

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R
Volume 24, Number 7 Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing March, 2000

...FROM THE EDITOR...

In this month's issue of the newsletter, you'll find the emphasis is upon the diversity among writers who come to work with tutors. David Mosher, Davin Granroth, and Troy Hicks offer us insights into cultural variants among ESL students and how these differences can affect both writing and the tutoring session. From a tutor's perspective, Linda Bricky narrates her journey toward understanding more effective ways to work with ESL and basic writing students, and Ann Olson describes a program designed to make their tutoring services more comfortable for the Native American students who attend the college.

Because dictionaries and thesauri are likely to be useful tools in these tutorials, Bonnie Devet recommends a particularly helpful dictionary to replace what may be on your reference table. Finally, Ted Knoy briefly describes an OWL that provides writing services for Chinese authors of English manuscripts.

In addition, you'll also find another set of "Quotable Tutor Quotes," a feature I hope will attract more tutors' contributions. (Yes, that's a very definite hint!)

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Creating a common ground with ESL writers

Because one of our goals at the Michigan State Writing Center is to reflect upon our practices, we frequently ask ourselves, "What worked so well with this client?" or "What could work better next time?" Often, these questions arise when we are working with English as Second Language (ESL) students. One of the recurring questions in our writing center is, "Why is consulting with non-native speakers so different from consulting with native English speakers?"

In her article, "Individualized Instruction in Writing Centers: Attending to Cross-Cultural Differences," Muriel Harris suggests that one of the main differences between native and non-native texts is a difference in rhetorical patterns. Sometimes, differences in logic, topic development, or argumentation can make the paper written by a non-native speaker of English look flawed to an American reader. Judith Powers comes to the same conclusions in her article, "Re-thinking Strategies with ESL Writers." Powers' solution for consulting with non-native writers is to use a more directed approach. She believes the help non-native speakers

seek “looks very much like the ‘bad’ kind of help that native speakers sometimes want when they bring their papers in to be ‘corrected’ (43).” Thus, there is a feeling of uneasiness between the consultant and the client.

According to Powers, then, instructional editing is an appropriate response so that non-native English speaking clients can develop the skill with grammar and punctuation that native speakers often intuitively employ. Still, constant use of instructional editing comes uncomfortably close to the

more directive style that we try to avoid and such directness may mask fundamental differences in rhetorical values, inadvertently blocking accurate communication. In addition, various cross-cultural variations, such as response time or eye contact, may exacerbate the miscommunication already effected by a consultation that is too direct (Wang).

Committed as we are to Jeff Brooks’ minimalist approach, as outlined in “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work,” our particular pedagogy tells us to avoid becoming the teacher in our writing conferences; we would rather be the listening ear. Greater directness, we fear, could compromise our goal of creating a better writer through talk (North). The consultant’s dilemma, then, is this: Do we ignore our minimalist instincts and give a non-native writer direct answers, thus changing consulting to teaching? Or, do we refuse to assume the teacher’s role and then feel like the session was ineffective? In this article, we wish to present an alternative. We question the necessity of shifting our role from peer to teacher and suggest, instead, that a cultural dialogue about writing and rhetoric may prove to be a useful collaborative strategy to use with non-native English speakers.

Do we need to switch roles?

Clearly, when working with non-native speakers, our normal collaborative approach of engaging the writer with talk about writing is not always effective, and the reason is not merely a language barrier. Powers, for example, has argued that “because collaborative techniques depend so heavily on shared basic assumptions or patterns, conferences that attempt merely to take the techniques we use with native-speaking writers and apply them to ESL writers may fail to assist the writer we intend to help (41).” We agree. We have found this practice to be both frustrating and unproductive.

While non-native speakers of English may genuinely need to work on

grammar and editing, we often interpret their concerns as a request for us to simply fix the paper rather than collaborate. Then, when we unconsciously move to a direct, teacher-like approach, we feel our role as a peer is threatened, and we encounter another problem. Even though engaging in more direct teaching may enable us, for the moment, to respond to what we perceive as the student’s request, Wang has shown us that some writers, especially Asians, perceive this shifting of the client to a student role as a cultural norm when working with a more experienced other. Unfortunately, however, such a shift may increase the distance between the peer consultant and the ESL writer and inhibit the creation of common rhetorical ground.

If switching roles doesn’t work, how about changing the topic?

According to Harris, Powers, Wang, and others, the difference between a native English speaker and a writer from a non-English speaking culture is primarily a difference in rhetorical patterns. The writing expectations of Americans often do not match the linguistic and cultural norms found in other cultures. This difference occurs in both *what* should be said in writing as well as in *how* to say it. Additionally, our expectations for a consulting experience may also differ from the non-native speakers’ experiences in one-to-one learning situations. Thus, non-native English speakers face an American academic metadiscourse and rhetoric that can be significantly different from that of their own language and culture.

Because of these factors, we often choose not to immediately take on the role of directive teaching with the non-native English speakers. Rather, we attempt to become a cultural informant by setting up the writing conference as a place where cultures and rhetoric can meet. A cultural informant offers suggestions about differences in rhetoric, explains the expectations of American audiences, and strives to maintain collaboration through discussion. A cul-

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tural informant establishes a common ground through conversation devoted to discussion of the effect of culture on writing. While some directness may still be necessary for certain recurring grammar issues, the consultant who wants to maintain collaboration with the writer can focus on opening a cultural dialogue with the client. Talking about differences between the writer's native language, culture and rhetoric and that of English may be the easiest way to make connections with the writer's logic, purpose, and meaning.

To help writing consultants stay open to the effects of cultural variation on a writing conference, we have developed an approach called WATCH (see Figure One below). In order to use WATCH, however, we need to first look at the contrastive rhetoric that supports this approach, since an under-

standing of contrastive rhetoric can help a consultant make more informed decisions about how to best support a writer.

Highlights of cultural variation and contrastive rhetoric: Invitations for cross-cultural communication

Recent research into cultural variation in written communication points to dimensions of cultural variation in writing that a writing consultant may want to keep in mind when working with a non-native speaker of English. Following is a list of nine areas in which variation exists between cultures. For each item, we will identify the cultural variant, and then offer some consulting techniques that might be used to create a common ground based on that variant. It is important to stress, however, that these variants are not meant to imply iron-

clad generalizations which apply to all ESL writers in every situation, since the extent of primary culture influence will vary across cultures, individuals, and rhetorical situations.

