

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T L E R

Volume 34, Number 6

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

February, 2010

— FROM THE EDITOR —

As you may have noticed, the December/January issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* was late in landing in your mailbox. We apologize for the delay. Before the issue went into the mail, the post office rules for bulk mailing were changed, causing much of the problem. But we hope this month's issue of *WLN* returns to its normal schedule, arriving near the beginning of the month of issue (depending on how bulk mail is handled in your area).

In this issue Ellen Schendel introduces us to the writing retreats for faculty and staff held in her writing center and the very productive outcomes of such retreats. Mary Rosner and Regan Wann alert us to some important data that can be lost when transcribing tutorial conversations, data that could lead to a deeper understanding of the interactions between tutor and student.

Jackie Grutsch McKinney returns with another of her "Geek in the Center" columns, discussing cloud computing and some of the cloud-based programs that could be very useful for your writing center. And finally, John Brenner offers an unusual approach for tutors to try—subverting the topic by brainstorming stances contrary to what's asked for in some assignments. As does Schendel's article, this piece promises productive outcomes from writers; it also suggests that contrarian tutorials could help writers overcome writer's block.

So, refill your coffee cup, find a comfortable chair in quiet corner (if you have one), and enjoy some worthwhile reading.

◆ *Muriel Harris, editor*

INSIDE

Retreating Into the Center: Supporting Faculty and Staff As Writers

◆ *Ellen Schendel* ◆

Page 1

Talking Heads and Other Body Parts: Documenting Writing Center Interactions¹

◆ *Mary Rosner and Regan Wann* ◆

Page 7

Geek in the Center: "Cloud 9"

◆ *Jackie Grutsch McKinney* ◆

Page 12

Tutor's Column: "Quite Contrary"

◆ *John Brenner* ◆

Page 14

Calendar for Writing Center Associations

Page 16

RETREATING INTO THE CENTER: SUPPORTING FACULTY AND STAFF AS WRITERS

◆ *Ellen Schendel*

*Grand Valley State University
Allendale, MI*

We're between terms at Grand Valley State University; commencement was last weekend, and students have gone home for the summer or are taking a break from classes before the summer terms begin next week. Grades were due two days ago, so most faculty are away from campus. A number of staff are on vacation, taking advantage of the light student and faculty traffic to plant gardens or visit family.

Normally, the Fred Meijer Center for Writing would be empty this week, save for the office coordinator and me, finishing up assessment reports, hiring staff for next year, and cleaning up.

Instead, seventeen faculty and staff writers are here, hunched over laptops, writing from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and making significant progress on a number of writing projects, including book prospectuses, dissertations, articles, conference presentations, scholarly book chapters, and creative pieces. It's Day Four of the Faculty/Staff Writing Retreat, and there's good mojo in the air. With fifteen writers checking in at lunch, we counted the words we'd written/revised since Monday morning: our best estimate puts the total at 113,681. And there's a day and a half left to write.

Our Center sponsors two week-long writing retreats each summer. They are facilitated by me (the director) and the Center's office coordinator, with the modest

continued on page 2

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by The RiCH Company, is a peer-reviewed 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 The RiCH Company. Material can 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 acknowledgement of title, author, and original publication date in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* should be included.

Editor: Muriel Harris
(harrism@purdue.edu)
Assoc. Editors: Michael Mattison
(mmattison@wittenberg.edu)
Janet Auten
(jauten@american.edu)

Managed and Produced by
The RiCH Company, LLC
Richard C. Hay, Founder and CEO
260 E. Highland Ave. MH700
Milwaukee, WI 53202
www.therichco.com
1-888-348-6182

<www.writinglabnewsletter.org>
support@writinglabnewsletter.org

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures but can issue invoices through the Web site. Yearly payments of \$25 (U.S. \$30 in Canada) by credit card are accepted through the Web site or sent by check, made payable to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, to The RiCH Company, Attn: *WLN*. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions. For international *WLN* subscriptions, please contact support@writinglabnewsletter.org. For IWCA membership and *WCJ* and *WLN* subscriptions, see <writingcenters.org>.

Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. Please send as attached files in an e-mail to submission@writinglabnewsletter.org.

funds needed to run the retreats provided by the Provost's Office. Our format is simple: we convene in the Center each morning and write until lunch. At lunch, we take a break from the writing and socialize. Then it's back to writing until 4:45 p.m., at which time we reflect on our writing via informal freewriting and then talk about our day. These post-writing conversations tend to be tired but celebratory and, in my opinion, much-needed. We need the brag session and the problem-solving of our fellow writers to push us into the next day. At 5 p.m., we emerge from the Center, chattering about our evening plans. Most participants are empowered enough by seven solid hours of writing to declare home a work-free zone.

NUTS & BOLTS: ORGANIZING AND FACILITATING THE RETREAT¹

When I became the Center's director in 2003, a number of retreats had already been jointly sponsored by the Provost's Office, the Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, and the writing center. These early retreats were opportunities for ABD faculty and staff to make significant progress on their dissertations, and they included intermittent programming throughout the week—reading/writing/discussion activities to keep participants on track, help them work through writer's block and other difficulties, and build a community of writers to sustain their dissertation work.

In recent years, we've opened up the retreats to all faculty, still giving preference to ABD faculty and staff working on dissertations, followed by tenure-track faculty who haven't yet been promoted or tenured. But for each retreat, a number of associate and full professors join us, as well as staff working on creative or professional projects.² Although some elements of the early dissertation retreats have fallen away, the core components have remained: the experience of writing in the presence of others; easy availability of feedback, discussion, and other writing support as needed by individual writers; and time for sustained, focused writing free of the distractions that abound at home or in the office.

The retreats are simple to set up and run. We advertise the retreats via e-mail to all faculty and staff, flyers to ABD and new faculty, and articles published in the campus newsletter. In addition to setting up the Center to accommodate the 15-18 writers, we reserve a couple of quiet conference rooms down the hall from the Center. There is bound to be a participant who needs a large space to spread out—such as a faculty member in art who will be engaged in a book-making project at our upcoming August retreat. Several times, faculty and staff have collaborated on a piece and needed a space to talk without disturbing the rest of the group. These rooms can also be used for impromptu peer review workshops or a bit of solitary writing time.

Retreat materials include a handout that summarize some of the resources faculty might use throughout the week, such as style guides, reference books, and a collection of books on writing in a variety of disciplines and genres, both academic and creative. We include a brochure about the Center's faculty/staff programming (such as Faculty/Staff Writing Groups, which meet throughout the academic year as an opportunity for writers to get feedback on drafts) and our consulting services for students. We have developed a list of local proofreaders recommended to us by other faculty and staff, and we tuck this list into the folders in case anyone has a project requiring the services of an editor. I try, too, to include a brief article or two that extol the benefits of getting feedback from others. For this retreat, we included a recent *Chronicle* piece, "Writing Group as Sanctuary," which describes Lisa Botshon's and Eve Raimon's experiences in regularly meeting with colleagues from across the disciplines and several universities to share and discuss their current writing projects. They write:

What the group offers . . . is much more than another opportunity for colleagues to tell each other how they can do better. Instead, it constitutes a kind of sanctuary, a refuge for intellectual and material sustenance that, after so many years together, we regard as a necessity of our professional lives.

This idea of meeting together to write as "a kind of sanctuary, a refuge" is exactly what our retreats are about. And one way that participants can sustain their writing lives—and their productivity—is to find a

writing group to meet with at regular intervals throughout the year. I encourage participants early on to take a break from writing to read the brief article so that we can discuss it a couple days later as part of our end-of-day time together.

The other retreat materials are six worksheets, plus an evaluation form. The first worksheet is sent to writers a week ahead of the retreat; titled “Project Inventory & Goals,” it walks writers through the process of imagining what they might need to gather ahead of time and planning their time at the retreat:

1. In 2-3 sentences, describe your project.
2. What have you completed so far?
3. What must you still do to complete the project?
4. Of #3, what can you realistically complete in five days of focused writing? Please break down these writing tasks into five sets of goals—a set for each day of the retreat:

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

The other worksheets serve as freewriting prompts about what writers have accomplished, what they struggled with, where they’ll pick up tomorrow morning—or, in the case of Friday’s handout, what they’ll do throughout the rest of the summer to sustain their writing productivity. The handouts are meant to help participants reflect and plan, but also provide a means for writers to gather their thoughts ahead of our closing conversation. On the last day, participants complete an evaluation of the retreat. This evaluation is the only document they return to us. The other handouts are for their own use, something I emphasize at the start of the retreat.

