

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

Volume 13, Number 4

December, 1988

....from the editor....

If this issue of the newsletter reaches you before you close up shop and go off to celebrate holidays and vacation time, you are probably in the midst of coping with the surge of students who were referred in September and are finally straggling in for the first time just before the semester ends. If so, you'll especially appreciate David Klooster's advice on training students to use the writing lab appropriately.

And if you're in need of some lighter reading, try another of David Chapman's spoofs, this one a Dragnet take-over in the writing lab, and Mandy Taylor's writing lab adaptation of "was the Night before Christmas?"

Included also in this issue are other interesting, useful articles, another guest editor's column, a book review, announcements and calls for papers, and readers' comments and requests for information. Included also are my heartiest wishes to everyone for joyous, happy holidays; for magnificently peaceful, relaxing vacation time; and for a good, healthy year ahead for us all.

Muriel Harris, editor

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Tutee training, or it takes two to collaborate

All of us who work in writing centers have witnessed the situation: A writer walks in the door, sits quietly with a tutor, and waits passively for the tutor to act. The tutor, well trained in collaborative techniques, works persistently to engage the writer in a conversation about the paper, probing for information about the assignment, about the writer's involvement with the paper, about possible directions the paper might move. The writer gives one-word answers, and every attempt to begin a conversation falls flat. Finally the writer gets annoyed and says, "Look, just tell me what to do to fix my paper. That will save us both time?"

We frequently read in these pages about tutor training, but a writing center also has to be concerned with a much larger training project. The kind of learning-through-talking model that most writing centers aim to follow depends on two people prepared and willing to participate in a conversation about the text at hand. Writing centers need

to find ways to educate the writers on campus—both students and faculty—in how to talk effectively about writing. We need to train the people on our campuses to use our writing centers and labs and workshops in productive ways. The writers we serve need to walk in our door ready to collaborate.

Well-prepared tutors are of course essential to the success of a program offering one-to-one instruction. But even beginning tutors, with their interest in working in a center and with their above-average writing skills, are likely already to hold healthy attitudes about the kind of give and take that occurs in a tutorial. Of course we need to work to define the tutoring task for our tutors and to enlarge their repertoire of approaches and techniques, to increase their sensitivities to the speaking and listening dynamics of the tutorial. Tutor training continues to be a high priority. But the most successful writing centers will also seek to train the writers they talk with.

The training that tutees need differs markedly from that our tutors need. Most important, I believe, is that writers learn to see writing as an interactive process, a constant effort to match personal intention with public perception. In large part, this understanding manifests itself as a frame of mind, a willingness to listen to a member of the writer's intended audience respond, and the flexibility to see that a writing center tutor can represent a member of that audience. As writers gain maturity, they become increasingly concerned to shape their prose to accomplish specific purposes for specific audiences. Writing teachers have learned to help writers toward the goal of internalizing methods of audience analysis by dramatizing audience response through peer interaction and other direct confrontation between writer and reader. The writing center can be a powerful focus for this stage in writing growth, for the motivated writer has an unusual opportunity here to talk about writing with an interested and unusually responsive reader.

In my view, then, the writing center needs to make an effort to educate campus writers to come to the center expecting to talk, to try out ideas, to ask questions, to explore possibilities, and to listen to a reader's response. The writers who use our services do not need elaborate training in specialized techniques. Writers need simply to understand that what happens in the writing center depends deeply on their willingness to participate in a process of examination and explo-

ration. They need to learn that writing centers are places for talk about writing, places that encourage discovery through conversation, places for collaboration.

Tutee training will of necessity be a multifaceted and hit-or-miss effort. Writing center directors are familiar with the endless public relations tasks we face, and I would suggest that we make this work a deliberate effort to retrain our campus communities about what to expect when a writer walks in the writing center door. Let me describe how I work to inform the writers on my campus about collaboration and to encourage them to work with us when they walk in our door. I work at a relatively small liberal arts college (2300 students and 150 faculty members), but I suspect that most writing centers, no matter where they are, could join in some of these efforts.

Class visits are one of my most important forums. I ask to be invited during the first weeks of the semester to freshman writing classes and to our writing-intensive classes in the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum program, and I receive an invitation to about two-thirds of them, which gives me access to a large portion of the freshman class. In five or ten minutes at the beginning or end of the class, I give the students two messages: first, their writing class is one of the most important classes they will take, because

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

world, and a path to self-knowledge. Second, I encourage them to find one to talk with about their writing- a classmate, a friend in the dormitory, or a writing center consultant. I talk for a few minutes about the importance of learning how to give and take advice in learning to write, and I suggest that a great deal of writing in the working world involves collaborative work with office-mates. Collaboration is an acquired skill, I stress, and I encourage them to learn how to participate in it. My goal in these class visits is not simply to tell students where the writing center is and when it is open, but more importantly to begin fostering a view of the center as a place to receive significant responses to their words on paper.

Workshops

The many workshops our Center sponsors offer another forum for teaching writers on our campus about collaboration. Nearly a third of the students on our campus come to a Writing Center workshop each year, many of them for our popular Resume and Cover Letter Writing Workshops. They come for information about a kind of writing they are unfamiliar with, and of course I give them that. But I also try to make the workshop itself a model of collaboration, a give and take of ideas as we think about the audience and purpose of a resume, the available organizational patterns of a cover letter, and the ways of controlling tone in these difficult kinds of personal writing. These writers, often seniors eager to get on in the world of work, come expecting a quick shot of information, and they leave having participated in a conversation about writing. More than half of them take me up on my offer to return to the Writing Center with a draft of their resume so that we can talk about it, and many of these return with a paper or even a senior thesis to discuss.

