

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing February, 1999

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Articles in this issue consider important but differing challenges in writing center tutoring, from working with learning disabled students to handling crisis tutorials. Yet, while all examine what we do, they also consider in thoughtful ways what we do not do.

As Jan Thompson shows us, we do not always need to respond to questions with answers. Instead, responding with our own questions can promote reflection. The reviewers of *Weaving Knowledge Together* remind us that there is no generalizable model of collaboration and that good books, such as this one, do not have to offer readers products or conclusions. Illustrating processes can be equally illuminating.

Our tutors' columns focus in useful ways on how not to do the writer's work for her; Pam Fox Kuhlken gives us a vivid example of why we ought not to do a student's imagining; and Michael A. Pemberton challenges us to think about when not to act on information we hear from students.

But what we will be doing soon, as the winter thaws into spring (we hope), is begin meeting each other at regional and national conferences.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Beyond fixing today's paper: Promoting metacognition and writing development in the tutorial through self-questioning

At Landmark College, where I teach composition, literature, and tutorials, my colleagues and I have ongoing discussions about how to help our students become more self-sufficient writers, discussions that no doubt take place at colleges and universities across the country. But at Landmark, the only post-secondary institution solely for students with dyslexia, specific learning disabilities, or attention deficit disorder, we have a unique and challenging mission. My experience has been working one-to-one or in small groups with writers who struggle (and succeed) on a variety of levels.* Some may have language deficits or dyslexia; others have written output problems that may involve attentional or executive functioning difficulties. As part of ongoing training, professional development, and outreach, faculty at Landmark frequently share strategies with each other and with educators outside the college who work with LD students. Moreover, we believe that what works well for stu-

dents with learning differences can also work well for other writers who lack the preparation or confidence to succeed on their own in college. In speaking with my colleagues about some of their favorite instructional techniques for writing tutorials, I found that a number of us use various questioning strategies, which we like because they seem to help students become more active learners and more independent writers.

I think most of us would agree that it would be hard to imagine a tutorial

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

session in which a tutor posed no questions. While questions are only part of the tutorial dialogue, they are what keep it moving. They can help students get started or unstuck, and stimulate them to more effective thinking and production of written language. It may be stating the obvious to note that students seem to experience writer's block less frequently when they are given a specific essay question or prompt than when they are asked to come up with a topic on their own. Questions also help tutors gain insight into students' thinking and writing and can help students gain such insight. Quite simply, questions require response. They provide direction, which is important for just about all writers but especially for those who struggle to generate enough ideas, focus and organize their thoughts, or find the right language to express them.

How do we use questions to shape dialogue in the tutorial? We use them in working with students to identify patterns of difficulty and strength in their writing, reading, and learning. (What types or parts of writing do you do best?) We also use questions to help students understand logical relationships and sentence structures. (How is the first clause of this sentence related to the second one?) We ask students to describe writing tasks, the content of their work, and how they plan to shape or revise that content. (What is this assignment asking you to do? What steps can you break it into? What do you need to focus on tonight when you edit your paper?) We ask questions to check students' comprehension of texts (What is the author's main point here?) and their understanding of language rules. (Before we work on editing these run-on sentences, can you tell me what a run-on is?) We ask students questions aimed at helping them assess their progress as developing writers and learners. (Why do you think this paper was more successful than the previous one?) These questions have a pedagogical agenda that extends be-

yond just fixing today's paper from the student's English, history, or biology class: we are attempting to teach the students *metacognition*—or ways of thinking about their own thought and communication processes—as a foundation for more successful and independent thinking and communicating in the future.

Studies show that effective writers are capable of strategizing in order to complete writing tasks; on the other hand, less effective writers may tend to take a less purposeful approach because they have not devised or learned sufficient rhetorical or writing process strategies. Individuals with learning difficulties often do not strategize without receiving direct, explicit instruction. In order to become more independent in using writing strategies purposefully, weaker writers need to practice them, understand their purposes and possible applications to other writing situations, and be able to self-monitor. In general, students without learning difficulties will have greater—or more immediate—success in becoming independent in these areas than students who have specific learning difficulties, who struggle to automatize skills and strategies. Nevertheless, we have seen students at Landmark make substantial gains.

When a student writer brings a writing assignment to the tutorial, the tutor can respond by asking questions that maximize the student's level of control over his own work. As many people in the fields of composition and tutoring have pointed out, we want to ask open-ended questions, or at least start with these and, as my colleague Christina Arieta said, "lead the student to discover the meaning or the solution." Of course, sometimes we have to narrow our questions or give direct suggestions, but we try first to inquire into the student's thinking. I find that when time is running out in the tutorial and a student's paper is due the next day, I become more directive. For example, in one tutorial session I had been giv-

ing cues such as “What is the relationship between the ideas in these two paragraphs?” which stimulated much deeper participation by the student than my cue toward the end of the session when time was running out and I directed, “You need a transition here.” Time and other factors enter in, and I am not trying to suggest that tutors should utter no declarative statements. But I have found it instructive to remind myself to focus on questioning that will serve the student beyond today’s paper. Maybe we won’t cover as much of the student’s paper today, but maybe that is okay.

We can also promote active learning by responding to students’ questions with questions. For example, when a student who was working on an analysis of *Hamlet* asked me if she should omit commentary on a particular type of imagery in her paper, I responded, “What would be an argument for leaving it out?” Then she reasoned through and verbalized why the material was tangential before deciding to leave it out. My hope was that this process of reflection would make a more lasting impression than if I had simply responded to her query by saying, “Yes, you should omit that material.”

Some of the tutors I surveyed mentioned Socratic questioning as a technique they employ to foster metacognition and independence in student writers. The Socratic method can be defined as a process of posing probing questions aimed at helping students find a meaning they wish to express or the language with which to express it. Each answer to a question provides the starting point for another question, which leads to another answer, and so on. We can introduce Socratic questioning explicitly as a strategy, that is, let students know what we are up to. Some tutors at Landmark College have even made a point to discuss Socrates and the Socratic method, helping the students make connections with their history, education, or English classes. One of my colleagues,

Ricia Gordon, has made the art of Socratic questioning the foundation for her Exposition and Analysis writing class as well as her tutorials, and has inspired me and others to incorporate more persistent, logical questioning in our tutorials and classes. Ricia says that such questioning “becomes a chain that takes students deeper and deeper into the text or issue at hand.” With students who have difficulty verbalizing, focusing, or organizing their ideas, Socratic questioning breaks the thought process and the task into smaller questions that require smaller answers. For example, a student read me a definition of “cognition” that he had found as a starting point for his research paper on dolphin cognition: Cognition is “The act or process of knowing, including both awareness and judgment.” In response, I asked, “What does being aware mean?” The student replied, “Being able to react to your surroundings and how they affect you . . . and your internal self—being able to perceive and think.” I then responded, “What does it mean to think?” He answered, “We use thinking to solve problems. [It is] not instinct or natural reflex.” At the end of this tutorial session, after discussing a scholarly article on dolphins’ ability to learn an artificial language, the student posed the question, “How does the way it [the dolphin] thinks relate to its surroundings?” Ideas resulting from such a dialogue can be recorded in writing by the student or the tutor to build a collection of notes that the student can incorporate in his written composition.

