THE WRITING LAB

– FROM THE EDITOR –

This *WLN* issue is aptly characterized by the first words of the title of Noreen G. Lape's article, "Going Global," and indeed, the issue reflects the increasing global orientation of writing centers.. As John Hall discussed in his article in the September/October 2013 *WLN*, many writing centers are finding that non-native speakers of English are appearing in greater numbers for tutorials. Similarly, in writing centers in other countries, the student writers—and in some cases also the tutors—are working in second or third languages. So Noreen Lape's article is especially useful as she discusses the new model for their center: a Multilingual Writing Center.

Multilingual concerns are a major focus of *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education,* a collection edited by Arlene Archer and Rose Richards and published in South Africa. The book is reviewed by Marna Broekhoff, who—having started a writing center in Namibia—emphasizes the "cultural and linguistic diversity of today's student body in higher education" and thus the relevance of Archer and Richards' book.

Helena Wahlstrom, a non-native speaker of English who tutors in English, reflects on concerns about working across language barriers. Finally, in her Tutor's Column article, Elizabeth Dellinger argues for the value of narratives and personal elements in writing.

If any regional or national writing center conferences for 2013-14 are not yet listed in our conference calendar, on p. 16, please let me know.

✦ *Muriel Harris, editor*

*J*NSIDE

GOING GLOBAL, BECOMING TRANSLINGUAL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTILINGUAL WRITING CENTER

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In an effort to prepare students for twenty-first century life, many institutions of higher education are seeking to develop "global citizens": students who are "engage[d] in global issues," see the "connection between the global and the local," practice "cultural empathy," and exhibit "intercultural competence" or the ability to communicate effectively across cultures (Green). To educate these global citizens, a growing number of colleges and universities have internationalized their curricula, increased their foreign language offerings, and multiplied their study abroad programs. At the same time, within the discipline of Writing Studies, many scholars have adopted an international perspective and are studying everything from academic genres to intercultural rhetoric to writing programs across cultures. Writing centers have always had a unique awareness of writing in international contexts, thanks to our good work with English language learners (ELL). However, writing centers can adopt an even broader understanding of writing in global contexts—one that not only builds on but extends beyond our work with English language learners. In a truly Multilingual Writing Center (MWC), tutors who are literate in multiple languages and

skilled as global citizens can work with writers as they construct their voices—linguistically, rhetorically, and discursively—in order to participate in the global exchange of ideas.

With the internationalizing of academia, a growing number of foreign language writing centers have emerged in recent years. Although a review of the writing center literature yields few studies on the topic, a cursory search of writing center websites reveals the existence of several Spanish and even some French and German writing centers, generally located in foreign language departments. Two notable examples are the University of San Francisco, which provides tutoring in English, French, Japanese, and Spanish; and DePaul University in Chicago, whose Collaborative for Multilingual Writing and Research employs a wide variety of foreign language writing tutors. Recently, the Norman M. Eberly Writing Center at Dickinson College has become a Multilingual Writing Center (MWC) where students writing not only in English but also Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish seek the assistance of trained writing tutors who are international students (both visiting and matriculated) and U.S. students who have studied abroad. Established in 1978, the Dickinson College Writing Center mainly has served U.S. students and, increasingly over the years, a growing number of international students learning to write academic English. Like other writing centers, the Dickinson Writing Center would provide sporadic foreign language writing tutoring—on an ad hoc basis—whenever foreign language faculty asked if they could send their writers to English tutors who also happened to be proficient in a foreign language. Then, in Fall 2010, the Writing Center reestablished itself as multilingual, opening its doors to nonnative writers of languages other than English—from U.S. students tackling a second or even third language to international students learning a third language in their second language.

A unique feature of Dickinson's MWC is its collaborative governance structure, which includes members of each foreign language department. Aware of the value of the English writing center, foreign language faculty supported the idea of an MWC staffed by trained and fluent undergraduate peer writing tutors. In fact, the Chair of the Italian Department envisioned that the MWC could build bridges between language departments, bringing together colleagues to discuss language and writing instruction. All saw the value of an MWC with a defined space, consistent staff, permanent budget line, centralized oversight, and mindful pedagogy. As a result, the committee chose to draft a proposal for an MWC. Since then, the committee continues to meet regularly to establish policy, define pedagogy, recommend tutors, and participate in their training. The conversations continually interrogate the interplay between writing center pedagogy, classroom practice, and the development of writing ability.

MULTILINGUAL AND TRANSLINGUAL

In the field of Writing Center Studies, "multilingual" generally refers to nonnative writers of World Englishes; in this essay, the term describes tutors and tutees at a college where all students are first and (at minimum) second-language learners because all must have knowledge of a foreign language through the intermediate level in order to graduate. What's more, two-thirds of those students study abroad at some point during their college careers ("Open"). Thus, in the Dickinson MWC, writers who will or have studied abroad work with tutors who have studied or are studying abroad here at Dickinson.

Multilingual also denotes an open-ended and questioning attitude toward discourse—an understanding that the notion of "good writing" differs across cultures (as does the notion of

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"good writing center pedagogy.") A multilingual environment, then, is the necessary but not sufficient condition for translingual practice. Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur explain that the translingual approach "address[es] how language norms are actually heterogeneous, fluid, and negotiable" (305). Translingualism opposes the traditional approach to second-language learning, which views difference as a sign of error and teaches "conform[ity] to fixed, uniform standards" (Horner et al. 305). Thus, second-language teachers and students may be multilingual without being translingual if they privilege standard forms of a language. In an MWC, however, where the focus is on process, tutors and writers routinely play with the fluidity of languages as they consider "what the writers are doing with language and why" (Horner et al. 305).