Writers-at-Work Series

Our Writers-at-Work series is another chance to encourage healthy talk about writing. The tutors in the Center invite a campus writer-often a favorite publishing professor, but some-times an accomplished student, an administrator, or a writer from the community- to talk to the campus community about his or her work-in-progress. The presentation may include a reading of a draft, but it will almost always lead to a discussion of writing methods and an exchange of ideas about the manuscript at hand. At best,

these sessions turn into lively large-group brain-storming efforts, offering the writer new ideas and the audience a chance to participate in the discovery process of writing.

Follow-up Notes

As the day-to-day work of the Writing Center progresses, we make an effort to use the follow-up notes we send to professors after a tutorial to demonstrate to the faculty our commitment to join them in the work of helping writers understand their material and their expression of it. These hand-written memos describe the conversations we have with students from the faculty member's class, indicating not only the kinds of mechanical matters we tried to teach but also our exchange of ideas with the writer about the content of the paper. We have found these follow-up notes to be an important part of our effort to get the message out that the Writing Center is a place for serious discussions about writing. And the frequent responses we get from faculty members, either thanking us for helping a student or pointing out other matters of concern in the essay, suggest that the professors are getting our message and will be more likely to pass it on to their students.

Through all of these efforts our Writing Center spreads the word that we offer help not only in grammar and mechanics but also in the hard work of shaping ideas, developing convincing methods of support, and honing the message for the audience. And always we are trying to convince writers that they benefit most from the Center when they come to work with us. Our efforts are somewhat indirect, approaching the individual writers on our campus through the groups to which they belong. Of course, the most important element of our work to encourage writers to view the Writing Center as a place for collaboration is the tutorial itself. I'm not comfortable describing the work of the consultation as tuttee training, though, because that suggests that there's something manipulative or performance-oriented about what I mean. While most of the methods I have described above are self-conscious efforts to change people's attitudes about the Writing Center, the meeting of tutor and writer is intended to change something more important-the writer's command of the paper. As the tutor talks and reads and responds, the writer witnesses first hand the benefits of talking about writing. Ideas become clearer, new ideas emerge, intentions are strengthened, the audience reacts,

and the writer gains greater power over the rhetorical situation. As writers participate in this kind of collaborative exchange in the Writing Center, or in the dormitory, the coffee shop, or the professor's office, they learn to become discriminating in their use of response and advice, accepting that which makes the paper more fully their own and rejecting suggestions that draw the paper away from what they want it to be. In other words, they learn how to write by learning to become part of the community of thinkers in the university.

David J. Wooster DePa
uw University
Greencastle, Indiana

The electronic writing tutor

Jeff works the night shift at the local cheese plant to cover tuition costs, housing, and family living expenses. When he gets off work at 7:30, he's off to a series of classes and then a few hours of sleep. His homework is wedged into a two-hour block from ten until midnight, and he's having trouble organizing his freshman comp essay on "Making Cheese." Who can he turn to at 11:05 p.m. for advice?

Flipping the switch on his computer, he dials into the campus mainframe and writes his query on electronic mail to the Writing Center's "Electronic Tutor." When he returns to his essay tomorrow night, he'll have an answer.

Jessie is what the state calls a "displaced homemaker." Translation: her husband divorced her, leaving her with little support as head of household. Because she neither attended college nor held a job for 15 years, she is "unemployable." Through a grant program, she has enrolled in a "Going Back is Going Forward" college program to get a degree. She is also tied to her home most of the time. When she has a question on parenthetical documentation, she, too, dials into the campus computer and calls on the Electronic Tutor.

Although this scenario may sound like "Super Tutor to the Rescue," the examples are real. No longer do time and distance restrict learning to a classroom or to a writing center. As the number of non-traditional students on campuses increases, so must non-traditional methods of learning and teaching. Computer conferences are already a popular feature of many writing programs, where teacher **Page 4** nts keep in touch via e-mail. Often

computer user fees which gives them access to campus computers offering such sophisticated computer links as e-mail and the international system, BITNET. Communication possibilities fly fast and furiously. Some campus libraries offer on-line ready reference, such as Cornell's "Uncle Ezra" advice column.

Although writing centers offer a natural environment for an "advice column on writing problems," they have been slow to offer such services. Perhaps it is because writing center directors are humanists who prefer one-to-one conferences face-to-face rather than screen-to-screen. Others may claim that "we can't be all things to all people." An integral part of writing center philosophy, however, is that education should be accessible to all who can benefit from it. Unless a writing center is staffed 24 hours daily, then some students needing help are turned away. The "time" problem is solved by a tutorial reference system- provided the writer doesn't need the advice quickly (electronic tutors normally log on a few times daily).

With modems, "distance" is no longer a problem either. If a student needing writing help lives in a campus dormitory or in a town 50 miles away, she can request help via phone line/modem and then pore over the response during rewriting stages. Tom broke his leg on the ski slope and is laid up for two weeks, but he won't get behind on his writing assignments because he gets the help he needs.

Another target population that benefits from electronic tutoring is the ESL student. Because tutorial conferences rely on conversation, they are often confusing for non-native speakers-especially if the tutor talks quickly or Idiomatically. Written comments from a tutor via e-mail prove more understandable for non-native speakers as they can read the text over and over.

Students corresponding with the electronic tutor like the idea of convenient, friendly feedback; however, such a service could be seen as a panacea by budget-conscious administrators. Writing centers are a high-cost item on university budgets because of tutor salaries- admittedly, we know that writing centers scrape by and make do more often than not. But from an administrator's standpoint, a center that offers only electronic tutor services would be cost effective as the tutor logs on daily, responds to questions, and logs off with no wasted time. In contrast, tutors working within the confines of the writing center must wait

for business to come to them. Our response to those administrators should be that while electronic tutoring provides supplementary tutoring and combats the problems of time and distance for students needing tutorial help, such tutoring does not equal the value of dialogue in a face-to-face conference. In short, there is no replacement for the immediate questioning and discussion characteristic of tutorials.