If helping students become more independent writers is one of our goals, and if questioning is a metacognitive strategy that can foster their independence, then it seems reasonable to have as another central goal that students learn to formulate their own questions. A number of colleagues say that they have seen students experience success when the students themselves have developed questions to generate and organize ideas and details for essays. My

colleague, Ricia, has shown how, in a Socratic discussion, the tutor can encourage a student to rephrase his own statements as questions, which can propel his analytical probing or the building of an argument. In addition, she asks the student to start the writing process by writing ten questions about a topic and then choosing from those a single, central question which his paper will answer. The answer, of course, when it is discovered, becomes the student’s thesis.

Several other tutors say that they sometimes ask students to arrange their questions to form an outline for their papers, a question for each section or paragraph. While they are drafting or after they have completed a draft, they can refer to their questions and self-monitor: “Have I answered this question in this section? Does my essay answer the central question I have posed?” This approach can help students with a variety of writing problems, including difficulty developing and linking their ideas, labored or minimal written output, focusing difficulties, or organizational weaknesses. Furthermore, for those with overload or time management problems, such questioning can be a way of breaking an assignment into manageable steps: a student can plan to answer one or several of her questions each day until the draft is completed.

When cued to pose their own questions for writing, some students do not automatically ask provocative questions, and thus, may need additional cues. In my tutorials, I have observed marked differences between students in their ability to develop questions for writing. Learning heuristic questioning techniques can make a difference for students who need assistance in forming questions and who have difficulty generating and elaborating in their writing. One common approach to teaching questioning is to introduce the journalist’s five W’s and an H: who, what, where, when, why, and how, a strategy that appears in countless com-

position textbooks. This approach has brought results for several students with whom I have worked who could create cursory but fairly logical outlines for essays but then had difficulty filling in the discussion and detail.

With one student I have tutored for two years, I have continually come back to this strategy, cueing him to ask himself these questions. His performance in his biology, film studies, and humanities classes improved as he expanded his writing, usually in response to my cueing him to ask himself these questions. The five W's and one H strategy was reinforced in the student's journalism and humanities classes, which both naturally emphasized people, dates, and events, and required causal analysis. Gradually, the student has begun to do more active self-cueing using these questions while pre-writing, drafting, and revising.

The five Ws and one H are just a start, of course. Students may need ongoing assistance in order to be able to pose provocative questions that will shape strong essays. We can let them know that questioning is a skill we are working on; that is, we are exploring the question: How can I formulate a question that will lead me somewhere worthwhile in my writing? Recently I asked the student with whom I have used the five W's to generate ten questions from which he could then choose several of the best questions to frame his research paper. The next day he came in with a few fragmented statements rather than questions, though the heading at the top of his page said "Questions." I pointed out the discrepancy, asking him again to pose questions, and he began doing so. Then we did some trouble-shooting of these questions: I asked him to attempt an answer for each one. In doing so, he discovered that some of his questions led to dead-ends. For example, the student wrote, "Does the brain structure of dolphins affect their cognition?" I cued him to answer, and he said the answer was "yes." I cued him, "How can

you rephrase the question to lead to a more in-depth answer?" In response, he simply added the magic word "how"; thus, the question became "How does the brain structure of dolphins affect their cognition?" He was able to tell me how this question would lead to a more interesting discussion in his paper. Later, when the student was trying to formulate a question about memory in dolphins, he noted, without my cueing, that a question would be of little value for his paper if he could respond to it with just a short answer before even doing the research. The point here is that the student has begun to understand what constitutes a good question and how he can use questions to plan and organize his research, thinking, and writing on a topic.

For students who may need to give their questioning more direction or structure, we can introduce rhetorical modes of thought and communication. One colleague, Greg Cole, who cites Berke's *Twenty Questions for the Writer* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985) as a valuable resource, said that he presents rhetorical modes as common thinking patterns that we engage in every day and use in communicating. Greg notes that it is helpful for students to recognize that these modes exist and to "place them in their mental file cabinets." Beyond this, the tutor can guide the student to see that she can use questions relating to rhetorical modes to structure sections or paragraphs in her paper. For example, if she were writing a paper about metacognition, she might ask for a definition: "What do we mean by 'metacognition'?" Another question might call for classifying and analyzing: "What are some theories of metacognition?" Another, for example, for illustration: "How does metacognition apply to students at Landmark College?" When a student formulates questions with rhetorical patterns in mind, the questions, in the end, may not be qualitatively different from those formed without considering

these patterns. But for some students, this additional cue may make a difference—in their ability to get started, structure their papers, or understand and shape the logic of their writing. Identifying rhetorical approaches can also be done with a student mid-draft or after a draft has been written to help her analyze the development of ideas in her paper.

Recently Karen Malley, a colleague at Landmark, demonstrated a highly visual and interactive method of promoting students' use of questioning as a tool for revising sentences. Karen has used her laptop computer during tutorial sessions to engage in dialogues with the students about sentences that they have been composing. In one exercise, Karen had a student compose a sentence containing one of her vocabulary words, and then Karen responded by typing a question that was "intended to help her refine that sentence." Karen explained the following to me:

I'd type the question, she'd revise,
I'd type another question, and so on.
When she had arrived at a pretty well-refined statement, we switched roles: I wrote a sentence, and she posed [and typed] the questions while I revised. And then we looked at the whole thing and recorded observations about the kinds of questions that were being asked, what their purpose was, and how they shaped the sentence. My hope is that eventually we'll be able to observe a pattern and she'll be able to recreate this pattern on her own.

In Karen's approach, the tutor models for the student, encourages the student to pose questions, and captures the Socratic dialogue on the computer's screen and memory so that the questioning strategy and its results can be examined and evaluated by both tutor and student.

As a metacognitive follow-up to our introduction of questioning strategies,

we can engage in discussions with students in tutorials which lead them to reflect on the value of questioning and how they can implement self-questioning as a strategy. These dialogues can also help us as tutors reflect on our practices and learn to what extent a student is understanding or internalizing strategies. Sometimes students let tutors know that they are consciously engaging in self-cueing. Last year I worked with a talented student who had attentional problems and perfectionism which interfered with her completion of writing assignments. In a tutorial one day she told me, without being asked, what her next step would be in writing her paper on *Hamlet*; she prefaced this by saying, "I'm telling you because you always ask me what my next step is going to be."

A self-cue is not necessarily going to be a question, but perhaps the initial impulse toward self-cueing for some student writers is inspired by the tutor's questioning. Often it is hard to know whether a student actually asks himself questions while engaging in writing tasks. Nevertheless, we can still ask students to contemplate their thought processes and to report on them. Several months ago, I asked a student (the same one who was writing about cognition in dolphins) if he had found the questioning strategies I had introduced and periodically cued him to use to be helpful and if he knew whether he had internalized these. That is, when working on his writing assignments outside of tutorial, did he, in fact, ask himself questions? He responded that he did, in a sense, though not necessarily in the form of direct questions, more by thinking of the answers to those questions. During our discussion, without my cueing, he recalled papers he had written for various courses and recounted to me some of the key questions these papers answered. Such discussion can be especially helpful at the end of an exercise or tutorial session in which questioning or other self-cueing strategies have

been used. It is also a good way to review at the end of a semester or school year.

