

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 29, Number 7

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

March, 2005

...FROM THE EDITOR...

The articles in this month's issue of *WLN* offer opportunities to widen our horizons, our modes of thinking, and our approaches to writing center administration and pedagogy. Beth Boquet and her tutors, who turned to focus groups to assess their center, offer insights on how to set up and hold successful focus groups, and they describe what they learned in the process. John Blazina's poem offers us a fresh view of what grammar does—or can—do, and then, the leaders of next summer's Summer Institute for Writing Center Directors, Anne Ellen Geller and Michele Eodice, review the results of their study of what past participants gained from being at a Summer Institute.

Two tutors, Amber Gschwend and Brooke Ann Smith, examine their tutorial practices in terms of what works and what doesn't. Dawn Fels takes a close look at a tutoring program in use in high schools and colleges, TutorLink, and its potential conflicts as well as its advantages. Finally, Michael Mattison reviews a new CD published by the IWCA Press that includes the presentations at a recent European conference. And do check the Conference Calendar where you'll find conferences to expand your horizons even farther.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Using Focus Groups to Assess Writing Center Effectiveness

• Tara Cushman, Lindsey Marx, Carleigh Brower, Katie Holahan, Elizabeth Boquet

1

Ungrammatical Verse

• John Blazina

5

The Rewards of Summer: IWCA Summer Institute

• Anne Ellen Geller and Michele Eodice

6

Tutors' Column:

"Perfectionism Isn't Good Enough"

• Amber Gschwend

8

"The Socratic Method: The Answer for the New Tutor"

• Brooke Ann Smith

9

Et Tu, TutorLink?

• Dawn Fels

10

Review of Tutoring and Teaching Academic Writing: Proceedings of the Second Conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing

• Michael Mattison

13

Conference Calendar

16

Using focus groups to assess writing center effectiveness

Institutional context

Every fall, as the new academic year begins, the staff of our writing center engages in the public relations campaign familiar to tutors and directors of writing centers everywhere. We hang posters, distribute brochures, visit classes, pass out pens. Before students even cross our writing center's doorstep, they have already been counted and categorized by our web-based scheduling system—major, year of graduation, courses for which they are using our services. All of this information gets collected, at our writing center as at others across the globe, in an effort to demonstrate that we do what we are supposed to do, with the resources allocated to us.

Even a passing familiarity with the literature on writing centers illustrates that writing centers document their tutoring activities long before "outcomes assessment" became higher education's concept du jour; and we can now say that there appear to be time-honored methods of tracking usage: The 1982 collection *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing*

Labs, edited by Mickey (Muriel) Harris, contains a thirty-four page appendix of forms designed to collect information (from students and from tutors) and to report that information (to instructors and to administrators). Many of the basic questions contained in

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by Purdue University. Material will not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. As always, proper acknowledgment of title, author, and original publication date in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, Purdue University, should be included for each article.

Editor: Muriel Harris

Managing Editor: Shawna McCaw, English Dept., Purdue University, 500 Oval Drive, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2038; 765-494-7268.

e-mail: harrism@cc.purdue.edu (or) wln@purdue.edu

web site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/newsletter/index.html>

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of \$15 (U.S. \$20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the Managing Editor. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. If possible, please send as attached files in an e-mail to wln@purdue.edu. Otherwise, send hard copy and a computer disk or CD-ROM, and 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 an October issue).

these forms—questions designed to determine the kinds of assistance a student needs, for example, and the kinds of assistance he or she received—remain the core data collected by writing centers today. However, as these photocopied versions have given way in many writing centers to online databases, we find ourselves faced with the ability to track not only the standard information but also just about anything else the staff can imagine: When are students most likely to schedule appointments and not show up for them? Ask the database. What days, hours, weeks show the least use? The most? Pull it up. How many students have come to the writing center for both core and major courses? For intro and upper-division? Which tutor had the most repeat visits? The least? The list goes on.

The problem is, the list isn't always that helpful. As with any technology, the answers are only as good as the questions themselves. In our case, while many people were impressed with the bells and whistles on our new database, we felt pretty certain that more information wasn't necessarily always turning into better information.

In the September 2001 issue of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, Neal Lerner reports some research of his own to caution writing center staff against an over-reliance on statistics when telling our stories of writing center effectiveness (1). He ends the article with the following advice:

[W]e need to conduct assessment on our own terms, particularly before those terms are handed to us by those who might not have a clue. Assessment should be tied to our values and theories, as well as to larger institutional goals as described in college or departmental strategic plans or mission statements (4).

Shortly after the publication of Lerner's article, in the spring of 2002, Beth was asked to appear before the

university's assessment committee to discuss the writing center's methods for assessing our services. Committee members were certainly impressed with the writing center's efforts up to that point; however, their suggestions for improving assessment outcomes all steered her in an increasingly quantitative direction. Claiming that the writing center really had as much quantitative data as we needed, Beth proposed instead that the writing center begin collecting more qualitative data on the effectiveness of our services. Specifically, she mentioned that she would like to solicit participants for a focus-group study involving the writing center. Committee members seemed amenable to the idea, and Beth took it back to the tutors to work out the specifics.

Focus group methodology

When the idea of using focus groups was brought to the attention of the tutors, it became apparent that we needed to learn a bit more about the whole procedure and methodology to ensure that the groups would be effective. Focus groups are most often used in marketing situations before, during, or after a program, as well as for ongoing assessment and suggestions about how to reach a greater audience (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 31-40). The advantages to this methodology are numerous. For example, focus groups can be held at multiple times throughout a program (or throughout an academic year) to collect a variety of qualitative data in a discussion-based research setting. Since people tend to be naturally socially-oriented (to some degree), one strength of using focus groups lies in tapping into human tendencies using a socially-based method (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 23). Through the leadership of a good moderator, responses from participants can be clarified, and the moderator has the ability to tailor follow-up questions in order to gain specific information. In this way, researchers are able to collect responses to specific questions and to use the social dynam-

ics of the group to allow for the participants to play off of one another's answers, resulting in changes that can be implemented rapidly to make their organization or product more productive. The ability to gather such follow-up information is one way focus groups can provide data that more quantitative methods (such as surveys) fail to capture (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 45).

Moderating a focus group

Each focus group typically has two moderators—one main person to ask the questions and interact with the participants and one assistant moderator to take notes and ensure all is running smoothly. Effective moderators tend to share a few select qualities. Most importantly, they should be people who are comfortable in group situations and familiar with the discussion or purpose of the focus group (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 72-76). This allows them to be knowledgeable enough to probe deeper for specific responses or clarification after asking an open-ended question. Assistant moderators should have these qualities and more; they also need to be skilled at organization (since they are generally in charge of setting up the meeting and signing people in) (Krueger, *Moderating* 70-73). The assistant moderators may also need some familiarity with technology (depending on the devices being used in the focus group), since they are responsible for recording participants' responses, which can then be reviewed later for additional information (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 79).

Group selection and question preparation

Each group should include approximately seven to ten participants (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 93). Krueger cautions that four is an absolute minimum and twelve is the maximum, a range that allows moderators to take advantage of group dynamics (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 93).