There isn’t much variance to what we do each day, although on Monday we spend twenty minutes in the morning getting to know each other and our writing projects, and on Friday we quit an hour early so we can have an extended celebration and brag session. Participants’ successes have been impressive: several dissertation chapters revised and edited, ready for defense; a book prospectus drafted; multiple articles finished and sent out for review. Toasting our successes and taking turns describing (or reading from) our projects on Friday afternoon is something we anticipate all week.

Throughout the week, we celebrate process-based successes as they come about. During one retreat, a participant working on a book heard from a university press that a contract was on its way. Another time, a wayward and difficult dissertation director finally replied to a chapter with encouraging feedback. This week, a writer’s application for international travel funds was rewarded with quick processing and the securing of that money. We marvel at these moments, thinking there must be something about putting our laptops and hard work into the same room for concentrated periods of time that encourages us to stay productive and makes others, outside the room, receptive to what we’re accomplishing within it.

“ [T]he faculty become the embodiment of the community of writers that is the Center’s mission and vision to build on campus. ”

DIRECTOR AS PEER WRITING CONSULTANT:

As facilitator, I spend the day in the Center, hunched over my own laptop much of the time, but also

consulting with faculty about their writing. Yesterday, one writer needed a reader for the methodology section of her dissertation. She wasn't sure she had included everything readers would need to really understand the process she went through in conducting her study, so we discussed her goals and purposes, then I read the chapter, asking lots of questions and generally trying to articulate one interested reader's experience in navigating the chapter.

Another participant wanted to talk about her writing process for the week. We sat in my office, which is adjacent to the Center, and she shared her difficulty in moving from writing a scholarly piece to writing one more journalistic in nature to writing creatively. So we talked about our writing processes: envisioning our target audience; using different technologies—e-mail, blog interfaces, Google docs, Word, paper and pen—to set different tones for our writing in different genres; using focused writing and freewriting about the writing task to ease us into a writing moment.

Still other participants had quick questions related to the pieces they were writing: What are other words for “oppressed”? What resources do you know of that address how best to teach graduate students to write in the discourse of their fields? Where on campus can I get funding to attend an international conference?

My experience as facilitator is much like that of the writing consultants who typically work in the Center when classes are in session, and I make this comparison transparent to retreat participants, repeatedly saying that what they experience in a consultation is what their students experience, too. I'm an interested reader, a question-asker, someone who can facilitate deep and metacognitive thinking about the writer's process and product. I'm a willing collaborator, a second brain, a wall off which they can bounce ideas. But I'm also a resource, someone “with connections” to writing resources and other programs on campus, and a fellow writer. Perhaps most importantly, I'm a colleague—to most of these participants, a colleague from outside their home departments, which makes me a safe party to their processes and documents and memoirs.

OUTCOMES AND REFLECTIONS ON WHAT WORKS

This year, a total of 30 writers will participate in the retreats. These are faculty and staff who become “friends of the writing center” in that important PR sense—they can offer us recommendations for good peer tutors, and they spread the word about the good things the Center can do for all writers on campus. More importantly, they become the embodiment of the community of writers that is the Center's mission and vision to build on campus.

Peter Elbow and Mary Deane Sorcinelli, who facilitate and participate in a Professors As Writers program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, published an article in *Change* magazine describing their series of writing sessions. Rather than a week-long retreat for writers, their program is a series of monthly day-long writing sessions. They, too, have noticed the supportive atmosphere I've termed “writing mojo” that permeates the room during these writing sessions. Sorcinelli writes:

I could never quite define what I especially liked about the feel of a “Professors as Writers” session until I signed up recently for a beginning yoga class. In the same way that yoga promises to stretch one's physical muscles, freewriting can help us relax our writing muscles. Yoga, too, offers a unique mix of private and communal space. You arrive, nod to the other students if you want, take your mat, find an open space, and get some stretching and toning done. You can smile, say hello, chat at a break if you want—but you don't need to. You can work out alone or in a group of people. There are no expectations to talk about the office or national politics or the last book you read. Both a writing space and yoga offer environments that encourage a quiet camaraderie free of forced collegiality. (20)