To reinforce self-questioning strategies so that students can remember to employ them independently, teachers can ask students to write about these strategies. Through end-of-semester questionnaires or brief metacognitive essays, tutors (or composition teachers) can ask students to answer questions in writing, such as the following: What writing strategies have you developed this semester? How can you use them more independently in the future? How can you cue yourself to use these strategies? On such a questionnaire I used this past year, several students identified strategies that had worked for them and said they could use these strategies in the future. A number of classroom instructors at Landmark College have students write metacognitive essays about themselves as learners or writers, including a discussion of progress, useful strategies, areas that need work, and even how to address those areas. These essays are sometimes done in collaboration with the tutor or are shared with the tutor. In such an essay for his English 101 course, one student I had tutored wrote about his struggle to structure and limit his associative thinking and over-generation of material, explaining,

ADD . . . provides me with the perception that everything is related and no matter how thinly related, information that should be covered. I fight this problem mostly with will power, [asking] What is the purpose of the paper[?] . . . I revise and revise, revise and revise . . . In doing this I keep checking with myself, Is this what I want to say? What do I want to say?

In writing this essay, which he did independently, the student echoed cues that both his English teacher and I had given him throughout the semester.

To make self-cueing strategies more tangible and lasting, they can be col-

lected in the form of written protocols, "toolkits," or checklists which the student can use beyond the tutorial. Auditory memory, attention deficits, and organizational problems that students may have can interfere with their ability to remember to self-cue and employ writing strategies if they do not have tangible reminders. As teachers begin to expect greater self-cueing from students, it is important to make sure that students have the resource materials they need and that they know how to use them. Tutors at Landmark often work with students to collect or create personalized reference sheets or "master notebooks." These often evolve out of questioning, but the documents themselves can contain questions or statements. Or they may be more visually oriented guidelines, such as flowcharts. Such references might include plan sheets for composing, a series of questions including What is my purpose? Who is my audience? What rhetorical approaches could I use? My colleagues and I encourage students to keep and use planning sheets and other templates or references for as long as they need to do so.

Self-cueing systems can take many forms, depending on students' academic and skill needs, and their learning styles. Students may want to make an index card that reminds them to try asking "Who, what, where, when, why, and how?" They might find useful a list of rhetorical patterns, or a copy of Berke's list of *Twenty Questions for the Writer*. My colleague Ricia Gordon created a handout that takes students through a process of generating and refining questions for writing essays. Some tutors help their tutees create written protocols for composing and revising. One colleague, Sara Glennon, typed up a personalized guide for a student that she titled "Writing Strategies That Have Worked for You." Another colleague, Leslie Lewis, worked with a tutee to create what they called "Andrea's Customized Process for Paper Writing." Such lists may contain

questions (“What is unnecessary? What needs to be added? What’s out of order?”) or reminders (“Generate the questions your paper will answer”). Or they may be entirely in the form of imperative statements (“Freewrite on each chunk of the outline”). At Landmark students are often encouraged by their English teachers to develop with their tutors a revision and proofreading checklist. Some students put the checklist in the form of a series of questions for themselves (Is there a clear thesis statement? Does the body of my paper . . . back up my thesis? etc.); others simply make a list of what they need to look for (one main idea per paragraph, paragraph transitions, etc.). Tutors can help students organize the items on the list in a hierarchy that moves from overall essay content and structure to paragraph, sentence, and word issues.

These checklists generally reflect at least a semester of diagnostic teaching, feedback, and discussion, through which a student, with the help of a tutor and English teacher, has learned to identify patterns of strength, difficulty, and error in her writing. Any of these self-cueing devices can be created and saved on a computer so that a student can easily modify them as needed.

Some students take to self-cueing and self-questioning quickly, but others need considerable reminders to employ these and other strategies. Such factors as motivation; difficulties with language processing; and perceptual, memory, or executive functioning can affect a student’s ability to apply strategies independently. Learning to self-cue is probably less difficult for struggling writers who do *not* have specific

learning disabilities than it is for those who do. However, I believe that developing self-cueing strategies can be a worthwhile endeavor for many under-prepared or tentative writers.

Jan C. Thompson
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*At Landmark, part of each student’s program is an individualized skills tutorial that meets several times a week and is taught by a faculty member. Last year the college opened the Center for Teaching and Learning, which offers writing, reading, study skills, and content-area support for students who seek assistance with assignments. In addition, the Center, headed by Sara Glennon, is becoming a clearinghouse for pedagogical resources and workshops for faculty and students.

National Writing Centers Association

April 15-18, 1999
Bloomington, IN
“Writing Center 2000: Meeting the Challenges of the New Century”
Keynote Speakers: Muriel Harris and Edward M. White

Contact: Ray Smith, Campus Writing Program, Franklin 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; phone: 812-855-4928; e-mail: nwca99@indiana.edu; <http://www.indiana.edu/~nwca99>.

Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition

July 4-7, 1999
State College, PA

This cross-disciplinary working conference will explore the purposes, problems, and possibilities of Rhetorical Education in America. For information, visit the Web site: <http://www.psu.edu/dept/english/rhetcomp99/> or e-mail Cheryl Glenn, cjg6@psu.edu, or Margaret Lyday, mmc2@psu.edu

Wyoming Conference on English

June 16-19, 1999
Laramie, WY
“Remembered Lives”

The Wyoming Conference invites submissions on all aspects of autobiography and biography from scholars across our discipline. Proposals no longer than two double-spaced pages should reach the following address by March 1, 1999: Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Conference Director, Dept. of English, Box 3353, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071-3353. For further information, contact Shelley Straley at this address or e-mail to straley@uwyo.edu

Book Reviews

Weaving Knowledge Together: Writing Centers and Collaboration. Eds. Carol Peterson Haviland, Maria Notarangelo, Lene Whitley-Putz, and Thia Wolf. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA Press, 1998.

(To order: NWCA Press, Carl Glover, Managing Editor, P. O. Box 7007, 16300 Old Emmitsburg Rd., Emmitsburg, MD 21727; \$15 + \$2 for shipping/handling for each copy.)

Reviewed by Gerry Fisher and Gail Tubbs, Washington College, Chesterton, MD

After working happily together for thirteen years, building our writing center, team-teaching courses, and co-writing articles, we looked forward to reviewing *Weaving Knowledge Together*, believing it would celebrate the virtues and pleasures of collaboration. In many ways the book did affirm our assumptions. But its benign title, which sounds so domestic and sociable, is deceptive, giving no hint of the provocative material inside. If not quite the stuff to make you start awake at 3:00 a.m. to question the meaning of your life, it does confront you with some soul-searching questions about practice, self-definition, even the possibility of collaboration itself. And just when you think, "oh, this isn't about me, my writing center, my experience," you find that it is.