The selection of participants varies according to the goal of the study;

however, the easiest way is to begin with a previous existing list or directory relating to the subject being studied. If no list or directory is available then a random telephone book selection can be used.

Once the participants are selected, moderators can draft the questions they will ask (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 97). No more than ten main questions should be used to prompt discussion. These questions should be reviewed by both moderators so that they are familiar with the purpose of the group and can facilitate the discussion smoothly and easily. Additional questions may obviously arise as the groups progress, and they can either be addressed at the time or they can be held until the end of the discussion so as to not interrupt the predetermined flow of the questions (Krueger, *Focus Groups* 59).

Setting up the room

Moderators should spend some time setting up the room in a way that will be welcoming to the participants as they enter. Three tables are recommended: one for check-in; one for refreshments; and one (ideally a round table) for discussion. A round table is the ideal shape as it allows for participants to see those who are speaking and to interact with one another more easily (Krueger, *Moderating* 13).

Facilitating the discussion

During the discussion, moderators must keep their roles in mind: they are not participants; they are instead present to help focus the group's discussion. When facilitating the group, moderators should respect the individuals, regardless of their views or how many times those general responses have already been expressed. Moderators should limit verbal and non-verbal feedback and should try to withhold any comments so as to imply neither agreement nor disagreement with participants' opinions.

Moderators must also be comfortable with silence. Natural pauses in the dis-

ussion allow for participants to reflect on the question at hand and encourage balanced participation from all group members. Finally, it is also the moderators' responsibility to recognize when the question has been fully answered and to move the discussion forward from that point. At the end of the session, participants should be debriefed with a quick summary to ensure that moderators have understood the group's thoughts on key issues (Krueger, *Moderating Focus Groups* 31).

Focus groups at Fairfield

After an initial brainstorming session, those of us in the Fairfield Writing Center decided to hold three separate focus groups: one group of "regular users" (students who have come to the Writing Center five times or more); another group of one-time users; and a third group of students who had never been to the Writing Center. To direct the discussion, we created a list of questions for each group, focusing on why students return, don't return, or have never come.

Next, we faced the challenge of finding participants. Identifying and contacting regular users was easy: We simply searched the Writing Center's computer database and files. To identify students who had never been to the Writing Center, tutors randomly chose names out of the Fairfield University student phone book. One-timers users of the Writing Center proved the most difficult to identify. Few students had only come once to the Writing Center, and our records occasionally contained outdated contact information. Nevertheless, we trudged along, making sure to choose several more names than we thought we would need (to account for people who were too busy to participate or simply did not want to participate).

The actual focus group discussion lasted about 45 minutes with participants sitting in a circle on couches and chairs. Each session was kicked off with food (of course) and informal introductions to help keep the atmosphere relaxed. Once the talking began, the moderator guided

the discussion, the assistant moderator took notes, and another tutor added to the discussion whenever she could surmise a point, bring up another issue, or move the conversation along. At the end, the group debriefed by reviewing the notes that were taken.

In the introduction to “Writing Center Research: Testing Our Assumptions,” Stephen North calls on writing center workers to “not merely accept and operate by our assumptions, but . . . [to] test them, challenge them, re-shape them” (24). The results of our initial focus group study support anecdotal claims often made in the writing center literature, the kinds of claims North refers to as “lore” or “practitioner knowledge” (*Making of Knowledge* 23). As a result, we see our small study as a step in the direction North is calling for.

In general, we found that the regular users had positive experiences with their tutors. They liked the individualized attention; they appreciated the perspective that tutors were able to give them; they felt that their visits to the Writing Center helped them to structure and organize their work better and kept them from procrastinating. Their main suggestion for improvement was that the Writing Center needs a better space. We all laughed at that observation, because we have been arguing for a better space for a decade. The more corroboration we have for this request, the better.

Students who had never been to the Writing Center revealed that the reasons behind their absence were largely based on the ways they approach their writing—in other words, they procrastinate—and the lack of confidence in their writing skills. Since this group of students had never visited the Writing Center, they were obviously unable to give us the kind of feedback on our services that the frequent users gave us. They did, however, suggest more

effective ways to market the writing center’s services. Specifically, much of our promotional literature currently focuses on practical matters to prepare students for their first visits—what kinds of material to bring to the session, for example, or how to make an appointment. In the future, we may want to target students’ work habits more specifically if we want to encourage reluctant students to use our services.

Suggestions for using focus groups effectively in the writing center

As we prepare follow-up focus group sessions, we have identified several areas for improvement in the design of our study. Making these small changes should allow us to target information more effectively and to ensure consistency across groups.

• Defining objectives

According to Krueger, the danger in not having a clearly defined objective is that you “may not know what information is essential” and may as a result adopt the attitude, “I don’t know what I’m looking for, but I’ll know it when I see it” (*Focus Groups* 54). Although we had a general sense of what we hoped to gain from the focus groups (an idea of how effective the Writing Center is), we did not clearly define our objective.¹ In follow-up studies, we will first clarify what we intend to learn from the focus groups, what we think the end results might be, and how those end results will be used.

• Categorizing groups

Additionally, when we decided on the three categories for the focus groups (no-timers, one-timers, and five-timers), we assumed that the categories would yield comparative data. However, this turned out not to be the case. When we

run the groups again, we will break students up into different categories (by major, for example, or by year of graduation), depending on our goals for the project. Future studies of this nature might run multiple focus groups in each category in order to yield more information. A study of this size could potentially be a multiple-year project.

• Designing questions

Because our initial study lacked a clearly-defined objective, our questions were not as well-focused as they could have been. We also had far more questions (11 total) for the five-timers than for the other groups (who had 7 each). In subsequent studies, we plan to keep the number and content of questions consistent across groups.

• Encouraging participation

Funding was key to encouraging participation. We had a great deal of difficulty recruiting participants until we secured funds to pay each participant \$25. After that, we had no trouble at all. Additionally, we provided pizza, soda, and cookies for everyone, which served as an ice-breaker at the beginning of the session.

• Selecting moderators

Krueger recommends that the moderator be someone who has adequate background knowledge on the topic of discussion to place all comments in perspective and follow up on critical areas of concern” (*Focus Groups* 73). In our case, that meant either Beth (our director) or one of the peer tutors. We decided to use one of the Writing Center tutors, because the focus groups were modeled after the dialogical and collaborative model of the Writing Center itself. We also thought that students might be more likely to

speak freely to other students, rather than to a professor. Using tutors as moderators, however, does not come without its problems. For example, participants might feel uncomfortable talking to someone who might have tutored them in the past or could potentially tutor them in the future. We briefly considered asking someone outside the Writing Center to facilitate the groups. In the end, though, we decided it was more important to have a moderator who was familiar with the Writing Center, who knew enough about the topic at hand and would be able to ask relevant follow-up questions.

• Recording the focus groups

There appears to be no ideal method for recording group interaction. Video recordings have proven quite intrusive in our Writing Center in the past; tape recordings work well for pairs (to recording individual tutoring sessions), but the reliability of the recording diminishes as the groups get larger. In the end, we simply used a note taker (who functioned as the assistant moderator). Obviously, there are limits to this method as well. In the future, we will continue to have the assistant moderator take notes, and we will use an audiotape recorder as a backup device.