TAKE NOTE

EUROPEAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
May 25-28, 2010

Paris, France

American University of Paris

Theme: *Crossing National Boundaries and Linguistic Borders: (Re)Thinking and (Re)Situating the Writing Center and WAC Connection in Europe and Beyond*

Keynote Speakers: Chris Anson, Anne-Marie Picard-Drillien, and Muriel Harris

The European Writing Centers Association Conference is extending its proposal deadline to February 10, 2010, to allow people returning to campus after a lengthy winter break enough time to prepare and send proposals.

For information about the conference, e-mail to contactewca@aup.edu, or see the Conference website: http://www.aup.edu/news/special_events/ewca2010.htm.

And Elbow writes that “it’s a heartening sight: a bunch of serious academics sitting all together in a room, writing or sharing writing. There’s a certain energy in the air that helps people be productive and creates a spirit that’s collegial and supportive” (22). This supportive atmosphere is necessary for all writers, but junior faculty in particular often need it.

Parents of young children often need a space away from home to write. A number of parents, particularly mothers, participate in our retreats each year. The May retreat comes when the city’s schools are still in session; slipping away to write from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. is less burdensome when children are in school. There is also a tidiness, we all agree, to setting aside a week between terms to write, when colleagues and students don’t expect us to be in our offices. Sorcinelli and Elbow’s retreats happen off campus, so faculty can escape the normalcy of their routines, but I think it’s important that faculty and staff experience what we hope their students experience in the Center: a supportive writing environment, a community of writers, and the amenities of this space, from the bottomless coffee pot to the comfortable chairs over in the corner to the shelves of handouts and books.

Each summer, we agree that writing together like this would be helpful throughout the year. Our participants like the idea of blocking out a couple of days for a mini-retreat at various times during the year, but my experience has been that weekend retreats are largely unsuccessful: only a few people sign up for the event, and someone always cancels before the retreat begins. So next year we’re going to try something new: we will designate the Center as a faculty/staff writing space from 2-5 p.m. on Fridays. We hope retreat participants will use the space and spread the word to their colleagues. If this takes off, we might try rerouting student traffic to an adjacent conference room one Friday a month for all-day writing retreats throughout the academic year.

A few final thoughts on these retreats:

- **Less is more:** Consistently, passionately, and unanimously, participants say they do not want time dedicated to structured programming or writing activities. They want the time to write on self-directed projects; they want to seek assistance with their particular writing needs on their own (their needs are quite diverse, given the variety of disciplines, genres, and writing backgrounds of the people in the room). So we have deliberately “structured” the retreats as ample time to write, with a bit of discussion and reflection built into the beginning and end of each day.³
- **Collaboration with other departments/people is key:** The Provost’s Office is happy to fund these retreats each year out of faculty development funds. On other campuses, perhaps a research center, various deans, or departments could be willing to contribute toward the minimal costs, which at our retreat include meals and refreshments, paper and printer toner, name tags and copies of worksheets.

When it comes to publicity, we seek out the help of various groups on campus. Our Faculty Teaching and Learning Center is a machine at getting faculty to various events throughout the year, and they are willing to list the writing retreat on their master calendar, website, and promotional materials. The Provost’s Office hosts a luncheon for newly minted PhD’s each year, and all ABD faculty are invited to attend. Flyers promoting the writing retreats are on hand at this event. Research workshops, new faculty orientations—all are places to publicize the event.

At the retreat, other campus experts might be invited to lunch with participants or be “on call” to work with writers needing specific assistance. Our statistical counseling center has been available to faculty/staff needing statistical support. And occasionally, faculty who have published a book or have expertise in creative writing join us for lunch to be extra resources/consultants to writers with

TAKE NOTE

CHICAGOLAND ORGANIZATION OF WRITING, LITERACY, AND LEARNING CENTERS

February 26, 2010
Glenbrook North High School
Northbrook, IL
Theme: “*Undergoing, Understanding
Change*”
Keynote speaker: Pam Childers

The registration includes a continental breakfast and lunch. Registration is \$75 per person. Please register early so that we may plan appropriately. Participants may register here: <<http://tinyurl.com/COWLLC-2010-Registration>>.