Cultural variant 1: Deductive and quasi-inductive topic development

One difference between American texts and texts produced in other cultures stems from the explicitness and the sequential logic of topic development. For example, Americans often prefer *deductive topic development* in academic writing, with the thesis at the beginning and the points of the paper very clearly laid out. In many Asian cultures, on the other hand, writers may prefer what John Hinds calls a *quasi-inductive topic development*; namely, they save the central argument for the end of the paper and rely on the reader to make connections and infer their thesis which may be indirectly stated. Therefore, the normal rhetorical pattern of a non-native speaker of English may be to save the main point of the paper for the end, but an American professor or fellow student might see this as poorly organized and logically flawed. Talking with the writer about differences in topic development across cultures is one way a writing consultant can function as a cultural informant for a non-native speaker of English (Connor; Hinds; Mosher).

Creating common ground: Topic development

Instead of assuming that the writer's logic is flawed and trying to help the writer develop a thesis statement before reading the whole paper, invite the non-native speaker to read the whole paper first. Then try questioning the writer about the structure of the paper in one of these ways: *Tutor Outlining*: Outline the ideas in the paper as the student reads aloud; then, examine the outline with the student. *Mapping*: Set the paper aside and concentrate on mapping out ideas. If all else fails, and the paper does need some serious logical re-thinking, try *Radical Deletion*: Suggest to the writer that s/he use the

Using the WATCH Approach

W—Talk about the **WRITER**.

Use "small talk" to find out where the student is from, how long s/he has been in the U.S., how s/he likes it, the extent of his/her first language writing experience, and opportunities to use English outside of the classroom (Fox 111).

A—Talk about the **AUDIENCE/ASSIGNMENT**.

Ask for a description of the assignment. Help interpret the professor's comments and discuss his/her probable expectations. Check for understanding of the subject and reading comprehension in English.

T—Talk about the writer's **TEXT**.

Ask the student to explain his/her purpose or the focus of the paper. Ask where s/he has informed the reader of his/her purpose. Confirm whether your interpretation of the text matches his/her intent in terms of voice as well as content.

C—A few **COMMUNICATION CAVEATS**.

Be more direct than when working with native speakers, but don't silence the non-native speaker by dominating talk time and not genuinely listening. Do not always expect explicit verbal disagreement. Pay careful attention to non-verbal cues as well. Also, be aware that a student's pause time may be longer than yours. If are not aware of this, you may have a tendency to silence and/ or interrupt a student without realizing it.

H—Remember, **HELPING** the writer is your primary purpose.

Being WATCHful will help to establish the trust, respect, and empathy necessary for any "helping relationship" (Taylor 27). Creating a common ground by being WATCHful fosters better interpersonal relationships which, in turn, lower anxiety and increase productivity for both the ESL writer and the consultant.

Figure One

conclusion as the introduction and re-write the rest of the paper. Or try *inversion*: Move the conclusion to the beginning and delete the original introduction.

Cultural variant 2: Degree of explicit transition signaling

Between topics in a paper, Americans usually like to have a strong *degree of explicit transition signaling*. Without clear and relevant transitions, American readers often think the writer's argument is weak or incoherent. Again, in many other cultures, transitions are more reader dependent and the extra words are not included (Connor; Ferris; Mosher).

Creating common ground: Transition signaling

In order for the writer to make the paper more clear or to include more transitions, try *Paragraph Labeling*: Ask the student to write down the main idea of each paragraph in problematic sections and clarify how the paragraphs relate to one another and to the overall theme or purpose of the paper. *Lexical Ties*: Show the student that English sentences generally state old discourse information in the subject position and new information in the predicate position. Second sentences frequently either restate the new information of the first sentence as old information in their subject position in a "tail-to-head" pattern, or refer back to the subject of the first sentence in a "head-to-head" pattern (Smith & Bernardt). An example of the more common tail-to-head pattern is, "John hopes to set a *personal record*. His *personal best* is still five seconds off the age group record."

Cultural variant 3: Degree of directness and explicitness

When stating an argument, Americans often use a strong *degree of directness and explicitness*. Many professors ask for a bold thesis such as "Slavery is the root of American racism today." In some cultures, however, a strong opinion expressed to older

persons or persons of higher status, such as a professor, is disrespectful. Sometimes writers from such cultures write ambiguous statements with agentless passives, excessive disclaimers or vague pronoun references, such as, "Many people may think that today's racism might be linked to America's past use of slavery," to avoid imposing their ideas on the reader, not knowing that American academics prefer greater directness and clarity (Hinkel, "Indirectness"). Perceived lack of clarity may also be due to what one Chinese student describes as a "concept gap." This student says that "concept gaps" between sentences in Chinese are often larger, so American professors always ask her to write more sentences in English than she would need to write in Chinese (Severino 53).

Creating common ground: Directness

When a client's paper seems ambiguous, try to understand what the client is really saying by *questioning the student*. *Seek clarification*: A consultant should question the student about the directness of the thesis; "what are you really trying to say here?" One strategy that a consultant could use is *thesis identification* where the consultant underlines what s/he thinks is the opening thesis, and then asks the client if s/he is correct. This will initiate a dialogue about the directness of the thesis statement. Also, discuss the use of active and passive verb constructions and how they affect meaning in a sentence (i.e., who is responsible for a given action, event, or opinion). "What did you mean, exactly, by this sentence?" "What were your reasons for using this quote here?" Or, try *tutor restatements*: Restate the points made by the student. Clarify with phrases such as, "So what you're saying is. . . ." or "As I understand it, you're saying. . . ."

Cultural variant 4: Metaphoric usage

In some cultures, particularly East Asian cultures, words may be used in a

more evocative or metaphorical sense than Americans are used to. In these cultures, the reader is given more interpretive responsibility and expected to read more meaning into a single word (Carson; Young; Mosher). Americans, on the other hand, usually prefer fuller explanations. For example, Americans may use "theme" words throughout a paper, encasing them in quotation marks the first time they are used to imply a metaphoric usage of the word in the paper. Non-native English speakers need to know that an American academic audience may expect a metaphor either to be explained fully or implied by using quotations, italics, or underlining.

Creating common ground: Metaphoric usage

When the wording of a student from another culture seems awkward, rather than correct their usage or grammar, try to find out what the writer means. The consultant should look for theme words or words used in a highly evocative manner in a paper before determining if the cause is in fact an error in grammar, mechanics, or word usage. For example, a paper on education might have terms common to the field and in constant use marked with quotations. "At-risk," "inclusion," "educational technology," and other words quoted like that imply a whole series of thoughts to someone in the educational field, but may only look like a punctuation error to someone in another field. Remember to *question metaphors*: Question the meaning of suspect words and their relationship to the rest of the paper. Students may have been using language in an audience-specific metaphorical or evocative sense that you may not understand if you are not a part of that audience. If this is the case, the consultant should encourage the student to make the implied meaning more explicit.