Conclusion

In closing, we feel that Beth's original claim to the university assessment committee was borne out in our experiences: focus group assessment feels consistent with the kind of work we do in writing centers. Tutors and students liked the social element. They enjoyed talking to each other face-to-face in a small group setting. They appreciated the participatory, dialogic emphasis of this kind of research. Like many writing centers, we have a range of assess-

ment techniques that we use from time to time in our Writing Center, including post-conference evaluations and class surveys. We look forward to incorporating focus groups into the ongoing research into our services. It promises to provide a crucial qualitative component for writing center assessment, one that highlights the importance of talk and the value of small-group interaction, both of which are key features of any writing center's philosophy.

*Tara Cushman, Lindsey Marx,
Carleigh Brower, Katie Holahan,
Elizabeth Boquet
Fairfield University
Fairfield, CT*

Note

¹ We would like to acknowledge members of the audience at our IWCA/NCPTW session at Hershey for suggesting several helpful options for refining this study.

Works Cited

- Harris, Muriel. *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982.
- Krueger, Richard A. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1988.
- . *Moderating Focus Groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998.
- Lerner, Neal. "Choosing Beans Wisely." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 26.1: 1-4.
- North, Stephen M. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook/Heinemann, 1987.
- . "Writing Center Research: Testing Our Assumptions." *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984. 24-35.

Ungrammatical Verse

The comma splice
is fine, is nice
in letters or in poems,
in essays it's a major vice
and must be stopped
at any price.

The dangling participle
looks in vain
for some plain
noun to modify,
and finding none
sinks loveless, lost, forlorn,
without a ripple.

The fragment is
a lonely clause.
Abandoned and disconsolate.
Unpleasantly autonomous,
it wants to get
subordinate.

The run-on sentence
so conflates
two thoughts
that nonsense grates
the reader's ear unless
the writer punctuates
there is no sense
without a fence.

*John Blazina
York University
Toronto, Ontario Canada*

The rewards of summer: IWCA Summer Institute

When the IWCA sponsored the first Summer Institute for Writing Center Directors and Professionals in 2003, the intent was to offer mentoring and networking for both new and seasoned directors. As part of IWCA's commitment to professional development, the institute continues to focus on bringing professionals together, providing opportunities for deeper reflection on writing center work, and offering mentoring as participants shape their own careers through writing and research.

Summer Institute leaders immediately sensed the power the institute had to foster professional development, yet it is through the voices of the participants themselves that we found the most compelling evidence of the scope of the professional development. One year after participation, 2003 participants were asked about their SI experiences, and their answers reveal why the institute is so important, not only to individuals, but to the future of the profession.¹ Three major findings, or themes, emerged as significant. Participants' quotes follow each theme.

Those who attend the Summer Institute feel connected to their colleagues and peers and to disciplinary conversations.

"I have 50 new friends, colleagues, cheerleaders, confidantes that I can call on at any time."

"The leaders and participants demystified the community and culture in writing center circles, but they also taught me about their professional commitments in intellectual debates, pedagogy, and administration."

Those who attend the Summer Institute feel prepared to, interested in and encouraged to join professional and disciplinary

conversations (through regional and national networks, through research and publishing, etc.) and feel more supported as they do so.

"Two articles and a high school collaboration have grown out of the experience, and I think I have contacts with people that I've supported for other conferences and activities. In my neck of the woods, I try to pass on those politics of support and inclusion to my local and regional WC groups and people."

"I'm becoming a more engaged academic writer in the field, and I'm working to get more articles out. The SI and the contacts I made helped me be less afraid of joining the conversations. I used to think I was this stupid, naïve outsider, and now I think I have something of merit and value to offer. Without the SI, I don't know if I would have gotten there."

Those who attend the Summer Institute build confidence in their administrative, decision-making, and negotiation skills.

"The SI helped me feel more prepared for the many trials and challenges that I face in my job. I emerged from that week a much better administrator and negotiator."

"I feel so affirmed that what I've done at my school is right. I feel like I can channel the SI leaders and know I'm doing the smart thing."

Writing center professionals need to engage in both early career and ongoing professional development. This related directly to the job market: there are many professional opportunities

across the country that remain unfilled because those positions demand writing center people who can demonstrate commitment to the discipline and their peers, display knowledge of and engagement in research, publish, and develop a vision of a sustainable future for their own writing centers and for the field.

Just take a look at a few phrases we have lifted from recent job ads for writing center directors:

- Provide a truly collaborative center for the discussion of all sorts of writing
- Conduct seminars for faculty and staff working with writers from a wide variety of university schools and programs
- Develop a writing center and oversee the center's daily operations; select, train, supervise, and evaluate a staff of writing consultants
- Develop assessment, instructional materials, and on-line programs
- Fulfill a research agenda in area of expertise and make scholarly contributions to the field

It is no coincidence that the Summer Institute delves into such topics as developing a technology vision, writing a budget or grant proposal, research and publishing and collaborating with other campus programs. We now know that the learning that happens each summer is useful in seeking and retaining work as well as in developing a professional identity and sense of belonging to a community.

Participants' testimony may be impetus enough to attend the IWCA Summer Institute yourself, but many of us are also in positions to support others attending. We mentor and prepare graduate students and up and coming assistant directors; we may be in posi-

tions of hiring, and we may want to encourage our local and regional colleagues to attend.

Deciding to attend or sponsor someone from your staff is a commitment in both time and funds. But the rewards seem well worth it. Visit the IWCA Summer Institute for Writing Center

Directors and Professionals Web site for more information: <<http://www.writing.ku.edu/SI05/>>.

Anne Ellen Geller, Clark University and Michele Eodice, University of Kansas; Co-Chairs of 2005 IWCA Summer Institute

1. These responses are from Anne Geller's study of 2003 SI participants' experiences. Responses to a series of survey questions were submitted online and were anonymous. 40% of the 2003 SI participants responded. Anne intends to follow the experiences of SI participants for three years.

2005 IWCA Summer Institute

Registration opened for the 2005 IWCA Summer Institute in December. We have received many registrations already, but there are still slots available. Please visit the Web site for more information and to view the programs from the two previous institutes. Former participants continue to communicate to us how valuable their experience was and how much of what they learned and wrote about is now a significant part of their work. The new leaders for this year look forward to meeting you at the 2005 SI in Lawrence, Kansas. Questions can be directed to Anne Geller (angeller@clarku.edu) or Michele Eodice (michele@ku.edu).

Language Skills Specialist and Writing Instructor St. Olaf College

10-month position; annually begins August 15 through June 15 for Language Skills Specialist duties and a renewable 1-year term appointment for academic year 2005-06 for Writing Instructor duties. Hours are typically scheduled between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm Monday-Friday with some weekend and evening hours required. This is a replacement position.