As far back as the early 1990s, Carol Severino imagined a "translingual" writing center, although she did not call it that ("Writing"; "'Doodles'"). While translingualists "recogniz[e] the linguistic heterogeneity of all users of language both within the United States and globally" (Horner et al. 305), Severino imagined a pedagogy that values the "hybridized, 'culturally balanced' styles" of international students ("'Doodles'" 56-57). Her call for a multicultural rhetoric that "allows experimental and culturally mixed patterns" is echoed later by the translingualists ("'Doodles'" 56-57). For Severino, writing centers can cultivate multicultural rhetoric by offering opportunities for "collaborative exploration of cultural and linguistic differences" ("'Doodles'" 57). Severino focuses on English language learners, yet her approach has implications for the MWC model.

Although an MWC calls into question monolingualist assumptions and U.S. concepts of academic writing, tutors must be aware that the personal learning goals of writers may not necessarily include "hybridity" or "linguistic heterogeneity." When writing cross-culturally, some writers find themselves in the contact zone, which Mary Louise Pratt famously defines as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (4). In a contact zone, writers may resist or subvert culture contact; alternatively, they may find themselves in a liminal position between cultures. Other writers experience cultural immersion when they choose to suspend identity to empathically experience another culture. In cultura-immersion contexts, writers may assimilate or erase the self, even temporarily or partially, and adopt another cultural identity; others may, instead, construct hybrid identities. In an MWC, hybridity is just one potential outcome of writing cross-culturally.

> " [T]he Multiliteracy Writing Center model raises a whole new set of questions about the teaching and learning of writing in international contexts for writing centers. "

CULTURAL IMMERSION AND WRITING CULTURE SHOCK

Despite some writers' desires to assimilate to the target writing culture and master standard forms of the language, heterogeneity is inescapable. Traditional English-only writing centers tend to have a far more monolingual staff comprised mainly of U.S. native speakers who have variously mastered Standard Written English. In the Dickinson MWC, the tutors represent a variety of writing experiences: native and non-native speakers of multiple languages who have written for professors in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Given this complexity, I wanted to understand how MWC tutors struggled with differing, culturally-specific notions of good writing when they wrote in their study abroad programs. Christiane Donahue notes that "a broadly ignored area of composition work is that of U.S. monolingual students' experiences when they go overseas to study or work and find themselves in universities or workplaces with different rhetorical, discursive, and sociolinguistic expectations, whether that work is being done in English or another language" ("'Internationalization'" 218). Because that kind of composition work undergirds an MWC situated in an institution with a

robust global education program, I began to survey each new incoming staff about their overseas writing experiences. Two staff members, Melissa and Grace, were seniors who had just returned from their junior year abroad in Toulouse (Melissa in 2010 and Grace in 2011). Prior to going, they completed the training course for English writing tutors. While studying in Toulouse at the Dickinson Center, they took the required French Methodology and Composition, a course that not only focuses on grammar and vocabulary but also teaches the basic French genres—*commentaire de texte*, dissertation, and exposé oral—that form the basis of university writing (Donahue, "Lycee" 136). Despite the direct instruction in writing, their experiences were very different. Grace found herself in a contact zone suffering writing culture shock as she grappled with feelings of disempowerment within an asymmetrical rhetorical relationship. Melissa, who focused more on genre expectations, seemed to assimilate to the writing culture without much conflict. Their experiences have implications for their translingual work with writers.

Grace and Melissa—whose previous academic writing mainly involved literary and cultural analysis—were taught to value arguing a controvertible thesis, developing an original analysis, and crafting an organic line of argument. Their U.S. professors encouraged them to offer counterarguments and to debate their sources, including the professor. In contrast, as Donahue describes, French academic writing involves the "systematic study of established knowledge about a topic, and the incorporation and synthesis of diverse sources of this knowledge into an authoritative viewpoint" ("Lycee" 156). From Grace's perspective, her professors in France did not value argument/personal voice. She describes her awareness of the rhetorical situation: "Personal voice is not very important. If I want a good grade, I need to write like a professor." She continues, "The professor is God. Do not contradict unless you're feeling real confident." Instead, Grace recalls that "formatting is important," admitting: "I tend to cling to form a bit more in French, where I am less masterful." Grace "clings" to form—for survival, it seems, within a rhetoric that forces her to erase her "personal voice" and form an obedient and submissive relationship to the professor-reader. Her uncomfortable ethos of submission resonates when she refers to her professor as "God"—and a "critical" one at that. She imagines the possibility of developing an argument, but only in the case of extreme confidence.

While Grace experiences a loss of personal voice at the hands of her "god-like" professors, Melissa, conversely, does not express a loss or even much of a conflict as she focuses more on genre expectations than the perceived power dynamics of the rhetorical contact zone. Unlike Grace, who finds French form confining, Melissa quips, "The French adore structure, to the point that it's almost rigid." In addition, she has developed an understanding of French academic genres: "In literature, French professors often ask for a commentaire compose; a very intense, detailed close reading of one particular section of a work, rather than an essay that treats an entire piece. Even larger essays, called dissertations, are different and incorporate multiple works to show one's knowledge of a subject as a whole." Her cross-cultural knowledge extends to conventions, like the problematique, which, she explains, is "different from a thesis statement. Essentially, the *problematique* asks the question that a thesis statement would answer." Both students make astute observations about the differences between the academic writing culture in the U.S. and France. Yet Melissa has a framework that enables her to make sense of the differences. She depersonalizes the rhetorical relationships and refers to "the French" and "French professors." At worst, her criticism is faint: the French are "almost rigid" and "intense." She can clearly explain French genres and criteria of good writing (e.g., they "adore structure"). Rather than writing-culture conflict, she participates in writing-culture immersion.