Cultural variant 5: Tolerance for digression

Americans have little *tolerance for digression* while in other cultures di-

gressions are often valued because they provide a broader, richer context for the main point. These digressions are seen as a way to expound upon knowledge and a chance for the writer to flex creative muscles. Americans usually save this type of writing for creative pieces outside of the classroom. Non-native speakers of English sometimes include digressions to get a point across that, in an American academic paper, would be explained more directly and in fewer words (Clyne; Leki). Of course, a writing consultant should be sure that an apparent digression is not a central argument in disguise.

Creating common ground: Digression

The lack of tolerance for digression in American academic writing can be illustrated for students in the following ways: Discuss the *global focus* of a paper by pointing out the ways the introduction and/or conclusion work within the paper. *Topical analysis*: Circle the subject of each independent clause in a problematic passage to illustrate the frequency of new topic introduction. Acting as a cultural informant, discuss how the digression may influence the writer's audience.

Cultural variant 6: Argumentation and degree of support

Cultures differ in what is considered suitable and sufficient support for an author's ideas. Americans value statistics, facts, personal experience, or documented occurrences. Other cultures may more highly value proverbs, metaphors, analogies, or examples and assertions which may require less support because the writer's words are considered authority enough or because the writer expects the reader to infer the necessary support. Americans also tend to use more counter-arguments in anticipation of reader objections and tend to write longer more complex arguments (Connor; Ferris; Hinkel, "Pragmatic Interpretations").

Creating common ground: Argumentation and support

Show the writer where s/he could expand in the paper by *providing support*. Ask *who*-questions to elicit support for unsupported statements. If necessary, ask if these details are important in the client's culture, and if they are not, explain why they are important to an American audience.

Cultural variant 7: Voice/Stance

Many Americans prefer that the *voice and stance* of a paper be authoritative and authentic to the author, but this preference may be seen as offensive in some cultures, especially in Asian cultures where a strong voice could be seen as an affront to the reader (Harris; Hinkel, "Pragmatic Interpretations"). Students from such group-oriented cultures, for example, may find it extremely difficult to use "I" instead of "we" or active instead of passive sentences due to a deep-rooted sense of the collective self (Shen). Understandably, the new "voice" of a non-native speaker sometimes emerges slowly, as s/he adjusts to the American standard. As with all writers, we try to help non-native speakers retain as much of their own voice and style as possible while coping with the expectations of their new audience.

Creating common ground: Voice/Stance

Student restatements are sometimes useful in this area. Have the student put the paper aside and tell you what he or she is trying to say. Take written notes of key phrases and words the writer uses while talking, and then explain how you interpret these phrases as a cultural informant. If the retelling includes more of the student's own voice, suggest that s/he include some of that material in the paper.

Cultural variant 8: Process vs. product view of writing

While our writing center pedagogy encourages us to focus on writing as a process, in other cultures, students may have no experience writing multiple

drafts, and the one-draft essay may be considered an art (Severino). Readers, in turn, may place more value than we do on this fresh stage of writing. If that is the case, a writer may be rather uncomfortable with our talk and practice of multiple draft writing.

Creating common ground: Process vs. product

Questions about the number of drafts a student usually does or the use of writing groups or writing consultants in the student's home country could lead to revelations about the writer's perceptions of writing as process. Other approaches include the following: *Selected focus*: Concentrate on one section of the paper (e.g., the introduction) and put the rest aside. *Role reversal*: Ask the student to listen to you as you read the paper aloud. Ask him or her to be the consultant and give you advice on what to do with the paper.

Cultural variant 9: Ownership of intellectual property and plagiarism

Americans have a high degree of *ownership of intellectual property* and *plagiarism* is not tolerated; in some cultures, the prohibition against unattributed use of others' ideas is not as stringent and may even be seen as a way of honoring the author (Leki, Young). For some non-native speakers of English, a discussion of these issues may be necessary.

Creating common ground: Intellectual property

Consultants should act as a cultural informant when talking about the seriousness of plagiarism. Many universities have strict policies about the use of another's idea as one's own, and ESL writers may have never encountered the idea of plagiarism before. A quick peek at a university student handbook or English department rule book should be enough to introduce the student to the idea that American academia doesn't take well to plagiarism. To assist with avoiding plagiarism, some instruction in *paraphrasing* might be useful. Often

non-native English speakers think they have to change every word. *Student re-statements* could also be helpful. Ask the student to restate hard to understand text in his or her own words. Write down exactly what the student says and compare it with the original text. Explaining the principles and details of *citation conventions* may also be necessary, such as telling the student that any unattributed use of an author's ideas and not just his or her words is considered to be plagiarism.

WATCHing for cross-cultural variations in writing conferences

In order to facilitate implementation of these strategies, we have designed a system called WATCH to facilitate a cultural dialogue with ESL writers. This system focuses on the Writer, the Audience and Assignment, the Text, Communication, and reminds us that our primary goal is to Help the client. General considerations for implementing WATCH include the following three guidelines adapted from Harris. First, look for rhetorical patterns or preferences that conflict with American expectations. Identify differences in topic development, coherence strategies argumentation, and logic. Second, look for hidden assumptions about writing and audience, etc. Try to determine the writer's reasons for writing as she or he does. Only when assumptions are uncovered, can we begin to understand whether cross-cultural differences are affecting the student's writing. Third, look for ethnocentric biases in your own judgments of non-native speakers. Don't assume that the absence of expected writing conventions equals poor writing. Question your own assumptions about good writing before making negative judgments.

When working with non-native speakers, remember that these writers must ultimately choose their own style of writing. Some non-native speakers may prefer to retain their own cultural style of writing as much as possible. Whatever their decision, WATCHing for cross-cultural variation is intended to help the writing consultant become a

cross-cultural informant so that the non-native English speaking writer can make pragmatic and rhetorically sound decisions. Finally, we like to suggest that the WATCH approach is highly compatible with a research agenda like Carol Severino's study of ESL students' home country literacy instruction and writing experiences through structured writing assignments and interviews. As Severino suggests, these interviews can be taped and transcribed for use in writing tutor training programs. WATCH, we believe, would be best applied by writing consultants as one component of such a larger ESL research and training program.

New goals for working with non-native speakers of English

Learning a new language is a difficult task. Writing in that new language is especially challenging because when we ask non-native speakers of English to write in English, we are also asking those students to come to terms with the rhetorical conventions and values of a new culture. As writing consultants, we struggle to maintain our roles as both peers and cultural informants in a complex situation. As Leki has pointed out, "Clearly, when dealing with students whose language we do not share, we must remember how strong the link is between identity and language and remain sensitive to the difficult and sometimes painful juggling acts we may innocently be asking our students to perform (104)." And, may we add, those acts we ask of ourselves.