Areas of Responsibility:

Writing Place: administer writing center: supervise student tutors providing peers with help on academic writing. **English language skills program:** administer English language skills program and contribute to the academic success of English language learners. **Professional academic counseling:** work individually with students on English language fluency, verbal skills, college reading, academic writing, study skills, time management, academic advising, and other topics contributing to academic success. **Teaching:** instructor for two writing courses per year, one in each fall and spring semester, faculty rank dependent upon qualifications. Likely courses include Critical Skill in Composition, an introductory composition course for native and non-native speakers, and First Year Writing, a topical seminar required of most first year students that emphasizes critical reading and writing and includes a research component. **Program support:** work collaboratively towards effective

operation of the Academic Support Center office, prepare and present academic support outreach programs, support tutoring program in the social sciences and the humanities, support the Study Skills Center, support student Academic Assistants, and fulfill other duties as requested. **Supervision:** recruit, hire, train, assign work, schedule, and evaluate student Writing Place tutors and student English language skills tutors.

Essential Qualifications:

EDUCATION: Masters or Doctorate level Degree in a humanities or social science discipline and English as a Second Language (ESL) certification.

EXPERIENCE: 3-5 years teaching basic writing and undergraduate composition, with additional experience in teaching writing to English language learners in a higher education setting

Pay rate: Minimum \$26,600 – DOQ (Grade 13); **Start date:** August 15, 2005. **Review of applications begins immediately and continues until position is filled.** Please send letter of interest, resume, and list of three references with contact information. **To apply drop off, mail, e-mail, or fax your application materials to:** Office of Human Resources, St. Olaf College, 1520 St. Olaf Avenue, Northfield, MN 55057; Fax: 507.646.3960 E-mail to: resume@stolaf.edu. Questions, call: 507-646-3068.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Perfectionism isn't good enough

Over the years I've become accustomed to telling myself that what I have accomplished or what I'm attempting is not good enough. I used to not think anything of this nagging compulsion in the back of my head. Now however, as a writing assistant, I have learned how my own perfectionist behavior can be detrimental to not only my own progress but also to the writer I am helping. However, I have also learned, throughout my first year, strategies to help others and myself overcome the obstacles presented by perfectionist tendencies.

My need to conduct a perfect conference from the beginning of my writing center career was disappointed straight off. I quickly found myself panicking at my loss for words in the middle of my first conference. I desired so much for the conference to go smoothly; but when I became aware that it was not, I was thrust into the position I had dreaded most. I was a fumbling beginner. After my first conference I immediately began a search to find out where I had gone wrong, so I could avoid the same problem in the future.

I started researching perfectionism upon the realization that my expectations were holding back my performance. I discovered that perfectionism is a learned behavior. Also, that a perfectionist rarely acknowledges success and most of the time regards any success as simply the avoidance of failure. Many psychologists consider this behavior of not accepting success unhealthy. A perfectionist becomes a person who is never happy or even satisfied with the results she achieves (*Double-edged Sword*). As a conse-

quence of never being satisfied with achievements, stress levels increase above what they normally would have been. Furthermore, because perfectionists have added stress from their own expectations, they often under-perform compared to people who don't set such high standards (Peters 2).

By now this news was sounding very much like my own experience. Now that I had learned a bit more about myself (and fellow perfectionists), I wondered if there were certain characteristics of the writing center that emphasized feelings of perfection in writing assistants. For example, expectations play a large role when two people interact in an arranged setting, especially for the first time. In situations like the writing center, the writer's expectations can inflate the writing assistant's goals even further. More specifically, writers who are visiting the writing center for the first time may have preconceived notions about what we do. These writers expect writing assistants to have some special formula for fixing papers, and they often expect much more from us than we can reasonably provide. Pressure from the initial miscommunication can induce a writing assistant to attempt more than what is realistic in a session.

If this happens, and the writing assistant notices the conference isn't going well, what are the chances that the writer picks up on the writing assistant's frustration? Would the writer assume that it's his own fault the writing assistant is disappointed? These questions all point toward negative effects a perfectionist attitude might have on a writer.

Another consideration that correlates to expectations in the writing center is that of the writing clientele we have coming through our doors. Most importantly, studies show that perfectionism occurring in college students is greater than the population at large (*Double-edged Sword*). It only makes sense that those writers coming in for help on their own are also looking for ways to meet their own high standards for an assignment. Granted not everyone is included under a perfect label, but it may be worth examining.

Defining perfectionism in writers may be equally important to defining perfectionist tendencies in writing assistants. For instance, from my own experience as a writer in conferences, I have found that positive reinforcement is the best way for me to broaden my ideas and writing skills. As a writing assistant, when I communicate to writers the things I like in their papers, I often see a wave of relief sweep over their faces. As a consequence writers gain new confidence, and they often open up more to the questions I pose. As a side note, writers also seem to become more aware of weaknesses in their papers. Overall, writers are more receptive to making changes once they gain the confidence they were lacking.

Another advantage for using a strengths-based approach in a conference is that writing assistants can regain confidence in their own skills. What I have in mind is this: once the writer is eased into the idea that his paper has strong elements, he becomes more receptive and thoughtful about any weaknesses. As the writer makes more and more connections, the con-

ference is likely to become a successful one. As a result the writing assistant notices the turn-around from a perfectionist-tainted conference to a positive, helpful conference. The writing assistant can then walk away and feel reassured of her own abilities.

It feels like I'm saying that it's easier to catch a fly with honey than vinegar . . . as the old saying goes. Perhaps I am, but more specifically I know how it feels to be a perfectionist writer; I like it when someone reaffirms what I already suspect is "good stuff" in my papers. Applying knowledge from my own experience in my practicum has noticeably improved my practice. But what about the expectations of someday having the perfect conference? It's like those math majors say, we're traveling along a parabolic line that is asymptotic to the axes. With each conference we get closer and closer to the perfect one, but we never get there. I can accept that, can you?

There are, however, many other steps a perfectionist writing assistant must

take in order to recover. For instance, a writer may not be as receptive to positive feedback as described previously. The unpredictability of writers may contribute to a writing assistant's quandary of perfectionism. Also, for a Writing Assistant to benefit from her own success, she must first recognize success. Meanwhile, the writing assistant should avoid dwelling on "failures"—perhaps by finding strategies to deal with new difficulties presented. It's easy to look for areas of failure, but also it may be of some use to discuss conferences with fellow writing assistants. Often others can come up with ideas of where we succeeded and didn't notice it. Despite these tactics, however, a perfectionist cannot be turned around in a day, for it takes a lot of work to change any learned behavior.

In spite of best efforts, perfectionism can be roused by many factors, and it can be a dark obsession if it continues unchecked. Now that I have identified how my goals had been limiting my

performance, I am able to compensate for the part of my character that was holding me back. I began the struggle with, "Hello. My name is Amber, and I am a perfectionist." And, from there I discovered how strength-based comments in conferencing could produce positively growing results for both the writer and the writing assistant. Upon regaining my confidence, I found less of a need for setting unreasonable goals.

Amber Gschwend
Western Washington University
Bellingham, WA

Works Cited

- Peters, Carol C. *Perfectionism*. 17 April 1996. South Australia Department of Education. 3 May 2003 <<http://www.nexus.edu.au/teachstud/gat/peters.htm>>.
- Perfectionism: Double-edged Sword*. University of South Florida. 3 May 2003. <<http://usfweb.usf.edu/counsel/self-hlp/perfect.htm>>.

