonstrated for the clients, and the variety of techniques employed in sessions. Because the consultant would *not* have seen the paper ahead of time (for more realism), this consultant also had to be flexible. And to play the client? That choice was easy: I picked a tutor who had exhibited the most sensitivity to clients and who understood how they struggle. The client-actor read the paper ahead of time, studying it to make sure she knew what she would say to her tutor.

A paper, though, is hard to pick. Too long, it drags down the taping; too complicated in its problems (like drifting off the assigned topic or being filled with convoluted logic), it also bogs down the session. So, I used an essay with problems that occur in most tutorials: the sample paper lacked a clear thesis but found it about half through the essay, and it also possessed a fair number of grammatical problems. Even though a useful source for papers could be those that come through the lab, I would not advise using an essay from one's own school. Even with the student's permission, it might be embarrassing for a client if a viewer of the DVD recognized the paper. Instead, it is easier to find an essay in collections, such as Muriel Harris's venerable and famous *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*, in the back of which are numerous sample papers. Here I found mine, which was slightly shortened for the taping. Before using a paper from a printed source, be sure to contact the publisher for copyright permission; NCTE promptly granted "fair use" for the short paper found in Harris's book.

HANDLING TECHNICAL ISSUES

The important technical issues to watch for are lighting, the background, your camera, the sound recording, shooting angles, and, after the filming, the arduous task of editing. Luckily, filming in our lab was easy. Its cream-colored walls reflected the lighting evenly, and its bookshelves provided an appropriately scholarly background. I would warn directors to watch out for technical problems arising from the camera itself. Kaylee Rogers, the consultant who filmed the session, reports: "I was limited by the battery pack on the Sony digital video recorder (DVR). Because it is a Handycam, its battery does not retain power for long. I also found it hard to hold the camera steady during the filming. My arms felt as if they would go out from under me, so

I would recommend using a tripod." While the tripod could have been useful, directors should also know that shooting from a tripod lends no variety to the images, leading to a static scene. Without a tripod, Rogers constantly moved the camera in order to capture different angles, always completely filling the camera's LCD screen with images of both the consultant and client. Another potential issue is the sound recording. Fortunately, because we shot close in (medium and close-ups), the Sony's built-in mic was more than adequate to catch the voices. For writing centers that employ wider shots, the two performers probably should wear microphones.

In the spirit of Hollywood, Rogers also decided to have the two performers repeat sequences so she could film the action from varied angles. This repetition meant that while editing, she had many shots from which to choose. Other useful shots are those of pages from the essay and of the client's hand making changes on the pages; these shots (or "cut-ins") can be inter-cut with the sequences, breaking up the time the two performers are merely talking. Once the filming is done, writing centers can expect to run into technical problems during the editing stage. Using the Mac program iMovie, Rogers edited the film, but she found she had an enormous amount of footage. With over thirty minutes to edit, Rogers found it hard "to keep all of it straight in my head. I sometimes got lost in the footage." To overcome what seemed a daunting task, Rogers provides other labs this advice: "Don't edit in one sitting; give yourself multiple sessions to do it." Clipping together footage from multiple takes was not easy, either. However, Rogers explains a labeling system for keeping up with the edits:

> The iMovie software automatically numbers your cuts from the initial recording and keeps up with cuts made during the editing process itself. On a task bar on the right hand side of the computer screen are different clips the user can drag onto a timeline for the final product. Although iMovie makes it impossible to lose any clips, it is sometimes difficult to remember which clip is which. So, when uploading the footage, the editor should note the number of each clip; then, use a pen and paper to construct a sequence of clips. Although an editor could name each sequence of filming, I just relied on the numbering of clips. Next, using the software, the editor should drag the clips in sequence, and only then worry about making cuts within the clips themselves. I made the mistake of splitting the clips before I had ordered the entire progression of scenes, so it was more difficult for me to conceptualize the final product.

SHOOTING THE SAMPLE CONSULTATION ITSELF

During the shooting, which took about sixty minutes, the two performers found, ironically, that playing client and tutor was not so easy. Chris Snyder, a veteran tutor in his second year, advises consultants that the hardest part was keeping in character and "trying not to laugh." Joanne Cinense, who played the client, felt it was hard to be a client when she was used to being on the other side of the paper working with students. She advises other client-actors to prepare for the part by "listing the most common concerns addressed during any consultations, and applying them to the selected essay. I also thought up questions to ask the tutor, such as 'Does this make sense?' 'Am I addressing each part as instructed by the professor?'" As the DVD director, I worried about the consultants' being nervous, which was reflected in one of their jokes: "Are we wearing the right clothes? What will the future think of us when everyone is wearing chains and studs?" I was concerned that this nervousness would mar the authenticity of the session. Their edgy energy, however, was advantageous, giving more animation to the scene than if they had not been nervous.