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

March 24-25: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Fort Worth, TX

Contact: Jeanette Harris (j.harris@tcu.edu), Texas Christian University or Lady Falls Brown (L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu) Texas Tech University.

March 25: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Keene, NH

Contact: Anne Szeligowski, Gateway Community-Technical College, 60 Sargent Drive, New Haven, CT 06511. E-mail ASZELIGOWS@aol.com; fax: 203-789-6976. Conference web site: <http://www.mcp.edu/as/wc/wc.html>

March 30-April 1: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI

Contact: J. Pennington, Lansing Community College, Lansing, Michigan. E-mail: Jill_Pennington@lansing.cc.mi.us. Conference

website: <http://www.lansing.cc.mi.us/~penningj/ecwca2000.htm>

April 1: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Rockville, MD

Contact: Jeannie Dadgostar, Writing and Reading Center, Montgomery College, 51 Mannakee Street, Rockville, Maryland 20850. E-mail: jdadgost@mc.cc.md.us

Sept. 28-30: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN

Contact: either Suzanne M. Swiderski at <sswidars@loras.edu> or Larry D. Harred at <larry.d.harred@uwrf.edu>

November 2-4, 2000. National Writing Centers Association in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Baltimore, MD

Conference website: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/mawca/nwcacon.html>

New addresses for WCenter

WCenter, the electronic listserv for writing center specialists, has migrated to new software:

- The address of the listserv is now as follows: WCENTER@lyris.acs.ttu.edu
- To subscribe: Send e-mail to lyris@lyris.acs.ttu.edu (or) Via the web, at: <http://lyris.acs.ttu.edu>

If you have questions, please contact the WCenter listowner, Lady Falls Brown: ykflb@ttacs.edu

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals

October 6-8, 2000

North Andover, MA

"Peer Tutoring 2000: Looking Ahead, Looking Back"

Proposals are invited from peer tutors, writing center administrators, and faculty. We emphasize tutor-led, active presentations providing the opportunity for audience interaction and/or discussion. Please include the following with your proposal: name and position of contact person, address, phone number and e-mail address; time required: 50 or 75 minutes; intended audience; format: interactive workshop, panel discussion, demonstration, presentation of paper; participants and their positions; description in 300-400 words; abstract of 50 words, with title (for the program); equipment needed Please send to Kathleen Shine Cain, 132 Kendall Pond Rd., Windham, NH 03087; Phone: (603) 437-2831; e-mail: kcain@merrimack.edu; deadline: April 7, 2000; notification: May 19, 2000; website: <http://www.chss.iup.edu/wc/ncptw>

TUTORS' COLUMN

The writing center: What really happens

Ideally, a writing center is a place where students come to grow as writers under the one-to-one attention of a caring writing professional or enlightened peer tutor. Global concerns are addressed first, while surface features such as grammar and spelling are delayed until final drafts. The tutee is respected as an independent writer with her own purpose and audience in mind as she writes, a writer who makes independent cognitive choices regarding her text. In the writing center, she gradually learns self-revision and self-editing. Her tutors are there to work themselves out of a job.

As far as I can tell, the ideal writing center does not exist. Textbooks and professional journals demonstrate what the “ideal” tutoring session should be, but reality produces its own kind of encounter. Communication in a tutoring conference is a dynamic interaction between two individuals. No two communication events are identical; each tutoring session is by definition unique. The people involved in the session—a tutee and her tutor—determine what really happens in a writing center. Each has rights, as well as responsibilities, that affect the success of a tutoring encounter.

Tutees come to the writing center voluntarily or involuntarily. Those who come voluntarily are usually strongly motivated. They may not be interested in becoming better writers per se, but they do recognize the value of turning in a polished paper. They come expecting a tutor to help them clean up their draft. When I work with one of these students, in an hour's time we are able to read through the paper for an overall impression, then examine the thesis

and structure, looking for a clear statement and supporting ideas, and finally touch on grammar and other surface features. By the time we finish, the student usually has some clear guidelines on how to rewrite and edit the text. Sessions like these make me feel as though some day soon I might become one of those “ideal” tutors.

Recently, I tutored a drop-in student to the writing center who brought me back to reality. I had gone into the center to work with a group of students taking a basic writing class, but my students had failed to appear. When I told the center personnel that I had no one to tutor, a young woman who had been waiting patiently by the desk spoke up and said, “Oh. Then you can tutor me.” Karin, an ESL student in a psychology class, had come with a handful of journals to be checked, but with her own timetable for a tutoring session. Her assignment was to respond to articles on the psychology of adolescents, comparing these with information in her textbook. As she sat down with her drafts, she said, “I need someone to look at them to see if they're okay before I type them.” One by one, we went over the three- or four-page handwritten journals. After a couple of hours, I started to get a little concerned; it was three o'clock and I had not eaten lunch yet. I had expected the usual one-hour tutoring session, but it was three times that when we finished the last paper. At the end of the conference, I explained to Karin that tutors usually work only one hour with students, but she was sure that the standard procedures did not apply, since she was enrolled in a special student assistance program. She had expected to be there for several hours, but I had

not. Although we had a fruitful conference, I felt that my rights as a tutor had been violated.

The session itself had gone smoothly. We worked on several problems in Karin's writings. Citing sources in the text and at the end of the paper was difficult for her. I asked what citation style her teacher required, but she thought the teacher did not care which one was used. Since that was the case, I taught her what I knew best—MLA, even though I wondered if her psychology professor might prefer APA. We found a reference book on the shelf behind us to use as a guide. As we went through her journals, Karin became more and more confident as she used her newly acquired skills.

While we worked on clarity of ideas, proper word choice, use of commas, and other details, I found myself concerned about doing too much for the tutee. As we looked at each problem, I tried to explain the rule that applied and suggested alternative solutions. As the same errors reappeared, sometimes she would begin to catch them herself and self-correct them, but at other times she would not even notice. I sometimes worry about what the instructor might think about the student or about the writing center if a paper is turned in with a lot of errors. I have to remind myself that the student, not the tutor, is responsible for the text. Hopefully, she will develop her writing skills a little more each time she comes in for assistance.