Establishing a *wired* writing center tutor may seem like a lot of work, but it taps an audience that might not ordinarily use the writing center because of time conflicts, distance problems, second language problems, or simply shyness. Although the electronic tutor cannot duplicate the comprehensiveness of the writing center tutorial or the value of face-to-face dialogue, the service offers an additional way for helping writers write,

Joyce Kinhead
Utah State University

Book Review

Donald L. Rubin and William M. Dodd. *Talking into Writing: Exercises for Basic Writers*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1987. \$5.75, \$4.50 NCTE members, 63 pages.

Donald L. Rubin and William M. Dodd (hereafter tackily referred to as R&D) do many things well in their contribution to the ERIC/ NCTE Theory and Research into Practice series, *Talking into W : Exercises for Basic Writers*. They remind us that the category "basic writers" is built upon no set of features shared by all of the students who, for good or ill, are relegated to it. They remind us that basic writing programs in many secondary and post-secondary schools across the country are still pit-bull persistently adhering to a belief that only intensive grammar and usage drills (and nothing more discursively demanding than the occasional topic-sentence heavy paragraph) shall set basic writers free. They remind us that the ability to survive (or at least persist) as a writer in an academic setting is heavily dependent upon attaining to privileged levels of intellectual development (Perry's "committed relativism") and degrees of sophistication in social perspective-taking/synthesizing skills. And they remind us, finally, that there are good (not conclusive) reasons for suspecting that tensions, interdependencies, and interferences

between orality and literacy hardly serve to enhance a nonstandard-dialect speaker's chances of success inside the literate, hyper-standard halls of academe.

They remind us of all of these things, and they set us to nodding fast and furious at the mere dropping of readily recognizable names: Shaughnessy, Wiener, Perry, Ong, Zoellner, Flower, Lunsford, Kroll, Rose, Hartwell, Bizell, etc., etc. And this is precisely where the problem ("shortcoming" may be the better term) with R&D's monograph lies. In order to validate their claim that "several oral communication methods provide the scaffolding that some students need to make the difficult transition from jointly constructed dialogue to individually managed monologue (i.e., writing]" (6), R&D present a persuasive summation of theory and research that is directed to an audience of readers who by and large already agree with them- or at least sympathize strongly with them. Certainly some might quibble that tossing too many cognitivists, process theorists, and literacy specialists into the same argumentative stew may result in a nausea of theoretical presuppositions and methodological starting points. Nonetheless, no one who is even casually acquainted with current issues in basic writing pedagogy is going to be effectively taken aback by any of R&D's claims. And that is what I call a problem.

Let me get clear on this. Writing to convert the converted (although a widely popular discourse option for many in our discipline) is a misdirected sort of mission. So I call it a problem here if only because there are people who do need to be blinded by the light of a clearly articulated, well supported defense of the value of collaborative learning and process-centered pedagogical strategies in the basic writing classroom. And these are precisely the people to whom R&D allude in their opening remarks, people closeted in remediation programs who do "adhere to instructional techniques of proven impotence" because they do in fact believe "that unless students first demonstrate competence in the atomistic, isolated, rote aspects of cultivated proofreading, they cannot handle molecular, purposeful, original composition" (1). Unfortunately, both that maneuver and the diction used to carry it through are designed to caricature those people, for us who know better, as the chuckle-headed opposition. Instead of adopting those people as salient members of their audience and attempting to either address their concerns or encourage them to consider an alter-native (actually, the current mainstream) posi-

tion, R&D relegate them to Stonehenge and lead us to the Cathedral of Tomorrow. And they have no trouble doing that because, for us true believers, tomorrow's already here. Or at least it's pretty to think so.

Let me get still clearer on this. I'm prompted to stay with this point about shortcomings in R&D's own social cognition primarily be-cause of a sentence sandwiched inside the order-ing information provided at the end of NCTE's Public Information Office news release for Talking into Writing. The sentence is misleading because of its level of generality. The sentence is "Audience: administrators and faculty in college and secondary school writing programs. education policymakers." And my point about this sentence is that it sadly misrepresents the facts in the ease because the adjective "like-minded" was carelessly omitted from it. No administrator, faculty member, or policymaker from a school where drill-intensive instruction is the official will and way is going to get very far beyond the wrist-slapping tone of page one without getting a hankerin' for a little impromptu book burning. For that audience, the opening "Theory and Research" chapter that justifies/contextualizes the oral communication exercises outlined as "Practice" is blithely underargued, and most of what presents itself as supporting material for R&D's claims rarely ventures far beyond simple parenthetical in-text citations of references. All of which makes for a seemingly all-too facile synthesis of so many taken perspectives.

And that's a deuced shame because several of the oral communication exercises that R&D offer could indeed be very useful for basic for developmental) writers as invention tools for es-says with any aim and as spurs for social cognitive development. Again, though, none of these exercises is going to come as much of a surprise to people (especially the great majority of writing center tutors) who are already committed to collaborative/facilitative instruction. Each of the exercises is grounded in the two writing center staples of dialogue and questioning; their only conceivable distinction from most tutorial sessions is that the exercises provide specific scenarios and more or less tightly scripted prompts to keep conversants on track. From a tutor's point of view, the most interesting activity is probably the Peer Tutoring Cards- essentially a set of typical planning questions sliced up as a deck of cards that can be shuffled and reshuffled for the sake of variety and for the sake of discouraging the sort of rote, lock-step planning that rarely leads either to

insight or to useful concrete details and development strategies.

The only word of caution to be given about the exercises is once again a matter of audience. I suspect that all of the exercises would play well with high school students, and if used sparingly, most traditional freshman college writers, would probably take to them as well. I would, however, be reluctant to use them indiscriminately with adult writers (who could easily read condescension into them) and, as R&D wisely caution, with any people who rank high on the communication apprehension scale.