By coming together, we strengthen our knowledge of the best ways to provide meaningful and appropriate assistance to our students, schools, and communities. We look forward to your registrations for this exciting professional development opportunity.

If you have questions, please call Jenny Jordan at 847-509-2695 or e-mail her at jjordan@glenbrook.k12.il.us.

See you in February,
Andrew Jeter, Niles West High School,
Jenny Jordan, Glenbrook North High School,
Patty Melei, Lemont High School, and
Sharon Sheehan, Glenbrook South High School

questions about those particular publication processes. And we learned early on how important it is to have a direct contact at IT in case writers experience technical difficulties.⁴

• **Assessment couldn't be easier:** At the end of the retreat, participants report on their overall satisfaction with the week (what they liked and suggestions for improvement), as well as what they accomplished. At times, I've prompted participants to be rather specific: according to their best estimates, how many words did they write/revise during the week? Later, a semester or two after the retreat, it is easy enough to e-mail a follow-up survey to participants. What came of the writing they produced at the retreat? What have they accomplished since then? What has been the longest-lasting effect of the retreat on their work as writers? These evaluations are reported to the Provost's Office so the administration can be as impressed as we participants are at what we achieved through this very simple and relatively cheap program—and continue to fund it.

The best moments are when, unsolicited, an article makes its way to me via e-mail or intercampus mail. The author is a writer from last year's retreat, and in the acknowledgements is a mention of the Fred Meijer Center for Writing. I like to imagine readers at institutions across the U.S. and around the world noticing that acknowledgement and making the connection to their own campus writing centers. Whether formal acknowledgements in published work or word-of-mouth publicity, these mentions are validation of what writing centers can do for everyone on campus. Faculty and staff included.⁵ ♦

Notes

¹Readers are welcome to see all the publicity, goal-setting, and assessment documents from our most recent Faculty/Staff Writing Retreat at our Center's website: <www.gvsu.edu/wc>. Feel free to use/modify these materials.

²In addition to bringing together colleagues across the university, there is value to having faculty at various ranks supporting each other's work, as well as staff, who are often left out of research/writing activities.

³Elbow explains he might provide freewriting activities to participants who want/need them, or that writers might spend the morning writing and the afternoon sharing their writing with each other. But in general, writers simply write: “The point of the day is that we're professors and we're writing—and the less theory, the better” (21).

⁴Sorcinelli and Elbow have experimented with inviting off-campus specialists to work with faculty, but, like me, have found that writers can get what they need from the university if put in touch with the right people.

⁵Many thanks to the seventeen writers in the Center that rainy week in April, who inspired me to buckle down and write this piece.

Works Cited

- Botshon, Lisa and Eve Raimon. “Writing Group as Sanctuary.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 1 May 2009. Web. 23 April 2009.
- Elbow, Peter and Sorcinelli, Mary Deane. “A Faculty Writing Space: A Room Of Our Own.” *Change*, 38.6 (2006): 17-22. Print.



TALKING HEADS AND OTHER BODY PARTS: DOCUMENTING WRITING CENTER INTERACTIONS

◆ *Mary Rosner and Regan Wann*
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

Words are all used up. They've been used about so many other things and people. I write, "he smiled". What does that mean? No more than a kindergarten poster painting of a turnip with a moon-mouth smile. (Fowles, The Collector)

Close vertical transcriptions are established tools for recording interactions between writing center consultants and clients for pedagogical and research purposes. These transcriptions attempt to replicate not only words but also silences and interruptions, signs and sounds, in order to provide full and accurate accounts of the sessions represented. While the transcripts do a good job duplicating verbal exchanges, we must be skeptical about their being full and accurate representations for two reasons: first, they tend to use generic terms—words like “laughs,” “coughs,” and “groans”—to record various physical gestures and sounds; and, second, even detailed and precise transcriptions wrongly imply that “words speak for themselves” and mean the same to all. Thus, even though close vertical transcriptions may have a place in tutor training, they should not be accepted unquestioningly, and any analyses drawn from them in writing center research should be examined carefully.