I learned several things from this session with Karin. First, I learned that students often know what they want

accomplished. In that respect, the conference followed the ideal—it was student centered. Another thing I learned was that a tutor needs to set some guidelines and follow them. Even though this student is entitled to extra tutoring time, I think that from now on I will limit that time to the usual one-hour meeting, but encourage her to sign up for two or three sessions a week. Lastly, I learned that I am still struggling with trying to “fix” a tutee’s paper as if it were my own. I tend to be a perfectionist, but have to tell myself that other students have a right to grow in writing as they write, just as I did. I did not learn to write overnight. It was a slow process. I learned text by text and revision by revision. If I allow my tutees to experience this same process without my interference, they will learn as I did, with a guide, not a ghostwriter.

Karin was a highly motivated student who came to the writing center on her own. Those who come involuntarily as a required segment of a composition class may or may not be motivated to write or to cooperate with their tutor. On one hand, Alberto and Casey,² my two students who come to the writing lab as part of their basic writing class, really seem to care about doing well on their essays. Their problem, however, is getting themselves to the center on time with drafts and other necessary materials in hand. They are young and forgetful. Maturity has not quite caught up with them yet. The first day we met, Alberto had left his draft at home. Since his partner Casey did not have his paper either (the teacher still had it), we rescheduled for the next day. Alberto showed up for that session and the following one, but then missed two times in a row. When he is with me, he is cooperative and really seems to care about doing well in his work. We focus on global matters: content, completion of all the requirements of the assignment, and clarity of ideas, just like an ideal tutoring conference.

Casey, the partner, has some of the same problems as Alberto. Since

Casey does not always show up when he is scheduled, he often requests a make-up appointment. He seems to be more fluent orally than in writing. The day he came without a paper, we worked on what promised to be a great essay, at least in its oral form. At the time, I kept wondering how much of that greatness would actually show up in the finished product. The essay I saw later contained only a small portion of the details that had poured out of Casey’s mouth.

I was nervous the day of that first tutoring session with these young men, since I had never worked with a basic writer’s group before. I thought I had come prepared for anything, but on reflection, it surprised me to spend thirty minutes discussing a text that wasn’t there. However, the experience taught me how to talk a tutee through a paper, while taking notes for him on his ideas and the structural order of his essay. I left that day amazed at what could be accomplished in an impromptu session. From the experience, I learned the value of flexibility in tutoring.

In an ideal tutoring conference, tutors have already prepared themselves to meet with their students. I did the best I could to be ready for this conference, by talking with experienced tutors and by reviewing the course syllabus and the specific tutoring guidelines for the writing lab. While I as a tutor have the responsibility of providing my tutees with the best possible tutoring session under the available circumstances, my students also have responsibilities. Both Alberto and Casey need to learn that as adults they have the responsibility to attend scheduled conferences, to call the center if they expect to be absent, and to bring all needed materials with them to the tutoring session. However, even when the tutor or the tutee fails to meet the standard of the ideal tutoring session, learning can and often does still occur.

To have their special needs met, students enrolled in ESL classes are also required to attend the writing center.

These students are usually highly motivated, since they know they need lots of help with writing in English. Shizuko, who graduated from a high school in Japan, produces essays that are thoughtfully written, but she still struggles with expressing those thoughts in grammatically correct English. She would like to spend all of her tutoring time going over her drafts, but also realizes the need to work on points of grammar. We compromise by spending the first ten or fifteen minutes on grammar and word choice and the rest on her current texts. As she learns or reviews grammar rules, she is then able to apply them to her own writing.

My other ESL student, Bopha, came from Southeast Asia as a small child. She was educated in the United States in a language not her own. Unlike Shizuko, Bopha is a victim of subtractive bilingualism. She cannot read or write her first language, yet has no competence in her second. We work on such basics as subject and verb agreement, present and past tenses, and use of articles. During the years I spent as a bilingual aide in an elementary school, I saw many students such as Bopha. Each year these students get farther behind. Some do not graduate from eighth grade. Many drop out of high school. Those like Bopha who actually get to college come vastly unprepared to read and write sophisticated academic texts. In an ideal writing center, tutors spend most of their time talking to writers about writing, helping them to rethink their ideas and to grow as a writer. Sometimes the reality is that tutors become language teachers to meet a real need in some students’ lives.

Both Shizuko and Bopha show an awareness of a student’s responsibility in the writing conference. Not all tutees assigned to the writing center are cooperative and responsible. One day I substituted in a group writing session for students at our university’s lowest level of composition studies.

(continued on page 15)

Tutor training: Native American tutors for Native American students

Heritage College has the highest percentage of Native American undergraduate students (25%) of any four-year educational institution in the state of Washington. We are a non-profit, independent, non-denominational accredited institution whose mission is “to provide quality, accessible higher education to a multicultural population which has been educationally isolated.” Our writing and tutoring services in the Academic Skills Center (ASC) are often referred to as the “Heart of Heritage College” because of the strong link we create between our students and their educational goals. However, one fact that can weaken our effectiveness is that our tutors are most often white while the students we tutor are most often Native American or Hispanic, and we had noted a certain reticence among minority students to approach and use our services. To repair this weakness and establish a cultural balance, Mary James, the ASC Director, began a project funded by the Sloan Foundation in 1995 and supported by the American Indian Science and Engineering Students (AISES) to provide Native American tutors for Native American students.

The purpose of the project was to make our free tutoring service more attractive and comfortable for all our multi-ethnic student population, but particularly for Native Americans. The first obstacle—finding and hiring Native American students with strong writing backgrounds—nearly ended our efforts. There were no applicants who were English or humanities majors or could claim writing experience other than completing the required freshman-level writing classes. There were, however, four applicants (out of ten) who demonstrated strong written and verbal communication skills.

I will summarize what we did in the training sessions, the successes (and some of the problems) during the next two academic years, the responses of the students who were served during that time, and my plans for the future of this sort of a program. I believe we accomplished almost all we set out to do, but the most important aspects of this program were 1) what we learned from the Native American tutors themselves about individual learning styles affected by a student’s home life and culture and 2) how we incorporated their insights into our general tutor training.

Tutor training

The four selected AISES members who completed fifty hours of training were Kari Umtuch, a nursing student who left in the middle of the first semester for an intern opportunity but whose easy, natural style is recorded in our video presentation of these sessions; Irma Garcia, an environmental science major who had the weakest writing skills but the strongest personality and role-modeling capabilities; Jenna Takesgun, a criminal justice major with a smile, a positive attitude, and above-average writing skills; and Tana Sells, in business/accounting, whose very traditional family is famous for drum, dance, and song displays in this community and whose writing is excellent.