However, in spite of these modest cautions, I feel obligated to reaffirm my initial claim: R&D do indeed do many things well in Talking into Writing. They provide instructors who may be interested in adopting facilitative teaching techniques into their classrooms with good practical advice and comforting theoretical justifications. Despite the occasional hard sell for oral communication activities in developmental curricula, they are eminently wise to point out that these activities "will not substitute for regular and frequent writing practice" (7), and they provide thoughtful rationales and advice for taking their activities outside the composition classroom and into writing across the curriculum programs.

R&D do numerous things well. Had they only selected a slightly less sympathetic audience, they might have increased their store of good works a seven hundredfold- or at least by a baker's dozen.

Mark Zamierowski
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Two readers ask....

We are gathering information about instruction of graduate students in writing centers. If you teach a substantial number of graduate students or have special programs for graduate students in your writing center, we'd appreciate a post card so that we can contact you. We would also like to hear from you if your institution has a thesis or dissertation center that offers grads help with writing. Please specify (1) contact name, (2) name of writing center, (3) address, (4) phone, (5) best time for us to call. Joyce Sexton or Mary Berthold, 6165 Helen C. White Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.



LAB TROUBLESHOOTER

-- Paula Gills

Those of us who staff writing labs have our own particular kinds of problems (and often creative solutions). While most of us are aware of the difficulties we all encounter in this noble profession, oftentimes we are not aware of how particular institutions like our own deal with them. With limited budgets and staff time constraints, net-working for ideas and feedback can be limited. The Writing Lab Newsletter, sensitive to this need for information, has created this forum for dialogue with centers across the nation in order to provide readers with some practical answers to common problems. LAB TROUBLE SHOOTER will not create budgets or secure facilities for your struggling lab, but it will provide support and answers for working around and with the constraints and problems that face us.

LAB TROUBLESHOOTER welcomes your input. Subjects in subsequent columns will include working with learning disabled students; serving the writing needs of faculty and staff; working with blind and deaf students; maximizing space; motivating the unmotivated student; bringing the writing lab into the classroom; dealing with emotionally disturbed students and other counseling issues; and dealing with accountability factors, student retention, and documentation of services. If you have specific comments on any of these issues, please send them to Paula Gills at the Norwich University Learning Skills Center, Hannon Hall, Northfield, Vermont 05663. This is your column!

This month's lab troubleshooter travels to the southwest region of the country to find answers to the question, "How do you secure/develop tutorial materials on a limited budget?"

Our first stop is Sherman, Texas, located north of Dallas; the Austin College Learning Lab is

the facility, serving 1200 students on a budget of \$2400. Director Tina Egge is the 3/4-time Director (up two notches from a 1/4-time start), and she uses this budget to purchase equipment, limited amounts of tutorial materials and handouts. She has managed to procure one computer for the lab itself and has taken advantage of the lab's proximity to the computer center; students check out software from the lab and go next door to the center to use its hardware. This arrangement has enabled her to concentrate more funding in the area of tutorial staff in order to expand the one-to-one tutorial services. The college also has a college-wide grant fund for specific requests. Ms. Egge has used that resource to procure software for student use.

St. Mary's University in San Antonio is our next stop in Texas. We find that grants have played a significant part in their Writing Center's funding structure, as well. The center began ten years ago with a Title III grant; Director Barbara Bastoli explains that they now have a separate budget which they use primarily to fund twenty peer tutor positions. Materials are needed, however, for a special minority student prep program for pre-med. This HPOP program requires specialized instructional software in such areas as chemistry. Grant money has been helpful here, but they also need to support programs for developmental summer school and ESL students. For these latter groups they use a combination of student tuition and grant money in order to continue to build their in-house library of texts and computer-software, but they are still in need of software tutorial programs for their four Apple computers.

Taking a turn northward we end up in Oklahoma City at Oklahoma Christian College. Dr. Joe McCormick is the Director of the Writing

Center which is housed in the English Department. He has a particular challenge- no separate budget at all. Students do have access to three computers and some software is available; they also have access to the university computer center that holds sixty computers and a variety of soft-ware for student use. But let's go back to that no separate budget for a moment- how does Dr. McCormick create money where none exists? A creative solution to the problem is found in housing tutorial materials in the college bookstore; a certain item is recommended for the student to purchase for tutorial sessions, and those that want it purchase it.

Again we find grant money assisting in the purchase of lab instructional materials, this time at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma. The Writing Lab is part of the English Department and operates on a limited budget under the direction of Dr. Holmes. However, a substantial grant from Title IV funding enabled them to purchase ten Apple IIe computers, and a separate grant for the Writing Lab provided software from Educulture. Some of this software is replacing composition and spelling texts purchased with a funding budget in the 1970's. Back-up materials are provided by the staff-the comment was made that they utilize a good bit of "homemade"-als.

The final stop on our southwestern journey finds us in Stillwater at Oklahoma State University. Here, too, the Writing Center is housed in the English Department and is sponsored by their budget; this is their first year of having a full-time director. Materials and texts are obtained from faculty and the English Department. They presently have three computer word processors available with fourteen more to be installed soon. They feel the need for increased funding might lead to students being asked to pay a lab fee in order to use the center facilities.

Limited budgets seems to be an ongoing issue in writing lab management and development. Directors and staffs, as indicated in many of the responses we received, seem to be spending a significant amount of time pursuing grant money. And, oftentimes, grants are restricted for the purchase of particular items that might not be in the greatest area of need. We also see labs reaching out into the university community to make better use of resources, such as computer centers and book stores. And we see centers developing their own in-house materials which can, sometimes, be the best answer for dealing

with the tutorial needs of a particular student population. Whatever the strategy or technique they utilize, it's clear that writing labs are trying to do what they can wherever they can, despite the limits and constraints that are placed upon them.

Don't forget to send your response to the LAB TROUBLESHOOTER so we can share your solution to the problems facing us as we provide our essential services to writers everywhere!

A reader asks... .