Unsettling though it may be, this book deserves to be read. We're glad to have read it, continue to reread it, and recommend it without reserve. Struggling with how to review nine disparate chapters, representing multiple voices and settings, we decided to examine the text in terms of its goals as stated in the conclusion. Briefly summarized, they are to produce a "generalizable model" for sites of collaboration; to highlight the value of dissensus in the collaborative act; to provide information about writing collaboratively; and to encourage the inclusion of students as genuine partners in constructing knowledge (232-233). Though at times its tone is poignant, the book's success in meeting the last three goals is readily apparent.

It doesn't take long for a reader to recognize a subtext present in most of the articles, illustrating the ways in which the dissensus inherent in varied perspectives enriches collaboration by raising questions and deferring closure. In "To Define Ourselves or to be Defined," the authors examine "contact zones," where "otherness is valuable even as we sometimes grate against each other" (114). As for collaborative writing, the text manifests it in a variety of ways, from e-mail dialogs, to individual journal entries, to one voice taking the lead and representing the others. Writing becomes an agent in the resolution of conflict, doing something more than just producing text: it's helping the writers see a situation more comprehensively, clearly, and fairly. And running through what the editors call this "wonderful chaos" are the student voices, sometimes loud and clear, sometimes muted—challenging, questioning, and affirming.

To return to the text's first goal, however, don't bother to thumb through looking for an explicit "generalizable model" for collaboration; it's not there. Often the model must be inferred—as much from what went wrong as from what went right. Still, the combined voices in *Weaving Knowledge Together* do provide the model's salient features, among which are to encourage a spirit of inquiry, keep open lines of communication, cultivate mutual trust and respect, find useful ways of thinking, negotiate authority, recognize shifting roles, engage in continual self-reflection, and

maintain (a cockeyed?) optimism. None of these is easy or unambiguous. For instance, in the book's very first essay, the writing center is described as a borderland, a "location for subversive counterhegemonic literacy work" (21). That description, however true, suggests a guerrilla training camp rather than a site of collaboration integrated into the academy. Though in this case the "funky" (read subversive) gives way to a more traditional environment and all seems well, the writers question what is lost or gained in that transformation. Here in action is the model's spirit of inquiry, "an ongoing self-critique," but strangely shadowed by the implication that we should maintain constant vigilance against an institution's subsuming our purpose. Rather than trust, we might better exercise caution.

We discern a still darker cautionary tale in "The Butterfly Effect," in which the authors explore the ways that lack of communication can sink a project, in this case coordinating a campus-wide portfolio assessment plan with the writing center. Initial optimism gives way to despair "not only that an exciting and innovative program would self-destruct but that friendships and good professional relationships would be destroyed as well" (73). Though the article repeatedly urges us to keep the channels of communication open (another piece of the model), that advice offers little assurance that the human tendency to resist change can be overcome, especially in an atmosphere of wariness and misunderstanding.

It takes time and repeated interaction to establish mutual trust, ingredients in short supply in writing centers, where people come and go, negotiating their multiple and diverse roles. Though we may chafe at tutoring's being "characterized . . . as a low status activity that lends itself to alienation" (148), sooner or later, as chapter six pointedly reminds us, we writing center "folk" must confront the discrepancy between our perception of ourselves—as valuable alternative resources, utopian, idealistic, non-hierarchical, less authoritarian than other forms of education, more nurturing of the student's ego and ability—and the institutional view of the center as supplementary to real teaching and "secondary to the central mission of the school" (141). Consid-

ering the myriad interactions among students, tutors, faculty, and administrators, all pursuing their own agendas and acting out their own convictions, no wonder we must "create and recreate ourselves" (126). And no wonder the "generalizable model" appears fluid and "damnably difficult" (231) to apply.

It may be that none of the individual collaborative teams of writers could have predicted the alarm that would sound when all their articles were combined in one book. Even though individual pieces—particularly those which raise questions of definition, status, agency—feel a little disturbing, it's the total, cumulative effect of the echoes, the overlaps, the recurring

themes that insists we look at ourselves and acknowledge the complex task before us. These collective and sometimes conflicting voices within the text argue, however, that collaborative work is worth the effort and that its inherent complexity is of a good kind. Working together catalyzes production—people listen to each other, and a problem-solving process begins, the resolution postponed while different perspectives are considered and negotiated. Hierarchies blur as roles are transacted and transposed. Eventually, when it works the right way, all participants are empowered and energized by the partnership. For those reasons, the authors of these thought-provoking essays urge that we keep trying. Their book will sustain us as we continue in that effort.

Reviewed by Jacob Blumner, University of Michigan, Flint, MI

In the latest writing center book, *Weaving Knowledge Together: Writing Centers and Collaboration*, I felt like a fly on the wall listening to writing center directors, tutors, students, and faculty share experiences and debate. I read e-mail and letters and watched groups compose together and apart. And all the authors welcomed me to participate, collaborate if you will, as a reader.

The narratives woven in this book inform and entertain, with implications reaching beyond writing centers. Acting as a window into a clock, the authors show the inner workings of how they wrote their chapter. Each essay begins with a post-modern prologue, ranging from a short paragraph to most of a page, describing how the chapter was written. And, as the editors note in their introduction, each group collaborated differently, but they all "challenge overarching notions of collaboration and writing center theory." The prologue does not block the inner workings of the clock; we get to see how things work throughout many of the pieces. Some chapters, such as

"Erika and the Fish Lamps," tick seamlessly like most traditional academic literature in our field with one voice, while others attempt to transparently show the collaborative process. Stuart Blythe and Muriel Harris with Suzanne Pollert and Amy Stellmach transcribed email messages they sent to each other, allowing the reader to see the discussion taking place. In fact, they include how the collaboration worked and failed within the piece. Readers may feel like academic voyeurs peering at the messy process of developing sound writing center pedagogy that serves students across a large campus and outside the traditional, physical academic walls. Their digitized discussion reflects how faculty collaborate in most fields, and I appreciate the conversational approach because it fits closely with their content, a discussion of developing an Online Writing Lab. Form follows function.

David Enriquez, Carol Peterson Haviland, Candace Olson, and Dian Pizurie collaborated on "To Define Ourselves or to be Defined," Chapter 5, in which they explore who and how

a writing center is defined. In an apparent roundtable discussion that the reader eavesdrops on, a junior marketing major and writing center student, an assistant professor of English and Writing Center director, a master's student in English composition and Writing Center tutor, and an assistant professor of English and teaching assistant coordinator present their ideas about what should happen in the Writing Center; how the students, faculty, and administration define the space; and how the Center defines itself. The format allows the authors to clash in the contact zone without disrupting chapter continuity, and the questions raised in this essay are some of the most important to our field. How we see ourselves and how others see us influences every other aspect of what happens in a center. Enriquez, Haviland, Olson, and Pizurie handle the postmodern issue of defining well; they offer many perspectives with infinite variations. The one perspective I found missing is that of the "outside" faculty member, as they define it. "Zone 2" in their chapter discusses faculty perceptions, but an authorial voice would have been helpful.