The history of rhetoric justifies the attention to body language and gesture found in close vertical transcriptions that include non-verbal with verbal texts. For instance, non-verbal communication, and particularly its role in delivering arguments, was a focus of ancient Roman rhetoric. According to Gregory Aldrete, Quintilian believed that Roman speakers were “simultaneously communicating in **two languages**, one verbal and one nonverbal” (6, emphasis added). Further, for Quintilian, “each twitch of an eyebrow or bend of a finger had a specific and widely recognized emotional content” (7). In Book XI of his rhetoric, he argues, for example, that without the hands, “delivery would be crippled and enfeebled. . . . the hands . . . speak. . . . Do we not use them to demand and promise, summon and dismiss, threaten and beg, show horror and fear, inquire and deny, and also to indicate joy, sadness, doubt, confession, remorse, or again size, quantity, number and time? Do they not excite, restrain, approve, admire, display shame?” (129). And we can also read the elocutionists of eighteenth-century England, where body movements were called “the hand-writing of nature” (Howells 242), or examine the images in Gilbert Austin’s 1806 rhetoric on delivery, *Chironomia*, to find advice on gestures used by clergy, actors, and politicians in early nineteenth-century England.

After long neglect, attention to body language reemerged in our own time as “a topic of study in anthropology, linguistics, and psychology” (Kendon 73), primarily because of a continuing curiosity in the mental processes that underlie non-verbal communication. But this interest rarely shows up in studies of writing center work, even though one-to-one interactions between tutors and clients make attention to all kinds of communication crucial. A quick survey of writing center publications reveals few references to language beyond the word, and those too general to be helpful: “body movements, posture, proximity and use of space, bodily contact, hand gestures, head-nods, facial expression, eye contact and gaze, appearance, and paralanguage” send “*a lot of information, often conflicting information*” to clients (Claywell 13); tutors should study “body language, eye-movement, and facial expression” (Black 84); they should “avoid facial expression that could be misinterpreted by students. For instance, a student could negatively interpret a frown” (Phillips and Phillips 16); tutors should note that “keeping the arms unfolded, feet flat on the floor or legs crossed, with knees pointing towards a client indicates warmth and acceptance” (Amigone 26). We’re also told that clients with learning disabilities have trouble reading nonverbal behavior (Neff 92) and that clients from different cultures interpret “non-

verbal cues” differently (Matsuda and Silva 251). It does indeed seem true, as Nathan Ragland has claimed, that while fields like psychology and communication investigate nonverbal communication, “relatively scant literature on [that topic exists]” (4) in our field.

This continuing lack of attention to our talking heads and other body parts is striking—particularly when we consider the arguments for fuller transcriptions of writing center exchanges. Probably most influential is “Close Vertical Transcription in Writing Center Training and Research,” in which Magdalena Gilewicz and Teresa Thonus maintain the need for a record of “a more complete . . . tutorial interaction” (28) than a dialogue-like transcription, a record that could enable a tutor to pay attention “‘not only to what [is] said but also when and how. . . . The when and how seem to matter more than [the] actual words’” (25). They argue that transcriptions should signify not only overlapping comments and interruptions but also nonverbal features like laughs, coughs, and other physical signs: “a whole spectrum of linguistic utterances [should be] represented visually” (30). In a related context, one largely ignored by writing center researchers, discourse analysts have similarly encouraged attention to “something as faithful to ‘what was said’ as possible, and a way of writing it down that makes it reasonably easy to read” (Antaki).

Interest in thicker descriptions of client-tutor interactions has led us at the University of Louisville to invite new writing center tutors to practice videotaping, transcribing, and analyzing interactions—parts of television interviews, exchanges in movies and TV shows, commercials, music videos, and, finally, their own work with clients. For instance, each new tutor practices paying attention to details of body language and learning to represent those details in close vertical transcriptions by working with short video clips. To demonstrate how tutors go about this work, three extracts from transcriptions of the opening to one of these clips, an Elton John/Kiki Dee video, follow.

Example 1: ((E and K enter holding hands.))

E: Don’t go breakin’ my heart. ((smiles))

K: I couldn’t if I tried. . . .

Example 2: ((Elton walks in, holding the hand of Ki Ki Dee. Once they reach the microphone, he pulls her forward and places her in front of it.))