Harvard, the University of Western Ontario, and other business schools have successfully employed the case study method for educating students in the complexities of the business world. Can we successfully adopt the case study method for educating tutors? Do you know of any case studies, that is, any detailed accounts of tutee problems, tutor decisions, and the consequences? Do you know of any writing centers using the case study method? Would you be interested in a collection of case studies to use in tutor education? If so, what issues should the cases address? Contact Jim Bell, 113 Renova Private, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 4C7.

A reader comments ...

I found the new format professional, but still informal and accessible; attractively laid-out and, most important, easily Xerox-able. Are you going to stick with the cream-colored paper throughout the yea'? I hope so. The rainbows in the past were gay, but as the survey results pointed out, not always compatible with the old Xerox machine. (Although I loved saying to col-leagues things like, Have you read the article in the pink issue yet?")

David Taylor
Moravian College
Bethlehem, PA

(Ed. note: Unless there's a hue and cry from those of us who like the variety of brightly colored paper, the newsletter will stick with this boring- but easily copied- ivory-colored paper.)

Tutors' Column

'Twas a semester at the writing center

'Twas the night before Friday, December thirteenth,
My last night of tutoring (to my great relief!)
No more papers to read or prose to correct,
No more students who expect a 5-minute check.
I will now sleep peacefully all tucked in my bed,
Without pages of scrawled handwriting dancing in my head.
Now don't get me wrong—the semester has been great
But there's only so much a person can take.
I know, however, once break is over,
I'll be back once again, ready to get going.
So to all at the Writing Center I wish a relaxing vacation,
One filled with happiness, joy, and love through the nation.
Then I said as I walked through the door and out of sight,
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

Mandy Taylor
Moravian College
Bethlehem, PA

A college try

To be a tutor in the writing lab is to witness progress first hand. It's great. I finally know how my father, who taught engineering for 30 years, felt during semesters filled with students who continually and successfully gave his classes the ole' college try. And I know how he must have felt when he would see students giving in to burnout, frustration and apathy. Students' failure and successes are felt personally by all who invest their time with them. But I learned, as my father learned, that the successes far outweigh the failures, for they burn far brighter and much longer than the failures sting. That's the greatest part of the writing lab.

Failure stings like lemon in a cut. With each occurrence the full sensations return- the intensity of the sting, the depth the acid seeps. And each time we can't seem to recall it ever feeling quite this intense before. Failure at its worst is destitution. No alternatives. This doesn't exist in the writing lab. If I've learned anything in the lab, as a student or as a tutor, it is how to assimilate

and learn from mistakes- how to find alternatives. We profit from our mistakes and gain knowledge. Therefore, our students in the Washtenaw Community College Writing Lab do not fail.

The atmosphere gently hums, "It's okay," and the shaking and frightened student is some-how rocked into peace and taught to play again. The child is drawn out by gentle constructive direction and is taught alternatives to fear. I choose to call this soul-soothing-tender-loving care- the kind needed to nurture creativity and emotion and writing in our students.

As tutors, we can and do say, "our students," just like the instructors, because we get students who come just for us, they wait in line for us, and they rely on us. We also learn from our students. They help us when we don't understand things. They talk things over with us, debate with us, and challenge us. This is the exchange that signals the success of the lab. We see the increas-

ing ability for the students to speak out and question us if they need to. And we encourage it. I wonder if many other college writing labs do this.

Our students don't fail. Together we find alternatives to problems, to potential failure, thus achieving success. The students either leave with solutions or leave with determination to come back and try again. How can this, even in the face of poor letter grades, be seen as failure? Surely, this is success. And it's traded back and forth. When they succeed, I succeed. We are partners in achievement. And it works. When scared and crabby "Tina" comes into the lab on Mondays and seeks me out to correct her assignments that frequently have the same errors as her last assignments, I know by her smile when she leaves that she is determined to once again give her assignment the "ole' college try." I know she is thinking like I am thinking, that maybe when she comes to see me on Wednesday, this time she will have it right. And if it's not, we will both work harder. The point is, we both know we both want to try and we both care. And we have faith that eventually we will lick her problem. It may take some time, but in the meantime, we soothe each other's soul with subtle, tender, loving care,

When we collectively use our imaginations to find solutions and alternatives. we all learn, we all win. Great things are conceived, and if I'm lucky as a tutor, I am there when my students' great achievements are born. That is the payment I seek. But if I happen to miss a particular birth of achievement from my students, I will apply "the ole' college try"- I will return again and again to the lab until I do witness achievement. I am confident that if I stick out teaching in some form for even half as long as my father did, I will see it many times over.

Erin Smith
Peer Tutor
Washtenaw Community College
Ann Arbor, Michigan

SLATE offers a starter sheet on writing labs

SLATE, a subgroup of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), regularly offers Starter Sheets on topics of interest to teachers of writing. In September 1988, SLATE published a Starter Sheet on writing Centers, written by Muriel Harris, Purdue University. Copies may be obtained from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

New York College Learning Skills Association

12th Annual Symposium on Develop- mental/Remedial Education

April 9, 10, 11, 1989

**The Albany Marriott
Albany, New York**

For further information, contact David Martin,
Director, Learning Skills Center, Cayuga Commu-
nity College, Auburn, New York 13021 (315-255-
1743, ext. 304).

New England Writing Centers Association call for proposals

The New England Writing Centers Association announces its Fifth Annual Conference for High Schools and Colleges, to be held April 15, 1989 at Lesley College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The theme of the conference is "Recharging Writing Centers: Power Through Literacy."

Possible topics include community outreach programs, tutoring in a multi-cultural setting, defining literacy, tutoring strategies, connections with writing across the curriculum, research in writing centers, computers in the center, evolution of writing centers, writing centers and freshman year programs, and collaborative learning.