Looking specifically at some of the issues raised in Chapter 5, Thomas Michael Conroy and Neal D. Lerner with Pamela J Siska, present two distinct sections to examine expert knowledge and “whether the idea of tutor as professional can ever be obtained.” Lerner begins by arguing whether tutors should be generalists or experts, and Conroy builds upon that by applying Talcott Parsons’s definition of a profession to tutoring, thus complicating the issue. The conclusion’s title, “Authority, Anti-Authority, and Tutorial Utopianism,” points to the tension inherent in the issue, but their final words might be their most powerful: “we recognize that our students have insights worth stating and worth sharing.”

Paralleling the chapter on professionalism, Joan Mullin, Neil Reid, Doug Enders, and Jason Baldrige, authors of “Constructing Each Other,” generated my favorite format while uniquely presenting a quandary experienced in many WAC-based writing centers. Using italics, boxed text, and theatre-style

dialogue, the authors present the complex nature of communicating collaboratively, in regard to both style and content. Because of the chapter’s unconventional appearance, the authors use a footnote to explain whose voice is represented and how, and the appearance serves as a constant reminder that the authors and the reader work within Pratt’s contact zone.

The layered text juxtaposes the different perspectives of who should teach writing and what should be taught. Neil Reid teaches a writing-intensive geography class, and Doug Enders is the Writing Center tutor linked to it. Reid has different ideas of how Enders should involve himself with the students and the teaching of writing. And, as the narrative of Reid and Ender’s interactions unfold, we watch over Mullin’s shoulder, waiting for the inevitable. Fortunately, no blood is shed, and after reading the chapter, I will join Mullin in “examining [our] more global assumptions about writing in the disciplines and about the ways [we] interact with writers, faculty members, and writing center tutors.”

As a WAC director intimately involved in the workings of our Writing Center, I hear faculty talk about our Center and student writing. *Weaving Knowledge Together: Writing Centers and Collaboration* raises questions for me to consider when working with faculty and shares experiences I find interesting and sometimes similar to my own. But it offers something more to those involved with writing, no matter what the discipline. It shows the process of collaboration between faculty, administrators, tutors, and students. And, as the editors note, the work here represents how “messy” and “chaotic” collaboration can be, and “This chaos is at once alarming and reassuring—alarming because it is difficult to bundle into a book, but reassuring because it is consonant with writing center theory and practice.” When teaching composition, I tell my students that the process is as important as the product, and this book bears that out. It breaks new ground as an innovative model for academic writing and inclusion of traditionally underrepresented parties—tutors and students.

Reviewed by Sallyanne Fitzgerald, Chabot College, Hayward, CA.

When Mickey Harris asked for volunteers to do a book review of the newest NWCA publication, *Weaving Knowledge Together: Writing Centers and Collaboration*, I offered to do one since I have been involved in writing centers since 1982, have administered two writing centers—one at a university and another at a community college—and have written about collaboration. I was excited about the topic and proud of the National Writing Centers Association’s efforts to publish important works about what we do. The book was both more than I expected and somewhat less as well.

Each chapter has both a report or analysis of a particular writing center and some aspect of its collaborative efforts and an explanation of the chapter’s authors’ attempts to write

collaboratively. The authors’ honesty was encouraging even though I was disappointed that their collaborations generally were not so successful as they or the editors would have wished. For example, many student collaborators either did not continue until the final draft was submitted, or in some cases, only collaborated by editing drafts. This means that student voices are rarely included in the text even though this was one of the aims of the editors. An exception is the chapter about a high school writing center. On the other hand, teachers, whether as faculty or administrators, speak in every chapter.

Two important points arose from the explanations about trying to write collaboratively: collaboration works better with students if the time allowed

is brief, and the act of collaborating has benefits beyond the writing project. Because the book was written over several years, most students who were only available for a year or so could not remain committed. Several groups tried to deal with this by involving other students later in the drafting and others by using their e-mails or asking them to edit. In spite of their efforts to be inclusive, the faculty authors, as many of them recognized, were also hampered by the power relationship between faculty and students. Indeed, for each collaborative effort, power became an issue, sometimes addressed but more frequently ignored until the analysis of the process forced its consideration. Indeed, it appears nearly impossible to have an equal collaboration between faculty and students in a project that

involves an extended timeline. Whether it is possible in shorter projects such as articles or presentations is still open for investigation although my personal experience indicates that given a mature student who is committed to the topic a collaborative presentation can result: a staff member, a student tutor, and I gave such a presentation several years ago at a Northern California Writing Centers Association conference.

Many of the faculty involved in the creation of this book mention the value writing collaboratively and working together on this and other projects had for their personal relationships. In one case, it enabled two faculty members to continue being friends in the midst of a very confrontational situation, and in other relationships, the attempt to explain working together was helpful in analyzing what they were doing and why in their center.

That the authors seem to have been primarily faculty raises another issue for me. The editors and the authors seem to assume that administrators are speaking in the chapters. Yet, they rarely speak in the role of administrators. Instead, references to administrators are usually negative, reflecting a sense that administrators either interfere with or manipulate writing center staffs. Those who list themselves as writing center directors do not speak in their administrative role, but address their issues as faculty members. While I have no problem with this approach, it does mean that the voice of administrators is not heard. I wanted to hear how administrators collaborate in their role as administrators. The issue of power is so important in this area, and while many of the authors do deal with power issues, they rarely do this in their administrative roles. Two exceptions are the comments in chapter two by Pam Childers and those by Lisa Johnson-Shull and Susan Wyche in chapter three. More typical of the

other authors, however, were comments about administrators such as that in chapter six, “The bureaucracy seemed more a burden than a tool for the benefit of tutors and students; it also reflected a top-down style of management that was characteristic of our director” (145).

Setting aside my disappointment at what is not present in the book, I must speak to the wonderful advice any of us can gain by delving into the chapters. Chapter one offers a very specific situation, but many of the issues the staff encountered will be familiar to others in writing centers whatever role they play. Chapter two, in addition to offering insights about high school as well as writing across the curriculum centers, has some excellent advice from a student tutor to other tutors. For example, Steve, the tutor, answers the age-old question about tutor expertise: “What a tutor should be able to do is to help students back up the facts that they use, advise them how to develop the topic they have already chosen, and help them create a paper that is more structurally sound” (35). Chapter three offers a warning about the dangers of trying to combine two opposing philosophies in one center. The authors admit that the “whole point of the lab is to provide students a haven where they are given individualized attention . . .” (65), yet they attempted to add assessment to the center and the goal of writing assessments is always to evaluate and almost never to assist students. In chapter four the authors offer lots of useful hints about designing online services, advice that can save others time, resources, and relationships. Their most useful piece of advice for me was to shift the questions from hardware and software to mission: “Our perceptions of technology and how we plan to use it—or argue against it—imply stances toward technology” (87). In chapter five, the authors challenge our ways of viewing ourselves, a question for both new and

established centers to ponder. Chapter six raises issues about tutoring that may be unique to graduate student tutors, but range across many conflicts and tensions. Because so many writing centers work across the curriculum, chapter seven has much to offer. For example, the authors state, “What we learned from these encounters was what all seasoned tutors come to know: writing experts become so only in response to specific situations, to acceptable practices and forms, to audience expectations, and to agreements about knowledge and its constructions” (169). Issues around ESL are the topic for chapter eight where the authors conclude from their experiences that “the boundaries between different categories of writers are so unclear that often they are invisible once tutors and students learn to look beyond the surface, writers tending to benefit from the same pedagogy regardless of status and background, national origin and mother tongue, race and ethnicity” (180). Balanced against the ESL issues in chapter eight are the two native speakers in chapter nine who face problems because their “regional accents identified them as nonmainstream students” (196).