The Socratic method: The answer for the new tutor

I'm new to this tutoring thing. Though I've had plenty of experience editing papers belonging to my friends and family, I've never helped someone with their writing in a more formalized setting. Understandably, this gave me some consternation at first. I wasn't sure how to move beyond the role of proofreader to that of facilitator, helping students to not only write strong papers to turn in during that week but to become fundamentally better writers so they could compose strong papers for weeks beyond our session together. "Teach them how to fish, Brooke," I kept reminding myself. "It'll do them much more good than handing over a filet."

Being both an instructor in the English department and a tutor in the Writing Center at Utah State Univer-

sity gives me an advantage—I have a heads up on what may be presented to me when I sit down to consult with an English 1010 student who's come to the Writing Center for help with an assignment. I was pleased, then, when during one of my first Tuesday afternoons in the Center, a student presented me with her rough draft of the very paper I'd assigned to the students in my freshman composition classes. This was a nice way to ease into my new role as an officially sanctioned tutor.

I began as I was trained to begin: "Hi, I'm Brooke. Nice meeting you. Is this your first time here?" She indicated that it was. I explained how we generally proceeded and asked her if she could tell me about the assignment and what specifically she wanted to

give attention to as we read her work.

"I'm not sure what I want to talk about," she began. "I think it's pretty good."

As per USU Writing Center tradition, I asked her to read her paper aloud so that we could talk about it. She was happy to oblige, reading steadily. When she was finished, she looked at me expectantly. This, apparently, was the time where I was supposed to reveal the problems with her paper and correct them, giving her a half hour of golden writing advice that would translate into an A grade. I mean, I *was* the one with experience here.

The problem I first identified with her paper was that there wasn't much

(continued on p. 15)

Et tu, TutorLink?

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) saddles teachers with increasing responsibility to raise test scores. At the same time, deep budget cuts are forcing administrators to eliminate teaching positions and proven programs. Getting by with less while meeting demands to do more means schools have had to tap internal resources in order to support the struggling student. Enter World Book and the National Tutoring Resource Center (NTRC) who began distributing TutorLink, a peer tutor program once offered for free at professional development workshops, after becoming “disenchanted that many NCLB school programs were falling far below accepted standards of practice” (Redicks). The product is distributed by referral only and costs \$795 for materials and an unlimited time school site license. Subscribers to TutorLink.com receive additional products and services, including online reading assessment and improvement exercises for 4th through 12th graders and an on-line scheduling and tracking system. This discussion pertains to the TutorLink Peer Tutoring Program, which contains three guides, one faculty and three tutor training videotapes, a peer tutor training manual, a CD-ROM, and two posters.

Explicitly stated in the materials is the belief that one-to-one tutoring improves a struggling student’s grades, basic skill mastery, study skills, content area knowledge, motivation, and self-confidence. The program is not intended for all students but as an intense support program for students “who are good candidates.” The *Guide to the Tutoring Process* states that students are selected for the tutoring program because data collected and analyzed prior to tutoring “validated their admission” (91). Admission is decided after completion of *The Discovery Process*, a step in the TutorLink protocol that involves gathering and analyzing

data in order to address “academic underachievement” suggested by achievement test data, teacher questionnaires, administrators’ input, parent/guardian requests, and director and peer tutor impressions obtained during an initial interview with the student. Sample transcripts of Terra Nova tests and explanations of the relationships between test scores, grades, and student achievement are included to assist the director and tutor in determining whether a student will benefit from tutoring.

Though the materials do state that a “director” or “experienced peer tutor” should collect and analyze the student’s data to determine the nature and length of tutoring, most of that information is considered confidential and unavailable to peer tutors. Upon reading about how the data collection is done, my FERPA ears immediately perked up. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act Policy (FERPA) is a federal law that restricts disclosure of student information, including addresses, grades, test scores, Individual Education Plans, and other school records. The main purpose of the law is to protect the privacy of students’ records, allowing only parents and “eligible” students (the student) access to the records. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s website, “the law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.” All personnel on our campus, for instance, were required to attend FERPA workshops early in the year. Concern revolves around disclosure of information to a third party without written permission from either the parents (if the student is under 18) or the student (if 18 or over). Jeannette Jordan, who directs the writing center at Glenbrook North High School near Chicago recently told me her faculty was also required to do a

FERPA in-service. A follow-up to the in-service assured them that “trading and grading” papers was legal, according to a Supreme Court ruling, but they were advised not to allow students to pass back each other’s papers or post grades by ID numbers or pseudonyms. While it is unclear if these practices violate FERPA, Jordan added, “We live in a litigious community . . . so we are cautious.”

The U.S. Department of Education does grant several third parties permission to view students’ records, but peer tutors are not among them. Certain that I encountered a misprint in the TutorLink materials, I read for further clarification that the director (and not the peer tutor) should complete the data collection and analysis. I discovered, instead, that a TutorLink peer tutor’s role extends far beyond the traditional tutor’s role to include responsibilities typically limited to someone who is credentialed and employed by the school. For example, in the *Guide to the Tutoring Process*, a TutorLink peer tutor is described as one who “provides an additional support system and can help a student understand and complete assignments, organize materials, manage time, comprehend key concepts that were introduced in class, and study for tests . . . the tutor can offer practical, hands-on assistance to often frustrated and discouraged students who might otherwise be tempted to give up and shut down in school” (51). Not many would argue with this description. However, the *Peer Tutor Handbook* suggests to tutors that they “sometimes need to function as a teacher to explain concepts that students may have missed in class” and refers to the tutor as “an important member of a team, which includes the tutoring director, the teacher, and sometimes the parents or guardians of the students [they] are tutoring” (5). A later passage says the peer tutor and/or

director is expected to “begin defining realistic remediation and achievement goals for the student” after the data is collected and analyzed (33). Peer tutors can also discuss students’ progress with teachers, review quizzes and tests with students, and according to at least one case study, communicate directly with parents if the student is not meeting expectations. I suppose if the parents and students give written permission to everyone involved before the process of data collection begins, these actions may be perfectly “legal” in FERPA terms. Legal ramifications aside, I think directors of both writing centers and learning centers might want to consider this use of their tutors. Should peer tutors be placed in these potentially contentious roles?

Writing center directors would love for teachers and parents to consider their peer tutors part of a “team.” But educators and parents might find it discomfiting to know that a pre-teen or teenaged student assisted in developing a “remediation” program for their student or child. I advocate peer tutoring programs. As a teacher and writing center director, I relied on the peer tutors who worked in our writing center. But my expectations were different, and TutorLink’s expectations concern me. I’d be interested in knowing how well a pre-teen or teenaged peer-tutor understands and handles the responsibility for bringing another student, a peer, up from the depths of “academic underachievement,” which is one expectation of a TutorLink peer tutor. Having had many conversations with the parents of struggling students, I wonder how well a peer tutor will be trained to handle the “flack” they may get when they call a parent and report that their child didn’t attempt the homework that was due for the tutoring session. What sort of conversation would the peer tutor have with the student’s teacher? How would these conversations and the tutor’s role, in general, affect their relationship with their peers? I’d also worry about the interpretations of a pre-teen or teen-

aged peer tutor about a student’s grades, test scores, academic skills, progress, and preparation for tutoring sessions. These interpretations could have far-reaching academic and affective consequences for the student. Finally, I worry about the social milieu created by a program that seems to suggest that the peer tutors—the “smart kids”—will “save” their underachieving peers from the depths of academic despair, all in the name of NCLB, and if they fail, then it’s obviously because the underachieving peer failed to progress according to TutorLink’s benchmarks or because they failed to quit their extra-curricular activities or because they just weren’t a good candidate to begin with. The tone presented by the materials is enough to serve as a red flag for writing center directors who tend to see their writing centers as safe places for all students.