Send 1-2 page description of the workshop, specifying equipment needed, time required (1 hour or 1 1/2 hours), and description of intended audience (peer tutors, elementary/high school teachers, composition instructors, writing center staff). Presentations or workshops should be designed to encourage audience participation. *Deadline: January 18, 1989.* (Notification of decision by the first week of March.) Please send proposals to: Sharyn Lowenstein, UNH/Manchester, 220 Hackett Hill Rd., Manchester, NH 03102.

Out of the dragnet and into the writing center

There are over 20,000 students on this campus. A lot of them know how to write. Some of them don't. That's where I come in. My name is Friday. I work in a Writing Center.

Dum-de-dum-dum. Dum-de-dum-dum.

At 10:00 on Wednesday morning a guy came into the Center. His paper was covered with Chapter 2, Section C violations of the Harbrace Grammatical Code: Subordinate Clause Impersonating a Sentence. The man claimed he had been framed,

"It's not fair. I hate English teachers. They have all these dumb rules, and if you don't know all of them, they throw the book at you."

"Just the facts," I said.

"OK, look at this, See all these "frags" in the margin. My teacher never told me anything about frags before I got this paper back."

"What's the point?"

"How can they expect you to know some-thing they never taught you?"

Good question, I thought. I told him I would check into it and get back with him.

3:45 p.m. I make a call on Mrs. Beulah Stevens.

"You Michael Langenfritzer's teacher?" "I am."

"I got a few questions for you."

"Have."

"What?"

"Have. You have a few questions for me."

"That's right, ma'am, I do. You put the frags on Michael's paper?"

"I did."

"You ever talk about frags in class."

"Oh, gracious, not He should have studied that long before he came to college."

"Thanks. We'll get back to you if we need more."

"More?" "
What?"

"More what? More answers?"

"That's right, ma'am."

9:48 a.m. Thursday. I'm in the principal's office at Jefferson High School. The secretary ushers in Fred Foss, English teacher and badminton coach.

"Fred,"-- I show him my badge- "I've got a few questions for you."

"Go ahead, shoot, " Fred laughs, "I mean not literally. Heel Heel"

"You Mike Lagenfritzer's sophomore English teacher?"

"Yeah, Langenfritzer, who could forget a name like that?"

"You cover fragments in your class?"

"Fragments, sure. We work with all kinds of sentences: simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, Oedipal-complex. Hall! Hah! I love that one!"

"About the fragments..."

"Oh yeah, we do fragments. I've got this whole gig I do where I dress up like Boy George. I call it "The Frag in Drag." The kids love it."

"What else?"

"Exercises. We have this whole book of exercises where the kids underline parts of sentences, correct sentences, write their own sen-

tences.... I tell them by the end of the semester they'll all be sentenced to death. Hah! Hah! Hee! Heel!"

Fred was still howling when I left. 2:11 p.m. I confront Langenfritzer.

"The name Fred Foos mean anything to you."

"Freddie Foosbrain? Sure, I had him for sophomore English."

"Foos says he taught you all there was to know about frags."

"So what of it?"

I could see him begin to squirm. I had him right where I wanted him.

Then it dawned on me. I'm not a cop. I work in a Writing Center. Maybe Mike had studied frags, and maybe he hadn't. Maybe he was sick or distracted or bored when they studied frags. Maybe he had never transferred the understanding he had gained in doing exercises to his own writing. In any case, it didn't really matter. The point was, he hadn't learned it, and placing blame wasn't going to do anyone any good.

"Let's take a look at those frogs and see what we can do."

Mike smiled, and we began to talk.

David W. Chapman Texas
Tech University Lubbock,
Texas

Know any Pullet Surprises?

An out-of-print book by Amsel Greene, entitled Pullet Surprises, is a collection of unintentional word misuses which takes its title from a writer who noted that "In 1957, Eugene O' Neill won a Pullet Surprise." Other Pullet Surprises found in this book include "the banker whose money was well infested," "the woman who came home worn to a fragile," "the local weather procrastinator," and information such as the fact that "in the Sarah Desert they travel by Camelot, "an antithesis is something given before surgery," and "a popular gift for weddings is an ostracizer." Have any Pullet Surprises you'd care to share?

A secondary school success story for writing enthusiasts

Overheard at Deerfield High School in Deerfield, Illinois is the statement, "The WERCS is the busiest place in town." WERCS (Writing English Resource Center Services) is the writing center in our high school. A year ago the WERCS did not exist except as a dream and a belief that writing centers provide optimum conditions to improve student writing.

Having secured a funding allocation from our local board of education, we scoured the lists of publications searching for information on how to set up a center in the secondary school. We made several on-site visits to schools that had existing centers, and we participated in a planning workshop. September arrived and in we plunged.

Our amazing results convinced us that writing centers have a positive influence on students' attitudes about writing as well as the writing itself. The success of our infant writing center has engendered an excitement and a commitment that has made us writing center advocates whose philosophy is to teach writing as a process using one-on-one conferencing and employing the services of staff, adult volunteers, and peer tutors.

We were blessed with cooperation from on high; however, we are convinced that the task can be undertaken with less than optimal conditions. Obviously the consumers of our services are out there waiting to be served. To provide this service the basic components are a place (even a store-room will do) and a minimum of two committed staff people for starters. Mixing the two sets of ingredients becomes the next issue. The developers need to devise creative ways to bring students into the center. A few satisfied customers will spread the word, and quickly a writing center will be functioning.

Before long the developers will need and want more of everything. Success will engender enthusiasm. The participating teachers' own excitement, the student response to a comfortable place to write and talk about writing, and the obvious improvement in their product will generate writing center fever. This evidence in tum can be used to recruit other faculty members for the program. In this case, too many cooks do not spoil the broth. It would be ideal to have a faculty member present each period of the day. If how-ever, as in many cases, there is a shortage of

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Tutor-instructor collaboration in the writing center and the classroom

With their non-hierarchical processes and non-traditional pedagogy, writing centers challenge institutional frameworks and may under-mine that which the staff seeks to promote: creative working relationships among those involved in teaching and learning. By integrating collaborative processes from the writing center with hierarchical processes from the classroom, every-one- students, teachers, tutors, and directors-benefits. Such a bringing together of student-centered and teacher-centered processes leads towards changing education in general and in particular, writers' views of what it means to write. Here, we will look at three kinds of collaboration and explore the effects on students', teachers', and tutors' perceptions of the writing process. In each case, it was not easy for the tutors to pursue collaborating with an instructor: Initially, they needed encouragement and enthusiasm from me, their writing center director, and, as they pursued the collaboration, ongoing, non judgmental responses from me.