I also discovered, though, that we could do more than merely record a session. When the consultation had ended, a serendipitous moment occurred. I realized the cinematographer Rogers should also shoot just the consultant Snyder and, then, the client Cinense, answering questions. These off-the-page interviews should be as helpful to future viewers of the DVD as the recorded session, for both performers were forthright about what they had done, explaining in only about one or two minutes, as separate DVD chapters, what it is like to be consultant and client. So, lab directors who find themselves as erstwhile movie directors should look for the spontaneous even as they are filming the scripted. A treasure may lie in these instinctive moments.

DISCOVERING THE EFFECT OF MAKING THE DVD ON THE THREE CONSULTANTS

An indirect benefit of the taping was that the consultants making the DVD learned more about being tutors.

Cinematographer Rogers, in her third year as a tutor, reported she picked up a valuable tutoring technique:

I learned how well Snyder [the consultant] responds physically to clients. I have not thought of how much my gestures and the rest of my body speak to clients. When the client and I are reaching the end of the client's paper, for example, I tend to get restless, shifting the way I sit. I also pull the pencil out from behind my ear and put it back, so I think the client might be feeling pressure to end the session. I do tell clients it is ok to take their time, even when we have other clients waiting, but my body movements are not lining up with what I say. I have to adjust to keep the trust of the clients.

As the client, Cinense gained a different understanding about the emotional baggage students bring to sessions:

For them, it can be uncomfortable to expose their difficulty with writing. They don't want to seem 'dumb.' Truthfully, clients are not 'dumb' in writing. (I have just as much trouble with chemistry.) They just have trouble with trying to organize their ideas, and when they've discovered how to do so (i.e., brainstorming, listing, charting), everything seems to naturally work out.

For Snyder, the consultant, filming the DVD felt like a typical session: "I made suggestions without trying to control the client. I wanted to challenge her by asking specific questions; then, she could make her own changes."

IF WE COULD DO IT AGAIN

If our Lab could re-record the session, we would do some things differently. Cinsense, for example, described what was missing from her portrayal of the client: "I would have been a more stressed client. In a majority of the consultations I have had, stress has been one of the sources of frustration with the writing process, obstructing the client's ideas." Snyder, playing the consultant, noted another omission: "We needed to talk more about grammar; I seemed focused on coherence and structure and might have overlooked some big grammatical points." However, like any good tutor, Snyder did let the client lead the discussion and notes, "Coherence was the client's primary concern, though, so maybe I did ok." The cinematographer Rogers also offered a suggestion: "I would like to have ahead of time a copy of the paper to be used. Then, I would meet with the two consultants to show them where we could break up the reading. We would also rehearse to see where the stopping points would be so I could do easier editing."

USING THE DVD FOR TRAINING

Before using the DVD, I realize, as a director, that I will need to frame its showing in order to forestall a misconception. Tutors evolve into the consultants they were meant to become, developing distinctive tutoring techniques even while they follow the general procedures for conducting consultations. I have to be careful, then, that this recorded session is not perceived as the Platonic ideal, stifling the development of consultants' individual tutoring styles. In fact, the session we captured had its problems (as all tutorials do), something I would point out to help tutors learn. So, before they watch the DVD, I will be sure to stress that it shows only one session, and consultants should watch for techniques to adopt only if these fit their tutoring styles or if they would help their clients. After all, no one DVD recording can ever capture the epitome of tutoring.

CONCLUSION

None of us making this DVD would claim to be professionals; Ken Burns needn't worry about competition from us. What does make us qualified to do a DVD, though, is the consultants' years of experience working and helping others. That spirit of sharing and caring comes through, especially because of the sincerity and concern peer consultants show their clients, something that cannot be scripted but can be captured on a DVD for all to see. If we lab directors capture just that quality, then we have, indeed, produced an effective DVD for training. ✦

Note

[1] "The Consultation," our 30-minute training DVD, and the sample paper used on the DVD, can be viewed at <http://www.cofc.edu/studentlearningcenter/writing/>.

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Harris, Muriel. *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*. Urbana, NCTE, 1986. 179-81.