One other final caveat—the editors mention community colleges in their conclusion, but no where else in this text are community colleges mentioned or included. What is here is very valuable to all levels, however, and can certainly be applied to any level of education.

TUTORS' COLUMN

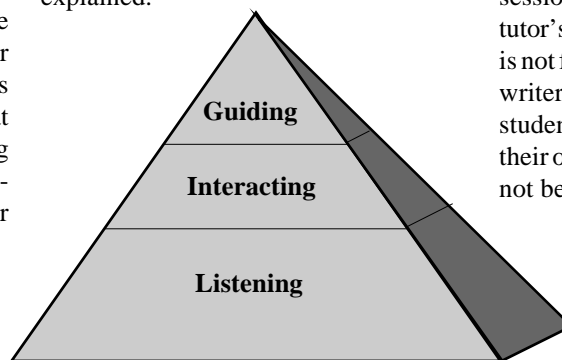
Tutorial balance

When I think of tutoring sessions in terms of the balance between the student-writer and the tutor at every stage of the tutoring session, I imagine a pyramid divided into three levels—listening, interacting, and guiding—that build on one another.

The base of my pyramid is listening because it is necessary to develop a good line of communication as the foundation for a productive tutoring session. The tutor has to understand the concerns the student-writer has, and the student-writer needs to understand what the tutor is suggesting; the only way to assure that this is accomplished is through listening to one another. The tutor has more responsibility to listen to the student-writer because the tutor is there to give her the support she wants. The opening minutes of a session should establish a two-way conversation between the tutor and student-writer to find a common starting ground. During this conversation, the tutor is listening to find out what the student-writer's concerns are and how best to address them. It's essential that the listening session be balanced at this point between the student-writer talking and the tutor listening.

Balance at the listening stage is also needed to achieve mutual understanding; besides simply asking student-writers if they understand what I say, I may need to go one step further and ask them to explain back to me what I just explained to them. If I know that a student-writer doesn't understand what I am talking about, then I need to backtrack and cover what confuses him in more specific or maybe even different terms. The tutor needs to be able to see that a balance between talking and listening is achieved in order to accomplish the goal of tutoring.

For instance, I tutored a woman named Julie who constantly said "uh-huh" to me while I was explaining that connections within a paper needed to be specific. I kept on asking her if she understood, and she said she did. To my dismay, however, she did not understand what I was saying, but, in her mind, she was preventing herself from looking dumb. To get around this ploy, I should have asked her to tell me in her words what I had just explained.



Listening is more than hearing the words the student-writer says; listening can take a variety of forms: paraphrasing, perception guessing (assuming what the student-writer is thinking), leading with questions (directly and indirectly), and interpreting what students say. These techniques are discussed by Muriel Harris in her book *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* (Urbana: NCTE, 1986) as methods that come from occupations where listening is pertinent to the success of the job; that is why these occupational fields have developed effective ways to listen. If tutors borrow these techniques, they can improve the quality of their tutoring sessions.

Balanced listening also works to shift the balance of the interaction from a tutor and student-writer to two writers discussing the needs of the text, the reader, and the subject. This validates the stu-

dent-writer and encourages him to attempt new and unique ideas or styles.

The middle level of the pyramid is interaction because it's more advanced in that it requires more than a conversation about writing; this is where the student-writer and tutor define the needs of the student-writer in relation to the text and the reader. A key factor to balance in interaction is who sets the agenda for the session. The session, if planned on the tutor's immediate judgments exclusively, is not fully balanced because the student-writer is left out of the process. This robs student writers of their authority over their own work, and the writer may, then, not be willing to work with the tutor.

The student-writer and tutor, together, set the agenda for a session by looking at the needs of the text. This is different from basic listening because it requires the tutor and student-writer to attend to both the text and what the writer says or intends of that text. If there is a discrepancy, it's the tutor's responsibility to point it out and the student-writer's responsibility to address it. By creating balance through interacting, the student-writer is positioned to take authority over her own writing.

The final and smallest level of the pyramid is guidance because this level focuses on tutor expertise. Guidance grows out of interaction because it's still a two way conversation, but it's the moment where the tutor most needs to intervene to meet the student-writer's need. The balance between tutor and student-writer is reversed from the listening level; in guidance, it's the tutor who speaks more while the student listens. The key to guidance is keeping the student-writer involved in the session.

Interaction becomes guidance when the tutor looks most like a teacher assisting student-writers with their weaknesses which may vary from development, to grammar, to organization. Some student-writers realize that something is not quite right but do not know what that something is, or the student-writer may be oblivious to it.

The two-way interaction of guiding involves the tutor implementing his expertise and the student-writer following her lead. For instance, the tutor can point out the pattern of problems and show possible solutions. Working together the tutor and stu-

dent-writer address the difficulties; then, the student-writer takes authority for corrections while the tutor observes. Finally, the student-writer works independent of the tutor. Another form of guidance is where the tutor points to a writer's strength and asks the student-writer how to use the success to address the weakness.

A special type of guidance is closure; this is where all sessions should end because it gives the student-writer a starting point for working independently. Closure determines if a session is successful because the ultimate goal of any tutoring session is to make more independent and effective writers. Clo-

sure allows the student-writer to work independently, whereas a session without closure inhibits independent work because the student-writer may not have a sense of the next steps.

Tutoring is a balancing act and a good tutor needs to learn when to balance and how much. My pyramid provides me with a reminder of the complexities of balancing a tutoring session between the student-writer and myself as tutor.

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Starting the session

One of the most challenging but important moments in a tutoring session is starting out. It's not that I have a problem approaching a waiting student, introducing myself, and asking if I can help. It's a problem with what Thomas Newkirk calls, "setting the agenda," where the student and tutor decide on one or two concerns about a piece of writing to concentrate on. I listen closely to what the student wants to work on, but I try to limit our work to something that can be accomplished in twenty or thirty minutes. Once I determine, with input from the student, a realistic goal, the session practically runs itself. The student can leave with a sense of having accomplished something, no matter how small. If we try to do too much, though, or if we don't know where we're heading, our time together will not be productive and can be frustrating for both of us.