Although I recognize that establishing new working relationships with other faculty requires tutors to take risks and is a scary experience for them, I believe persisting in a collaborative pro-gram has tremendous benefits for all involved, especially the tutors who grow by leaps and bounds personally, intellectually, and profession-ally. I have been especially pleased by the way in which collaboration with instructors sets the tutors free from me and causes them to learn something from other interested instructors. They also learn invaluable lessons about communication in education, the role of expectations and assumptions in the learning process, and how to comfort themselves professionally beyond the writing center. The three situations described below show clearly that these features are common to successful collaboration: the willingness to be flexible and cooperative on the parts of both the instructor and tutor, and an agreement about the pedagogy of tutoring, including such elements as encouraging the tutee to take responsibility for her own work and discouraging the tutor from evaluating the student's work.

As part of the initial tutor-preparation programs that all new tutors are required to participate in at RIP, tutors choose a professor to interview about his or her attitudes toward the

writing center. One tutor, Melanie, chose to interview a professor who encourages his basic-writing students to use the writing center, volunteers as a tutor himself in the writing center, and is in general, supportive of the writing center pedagogy. Melanie was also taking a technical writing course with this instructor at the time of the interview. She was dismayed to find that he felt tutors' expertise is too limited to work with advanced students, and Melanie consequently determined that the writing center's image is dependent upon teachers' perceptions of tutors' experience and knowledge. But when 27 computers arrived at our center, all tutors had to become "technical assistants" as well as writing tutors. Suddenly, more professors teaching upper level courses were interested in bringing their classes to the writing center for Instruction in word processing

and accompanying tutorials. Thus, the new knowledge and expertise associated with the computers enhances the writing center's image and the faculty's belief in the tutors' expertise. By continuing to collaborate with instructors when they are interested in having their students learn word-processing, we have turned the presence of technology to our advantage.

While working through her reaction to her instructor's view of the writing center, Melanie drew upon her own experience to help her determine her position and her approach. Melanie knew from her own experience as a tutor and as a tutee that the writing center can provide important assistance to students in advanced courses. While enrolled in technical writing, she learned the usefulness of simply getting another point of view on her subject. Most useful to her was the access to word processing that enabled her to create a very successful main project for the technical writing course- a manual for a veterinarian's office. By using a graphics pro-gram, she designed a professional-looking pet care book for pet owners. With the success of this project, she approached her technical writing professor and received his support in designing a brochure for technical writing students about the writing center. It is now routine for technical writing instructors to bring their classes to the writing center for an introduction to the computers and the various programs we have available. Melanie's persistent collaboration, therefore, was groundbreaking in changing the image of the

writing center. Her efforts, and the students' clamor for access to technology that makes their work efficient, changed a piece of our educational structure.

Another tutor, Patty, conferenced twice weekly in a basic writing classroom and found that her role as a neutral sounding board accelerated students' development of their own heuristics in the early drafting stage as well as the revision stage. The key to this successful collaboration between students, tutor, and instructor was that the tutor and the instructor shared one role, that of raving respondent, with both teacher and tutor circulating among the students and reading their work. Although Patty was initially confused about how to react to the instructor's authoritarian posture during part of her class, she came to recognize that this stance enabled the instructor to provide the necessary direction for setting forth assignments. Patty realized that the instructor's role freed her to just talk with and elicit questions from students in a more neutral role. Thus, the differences in their roles helped balance "conferencing talk": students established direction with the instructor, and then discussed specific rhetorical concerns with the tutor.

Because the instructor used a text, *Writing in Action: A Collaborative Rhetoric*, (Masiello, Macmillan, 1986) that had also been used during Patty's preparation workshop, Patty was familiar enough with the text that the instructor could limit her pre-class discussions with Patty who could then utilize strategies from previous experiences with the text. Thus the instructor had to do very little "instructing" of the tutor and could use quick before-class conversation time for discussion of students' work. Their shared familiarity with the text enhanced their collegiality and professional relationship—they came to admire, respect and like each other very much.

Patty recognized and appreciated how the students played a crucial role in the successful collaboration. As active writer-reader-respondents, a role they had learned from their Instructor, they developed a willingness to explore ideas with Patty and did not expect her to evaluate their writing. As they talked with her, they learned that the writing process means asking questions. Their informal conversations with Patty led them to explore content and purpose comfortably, leaving mechanical and formal concerns temporarily aside. Patty often found that because she presented herself as an interested listener, she was never viewed as an intruder into the writing process.

Rewards for Patty grew as students began to exploit her role as a "sounding board"; they expanded their questions about writing to include specific rhetorical elements, such as "too you think I need more detail in this paragraph?" or "Is this what a narrative paper should sound like?" Not fearing their instructor's reaction to what might have felt like "stupid questions," students didn't need to risk their self-images with the tutor. Instead, they could concentrate on the writing process and learn to ask more detailed, probing questions about their work. Students, tutor, and instructor found this collaborative experience extremely rewarding because they all took pride and pleasure from the students' growth as writers. It's clear that the tutor's integration into the conferencing process modified the hierarchical environment of the classroom and helped create a fertile climate for writing.