The first question we discussed was “How important is it that Native American students have Native American tutors to come to?” Irma responded, “I don’t just want to be spotlighted in the sense of being the ‘token Indian’—I’m here to help students, period.” She then added that it *was* especially important to encourage Native Americans because when she first

came to the Academic Skills Center, she was uncomfortable asking for help; she felt inferior to the tutors and staff there, and would have appreciated seeing one of her own race. She also said having Native American tutors would help encourage not only Native students but all the others as well. How? She said the four tutors present in this training program were the “how”—they stand for students who have faced numerous economic, social, and personal obstacles to higher learning and who have “made it.”

We then focused on how to help Heritage College students succeed in their required writing classes; we have our writing courses sequenced to build skills in reading critically, paraphrasing and summarizing accurately, and researching and synthesizing ideas clearly. But since our ASC deals with so much more than just the academic side of tutoring, we broke the training into three parts: academic, technological, and social skills. The training techniques we used in the academic and technological areas are probably similar to any other tutor training, so I provide only general summaries of these components of our program. What we felt was most effective and pertinent to our multicultural student body was the social and “spiritual” awareness that was uncovered in the social skills training.

1) Academic skills—Re-examining tutors’ own writing development.

We used a combination of methods employing Heritage College writing instructors, computerized tutorial programs, and videotaped “hands-on tutoring” practice sessions. Since our college is so small, we can rely on the close interaction between instructors,

tutors, and students. In fact, our instructors are often our tutors. We broke the skills areas into HOCs and LOCs, as described by Michelle Kendrick on the WCenter listserv (October 20, 1997), each instructor providing examples plus opportunities and materials for the tutors to practice. Even after this intensive writing skills training, because of the inadequate writing backgrounds of these non-English majors, we agreed it was necessary to commit our full-time tutoring staff to making themselves available whenever the AISES tutors worked with a peer, at least to be within listening range and ready to offer advice, if invited.

2) Technological skills—Getting comfortable with the writing lab technology.

The tutors were introduced to and/or given time to become proficient on the following: HAL, the ASC sign-in computer which documents all student contacts in the ASC by activity, by tutor, by course; the network of math, business, science, keyboarding, and computer language programs available to all HC students; the accessible word-processing programs—we have Collegiate Writer, MS Word for Windows, and WordPerfect; and the Learning Plus tutorials in writing and reading.

3) Social skills—Acknowledging individual learning styles.

Having covered the academic and technological skills, we were ready to address what we thought was the most important part of the training, the social skills that ensure the atmosphere of comfort and acceptance we try to create in the ASC. We used a combination of professional speakers, videotapes about tutoring skills (*The Tutor's Guide* video series), and discussion of articles addressing Native Americans as students. At this point, the tables were turned in the training: the Native American tutors, with their unique insights from their individual cultural and educational experiences, became the trainers for the rest of us. They helped us not only to understand about the cultural perspectives of traditional

Indians, but also about how to incorporate this understanding into our general tutor training.

American Indian characteristics and values

We invited Patti Zack, a Yakama Nation tribal member and staff-support member of the Heritage College family, to address both tutors and faculty. Ms. Zack began by passing out an informal quiz called the “Frybread Intelligence Test,” which she adapted and revised for just such occasions to see what her audience already knows or thinks they know about Native Americans. Before we began, she clearly explained that there weren’t exactly right and wrong answers, but that the whole purpose of the test was to open up a discussion about Indian stereotypes so that people can become more aware. Here are some examples of questions:

- **“Reservation” means:** a) home, b) place for animals, c) place for humans, d) hotel space, e) airplane space.
- **A “rez” car is:** a) picked up at the airport, b) a new automobile, c) a beat-up ageless car, d) of no use, e) all of the above.
- **People going by “Indian Time”:** a) are always early, b) are always late, c) do things when they need to be done, d) do things in late summertime, e) do not have jobs.
- **Roaches are:** a) funny cigarettes, b) insects in the kitchen, c) a type of headdress, d) undesirable people, e) lively companions.

In the discussion and comparison of answers that followed, Ms. Zack said that “Reservation” is not thought of as “home” to most Native Americans; they tend to see the word as a “place for humans,” a place where the government has told them to go and stay, most often against their will as a tribe. A “rez” car, or “beat-up ageless car,” was easier for most of us to get, but a few were hesitant to pick that answer because of the negative connotations, and such a direct association between Indians and an icon of poverty made

some uncomfortable. The white participants also felt they had to be careful with “People going by Indian Time” because it is so easily, and (unfortunately) stereotypically, defined as “are always late.” But the more positive and more accurate choice was “do things when they need to be done.” We laughed when we came to the definition of “Roaches” because all the old hippies among us answered “funny cigarettes,” but many knew that it is a type of ceremonial headdress.

The purpose of this “test” was fully achieved because addressing the uncomfortable parts made us all re-think certain assumptions and learn new information about people we live with every day at Heritage. It was extremely valuable in helping us to think about the underlying assertions behind stereotypes and how we must be aware of our assertions when a person from another culture enters the ASC.

Next, Ms. Zack covered the following characteristics often associated with Native Americans. She tried to separate the truth from the stereotypes by explaining the history or background of a particular characteristic. It was her explanation that was most enlightening. Because of space limitations, I can only summarize here, understanding that such generalizations imply a stereotyping in themselves. I can state most emphatically, however, that the focus of the instruction and discussions was on the ASC staff remaining open and non-judgmental.

1 *Native Americans avoid eye-contact.* Ms. Zack told a story about her father telling her as a child never to stare at people in their eyes, that it was disrespectful to them. She said the reason behind this may be connected to the sacredness of a person’s spirit which was most easily seen in that person’s eyes. She said much damage to the Native American stereotype is due to this characteristic, that psychology tests, for example, have shown Native Americans as “hiding something” or “lying.” She also said that she her-

self learned only when she went to college that eye contact was expected for better communication and to show herself as an intelligent, unintimidated being worth talking to.

2 Native Americans are non-verbal or speak softly and at a slower rate. She described the frustration she felt in college when other people would finish her sentences for her because of her slower way of speaking. She suggested that we all learn to be more sensitive and more patient—to wait a little longer if someone seems to be hesitating.

3 Respect for the aged is primary. Ms. Zack told us about a cousin of hers in his 70s who comes by often to talk. She said it does oftentimes drive her crazy because she has so much work to do; the phone may be ringing; there may be others waiting at her door to see her; but because she has so much respect for this older relative, she can never ask him to leave or to even politely suggest that she has other things to do. Sometimes she has left her work and other people waiting one and a half hours to be with him and listen to his concerns. She said that the work world has to stop and wait for the elderly; there is simply nothing else more important.