E: ((leans toward the microphone and moves to the beat, swinging his arm)) Don’t go breakin’ my heart.

K: ((stands much stiller than E and slightly leans into the microphone and shakes her head slightly)) I couldn’t if I tried. . . .

Example 3: Begins after the two singers have taken the floor and are standing in front of the shared microphone.

E: ((Leans toward the microphone, smiles broadly, and begins to swing both arms with the beat.)) Don’t go breaking’ my heart. ((Leans back and looks at K, still smiling. Turns toward camera, grins, and keeps arm still.))

K: ((Leans in slightly to microphone, shakes head slightly)) I couldn’t if I tried. ((Shakes hips gently)). . . .

These different versions—three of twelve—show an important limitation to close vertical transcriptions that use bare generic terms to document (and therefore oversimplify) non-verbal communication: not all movements and actions are the same; some laughs can indicate humor, some self-deprecation, some sarcasm. Yet while the details in the examples above might seem to create fuller representations—and might seem to enable the thick descriptions that allow for sound research and practice—each representation is necessarily partial, a version of the experience of the moment later recalled and interpreted. Variations in the amount and kind of detail recorded reflect varying interests, perspectives, and confidence in what we were doing.

Acknowledging partiality in a transcription of a Kiki Dee/Elton John video is a step toward acknowledging partiality in **any** transcriptions of **any** writing center work, a move important both for consultants who need to examine their own perspectives for what they value, trivialize, and/or ignore and for researchers who use close vertical transcriptions to document writing center interactions. However, partiality is not without its value. When University of Louisville tutors tape themselves working with clients and present close vertical transcriptions and

analyses of short sections of their videotapes, they say their self-conscious examinations of these texts teach them about their practices and their limits. One tutor's analysis told him that he needed to listen better: "better listening involves not only paying attention to the words used in this session [but looking] at body language"—his client's and his own—and recognizing that "exaggerated gestures are a physical way of talking over a person." Another discovered a rhetorical strategy he called "document-maneuvering" that he intended to use consciously in the future: "the sheet of paper, the [writing assignment] . . . , the document—anything on the table in the space between the tutor and the student—should be considered a prop. How each participant relates to the props says as much about the writing process as it does about how the participants relate to each other."

A tutor who taped her session with a deaf client-and-interpreter recognized that her own grand physical gestures (perhaps influenced by the signers around her) effectively supplemented her words, sometimes allowing for more direct communication between herself and her deaf client: she "(rapidly moves hand in small circular motions)," "(holds sheet up and raises and lowers right hand as she talks)," and "(pulls hands together in a bridge)." Finally, studying a tape and transcription helped a tutor recognize his tendency to ascribe his own ideas to the client, to "[beef] up [the client's thesis] into a more defined viewpoint." The tutor's body language suggested some uneasiness with this tendency: the ((s)) in the excerpt below identifies stabbing gesture made by the tutor's pencil on the student's paper:

Tutor: Really, everything you mention here [about Tarantino] is objectionable . . . , he steals ((s)), you know he's violent ((s)), you know he uses ((s)) his own music just, you know, and he has ((s)) a bunch of stuff that seems irrelevant ((s)).

Client: ((laughs)) yeah.

Tutor: And that's your paper, I think that's what ties it ((swooshes hands over paper)).

After analyzing the transcription, the tutor could interpret his stabbing motions as attempts to force his ideas into the client's paper.

As useful as transcriptions and analyses may be to the tutors themselves, how do we ensure their value for researchers? As critical theory reminds us, "discourse does not passively reflect or merely describe the world. Because language is action, different uses of language constitute the world differently. Events in the world do not exist for people independently of the language people use to make sense of them" (Mehan 262). Close vertical transcriptions are improvements over dialogue transcriptions of consultant-client exchanges, yet because they too are limited, Mehan reminds us that they can never be complete, can never be impartial. We must learn to question how we work with them: How reliable can transcriptions be when we fail to acknowledge that they are interpretations? Can consultants' intentions be recovered? Can clients'? Clearly, the excerpts above—from close vertical transcriptions that included some attention to body language—show consultants coming to realizations important to their work, but equally clearly, their realizations center on what they thought they alone meant in a session, and they necessarily ignore the client's intent. Thus, even when a consultant is able to record physical and verbal interactions in detail, and even while she **may** be able to recall intentions behind her own physical actions that she can include in her transcriptions, she can never **know** what underlies her client's actions or, consequently, guarantee the accuracy of her analysis. Can she be certain that his laugh is ironic? That his gestures signify (to him) enlightenment or acquiescence or submission? Her ignorance is intensified when the client comes from an unfamiliar culture; then meanings especially must be tentative and negotiated, not final, not based on fictions. The consultant's perspective is partial at best.