Evaluation is a critical tool to determine the efficacy of any tutoring program, and TutorLink tutors complete two lengthy forms following each tutoring session to “evaluate” how well a student is following recommended interventions and improving in the academic area of concern. Tutors check boxes to indicate what took place during the session and to record if the student arrived with their homework completed, attempted, or untouched. Another evaluation includes an area for evaluating the student’s preparedness (Excellent, Good or Needs Improvement), the student’s “organization of materials” (notebooks and folders), and “study management” skills including recording assignments, completion of homework, quiz and test preparation, knowledge of subject matter, outlining skills, and lecture notes. The tutor also summarizes the session, noting “any improvements or problems that [they] detect, for example in study skills, motivation, grades, and interest” (10). There is no video tape or special instructions for training tutors on how to evaluate a session. According to the *Guide to Training Tutors*, “one of the

best ways for a director to incorporate evaluation with training is to ask a tutor about a student and the tutoring session immediately after the conclusion of the session, *or even interrupt a session in progress*” (131). Another recommendation is for the director to use the forms to evaluate training and, for long-term evaluation, consult the “benchmarks and signs of trouble” from the *Guide to the Tutoring Process*.

The consequences for a student who does not progress vary, according to the materials. During *The Discovery Process*, students are identified as having “minor, moderate, or serious” academic problems using a list of characteristics and symptoms for each category; in addition to a general list, a separate list is provided for elementary, middle, and high school levels. This identification is then used to determine an anticipated time frame for progress and to plan how much tutoring will be required. Benchmarks for what to expect at 4 to 6 weeks, 7 to 8 weeks, 9 to 12 weeks, and 13 to 16 weeks are included in the materials.

Several of the case studies illustrate how a director and tutor can work with a student who is not making the desired progress. One scenario depicts the power the director has in deciding whether a student will be allowed to continue tutoring after “failing” to reach the benchmarks:

The tutor director concluded that Samantha was going to be a real challenge. If he had not been tutoring for many years, the Director would have turned this assignment down. . . . The Director spoke with the mother. . . . He told her that the outlook for immediate measurable progress was not good. . . . [The mother] was willing to cooperate, and the Director could tell that she wanted to be a very good parent. . . . After a month’s absence, the mother asked if Samantha could come back to tutoring. The Director was hesitant. . . . Nevertheless, he relented. (123-127)

Another troubling implication from this case study is that parents or guardians who refer their students for tutoring and then follow-up with recommended reinforcements at home are “good parents.” Supportive, involved parents are inarguably critical resources for a struggling student, and many of today’s students are overcommitted, a reality that the TutorLink materials relates more than once. However, to imply anything about parental commitment in a manual that will, no doubt, be read by peer tutors, could perpetuate certain stereotypes and biases and impede tutoring and learning.

Of course, labeling of students (and their parents) could be addressed in training, but whether that happens is not clear from the materials reviewed. Tutor training focuses on the protocol and skills used during each session. Four consecutive “modules” cover the steps in the tutoring protocol and are preceded by an orientation to the tutor’s role and job description, as well as tutoring policies and procedures. All are included in the *Guide to Training Tutors*, which contains much of the information in *The Guide to the Tutoring Process*. Three videotapes within the kit provide training support with short segments pertaining to positive reinforcement, questioning skills, listening skills, and respecting the student’s ideas. The short segments (7 to 17 minutes) allow tutors to view, discuss, role play, and write in response to the scenarios depicted. The Guide demonstrates how the director can incorporate the *Peer Tutor Handbook and Templates* (CD-ROM) into the training sessions and also provides questions for discussion. The step-by-step instructions and cross references to materials to use at various points throughout the training do simplify the process for the novice and/or experienced but busy peer tutor director.

But how effective will the tutor training tapes be? To answer this question, I asked the peer writing coaches of University City High School’s Writer’s

Room and a student observer from nearby Washington University who served as a reading and writing coach to underachieving freshmen. The peer tutors all found useful information on the videos but felt the content was more appropriate for training tutors for a learning center environment. One student appreciated the role playing. Another group of peer tutors felt that the segment on questioning skills did a great job of showing the differences among open-ended, close-ended, and Socratic questions. The college student noted, however, that there were “far more examples of science and math tutors than English tutors” in the video. She felt that, for students who come to the writing or learning center for help with English coursework, Socratic questions were “the best method for tutoring. . . because [they] keep the discussion going and help the student continue to brainstorm ideas” for writing assignments. I stand by the use of Socratic questions and understand the student’s concern. Students must practice the technique—over and over again—to really understand how to use it to further their and others’ thinking about a text. The same tutor wanted “more obvious examples of positive reinforcement, such as using encouraging statements, instead of just giving a nod or a smile.” One group suggested that the tutor training tapes be used in conjunction with discussion of an assigned reading from a training manual, book, or article that pertained to the curricular area of concern.

TutorLink is already used in over 300 school districts in the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico and “nearly the same number of colleges and universities are using specific program components” (Redicks). The *Faculty Video* includes testimonials from teachers and administrators who use TutorLink. And, indeed, several features of the program will appeal to those who want to (re)establish a peer tutoring program. But potential buyers of TutorLink must know its origin and its aim. Only then will they be able to

understand why only certain students are “eligible” for its very directive, prescriptive intervention. With state accreditation and federal funding on the line, schools must do something to raise test scores—and they must show that they are doing something to raise test scores. But they can’t just buy any product:

No Child Left Behind’s accountability requirements bring real consequences to those schools that continually fail to improve student achievement as a result of using programs and practices for which there is no evidence of success. Such schools would be identified as needing improvement and required to make changes . . . , including using education programs that are grounded in scientifically based research (U.S. Department of Education).

TutorLink, at only \$795, is far less expensive than most other “research proven” options out there. In fact, my local district can purchase a site license for every one of its 13 schools and spend approximately \$30,000 less than what they’d have to pay a teacher with a master’s degree and five years’ experience. And TutorLink, “a proven tutorial system of methods and strategies . . . based on more than 20 years of front-line experience that has demonstrated its effectiveness in helping thousands of students in elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary schools throughout the United States” probably qualifies as one of the programs the U.S. Department of Education would fund.

I have been in the unenviable position of having the writing center I used to direct scrutinized by audit teams during two different accreditation reviews. Though not our original aim, we were billed as one of *those* programs put into place to help the struggling student, when the auditors came through. Anyone who has worked in a “school of concern” or one that “needs improvement” knows the uncertainty,

fear, and anxiety that permeate the entire school community as released items begin supplanting authentic instruction. Teachers in schools like these have seen tens of thousands of dollars spent on reading programs (sometimes more than one in the same school), computerized instruction programs, and other “proven” programs that promise to boost test scores. But at what costs?