Ms. Zack concluded this section by suggesting the best ways to make a Native American student entering the ASC more comfortable. She said Heritage College is already good about offering individual planning and support, that people here are already willing to walk the extra steps with Native students. She also said to be more aware, be willing to probe but then wait and listen. Also recognize that the time orientation and outside obligations may make Indian students seem uninterested or detached. She urged, “Please just assume they are interested and attached in a different way.”

In addition to Patti Zack’s activities and discussions, we used several articles to address culture and learning styles in the ASC. Some articles we assigned for reading, writing responses to, and discussing included those by Karen Swisher and Donna Deyhle, Jay Barwell, and a variety of short stories like W. P. Kinsella’s “Buffalo Jump.” From these discussions we learned from the AISES tutors about the limitations of studies and articles written about Native Americans especially when they’re written by non-Natives. The danger they said, and Ms. Zack agreed, lies in replacing old stereotypes with new ones. It’s also misleading to attribute any one study’s findings to any one tribe or, worse, to all Native Americans in general. We learned the best way is to adapt ourselves as tutors to each person’s unique learning style, no matter what his or her skin color. For example, one AISES tutor recommended simply asking an Indian student how he’d prefer to go about this assignment. If it’s suggested that we begin by reading a paper out loud, ask if he prefers it read by the tutor or by himself.

Tutoring experience

These tutors averaged three student contacts per day with students, many of whom were Native Americans in pre-college-level composition classes. A typical tutoring session involved greeting the student, exchanging names and enough small-talk to make the student comfortable, then having the student explain the writing assignment, insuring that he/she knows what is expected. A 99A or 99B (Basic Writing classes) student is often asked to write a paragraph or short essay and has difficulty getting started. I’ve heard our new tutors employing storytelling as a device for overcoming the intimidating blank page. The tutor simply asked the student to tell a story about the assigned topic, and even if the first person narrative may not fit the assignment, it’s still good as a means for getting ideas down on paper. This tech-

nique seems particularly helpful for older Native American students.

Results

Our results were measured in three ways: 1) the computer sign-in report which did indeed document an increased number of Native American student contacts, the average time spent in contacts, and the number of repeat contacts, 2) self-evaluations by the tutors, and 3) interviews with the students who were tutored and positively affected.

Tutors’ self-evaluations

Tana Sells: Since I began tutoring, I noticed I have been of great assistance to Indian students who need help understanding their assignments. Not only have I tutored in writing, but I have been able to tutor in math and accounting, when needed. I realize many Native students feel uncomfortable asking for help in the Academic Skills Center, and I try to make sure they know I am available to help. There are some students who come to me on a regular basis, and there are some who just want to ask if a paper sounds appropriate and don’t need any tutoring. It makes me feel good knowing that I am able to help others improve in their studies and that this creates a positive image for Heritage College. I feel I have made progress in learning to be a helpful tutor, not only in teaching, but in communicating with the student who needs the help.

Jenna Takesgun: As a tutor in the Academic Skills Center, I have had the opportunity to help a lot of students. I’ve noticed that many students, not just Indian students, do not want to come and ask for help, but if you wander around, every once in a while they’ll ask you to come to their table. Native students especially don’t want to interrupt the tutor if we’re talking and so don’t ask at all, so it’s important to wander around. I meet so many nice people every day because they liked to be noticed. Some people don’t

even want to talk until you give them the chance, then they open up and let the sun shine out of them. You have to take different ways in helping people because everyone doesn't learn the same way.

There were times when I first started tutoring that Native American students asked me something and I didn't understand. When I asked if I should get them another tutor, they responded by saying "no" and were just going to give up. Lately, though, I can help them more because I seem to have more patience, and I'm not trying to hurry. A few have come back to tell me they received good grades for what we worked on together, and this makes me feel better.

The most difficult time was when I made comments on a student's paper, and she just did not want to accept them. From what I understood she wanted me to do this. Later she explained that she only wanted me to see if her work was OK for the assignment. Her face's expressions were just rude. To me it was simple misinterpretation. I felt upset, but really I knew she just wanted to catch up for when she had been gone for two weeks. In the future I hope that I help more students and that they'll be comfortable with me and come to me because people look up to a tutor, and I feel a certain strength or power from that.

Irma Garcia: While I've been tutoring I have learned a lot about my self. I've learned that I can be patient; I have learned to control my temper. I have learned to take whatever the situation is in stride. But I think most of all I have learned that education holds the real key, for all peoples of all walks of life.

I have also witnessed that since we have Native American tutors there have been more Native Americans coming in for tutoring. I see that they're not afraid to come and ask for help. It's a good thing to witness. I see

not only the Native Americans eager to learn, but all the students are just buzzing about and really taking advantage of the tutors in the Skills Center. I really do enjoy tutoring. It's a gift of learning I can share, with not only my people but with others as well. I know our people will succeed in this world of technology. All peoples will prosper.

What students say about Native American tutors

Ben Castilleja, in his 40's and a senior sociology major with minors in Spanish and forestry, uses the ASC daily, 5-6 times per week. He comes in to use the computers; to talk to different tutors for help in English, Spanish, religion, and philosophy; or just to work on his own. Of the atmosphere in the ASC he said:

I feel very comfortable when I see people of my own culture are here. They know what I've been through—the embarrassment of asking for help—they understand me and encourage me to be a professional. And that's why we're going to school, to be professionals.

When asked about the effect of the AISES tutors on the students in the ASC, he replied:

I'm mestizo, a mixture of European and Indian blood, and Yes! it makes a difference having Native American tutors here! We have a lot in common, being shy—no, not shy, but reserved in speaking up. We tend to withdraw, but it helps to have an Indian tutor who understands that, and can gently encourage us to study harder and can give us moral support. It's only natural to go to someone of your own culture for help. The AISES tutors also help to bridge between cultures. For example, I might go to Jenna for help in English. If she doesn't know a certain question, she'd walk with me over to ask Carol [the Caucasian, Masters-level English tutor]. That bridges the gap between nationalities. I'd be way less likely to approach Carol on my own.

Alex Yellowhair is a radiology freshman in his 20's who came to Heritage College from his Navajo reservation in Arizona to join his sister and brother-in-law who have been students here for two years. He uses the ASC about seven times per week to get help from tutors in English, Spanish, and math and also to study on his own for tests. When asked if he is more likely to ask a Native American tutor for help with an assignment, he said:

I would say yes because I'm comfortable being around other Native Americans. The tutors here are extremely helpful, all of them are. I go to whoever is available, but I like to see other Natives around.