Grace's and Melissa's conceptions of French academic writing have implications for the mission of an MWC, the role of MWC tutors, and the unique interventions those tutors can offer second-language writers. Tutors who assimilate, like Melissa, can help writers adapt—that is, cross confidently into the new academic culture. She represents the potential of MWC tutors to demystify the educational culture by explaining rhetorical relationships, genre, and discourse conventions. Resistant tutors, like Grace, can

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be trained to channel their frustrations into translingual questioning, prodding a writer to reimagine her audience and recover her personal voice. Both Melissa's and Grace's insights contribute to the multiple and shifting roles of MWC tutors: to help students understand culturally specific genres and rhetorics, to serve as useful guides who can help prepare students for the transition to another writing culture, to assist in resolving writing culture shock, and to support the creation and examination of hybrid linguistic selves.

BECOMING TRANSLINGUAL

Conversations in the MWC cannot help but interrogate strategies of resistance, assimilation, liminality, and hybridity. The Dickinson MWC cultivates such conversations through the podcast project "Going International: Stories of Second Language Writers" (blogs.dickinson.edu/mwc). In audio narratives students discuss the challenges that accompany learning to research, read, and write in a second language and in a foreign academic culture. The project is based on Severino's "Self-as-Writer II" project in which tutors prompt ELL students to "describe their native writing instruction and experiences" as well as to describe how writing for U.S. teachers differs from writing for teachers in their native countries ("'Doodles'" 49; "Writing" 56). More recently, Ulla Connor has proposed that writing center tutors not only discuss but also "document . . . in a systematic manner" their conversations with writers regarding their home culture and language (73-75).

The "Going International" podcast interviews include not only the visiting and matriculated international students who are writing tutors but also the U.S. foreign language writing tutors who have returned from study abroad. The interview itself, a type of professional development exercise, prompts tutors to reflect upon how their writing experiences in other cultures inform their current approach to writing and tutoring. As Melissa's and Grace's experiences indicate, students bound for study abroad in a non-English program would benefit from working with writing tutors who have "been there" and can serve as "cultural informants" of German or Spanish or Chinese "academic expectations," to quote Judith Powers (41). The actual online podcasts can be used in classrooms and writing center workshops to mediate potential writing culture shock for students bound for study abroad by discussing the rhetorical, discursive, and linguistic choices that face cross-cultural writers.

As the Dickinson MWC evolves, we continue to wrestle with pedagogical issues that problematize traditional writing center practice. First, we struggle to construct pluralistic definitions of "good" academic writing that acknowledge culturally-specific rhetorics and conventions in a world in which English is the *lingua franca*, "the universal language of the intellect" (Canagarajah 41). We also seek to mediate the conflict between the translingual valuing of heterogeneity, multiculturalism, and students' rights to their own language and the individual learning outcomes of writers who choose to adapt—and conform to—the language and discourse conventions of the study abroad university culture. Finally, we grapple with determining the appropriate balance between global revision and sentence-level editing in tutoring sessions. Depending on the writer's level—that is, the extent to which she is learning the language as she is learning to write it, the hierarchical categorizing of global revision issues above sentence-level concerns may not be useful. Instead, we train MWC tutors in "holistic tutoring"—a challenging practice that involves toggling between local and global issues while being keenly aware of their interconnection. Ultimately, the MWC model raises a whole new set of questions about the teaching and learning of writing in international contexts for writing centers and, by extension, foreign language instructors.

An MWC, in essence, is a meeting place for writers and tutors working simultaneously within and/or across multiple languages and writing cultures. True, the conversations take place in a local writing center, but they potentially comprise the world. With the help of tutors, writers can develop a nuanced understanding of the target culture in order to construct meaningful rhetorical relationships, adopt the proper conventions, and make effective linguistic choices so as to communicate proficiently. Thus, the translingual work of any MWC supports the creation of global citizens. What's more, this work potentially serves the

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discipline as MWCs become thresholds to other writing cultures. As Donahue laments, in the U.S. compositionists "do not often report being in the position of adapting teaching practices from these other countries around the globe" ("'Internationalization'" 220). As more MWCs emerge in the writing center community, perhaps they will serve as portals through which the writing practices of other cultures can enter U.S. universities and inform our own practices. ✦

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

Book Review

Archer, Arlene, and Rose Richards. *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education.* Stellenbosch: Sun Press, a division of African SUN MeDia. 2011. [202 pp. paperback].