If remediation of underachieving students is the answer to improving test scores, then perhaps TutorLink can help. Perhaps, as my peer tutors noted, TutorLink could even work as a

supplement to other training materials in a peer tutoring program. But buyer beware. TutorLink reflects a guiding philosophy and methodology that runs counter to how most writing centers are run and could burden peer tutors, especially middle and high school tutors, with pressures they are unqualified and too young to handle.

*Dawn Fels
Fontbonne University
St. Louis, Missouri*

Works Cited

Jordan, Jeanette. “Re: Question.”
E-mail to the author. 7 Jan. 2005.

Redicks, Thomas. “Re: TutorLink review/box.” E-mail. 5 Nov. 2004.
United States. Department of Education. *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*. 10 Jan. 2005 <<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>>.
United States. Department of Education. *Proven Methods. Questions and Answers on No Child Left Behind*. 10 Jan. 2005 <<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/whatworks/doing.html#top>>.

Book Review

Tutoring and Teaching Academic Writing: Proceedings of the Second Conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing

This collection is distributed outside the U.S.A. and Canada by the Center for Academic Writing, Central European University, Budapest 1051, Nador utca 9, Hungary. Tel: +36-1-327 3196 E-mail: eataw@ceu.hu (\$15 US [postage included], payment can be made online at <<http://www.ceu.hu/eataw/CDpurchase.htm>>; instructions for payment are on the Web site.)

Distributor for the U.S.A. and Canada: Byron Stay, General Editor, IWCA Press, 16300 Old Emmitsburg Road, Emmitsburg, MD 21727, Tel: 301-447-5367, E-mail: stay@msmary.edu ISBN:0-9648067-5-4. (\$15 + \$2 postage)

Reviewed by Michael Mattison (Boise State University, Boise, ID)

Near my hometown in Ohio, there is a signature restaurant called Chalet in the Valley. A Swiss flag hangs outside, overlooking the large parking lot that often tempts the tourists who travel the curving highway through Amish country. The menu inside tries to account for many tastes, offering “Swiss-Austrian cuisine” alongside “Amish favorites and American classics,” so it is not unusual to see the wait staff, clad either in dirndl dresses or lederhosen, carrying out trays loaded with wienerschnitzel, fondue, deep-fried catfish, and New York strip steak. The Chalet also has a special Sunday buffet, where customers can choose (repeatedly) from a host of food and flavors.

What, though, does this restaurant have to do with the CD collection of papers from the Second EATAW Conference? Well, that conference also featured an international menu—presenters from Prague, London, Copenhagen, Winnipeg, St. Petersburg, Negev, Singapore, San Diego—and the papers gathered together from the conference could well be thought to be an intellectual buffet: a rich selection of items offering a taste of how writing is discussed and taught/tutored across the world. (I’ll refrain from making any connection between the restaurant and the fact that the conference was held in Hungary.) On the CD there are thirty presentations, ranging from “A Socio-rhetorical Approach to

Teaching Paragraph Writing” to “Making Collaborative Writing Work” to “Integrating Academic Writing into Teaching ESP in Ukraine.”

Not surprisingly, at first approach this collection is overwhelming. Where to begin? An answer for many readers of *WLN* would probably be the articles directly tied to writing center work, and I will focus on those in this review. But first, I want to mention the two plenary sessions, given by Ann Johns, of the University of San Diego, and Otto Kruse, of the University of Erfurt, Germany.

Johns, in her talk “Academic Writing for the 21st Century: Shared Issues,”

recognizes the differences between the conference members, their programs and departments, and their students, but emphasizes that “all of us who are concerned with *academic writing* are asking some of the same basic questions and negotiating the same basic topics.” Ultimately, for Johns, the goal for all of us is to “begin . . . with the social constructivist theory that brought us modern conceptions of genre, a theory that accepts the evolving, fuzzy, situated nature of texts.” A focus on genre leads to our helping students to “develop a metalanguage about texts.”

The idea of preparing students not just to write papers but to become more conversant about and responsive to generic conventions is picked up by Kruse in his talk, “How Writing Shapes the Writer: Understanding Developmental Changes in Student Writers.” Kruse says, “Our task as writing instructors and tutors is to change inexperienced writers to competent problem solvers who do not simply execute routines but adopt enough meta-cognitive skills so that they can adapt to new writing situations and tasks.” For Kruse, this is especially important in German universities, where assignments are strongly linked to disciplines and teachers do not have a history of making conventions explicit.

It is Kruse’s grounding of his argument in a specific place that points to what might be a small amount of tension in this collection—albeit a productive tension. The few presentations from American teachers and researchers seem to speak of writing in broader terms—offering universal suggestions that could be practiced in many locales. The other, international selections are more often rooted in a specific school or program and the authors take care to note the particulars of each—offering suggestions that may or may not have relevance elsewhere. The collection, then, makes a reader consider any writing pedagogy in terms of how well it might be exported across national, cultural, and educational lines.

And the idea of importing or exporting certain practices is utilized by two of the presentations on writing centers. Harvey Kail and Paula Gillespie’s piece, “Peer Tutoring Theory and Practice: an Importable Model?” acknowledges that European “writing centers are being founded and developed as their institution’s central and often only focus on academic writing” and argues that peer tutoring is an “educationally and economically viable option” for those centers. Most of the points made here will probably be familiar to anyone already working with (or as) peer tutors, but there are some interesting details to be mined about Kail’s and Gillespie’s respective peer tutoring courses and writing centers.

Also familiar, at least to *WLN* readers, will be John Harbord’s presentation, “Minimalist tutoring: an exportable model?” (original published in *WLN* 28.4 [2003]). Harbord claims that most tutoring in the United States is minimalist, or non-directive, and that such tutoring is a “false response” to a “fundamentally outdated conception of teaching.” Better, in Harbord’s view, is “genre tutoring,” in which the “tutor’s role is . . . to use her expertise to help the student to master conventions and appropriate structure.” Like Kruse, Harbord’s views are much determined by place, a graduate university with a one-year M.A. program. Surprising, though, that Harbord never mentions Shamon and Burns’s work, which would have allowed for a trans-Atlantic connection rather than a disconnect.

Emmy Misser, on the other hand, puts Shamon and Burns’s “challenge of the status quo of non-directive tutoring” in the first paragraph of her presentation, “The Genre Approach: A Writing Centre Pedagogy.” Misser’s is a wonderfully detailed description of the work she does in her center, housed in a “Canadian university without first-year composition.” For Misser, the genre approach to tutoring allows her to begin a consultation by talking in general terms about “characteristics of

form, argument, and style that make higher order thinking skills visible in a text.” That conversation will often lead to a student doing “on-the-spot revision” of an introductory paragraph. Included are three pairs of examples of such opening paragraphs—originals and revisions—and the changes between them are striking. Misser also includes as an appendix the handout she uses during her consultations, “Essential Features of Academic Writing.”