Delphine Barns, a freshman Native American in counseling in her 40's with young children and an aging mother needing her care, began courses three years ago but had to withdraw until her youngest child started kindergarten last fall. She spends most of her free time in the ASC doing homework—every day of the week between classes. She likes the ASC atmosphere

[J]ust because it's a good place to come and sit and study, sometimes to visit or even work with someone when I'm stuck. Yes, it makes a difference to me when I see Native American tutors. It doesn't really matter to me personally who I see for tutoring—I get along with everybody—but it is good when visitors and new students come in and see diversity in the different tutors.

Conclusion

Working with the AISES writing tutors has taught me much. The insight and human understanding they have brought to the ASC continues to be invaluable. I have seen them grow in their communication skills and in their individual self-esteem. I have also noticed an improved understanding between students of different cultures. As Mary James says, "Studying and working together as we do in the Skills Center seems to open communication in

natural ways that don't occur in the classroom or in purely social settings." When we began, we were focusing on how to reach out to students of all cultures. We find that those doing the tutoring are benefiting as much as those being tutored, and we hope to expand this program to include students in M.E.Ch.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan), the Hispanic student organization. We are very pleased with the training, the tutoring, and the positive responses of the students who were affected, and we are committed to this idea. The future tutors in the Academic Skills Center will truly reflect the ethnic diversity of the student body we so proudly serve. This way, as Irma says, "All peoples will prosper."

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Assistant Director Academic Assistance and Resource Center (AARC) Stephen F. Austin State University

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Retire the dictionaries. Re-shelve the thesauri.

Like writing lab tutors, the consultants at the College of Charleston (Charleston, SC) had used the cheap (five bucks or so) paper dictionaries, well dog-eared and losing their covers. And, like at most labs, the consultants had their beloved copies of Roget's compendium of delights. However, as much as the consultants loved those old workhorses, they have now dispensed with both dictionaries and thesauri when working with clients, refusing to be burdened with these two books. Instead, the consultants (and it must be admitted the clients, too) are joyfully pulling from the shelf *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* (American edition; New York; Oxford UP, 1996). As the title implies, this book combines a dictionary with a thesaurus. Although several other reference books do the same, the *ODT*'s novelty and usefulness lie in its arrangement and content, making life much easier for consultants and clients desperately seeing the *bon mot*.

This much-coveted book (consultants were known to fight over it when the lab owned just one copy) defines a word—as most good dictionaries do—but then, it immediately presents a copious list of synonyms and antonyms

keyed to each definition. Such an arrangement is, of course, convenient with no more hunting through two books. Or as one consultant commented, "It makes many synonyms readily available without my having to thumb through endless pages of Roget's."

And important to the pedagogy of the consultation, the *ODT* offers more practical or common synonyms for the words which clients write all too frequently, words which they need to replace with more accurate diction. For the word "control," as an example, the *ODT* offers the synonyms "master," "subdue," "servitude," words which clients would be more likely to know and to use in their papers. As one consultant remarked, "Having practical words as synonyms means clients are less likely to go crazy with the thesaurus."

Another pedagogical advantage arises because the synonyms as well as antonyms are printed immediately below the entry: shades of meaning implied by varying definitions are more readily apparent. So, an overworked word like "great" (as in *Titanic* was a great movie.) reveals itself to be too vague when clients scan the list of synonyms:

"large," "huge," "critical," "grand," "distinguished," "keen," "zealous," "outstanding," and "first-rate." The cascade of synonyms (and antonyms) washes over clients and consultants alike, reflecting a wealth of subtlety available to clients, a fine lesson for all writers.

There are disadvantages. The book is a bit bulky; however, as one consultant said, "It contains an *important* bulk of easy-to-reach information." And at thirty dollars each, a copy of *ODT* costs more than either a paperback dictionary or a copy of Roget's. But, since the *ODT* is a reference book which consultants and clients both will use, the expense is minimal for the value. One consultant astutely observed, "When clients are waiting, it's the one book they always grab. They think it's cool."

Samuel Johnson and Peter M. Roget may cringe at the suggestion, but perhaps it is time for writing labs to retire the separate volumes of dictionaries and thesauri. A "much-coveted, cool" book has arrived to replace them both.

Bonnie Devet
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The writing center

(continued from page 10)

These tutees were poorly motivated and found an excuse to leave early. They did not seem to take writing seriously. Another time I observed a tutor working with a very reluctant student who seemed to resent having to come for tutoring. Since she had been praised as a good writer in elementary and secondary schools, she seemed to feel she had been wrongly placed in a basic writing class. She would not listen to anything her tutor suggested to improve her text or her writing in general. She even accused the tutor of trying to force her to make changes

against her will. The tutor finally decided to add other students to the session so the entire hour would not be wasted. He hoped some of the things he did with the others might help her realize that writing is not static; it can always be improved. Even when tutors do all they can to help students, the tutees themselves sometimes fail to take responsibility for their own writing.

A tutoring session is made up of two participants—a tutor and a tutee. What happens during tutoring depends on

what each person brings to the encounter. If both accept their own responsibilities and freely respect each other's rights, then an actual tutoring conference can begin to approach the effectiveness of the ideal.

Linda L. Brickly
California State University—Stanislaus
Turlock, CA

¹ An anonymous name chosen to protect the privacy of the tutee.

² Also anonymous names. The same anonymity will be extended to the tutees mentioned later in this paper.

A different kind of OWL

Originally established in 1989 as University Editing before going on-line in 1997, the Chinese On-line Writing Lab (OWL) at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, provides comprehensive on-line writing services and learning curricula for Chinese authors of English manuscripts. (URL address: <http://mx.nthu.edu.tw/~tedknoy>).

Staffed by native English speakers who are fluent in Chinese and long term residents of Taiwan, the Chinese OWL stresses the correction of Chinese-English colloquial habits in writing in addition to general writing style and grammatical errors. For anyone interested in reading about our work, see my essay, "Overcoming Chinese-English Colloquial Habits in Writing," in the Internet TESL Journal: <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Techniques/Knoy-ChineseWriters.html>

Ted Knoy
The Chinese On-line Writing Lab
Tsing Hua University (Taiwan)

Quotable Tutor Quotes

I once heard Paul Simon (the singer) say that writer's block doesn't mean that you have nothing to write. It means that you are criticizing and destroying all ideas before they even get a chance to get to the paper.

Josh Rosenzweig
Yeshiva College Writing Center
Yeshiva University
New York, NY

The greatest things that happen in the Writing Center are the surprise outbursts of understanding from the writers. Whenever a writer has a small revelation, whenever a writer discovers the true purpose of her paper, I feel I have truly witnessed what the purpose of a tutor is.

Caryn Lazzuri
Washington College Writing Center
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THE WRITING LAB
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