✦

TUTOR'S COLUMN

HOW I OVERCAME A TERRIBLY TRYING MOMENT IN MY LIFE AS A WRITING STUDIO TUTOR

✦ *Karen Gentry*
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At the beginning of the fall semester, I met with a first-year student who brought in a paper she wrote for a narrative essay assignment, one requiring her to describe a particularly trying moment in her life and to relate to her readers what she learned from this experience. Not all of us at age 18 or 19 have weathered a moment that qualifies as "trying," yet this student felt she had developed a narrative that had achieved this goal. With a shy smile, she pulled out her paper and set it between us on the table.

The crux of her piece was that she had suffered through the experience of being loved and adored by her father's side of the family, but, in comparison, had received only lukewarm affection from her mother's side. In one instance, her maternal aunt had complimented a cousin on her new hair style, but failed to mention the student writer's equally lovely new hairdo. In a supposedly more grievous incident, this same aunt missed one of the writer's high school basketball games, leaving only a few rows of her father's side of the family to cheer her to victory. The collective impact of these experiences left the student feeling isolated and abandoned. In the end, however, she learned that she did not need her mother's side of the family to accomplish great things and, almost completely on her own, applied to college and was accepted. She planned to get through the entire four years with the support of "only" her parents and twenty or so of her father's family.

True, my summary of the student's essay is sarcastic and cold. Yet, in a school where students regularly submit essays describing illness and loss, the violent gun battles they've survived, or the Civil-Rights-era grandmother who, despite having all of her possessions burned, managed to find a home and a job and provide for her family, this student's dilemma felt shallow and, well, a bit whiny. Coupled with the fact that I had just re-read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, I had a difficult time coming up with the initial positive feedback a tutoring session requires. New to the Writing Studio, I was unfamiliar with all the rules, yet I felt sure that it was not permissible to begin, "This is the damn stupidest life dilemma I've ever heard."

The trouble was, even though I loathed the personal trial, I was beginning to like the young student who had suffered through it. She was excited about college and had taken the initiative to come to the Writing Studio to have her first essay reviewed. She smiled as she waited for me to say something. I faltered. Who was I to weigh the trials of her life and judge them as insignificant? Was it her fault that her life, thus far, had been relatively pleasant? Perhaps her instructor, faced with twenty-four similarly ridiculous trials, might consider this student's paper acceptable. Fear of the student's reaction to my gut feelings kept me silent. I envisioned her filling out a post-tutoring session comment card that read, "Karen Gentry is not only cold-hearted, she's mean like my mother's side of the family. But I won't let Karen Gentry's meanness stop me from getting my college degree!"

Propelled by my chicken heart, I did what I always do when I'm afraid to say what I really think: I gave insipid advice. I started with the student-writer's first concern, organization. "Yes," I told her, "you might want to think about juxtaposing your mother's family's absence from a few of your basketball games with that terrible scene at the dinner table, in which you were not complimented." Even worse, I focused on sentence-level issues. "You keep repeating, 'my mother's family and my father's family.' See here, 'my mother's family is mean for no reason, my father's family has always loved me.' And 'my mother's family is cold' and 'my father's family really loves me.' Try mixing that up a bit."

I reflect on this tutoring session with a cringe. True, the student left pleased that I'd addressed all of her questions, yet I doubt her writing improved based on our session. Over the semester, I faced more than a dozen papers with similarly, for lack of a better word, immature analysis, themes, and arguments. "Abortion is Bad, Abortion is Good; The Israelis are Evil, the Palestinians are Evil-er; Homeless People are Bums, Homeless People are Bad, Homeless People Should Be Given Homes So They Won't Be Homeless Bums and Bad."

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

During the holiday break, softened by the luxuries of time, drink, and excess food, I found I could empathize with these students by reflecting on my own writing career. Next to a box of ornaments in my basement, I found a stack of my college essays. For an assignment asking me to respond to the quote, "If Ignorance is Bliss, 'Tis Folly to Be Wise," I used, as my central illustration, the horror of learning that Santa Claus was not a real man. "I would have preferred to remain ignorant," I wrote, but "a mean girl at a birthday party" told me that only idiot six year-olds still believed in Santa Claus. On this trauma, I elaborated for exactly five paragraphs, believing my essay covered the horrors of wisdom in today's post-modern, nuclear world.

Thankfully, I had professors who managed to communicate to me that, in college, we do not write about Santa Claus anymore. Sorting through other essays to see how these professors had handled me, I got a surprise. The professors I remember most fondly had quite a bit of criticism. "Please try not to get carried away with too many offbeat or flippant descriptions," one begged. "'Devil-possessed slut' comes immediately to mind." Some found kind words to soften their criticism: "Your third and final paragraphs don't quite fulfill the promise of your inspiration." Others were more blunt: "You might want to try arguing more than one point in a paper of this length."