Another valuable appendix is attached to John C. Bean and Teodora Rutar Shuman’s presentation, “Teaching Proposal Writing to Engineering Students: A Writing Center/Engineering Collaboration.” The appendix is the booklet created by writing center staff and professors of engineering in order to “teach proposal writing to senior engineering students.” Granted, I am biased in my valuing of the document because I am in the midst of a collaboration with colleagues in our College of Engineering, but the booklet should prove a helpful model for anyone involved with a writing center that shares WAC responsibilities. Ideally, Bean and Shuman would have included details of how the writing center consultants were prepared to work with the engineering students, but that “is the subject for a different paper.”

The papers above are those that most directly relate to writing center work, but again, they are but a small part of this wide-ranging collection. Also of interest is Kate Chanock’s “From one-to-one teaching to curriculum design: Taking the ‘re-’ out of remediation.” Chanock chronicles how her experience as an “academic skills advisor” prompted her to look toward “students’ common misunderstandings” about academic writing, and then design and promote materials for teachers to incorporate into their classrooms (and the materials are included). Chanock has not reduced academic writing to one catch-all method, but has instead offered an analysis of the ways first-year students are expected to enter into academic conversations in an Australian B.A.

Lotte Rienecker, in "Text Work that Works," offers up a detailed conversation on working with blocked thesis writers at Danish universities. She looks to move beyond "psychological/analytical perspectives" on the difficulties in order to "address the characteristic genre misunderstandings and absence of text elements . . . which the drafts of many procrastinating writers display." Many of the writers discussed work with a writing center, and certainly Rienecker's ideas are relevant for other tutorials. Joy de Jong's ideas also seem relevant in other contexts; she too looks at thesis writers, analyzing the transcripts of conversations between those writers and their supervisors in Dutch universities (and the work seems reminiscent of

Black's *Between Talk and Teaching*).

The last paper I'll mention is Carol Thomson's "Against all Odds? Academic Literacy Development in a Post-Graduate, Open Learning Context." Hers is a well-written examination of the challenges encountered when trying to implement "an academic reading and writing development course" at the University of Natal. Perhaps more than any other piece in this collection, Thomson's asks the reader to directly confront the questions of why we teach and how that teaching can matter in the world beyond the university.

To return briefly to the idea of the buffet: Many of the dishes served up

from the second EATAW Conference will be familiar for readers of *WLN*, old favorites prepared in the expected way. Others, though, will offer old tastes prepared in new ways, a flavor or two added or changed. Still other pieces should offer completely new tastes, opportunities to sample something different from the usual fare. That seems the best part of a buffet—a combination of foods that guarantee each diner the chance for a satisfying meal.

Work Cited

Shamoon, Linda K., and Deborah H. Burns. "A Critique of Pure Tutoring." *Writing Center Journal* 15.2 (1995): 134-151.

Socratic method

(continued from p.9)

'wrong' with it—at least that I could see right off the bat. Her grammar was quite good and the overall flow of the paper was smooth. A slight panic set in as I contemplated what I could say to her. Not only was my reputation as a tutor on the line with this one, but my own self image as an "English person." If I tanked this and it got out, I'd never live it down.

I retreated and resorted to something softer than a pronouncement—a question. "Okay. Thanks for reading. Something that will help us to start talking about your work is identifying your thesis. Can you tell me what it is and how you've tried to support it in the rest of your paper?" I let the question sit, hoping that she wouldn't see through my façade. She looked at the paper before us, screwed her mouth to the side, and furrowed her forehead. Pause.

"Great, it's not working," I thought to myself. "Now I'm really in trouble." Just as I was about to intervene to salvage the session, she spoke.

"Well, it's the last sentence of my first paragraph—here. But, I'm not sure that this paragraph on the second page supports it all that well. I mean, it is kind of

a tangent, now that you point it out," the student responded.

Sweet. She hadn't caught on that I was clueless. Not only that, but she thought that *I* had been the one who'd noticed that her paragraph on classroom testing didn't relate very well to her thesis on the ill effects of basing college admissions on SAT scores. It was a self-directed discovery, which made it all the more significant.

"So, what do you think you could do to change that?" If a question worked before, I reasoned, it was worth it to try the tactic again.

"I guess I either need to delete this paragraph or put something about tests in the classroom in my thesis. I don't know, though. I don't really have space to talk about other types of testing. I'll just cut it out."

The rest of the session followed these lines. I submitted question after question, prompting the observant writer to find opportunities for improvement on her own. I was able to point out some technical MLA guidelines that would make for a cleaner works cited page, but beyond that, the

student herself provided most of the know-how. At the end of the half hour, she left with a smile, thanking me for sharing my expertise. I smiled back, grateful that the session had gone as it did, and made a note to self that questioning as a method of tutoring was the way to go.

I've had more experience as a tutor at this point, and have come across a myriad of ways to facilitate the progression of a session. Still, this early lesson of questioning sticks with me. I've found that often a student knows what can be changed in their paper to make it stronger. It just takes a tutor inquiring about specifics to bring those things to the surface. When in doubt, inquire as to the efficacy of their thesis. Or, ask an even broader question—what is it that you want the reader to gain from your work? It's questions like these that have made me feel more confident in the Writing Center, as well as a semester's worth of sessions. I may not be able to claim that I've made the perfect writer out of any of the students I've worked with, but I think I've taught a few how to bait a hook.

Brooke Ann Smith
Utah State University
bsmith@english.usu.edu

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

March 3-5, 2005: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Baton Rouge, LA

Contact: Judy Caprio, B-18 Coates Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA: 70803. Phone: 225-578-4438, e-mail: jcaprio@lsu.edu. Web site: <<http://www.scwca.net>>.

March 4-5, 2005: Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference, in Orem, UT

Contact: Lisa Eastmond Bell, Utah Valley State College, MC-176, 800 West University Parkway, Orem, UT 84058-5999. Phone: 801- 863-8099; e-mail: lisa.bell@uvsc.edu.

April 1-2, 2005: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Adrian, MI

Contact: April Mason-Irelan, Siena Heights University, 1247 East Siena Heights Drive, Adrian, Michigan 49221. Phone: 517-264-7638; e-mail: amason@sienahts.edu. Web site: <<http://www.sienahts.edu/~eng/ECWCA/ecwca.htm>>.

April 9, 2005: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Frederick, MD

Contact: Felicia Monticelli, e-mail: FMonticelli@frederick.edu, Frederick Community College, 7932 Opossumtown Pike, Frederick, MD

21702. Phone: 301-846-2619; e-mail: FMonticelli@frederick.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/staff/mawca/index.html>>.

April 16, 2005: Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association, in Bothell, WA

Contact: Becky Reed Rosenberg, beckyr@u.washington.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.ac.wu.edu/~writepro/PNWCA.htm>>.

April 16-17, 2005: New England Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY

Contact: Patricia Stephens, English Department, Humanities Building, Fourth Floor, Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, One University Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Phone: 718-488-1096; e-mail: patricia.stephens@liu.edu.

June 10-12, 2005: European Writing Centers Association, in Halkidiki, Greece.

Contact: Conference Web site: <<http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/ewca2005/>>.

October 19-23, 2005: International Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN.

Contact: Frankie Condon e-mail: fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://writingcenters.org/2005/index.html>>.

THE WRITING LAB
N E W S L E T T E R

Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
500 Oval Drive
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2038

Address Service Requested

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Purdue University