When Joe came to the writing center, I went over to help. He took two notebooks out of his backpack and silently brought out paper after paper until there were five two-page papers on the table. He wanted to fix them all. Instead of narrowing the project down,

we proceeded to try to go over every one. Needless to say, forty-five minutes and three papers later, we were swimming in a pool of mud, frustrated by our incomplete work and inability to finish before his next class.

Su, an ESL student in the U.S. for about six months, brought in an essay about California. It was filled with misplaced articles, noun/verb agreement problems, noun/pronoun agreement problems, and sentence order changes, all of which made it very difficult to understand. I tried to dissect each sentence with him, working to explain the reasons for every new word. He wasn't able to transfer the changes we'd made together to any other sentences in the essay. He left not really knowing how to fix his own sentences, only that he couldn't make sense in English. I felt terrible, and I realized I hadn't set a realistic goal from the beginning.

While it is tempting for me to try to fix everything for a student, I am learning to create a narrower agenda from the beginning. Now when I see a student bring out numerous papers to re-

write, I ask which one he or she wants to start with. I make it clear that we may not get to all of them. I try to get the student's impression of the paper. What was she trying to do? What parts is she happy with? Does she have organizational questions or grammatical concerns? Does she understand comments made by the instructor if the paper has already been handed in? Then, as we read it together out loud, I have an idea of which areas to concentrate on. I will overlook certain mistakes so that proper attention can be given to the facet of the writing that the student wants to look at. By not trying to correct every tiny error, we can more fully cover one aspect of the writing, and it is less overwhelming and frustrating, too. Then, I explain that while there may still be certain imperfections in the paper, we have addressed the main concerns or the repeatedly made mistakes.

Now, I am more likely to suggest a task to be done independently to reinforce points made here or further improve organization within the writing. When Terry came in with a six-page research paper draft, we began by read-

ing through it to check for clarity and organization. I resisted the urge to point out every verb tense switch or run on. Once she had revised enough to feel comfortable with the basic structure and clarity of the writing, I gave her a list of things she could do to refine the paper further. The suggestions included choosing the best tense and sticking with it, looking for redundancies and deciding whether they should be eliminated, and reading each page from the bottom to top to double check for run ons. We found an example of each problem so that she knew what to look for, but she would be in charge and could revise as much as *she* chose. I told her to come back if she needed more advice after she had completed the changes.

I encourage students to return to the writing center often, especially if there are lots of errors since it will take a

long time for them to become self editors. Each time they come, they can tackle a new aspect of their writing if they've really understood what was addressed in preceding sessions. I think they have the best chance of gaining good writing and revising skills if a realistic agenda is set at the beginning of each visit. The focus can be altered slightly if necessary within the meeting as long as the new question to be tackled is manageable.

Even with an awareness of the need to set an appropriate pace, things can still go wrong. A student may be

"I realized I hadn't set a realistic goal from the beginning."

stressed or tired, or unhappy about not correcting everything. We may not have addressed all the points on his or her agenda. If I sense the student is not satisfied, I encourage the person to keep moving forward and come to the writing center frequently. Writing clearly, like any skill, re-

quires practice and won't be accomplished by a tutor editing and rewriting an essay for a student or by picking apart a paper, word by word, in marathon sessions. Trying to do too much at once is more likely to be counter-productive than doing too little. John Parbst, the English instructor who coordinates our writing center, said it best in one of his memos: "Develop priorities for your tutoring session, make your points clear, and be honest with students if they need more work by giving them a task and asking them to come back at a later date."

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Work Cited

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Telling tales on a desert isle in the writing lab

A good writing principle (a cliché, even) is "show, don't tell." Likewise, I teach my tutors to be concrete, to use explicit examples when illustrating a writing principle. Even the noblest platitudes have a dark side, I found out, when a student came in with a profile lauding her best friend. The final paragraph rambled: If we were alone on a desert isle, I'd want to be with him "because he's funny, the best cook, smart, and a great dresser" (with some elaboration on each point). "Too many subjects for a paragraph or conclusion," I assessed. Since it was the last few minutes of the tutorial, I rushed. Instead of asking, "What's the topic sentence of this paragraph—the single, unifying hinge?" or "What dominant

impression would you like to leave with your readers?" I made the call and suggested she end on the desert isle and show us her best friend in action. "What would he do, play coconuts as congas?" I imagined.

The paper was for my husband's honor's composition class. That weekend, I caught him grading papers. I interrupted because he was smirking and I needed a laugh. "What's more engaging that talking with me on a balmy afternoon?"

"Profiles. This last one ended really well—vivid and unexpected, especially compared to the first draft that's attached."

Sure enough, it was the paper I critiqued, whose Gilligan's Isle denouement was too familiar. There he was, the student's best friend, playing coconuts like drums just as I envisioned. The problem was, I didn't even know the guy, and I didn't know if he even played an instrument. Maybe he would have been burning palm fronds on the isle, sending up "Rescue Us!" smoke signals. I wish I knew; but now there's a fictional profile adrift because I imagined for a student.

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WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Crisis tutorials

I borrow the term “crisis tutorials”—at least in spirit—from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) which trains its readers to recognize the “crisis papers” that are sometimes written in response to standardized tests like the Advanced Placement Exam or the Test of Written English. Crisis papers, according to ETS, are those that describe plans to commit suicide, threaten violence, or discuss crimes such as spousal and/or parental abuse. These papers are immediately pulled and referred to ETS administrators for special handling, which typically means contacting the school system from which the student writer comes. The ethical line drawn in these cases is quite clear. When students reveal profound psychological or emotional problems, or when they discuss matters that have significant legal consequences, then the need to confront the matter directly is judged to be more important than the author’s right to privacy, and steps are taken to intervene directly in the student writer’s life.

Crisis tutorials are similar to crisis papers, though their scope and purview extend beyond the confines of the written text that students bring to conferences. They also include all of the conversation and discourse that emerges as a part of the tutorial session, whether that conversation is related to the topic of the student paper or not. Students often reveal some intensely personal—and occasionally disturbing—information in their papers and tutorial discussions, and most of the time these revelations present no ethical dilemmas for tutors. Private matters are kept pri-

vate, and confidentiality need not be violated. Still, on a few rare occasions, students may talk about things that raise bright red flags on tutors’ built-in warning systems. They may talk about complicity in crimes—most often minor, ranging from petty theft to vandalism—or they may talk about crimes that have been perpetrated against them. They may also talk about depression so severe and anxieties so intense that tutors will wonder if they plan to do themselves harm. Under such circumstances, the tacitly accepted sanctity of the tutorial conference and its attendant guarantees of privacy and confidentiality no longer seem quite so absolute.