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In their introduction to *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education,* Arlene Archer and Rose Richards ask, "Why a book about writing centres in South Africa?" (5). Their answer is that this book, in 12 essays by South African writing center practitioners, attempts to provide an historical overview of South African centers, a sense of their professional identity, and a redefinition of them as "agents of change" (9). The potential reader of this volume may want to ask the same question. My answer is that anyone connected with writing centers, or even more generally with higher education, will recognize the problems, contexts, and struggles presented in *Changing Spaces*. It does not matter whether that potential reader resides in South Africa, the U.S., Europe, or elsewhere. The issues will have a strong ring of familiarity for everyone, revolving around the marginalization of many writing center clientele, their cultural and linguistic diversity, the nature of writing/learning, the 'proper' roles of consultants in their relationships with both students and faculty, the perception of centers as grammar fix-it shops, and their struggles for academic legitimacy and authority while seeking to prove their worth.

The unique strength of *Changing Spaces* is that it shows "the significance of these issues in sharp relief" (5) against the unique backdrop of the post-apartheid socio-political context of South Africa. U.S. educators talk about the exponential increase in tertiary enrollments from open-admissions policies and the advent of community colleges in the 1970s. South Africa needed help even more intensely with an even greater influx of students, many of them descendants of Bantu Education, a policy to train blacks only for subservient roles, and not to show them, in a 1953 speech to Parliament by former President Hendrik Verwoerd, "the green pastures of European society in which [they were] not allowed to graze." Suddenly, august universities that had maintained apartheid "standards" were being forced into "massification" (Nichols 99). In the last quarter of the twentieth century in both South Africa and the West, droves of non-traditional students suddenly had to be guided into academia and into academic discourse—hence the growth of many writing centers.

The cultural and linguistic diversity of today's student body is a leitmotif in both American and European educational literature. But how much greater this challenge has been in South Africa, which has 11 official languages and many more cultural affiliations (see especially Daniels and Richards' article in *Changing Spaces*). Much sensitivity is required to create a "contact zone" (coined by Mary Louise Pratt) or "safe space" (Nichols 22) where students can both access and critique dominant paradigms while forging their own new identities, by examining "not only what they can do with English but also what English does to them" (Min-Zhan Lu, qtd. in Trimbur 3). Van Rensburg in his landmark article reprinted in this volume argues that writing centers are the best places for students to create alternative, "real" academic identities (60).

Fertilized in part by the altered socio-cultural landscape at universities worldwide, a new paradigm of knowledge and the role of writing in creating that knowledge has emerged. Unpacking this epistemological shift, especially as it relates to writing center work, is the main emphasis and strength of

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Changing Spaces. (See essays by van Rensburg, Leibowitz and Parkerson, Clarence, Skead and Twala, and Lewanika and Archer). No longer is knowledge seen as a static entity belonging to individual "possessors." No longer is writing viewed as a mirror of that knowledge, a mirror that can sparkle if only the grammar errors can be wiped off. Rather, knowledge is now seen as a collaborative act existing only in the social contexts of "discourse communities" (Archer and Richards 10). It requires negotiation, not transmission; inquiry, not reproduction (Simpson 181). Creating knowledge through writing is now considered a practice—in a group—not a generic skill that can be privately developed (Clarence 101). As philosopher Michael Polanyi puts it, "Every act of knowing involves the passionate engagement of the knower with what is being known" (qtd. in Nichols 95). From the theoretical viewpoint of New Literacy Studies (Archer 134), "good writing is epistemological, not generic" (Skead and Twalo 124).

Writing centers, with their democratic structures, are uniquely positioned to promote this paradigm of academic inquiry. All writers in this volume emphasize that the proper role of consultants is "conversational rather than didactic" (Clarence 106), although there is some disagreement about their need for expertise in separate disciplines (Dowse and van Rensburg 170). As Nichols puts it, writing centers "offer an alternative to the belief that knowledge is handed from master to disciple; in fact, they can galvanize the disciples to talk back to the masters" (92). Writing centers thus become transformative rather than normative (Scott 193). Although it is a "tricky space to navigate" (11), consultants can pivot between helping students engage in academic discourse and helping faculty clarify their assignments and expectations and understand student needs. This oscillation can also hugely help consultants themselves to grow professionally.

Within these social and epistemological contexts, each essay, or chapter, in *Changing Spaces* has its own focus within four major divisions. Some classics are also reprinted here. The first division includes two chapters under the heading, "Alternate Pedagogical Spaces." Nichols (Ch. 1) explains five strategies that informed the development of one of the early writing centers at the University of Witwatersrand: to maintain a safe new place, to be perceived as non-remedial and non-separatist, to allow creativity and outside connections, to assume that writing is thinking, and to maintain discussions between consultant and client at the heart of their work (25). Daniels and Richards (Ch. 2) argue that the multilingual language policy at the Stellenbosch University Writing Lab helps students engage in academic discourse, not just learn a language.

In the second major division, "Negotiating Academic Literary Spaces," Deyi (Ch. 3) argues that student discourse, feedback discourse, and academic discourse all differ, with the result that students are often confused and need cognitive scaffolding to understand feedback. Van Rensburg (Ch. 4) uses case studies to show that students in a writing center negotiate their academic identities through discourses of "transparency, belonging, surveillance, and expertise" (60-61).