I remember those professors who had the nerve to deliver bad news, and it is from their pointed criticism that I learned to improve my writing. In Richard Russo's "Horseman," included in *The Best American Short Stories* of 2007, the main character, Janet Moore, a successful graduate student and flawless writer, is disappointed during a conference with her academic hero, "the great Marcus Bellamy" (344). Janet, anticipating that he will shower her with praise, is thoroughly disappointed to find he has read a portfolio of her writing and concludes, "though it has much to recommend it, I have serious misgivings about your work" (345). Janet reacts with anger, but eventually, though disappointed with his "misgivings," comes to see the lack of her own self in her work. She struggles so much with the memory of Marcus Bellamy that she names her son after this critical professor.

I don't expect any of the students I tutor to name their children Karen Lee Gentry (though it does have a sophisticated and somewhat timeless ring to it). Still, I believe my tutoring sessions would have been more memorable and useful if I had employed some of my professors' gentle language to deliver the truth. I could have reminded the pro- and anti-abortionists that their audience might have grown weary of the subject. To the Middle East expert, I might have pointed to the page where his teacher wrote, "I want you to give space to the other side of this issue," and read the statement aloud. When the student responded, "Oh yeah, I didn't understand that comment, so I ignored it," instead of putting my finger to the headache behind my eye, I could have insisted that he look again. To improve as a tutor, I plan to remember my own beginnings, moderate my inner reactions, avoid giving insipid advice, and comment gently. I will accept that none of these comments will have an immediate impact on the students I tutor, just as none of my professors' comments had an immediate impact on my writing.

I will also hold onto an idealized vision of the future, imagining a point ten years from now. It's the height of winter and a student of mine has just stumbled on a box of undergraduate essays in her basement. She's laughing at the themes of her compositions and marveling at the teachers and tutors who helped draw her out of the folly of her youth, toward a wiser view of writing and the world. She's putting the box away and climbing the stairs to the main floor of her house, where her father's side of the family has gathered to celebrate the holidays, each of them still full of love and appreciation for my student. Later that night, her family tucked in bed, my student places a cookie and a glass of milk by the lighted tree. She takes a sip of the milk and wipes her top lip clean with the sleeve of her robe, remembering the man who was Santa Claus. ✦

<div align="center">Work Cited</div>

Russo, Richard. "Horseman." *The Best American Short Stories.* Ed. Stephen King and Heidi Pitlor. Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 2007. 341-364. ✦

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

February 7, 2009: Arizona Writing Centers Symposium, in Phoenix, AZ

Contact: Jeanne Simpson: Jeanne.simpson@asu.edu; Registration Web site: <http://studentsuccess.asu.edu/rsvp/>.

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February 19-20, 2009: Middle East—North Africa Writing Centers Alliance, in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

Contact: MENWCA newsletter link on the Web site: <http://tcc.qatar.tamu.edu/symposium.aspx>.

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February 21, 2009: So. California Writing Centers Conference, in Moorpark, CA

Contact: Kathryn Adams: kadams@vcccd.edu; 805-378-1400, x 1696.

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February 26-28, 2009: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Greensboro, NC

Contact: Hope Jackson, SWCA Chairperson: 336-334-7764; jacksonw@ncat.edu: Conference Web site: <cas.ncat.edu/~swca>.

◆

February 28, 2009: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Gilroy, CA

Contact: Natasha Oehlman: natasha_oehlman@csumb.edu; 831-582-4614 or Kimberly Smith: ksmith@gavilan.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.gavilan.edu/writing/NCWCAConference2009.html>.

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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/mawca2009>.

◆

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 3-4, 2009: East Central Writing Centers Association, in West Lafayette, IN

Contact: Linda Bergmann (lbergmann@purdue.edu) or Tammy Conard-Salvo (tcsalvo@purdue.edu). Conference Web site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/ecwca>.

◆

April 4-5, 2009: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Hartford, CT

Contact: Katherine Tirabassi; 603-358-2924; e-mail: ktirabassi@keene.edu

◆

April 17-18, 2009: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Ellensburg, WA

Contact: Teresa Joy Kramer; kramert@cwu.edu. Conference Web site:<http://www.pnwca.org/>.

◆

October 22-24, 2009: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Rapid City, SD

Contact: Christopher Ervin (cervin@usd.edu) or Greg Dyer (greg.dyer@usiouxfalls.edu).

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