What are the tutor’s responsibilities here? What should the tutor tell the student, and what should he/she tell to the writing center director (or the police)? Does it depend on the nature of the crime? Should a student who talks about pirating software from a local BBS be handled any differently than a student who talks about stealing tools from his workplace, for instance? Should a student who talks about being robbed three months ago (and not reporting it) be given any different advice than someone who talks about being raped three months ago (and not reporting it)? Federal, state, and institutional regulations may remove any illusion of choice in these matters. Just as public school teachers and physicians are required by law to report any suspicions of parental abuse to government authorities, writing center tutors may be required to divulge any knowledge they learn about certain kinds of crimes and/or behaviors. If a tutor senses, or is told directly, that a student is contemplating suicide and does *not*

report it, then the institution may be legally liable if that student actually attempts to kill himself or herself. Features of the *Institutional Context*, then, may supersede other ethical considerations and mandate a particular response.

But how are tutors to know when to take student talk seriously? They are not trained to be psychological counselors, and the “crisis tutorials” being discussed here happen so infrequently, it is entirely possible that a tutor could work for years and see thousands of students before encountering one that raises this sort of ethical conundrum. In the absence of rigorous training for all tutors in crisis counseling, then, the best alternative may be a clearly defined writing center policy that takes precedence in these circumstances and establishes reasonable, ethical guidelines for sharing certain types of information with people outside the conference and/or outside the center. The first, logical person to report to would be the director of the center, who would then be responsible for determining what the next step should be.

There are many kinds of tutorial situations we might refer to as “crisis” situations—conferences with terribly depressed students, potentially violent students, or students who exhibit some other types of emotionally disruptive behavior. These are all troublesome circumstances, and they are all worthy of special consideration and reflection. But the special case of the “crisis” tutorial I want to consider further in this column, however, is one in which tutors suddenly learn that the student they are working with is either involved in or has knowledge of illegal/

criminal activities. The issue of confidentiality becomes particularly problematic in these cases. Do tutors share the same shield of privacy as psychiatrists, lawyers, and priests? Or are they obligated by state laws and campus regulations to reveal any knowledge of illegal conduct as soon as they become aware of it? Do judgments of ethical response depend upon the type and/or severity of the crime being discussed or detected? Consider how you would handle the following situations (which generally arise independent of the specific content of the paper being discussed), and ask yourself what else (if anything) you would need to know in order to decide upon an ethical course of action.

1) A visibly nervous student comes into the writing center during finals week with a draft of a paper for a political science course. As you work with him, you notice that his eyes dart around constantly and he seems unable to sit still in his seat for more than a few seconds at a time. When he talks about his paper, he tends to talk very quickly and ramble a lot, and he has a habit of interrupting you when you try to say something about the text. Near the end of the conference, which you feel has been quite draining though somewhat less productive than you would have hoped, you try to chat a bit about what he plans to do on the next draft of his paper and how things are going overall during finals week. He shakes his head spasmodically and tells you that he's got two papers due and three finals to take in the next three days. "I'm so freaked out about this and pressed for time, that I've been taking speed just to stay awake and get everything done in time."

2) A student comes in with the draft of a letter to the editor of the school paper, lambasting the treatment that several other students have recently received at the hands of the local

police and university officials after their arrest on arson charges. Two weeks before, someone started a fire in one room of an on-campus fraternity building, and the evidence pointed to several members of a rival fraternity who had been heard to say that they would like "to see the Delta house go up in flames some day." Now the accused students are under investigation by the police, temporarily suspended from their fraternity, and being threatened with expulsion by campus officials. "This is so totally unfair," the student says, and he makes the case in his letter that nothing has been proven against the accused students, that people should reserve judgment until the facts are in, and that the accused should be assumed to be innocent until proven guilty. "Besides," he says, "I know the guys who set fire to the frathouse, and these guys weren't them."

3) A student from a creative writing class comes into the writing center with a draft of a story he's working on. It's a rather graphic tale about the murder of a teacher, told from the perspective of the murderer. As you read through the details of the story, you realize that even though the name of the victim has been changed, the teacher who gets murdered by the narrator is quite obviously a well-known member of the philosophy department on your own campus. The depredations performed on the teacher in the course of the murder are horrific, and you hardly know how or where to begin in giving advice. As you talk about the story with the student and mention the striking similarities between the victim and the philosophy instructor, he says, "Yeah, that's who it's based on. That sonuvabitch gave me a D in his class last semester, and I had to find some way to vent the rage and anger I felt. I think I'm going to send him a copy of the story in the mail—any-

ways, of course—when I'm finished, and I'll attach a little note telling him to 'watch his back.'"

4) A female student from a class in autobiographical writing walks into the writing center for help with her most recent assignment—an eight-to-ten-page paper on some dramatic event in their lives. The two of you look over the assignment sheet, and you discuss the two parts to the writing assignment: a description of the event from the first person point of view (8-10 pages), and a shorter reflective piece (3-4 pages) that discusses the ways in which the shape of the story and description of events might have been influenced by the conventions of autobiographical form: a single narrative thread, a single interpretive perspective, a need for tension or conflict to drive the narrative, etc. When you then ask the student to tell you what event she's chosen to describe, she says, her lower lip trembling, "I'm writing about a time last year when I went out on a date with a guy and he raped me." When you ask what she did about it, she tells you that she didn't do anything because she didn't think anyone would believe her. "Lots of people knew I liked the guy before I went out with him, so they'd just say I wanted to have sex with him and got mad when he dumped me. But that's not what happened at all." She tells you that she's using this assignment as a way to work out some of her anger about what happened, but she doesn't know what to do about the second part of the paper. "He raped me," she says angrily. "The 'conventions of autobiographical form' don't affect that at all. I know what happened, and I tell it like it was in this paper."

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois
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Calendar for Writing Center Associations

Feb. 3-6: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Charleston, SC
Contact: Tom Waldrep, Director, The Writing Center, The Medical University of South Carolina, AA 113 Harper Student Center, 45 Courtenay Street, Charleston, SC 29401. Fax: 843-792-9179; e-mail: motenb@muscul.edu.

Feb. 26: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Redding, CA
Contact: Maria Madruga, Writing Center Director, Shasta College, P.O. Box 496006, Redding, CA 96049-6009. Phone: 530-225-4689; e-mail: mmadruga@shastacollege.edu.

March 5-6: South Central Writing

Centers Association, in Little Rock, AR
Contact: Sally Crisp, University Writing Center, Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, U. of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 S. University, Little Rock, AR 72204; fax: 501-569-8279; e-mail: sccrisp@ualr.edu

March 20: Middle Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Dover, DE

Contact: Renee Young, English Dept., Delaware State University, N. DuPont Hwy. Dover, DE 19904. For further information: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/mawca> (or) ryoung@dsc.edu.

April 10: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Lewiston, ME
Contact: Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Freshmen, Connecticut

College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320. E-mail: tpamm@conncoll.edu.

April 15-18: National Writing Centers Association, in Bloomington, IN
Contact: Ray Smith, Campus Writing Program, Franklin 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; phone: 812-855-4928; e-mail: nwca99@indiana.edu; <http://www.indiana.edu/~nwca99>.

November 5-6: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in San Bernardino, CA
Contact: Carol Peterson Haviland, English Dept., California State University, San Bernardino, 5500 Univ. Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407; phone: 909-880-5833; fax: 909-880-7086; cph@csusb.edu

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