The third division, "Transformational Spaces," includes five essays. Leibowitz and Parkerson (Ch. 5) engage in a transcribed conversation about South Africa's first writing center at the University of the Western Cape in 1994, and how issues and perceptions have changed. Nichols (Ch. 6) claims writing centers have shifted power relations at South African universities, especially her own, not only among consultants but also between consultant and client. She insists that "South Africa cannot afford to make ghettos any longer" (96). Clarence (Ch. 7) reiterates that knowledge is a social practice, not a skill, and writing centers can help students understand the tacit conventions of a discipline, while helping faculty use more writing-to-learn activities, rather than only traditional learning-to-write activities. Skead and Twalo (Ch. 8) describe the Fort Hare writing center's rejection of the "deficit model of student writing" (117) and embrace of a "culture of active learning" (118), with the understanding

that "literacy must indeed be regarded as an end product of, rather than a prerequisite for, an undergraduate degree program" (129). Focusing on assessment of writing center interventions, Archer (Ch. 9) describes three evaluation perspectives (tutor comments, the grade, and the writing itself), using three criteria (organization, voice and register, and language use). She complains that "students who ask for help with grammar often have overriding problems with structure, voice, register and general understanding of the task" (142). Hence the folly of the traditional view of a writing center as a "repair shop for linguistically dented students" (9).

In the last major section, "Mentoring Spaces," Lewanika and Archer (Ch. 10) enumerate the benefits for tutors of working in a "community of practice" (147), which impacts their identities as writers, researchers, and educators. Dowse and van Rensburg (Ch. 11), claiming that a writing center is both a pedagogical concept and a place (172), report on an empirical study to explore the sometimes conflicting roles and expectations of tutors (170). Their premise is "that the peer tutor working within the **community** of a writing center enters into a conversation with student writers and through **collaboration, co-constructs** knowledge" [emphasis in original] (163). In a case, study Simpson (Ch. 12) explores one tutor's resistance and gradual change in attitude about what constitutes good academic writing.

To answer the question that began this review, *Changing Spaces* provides a welcome and much-needed extension of writing center research into the international arena. It shows that writing centers and research about them in South Africa have clearly come of age in the academic world, along with many other South African academic enterprises. As the editors state, "Through dialogue and the sharing of ideas we facilitate students in the development of a sense of academic writing and of themselves as academic writers. Our intention is that this book will be one of the ways in which we can do the same for ourselves as academics and professionals" (13). It is impressive that "nowadays most tertiary institutions in South Africa boast a writing centre" (5), particularly because I believe there are no others south of the Sahara except for two that I started in Namibia as an English Language Fellow for the U.S. State Department. Despite this boast, only seven centers and 15 researchers are represented in this volume; perhaps there could have been more. *Changing Spaces* nevertheless provides current and very clear epistemological articulations and explains how these can be put into practice in writing centers. The book's elastic definition of academic literacy (3) can help anyone in academia better understand the nature of academic enterprise—in all fields—and the centrality of writing in this enterprise. ✦

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

March 28-19, 2014
Oxford, OH
Miami University's Howe Writing Center
"*Fostering a New History: The Next Generation of Writing Centers*"

The conference will focus on new directions for writing centers in the 21st century as we build on scholarship and best practices of our field over the past forty years. More information to come as it's available. For questions please contact Joshua Kiger, <kigerja@miamioh.edu>, 513-529-6100. Updates on the upcoming conference will appear on Twitter: <#ECWCA2014>. Conference website: <writingcenter.lib.muohio.edu/?page_id=3524>.

IMPOSTOR IN THE WRITING CENTER—TRIALS OF A NON-NATIVE TUTOR

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Another day in the writing center, another incoming student, another inexplicable but inevitable bout of anxiety suppressed—for the time being. From the name on the reservations web page, I guess that the student is a second-language writer, and I see that the main concern that she has written on the form is "grammar." Lessons from the tutor training class begin circling in my brain. Stephen M. North's iconic essay "The Idea of a Writing Center" reminds me that this is not a grammar fix-it-shop you are twirling your pen in. Low order concerns were titled such for a reason. Don't try to steal away the student's ownership of her paper by being too directive. Become a veritable Socrates of tutoring—allow the student to discover her own answers. And all the while, be careful about revealing who you are. No matter how hard I try, how many students I tutor, how much literature I absorb, how open and flexible I remain, a fundamental aspect separates me from that archetypal Ideal Tutor: Like my incoming student, I, too, speak and write English as a second language. As both an "ESL" student and a tutor in the English language, I not only represent a group that writing center theory views as problematic, but I am also someone whom both students and scholars rarely expect to find in the writing center.

Writing center literature tends to paint "English as a second language" (ESL) students with a broad brush —we are concerned about grammar and mechanics, our English is clumsy at best (our spoken English at the very least, if not our written English as well), and tutors must respond to us with an approach specifically tailored to our unique needs. I read the message over and over: ESL students are in dire need of tutoring. As Harry C. Denny points out, rather than welcoming all writers as individuals with unique strengths and weaknesses, "writing centers have reacted to the presence of the ESL writers as 'problems' to 'fix'" (122). Ilona Leki writes, "There is…a tendency among humans to see their own social and cultural group as highly nuanced and differentiated, but to be less able to fully grasp that all social and cultural groups are equally nuanced and differentiated" (13). With this assessment, Leki summarizes the problem with most of the scholarship involving ESL students. Much of the literature is careful to note that it is only "some" or "many" or even "most" of the ESL students who are unfamiliar with American popular culture and conventions, struggle with grammar, or come to the writing center expecting the tutor to proofread and correct each error in their paper. While most of the research on ESL students acknowledges, if only in a cursory way, the many levels of proficiency and other differences among these students, most of the familiar assumptions about ESL students persist. As a multilingual writing tutor who came to the United States to study as an undergraduate, I am at a peculiar crossroads: Students come to me expecting a native speaker, while my background places me in the writing center's most archetypal customer group. I urge students to write candidly, to cut unnecessary hedging and hesitation, to jump right in and write boldly from the heart—while simultaneously concealing my true identity as best I can.