After taking an English majors course from one professor, Terri was eager to work informally in the classroom with him because his pedagogy was congruent with the writing center's. But in spite of this congruence, a conflict arose between students' and tutors' perceptions of the purpose of tutoring. Terri then learned the importance of establishing fluid communication lines between instructors and the writing center. Now, Terri is a strong proponent of encouraging tutors to establish clear sets of expectations for the outcomes of tutorial sessions for both the students and the instructors. The needed communication is not merely a matter of emphasizing writing center pedagogy, but making sure that everyone understands what that means in actual practice.

As a tutor, Terri was surprised to discover that some students' feelings that the tutor is responsible for their grades was unknowingly reinforced by the instructor's attitude that he, as a superior reader, would have offered the student more precise and corrective advice. Terri decided that it is the tutor's task to clarify students', tutors', and instructors' roles, expectations, and responsibilities repetitively until the distinctions are understood and accepted. Although it seems like a heavy burden for a tutor to carry, only the tutor can explain the process of a student's tutorial session to an instructor. A writing center director can "put out fires" when misunderstandings between tutor and instructor occur, but only the tutor can effectively report, "When we worked on that essay, this is what happened..."

Terra's growth in understanding the dy-

namics of tutoring between tutor, instructor, and student was similar to her own growth as a writer who learned the value of getting early, non-evaluative responses to her work. Although she once thought that she, as an English major, could not need the writing center, she now believes that peer conferencing is beneficial for all writers. She became eager, therefore, to share her enthusiasm with the instructor's students during an early visit to their classroom. The instructor's positive attitude toward the writing center, part of his philosophy that "Students need to talk to know what they're doing-to keep the writing process transpiring," and her confidence that his students understood the tutor's role and their responsibilities to explain assignments and tackle revising seriously, led her to expect that students would have productive tutorial sessions with her. She found, however, that some students believed the tutor's role was "to proofread-to help students become better writers," and others perceived that "tutors give direction: they don't proofread. They'll give opinions, but they won't rewrite." These views resulted in the first kind of student feeling frustrated with the lack of directive tutor-ing, and the second, somewhat more satisfied yet still occasionally disappointed because of her view of the tutor as a mediator between herself and the instructor, creating a role for the tutor as someone who helps the student prepare her image for the professor. After reviewing tutorial sessions with two students whose views represented these two positions, Terri discovered the benefit of ongoing discussion of the tutor's role. Because she has a trusting relationship with the instructor, she was able to enlist his help in dispelling the myth of the "tutor-critic," a mini-teacher who identifies every rhetorical weakness and surface error and then tediously explains necessary corrections. Terri's experience collaborating with an instructor helped her develop a realistic vision of the communication network surrounding school learning in general, and as a future high school English teacher, she will find this vision useful.

Although it was often hard for me to watch tutors struggling with conflicts that are part of collaboration, I believe that the process of tutors learning to work with students and faculty beyond the secure confines of the writing center is an important one. The collaborative situations de-scribed here show that so much more learning about writing process can take place when tutors become mobile throughout writing programs. I have seen that each time collaboration occurs successfully, friendships are made among students, teachers, and tutors, philosophies are

adjusted, and chairs and desks are moved around to eliminate rather than create barriers. When writing centers help break down barriers to communication and understanding, they contribute to the progressive development of higher education,

Lea Masiello

Indiana University of Pennsylvania Indiana, Pennsylvania

Announcing a writing tab handbook

In 1987 The University of Pennsylvania funded a pilot research program to design computer-intensive composition courses for under-graduates. Four graduate students collaborated, preparing classes to be taught in a writing lab equipped with fifteen personal computers. During the 1987-1988 school year, seven sections of computer-intensive composition were taught.

To help orient future teachers of such courses, the group has prepared a handbook. Although the Penn lab uses IBM PC's, the approach of the handbook is adaptable to any type of personal computer. It represents a studied effort at course and classroom exercise design by people with experience in writing pedagogy but new to computer-intensive composition. It is hoped that teachers in similar positions will find leads or avoid pitfalls by reading it.

Twenty-one practical exercises, which can be directly copied or adapted to different contexts, are preceded by a brief presentation of the theoretical position that evolved with the experience of teaching computer-intensive composition. The sixty-seven page handbook stresses the benefits of working with a network, both in the classroom and also in constructing theory and in designing research. In addition, the authors provide pragmatic tips for teaching composition in a lab, along with a short annotated bibliography and a glossary. Interested teachers can receive a copy by mailing \$3 to:

The Writing Lab Handbook
Department of English
University of Pennsylvania
34th and Walnut Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19104
attn. Thomas Kinsella

Checks should be made payable to "Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania."

A Secondary School Success

(cont. from page 12)

dollars, this should not be the end of the project; there are other resources to tap. Many school districts employ aides who can be trained to assist in the center. Another wonderful resource is the community. Adult volunteers with an Interest or expertise in writing can enrich the program and do marvelous things for public relations. And finally, probably the most effective element is peer tutors. Realistically, bringing in lay people requires more work as careful planning and attention needs to be given to their training.

Another key factor in considering the establishment of a writing center is the tone and atmosphere in the room. The writing center has to be a place of safety, a place of exploration, discovery, a place of risk-taking without fear of judgement. As Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman use the phrase, a writing center should be a "community of writers." The WERCS' slogan is "All writers need advice." Fostering this attitude is crucial to coaching successful writers. The frills and furbelows are nice, but the atmosphere in the room is the difference between success and failure as far as we are concerned.

We spoke of our amazing results. They fol-

low here: improvement in freshman post-test scores in language arts assessment, positive in-put from classroom teachers, improvement on essay exams, and numbers- a startling average of 1,100 students per month in attendance once we got rolling, the large majority of which were writing conferences. In addition, the stimulus increased interest and activity in writing in the whole English department and prompted the rejuvenation of spirit in veteran teachers who were involved in the project. The two of us have become such evangelists that we are writing a book on writing centers at the middle and secondary school level. In writing an article of this nature we must, of necessity, be very general. We would be happy to answer specific questions.

Kay Severns
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Work cited

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WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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