Denny explores the multiple pressures international and immigrant students face from the majority culture upon entering the U.S. in his chapter, "Facing Nationality in the Writing Center." The melting pot myth, although inclusive in spirit and intention, demands that newcomers assimilate into the mainstream culture, leaving behind the markers typical of their "former" cultures in order to fit in. Although Denny's excellent chapter focuses on students rather than tutors, I find myself relating to many of the challenges he discusses, as both tutor and student. The goal of "Americanizing oneself" (Denny 128) promises tremen-

dous benefits for internationals: If we keep our traditions, social norms, and accents intact, we risk representing the Other, challenging the comfort of mainstream Americans (119). Worse, we expose ourselves to the tensions that arise from what Denny describes as "a national history marked with tremendous jingoism, xenophobia, and a celebration of immigrant meritocratic drive and success" (122). This xenophobia has only heightened in the post-9/11 era (119). And in the academic setting, failing to assimilate into the mainstream and internalize its codes quickly translates into lower grades and fewer choices in graduate programs or employment options (128). Multilingual tutors, I argue, are by no means immune to these pressures. As students, we face these pressures both in our personal and academic lives. But as tutors, the stakes are, in certain ways, even higher. If, instead of assimilating and Americanizing ourselves, we retain and show pride in our own nationality and culture, we threaten to expose in ourselves "features that…might mark a writer as inadequately educated or lower class" (Severino, qtd. in Denny 129). The risks of outing ourselves as internationals vary based on our individual situations (including how "American" our speech sounds), the culture in which we do our writing center work (how assimilative or accepting it is), and the student we sit down with. "I want a native speaker to read my paper and tell me if it sounds right" is a common request that non-native students make in the writing center. How will they respond to a tutor who defies their assumption of an all-American, all-native speaker writing center? And in the case of native-born American students, how many of them will find it difficult to accept the advice of someone who isn't even a native speaker of English?

Another student sits next to me, and we hunch over his paper. I steal a glance at the time—still some remaining. We need it: There are several more pages to go, and plenty of grammatical errors to plow through. It's understandable, as he is a non-native speaker after all, and mainly concerned about grammar. He does not need to tell me: Writing in a second language is challenging, especially when the assignment requires students to analyze their topics skillfully and in-depth, displaying a range of vocabulary and using language that sounds natural, thoughtful, and (perhaps above all) grammatically correct. Despite this shared knowledge, I feel uncomfortable. I try my best to hide it under my ice-cool exterior and manufactured good cheer. When I ask the student to clarify what he means, I can hardly understand his response. Sometimes neither his written nor his spoken message makes any sense to me. Some primal sense of politeness prevents me from asking him to repeat himself too many times, and I scramble on, lapsing into the very role I am determined not to take: the faithful little grammar-hound, sniffing out any comma splice or misused semicolon, nose quivering at them with the intensity of an English pointer dog who has just uncovered upland game. The name of the game is no longer pursuing the sacred goal of helping the writer, not fixing the text, which North advocates (38). The game is now raw survival: making it to the end of the session with some sense of improvement and the fewest possible minutes wasted on trying to communicate through the seemingly insurmountable language barrier. With this student, and so many others like him, I find myself falling in the same trap as so many native English-speaking scholars and tutors. I no longer see the session as a learning experience, a chance for growth as both tutor and writer. Instead, the non-native student again becomes the Other: "a problem that requires solving, an irritant and frustration that resists resolution" (Denny 119).

Unlike the student who may well leave this session feeling better about his paper, if not his overall development, I have no more trouble expressing myself in English than I do in Finnish, and most people indicate (perhaps polite) surprise when I reveal that English is my second language. Certainly, some curiously ask where my accent is from, so my linguistic background has not yet been completely eradicated from my speech. And certainly I pronounce some words strangely and choose odd ways of constructing certain phrases. Sometimes the English term for something eludes me utterly, although

the same seems to happen to native speakers frequently enough. With non-native students, however, the idiosyncrasies of my English seem to blur and fade. I can readily distinguish even the slightest accent differences in people from different regions in Finland, but I can barely classify three different types of American English. I believe it's the same for my non-native peers.

For those second-language speakers who enter the writing center, it's natural to assume that the blonde scrutinizing their essays is one of many native speakers in the writing center, an in-born expert on the sound and logic of the English language. In reality, my sense of sound and logic has indeed accumulated over several years, but beginning not in early childhood as is the case for my native-speaking fellow tutors. I have pieced together my knowledge of English grammar slowly and painstakingly from English textbooks written for Finnish students. The limited awareness I have of American pop culture and colloquialisms pre-2007 (when I came to the U.S.), I have absorbed from subtitled movies and TV-shows. Like native speakers, I do "just know" certain things, but most aspects of the language must for me have a structure behind them, or else repetition after repetition. More often than I'd like to admit, I commit blatant errors, phrasings that to my Finnish ear sound right, but in reality are simply if not hilariously wrong. Despite these failings, I realize that as a blonde European tutor, I am differently located on the spectrum of difference than, say, a strongly accented tutor from Africa. My appearance and ease with the language fits with the classic assumption of Americans as white native speakers, which allows me to pass as American more often than the African tutor could. It makes me wonder: How would my overall highly positive experience and reception as a tutor in America have been different if my skin were a different color, if my accent were stronger?

When my session with one second-language writer tutoring another second-language writer ends, I feel uneasy, almost disappointed. Another part of me questions these feelings. The student got what he came here for: help with his grammar. I did my best to explain why things work the way they do, not simply correct errors. I listened to his concerns with patience and kindness. Although I may not have expressed it, I also understood both his frustration and his difficulty—the frustration of not knowing how to say things correctly or how to write down thoughts that are natural and eloquent in one's own head and language but come out scrambled and rudimentary in English. The difficulty of then trying to justify and clarify these thoughts in English, the language that runs like a wild river and overflows its banks, the one with the hundred ways of saying the same thing but only three of those ways being correct in this specific context. But at the same time, I didn't understand this student. My specific set of circumstances had allowed me to begin learning English at an early age, so now I am the student with advanced knowledge of English, facing another student whose knowledge is still basic. My level of English allows me to hide, to conceal my "ESL" status, to momentarily become just another native-speaking writing tutor, a perfectly reasonable expectation. After all, if we can't expect the writing tutor to at the very least be a native English speaker, what more can we expect? And so I hide behind these expectations, behind my non-threatening European appearance, behind my accent that betrays only a hint of the foreign.

The "ESL writer" is a familiar figure in education theory, and I have noticed broad generalizations seem to be made about us. As high school students, we are "quiet, obedient, and hard working" (Leki 5); we are not very familiar with "slang or popular culture," but "often very successful academically" (Leki 7); we are either "reluctant to exhibit negative responses to L2 writing" or "excessively aggressive and resistant to . . . suggestions for altering work" (Bruce 9); if we are Asians, we struggle with personal pronouns and articles (Bruce 36). Regardless of where we're from, we are the target of statements like "the pedagogy of the helpful collaborator, no matter how well intentioned, is 'cruelly unfair' to ESL writers" (McAndrew and Reigstad 97). Leki concedes that ESL students "present a wide range of interests, experiences, and characteristics, making it exceedingly difficult, even dangerous, to discuss them as a group

or even groups" (2). Nonetheless, too many scholars and other writing center people feel comfortable painting all multilingual writers with the same broad brush, and the result is to marginalize non-native speakers who aspire to tutor writing. In this climate, it is little surprise that I was the only foreigner on the tutor side of the writing center.

A student conceals her face in her arms, shaking her head lightly. The language is so difficult, she laments. This is the way we say it in Spanish—why is it this other way in English? It is a terrible struggle, learning to write in a second language, she informs me. I assent, and we move on. What I want to say is that I know, I've been through it all, I continue to struggle with it, to push back the avalanche of Finnish words that tumbles over me when all I need is a single, albeit very specific, English word. What I want is to join her, to engage in conversation about the beautiful complexities and absurdities of English, and to give her hope, to reassure her that it is more than possible to one day write in English what she would express in Spanish, even if her words do not come to form the exact message in all the subtleties of her native tongue. I want to reassure her that even if it takes a struggle and a dictionary, more time spent with books written in English, or one revision after another—far more labor than those who know the sound and logic of the language naturally—it's possible. But doubt overcomes me. Does our shared experience matter when the alternative is one of the several tutors who speak English as their first language, whose instincts are far more reliable than mine? What about the native-speaker students, whose experience may be even further removed from mine? Who certainly come to the writing center expecting to see a peer, in language as well as in status? To whom an "ESL" student belongs among the tutees and not the tutors? Rather than face these difficult questions, I choose to hide, to become as American as I can, hoping that my adopted persona lends me the credibility that would otherwise elude me should the truth about my background surface. And all the while, whether the student is non-native or a native speaker of English, I tell her to write candidly, boldly, and from the heart. ✦

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TUTOR'S COLUMN

FROM SYMBOLS TO STORIES: HELPING STUDENTS MAKE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

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I stood in an art gallery, puzzling over the apparently random use of letters in several collage pieces done by one of my friends. The three similar pieces all used layers of newspaper covered by bits of other paper. These papers, mostly small squares, contained carefully hand-drawn letters, some darker, some lighter, in a variety of colors and sizes. The images tugged at the edges of my mind, as if they were a puzzle that I should have been able to figure out but wasn't quite able to.

"Kerry," I said, grabbing my friend as she walked past. "Explain this to me."

"Well," she began, "The 'K' always stands for me."

She proceeded to describe how the different letters stood for other names, and how the pieces showed how she felt about different relation-ships in her life. I nodded my head, listening attentively. Suddenly, as she explained how the last of her collages described her feelings about friends she had lost contact with, I found myself identifying deeply with a piece that had previously confused me.

Surrounding her 'K' in the center of the piece, Kerry had lined up the many letters in a grid-like pattern. A few of the letters, though, were just outlines, some partly erased away. As I looked at the blurred-out letters, their squares of paper still marking a place in the grid-like pattern, I thought about my own good friends who had moved on to other places in life. "Wow!" I exclaimed. "That's exactly how I feel, too, but your picture expresses the feeling so much better than words can."

When I heard Kerry's story, suddenly what was abstract and vague took on a personal meaning. In the same way, when a piece of writing contains some kind of personal element or narrative, it often gives the reader a greater likelihood of being able to connect with the author's ideas. Personal narrative has the ability to bring large concepts about the world and human nature sharply into focus by providing the reader with specific anecdotes with which he or she might identify. If the goal of writing is to bring people together in an understanding of ideas, then the inclusion of personal narrative (when appropriate) can function as an ideal way for readers and writers to find a common starting point.

As writing center coaches, we can help students understand that both thinking about and sometimes including personal elements in their academic writing are powerful techniques that can increase their ability to connect with their topic, and later their audience. Eileen Crowe, in her article "Re-Valuing the Personal Narrative: Developing Metaphor and Critical Thinking in the Composition Classroom," says that, "Experience as evidence is generally viewed skeptically in the university setting. We are trained to look to libraries and databases for reli-able evidence, not to ourselves" (38). As a result, students can often feel like they are expected to write in a formal and sometimes almost incomprehensible style, though many scholars are moving away from this (Howard 6). In the writing center, we have an opportunity to challenge the idea that "academic" is code for impersonal, and to encourage students to consider exploring the value of their own con-nections with their subjects.

Exploring this connection by asking students about the reasons why they chose their topic and what their experiences with it have been often results in giving students a much-needed new perspective on their writing. "Too often, the clients we see in writing centers are lacking a connection, a spark, a perspective" (44), Wendy Bishop says in her article "Is There a Creative Writer in the House?: Tutoring to Enhance Creativity and Engagement." Even if none of these conversations ends up in the final paper, they still give the student the chance to connect with her topic. In my art classes, I've observed that it often seems to be harder for students to create really interesting pieces of abstract art unless they can see it connected to something from their lives, whether it be the model they are looking at or a photo of something meaningful to them. When coaches help students see the assignment as more than just an abstract exercise, they can lead the author to feel increased engagement with his or her own work.

Often, as I talk with students in the writing center, I discover that they do have some kind of personal connection with their topic, some reason behind what they have chosen to write. However, frequently they haven't actually included this personal connection in their writing. "So why don't you use that in your paper?" I ask them. Some students are open to the idea of doing something a bit different while others aren't, due to the either very real or only assumed expectations of their professors or fields.

I recently worked with a student who told me she had chosen her topic because it related closely with her father's career in medicine. I was struck by how much higher her interest level seemed once she started talking about her family and how they had been influenced by the health care system. When I suggested bringing in parts of her story, she declined my suggestion. She felt that the inclusion of personal narrative would make the piece too informal for this particular assignment. Wanting her to retain her sense of ownership of her work and realizing that she knew her professor's expectations better than I did, I did not try to compel her to include something with which she wasn't comfortable. Often incorporating personal narrative into a piece can be intimidating for students. They are concerned about their teachers' expectations, hesitant to put their personal lives into their academic work, or puzzled as to when and how it is appropriate to include their own experiences in their writing. As writing center coaches, we have the chance to assist students to navigate, rather than simply avoid, these complex issues.

One way to help students determine if the use of narrative elements could be appropriate in their work and possibly consider how to include them is to spend time discussing the goals of their projects. In the area of art history, the scholarly field for which I most often write, there are times when my goal is to convey ideas as concisely and lucidly as possible. However, there are other instances when communicating with more descriptive techniques can function to draw readers into my paper and help them connect with my subject. Examining elements of an assignment such as intended length, audience, and purpose can help students and tutors decide when including personal narrative might be appropriate. Often, students in freshman writing or similar classes may have room to experiment with personal narrative in their work, while students at more advanced academic levels will need to be more cautious. In terms of how to include personal narrative, it is often helpful to discuss writing that is familiar to us outside of school assignments, much of which tends to include personal elements that grab the attention of the intended audience. However, even when it is inappropriate to include personal narrative or students decide against it, investigating that personal connection will often help them feel more connected to their subject. In the case mentioned above, just encouraging the student to spend time explaining her personal connection with her subject helped her to focus her argument and to home in on the information about which she most wanted to write.

By valuing students' personal connections, coaches help students to take deeper interest in their writing. When students' preconceived notions hinder communication in their work, we can also expand their ideas about what academic writing can be. Every time we, as coaches, encourage students to think about or even include a point of personal connection in their writing, we are chipping away at the wall between scholarly writing and personal, creative work. There are certainly times when components such as personal narrative are not appropriate in scholarly writing. However, just as hearing the story behind a piece of art can help the viewer to understand it better, encouraging students to take time to consider their own stories will help them to connect more deeply with their writing, and sometimes including these stories may allow them to communicate more effectively with their readers as well. ✦

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THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

November 1-3, 2013: National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Tampa, FL
Contact: Conference chair: Tom Brandt: <brandtom@berkeleyprep. org>. Conference website: <www. ncptw2013.org/>.

February 6-8, 2014: Southeastern Writing Centers Assocation, in Greenville, NC
Contact: Will Banks and Nikki Caswell: <swca.ecu@gmail.com>; Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/ Conferences.html>.

March 1, 2014: Southern California Writing Centers Association, in Irvine, CA
Contact: President of SoCal WCA, Shareen Grogan: <sgrogan@nu.edu>.

March 1-2, 2014: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Smithfield, RI
Contact: John Hall: <johnhall@bu.edu>; Stephanie Carter:<scarter@bryant.edu>.

March 28-29, 2014: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Oxford, OH
Contact: Joshua Kiger: <kigerja@miamioh. edu>; Conference website: <writingcenter.lib.muohio.edu/?page_id=3524>.

July 19-22, 2014: European Writing Centers Association, in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany
Contact: <ewca14@europa-uni.de>; Conference website: <www.ewca14.eu>.