Moreover, as the transcriptions of the Elton John/Kiki Dee video excerpt demonstrated earlier, researchers make choices that can transform the same words and gestures to tell varied stories, perhaps entirely different stories. Any one of the three exchanges that follow the basic exchange below

TAKE NOTE

IWCA SUMMER INSTITUTE

Join co-chairs Michele Eodice (U. of Oklahoma) and Lori Salem (Temple U.), plus seven outstanding leaders, and 55 wonderful participants from across the United States and around the world, for in-depth and critical discussions.

The 2010 Summer Institute will be held at Quartz Mountain, a resort in southwest Oklahoma: <<http://www.quartzmountainresort.com/>. This is a departure from holding the Institute on a campus, but we think the getaway factor will contribute to a sense of retreat and to an intensified learning environment. Special room rate: \$89 per night.

The registration fee of \$800 will include all Institute meetings, supplies, and most meals. Full and partial scholarships will be available to defray the registration fee. (Stayed tuned for more details about how to apply for scholarships.) Registration opens February 15. Participation will be limited to the first 55 paid registrants.

If you have questions about the 2010 Summer Institute, please contact us:

Michele Eodice (co-chair and local host): e-mail: meodice@ou.edu; phone: 405-325-2937; Skype: michele.eodice.

Lori Salem (co-chair): e-mail: lori.salem@temple.edu; phone: 215-204-0709; Skype: lori.salem.

TAKE NOTE

CRLA-SPONSORED CONFERENCE

March 10, 2010

Queens University of Charlotte
Charlotte, North Carolina

Theme: "Fighting Isolation through
Program Integration: An Integrated
Approach to Academic Success"

Queens University of Charlotte is issuing an invitation to a conference on integrating a writing center and other center-for-academic-success programs. Topical discussion sessions will offer in-depth conversations with all participants, as well as techniques to further the relevance of academic student support services on your campus.

The College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) sponsors the conference's agenda which includes partnerships across campus, retention efforts, Student Disabilities Services for the comprehensive university, and tutor training and certification.

The CRLA is a group of student-oriented professionals active in the fields of reading, learning assistance, tutorial services, and developmental education at the college/adult level.

For more information, contact Ulrike Miles, milesu@queens.edu: 704-337-2209.

has the same likelihood of being "real," but which version or versions **should** we see? (Non-verbals are in bold and italics, C stands for Consultant, W for Writer.)

Basic Exchange (using the current method of close vertical transcription with few descriptive details):

C: I know that, at least for me ((gestures to chest)), my instinct is always to over-comma

W: ((laughs)) Uh-huh ((nods)).

C: instead of under-comma-ing, but I think that in that place

W: it doesn't need it. OK.

The following examples demonstrate how much difference modifiers can make in presenting the "reality" of the session.

Exchange One:

C: I know that, at least for me ((gestures to chest **arrogantly**)), my instinct is always to over-comma

W: ((laughs **nervously**)) Uh-huh ((nods **timidly**)).

C: instead of under-comma-ing ((**emphatically**)),
but I think that in that place

W: it doesn't need it ((**anxiously**))? OK ((**with relief**)).

Exchange One identifies the Consultant as being clearly in power and the Writer uncertain and malleable.

Exchange Two:

C: ((**mildly**)) I know that, at least for me ((gestures **weakly** to chest)), my instinct is always to over-comma

W: ((laughs **derisively**)) Uh-huh ((nods **broadly**)).

C: instead of under-comma-ing, but I think
that in that place

W: ((**boldly**)) it doesn't need it? OK ((**curtly**)).

Exchange Two reverses the power structure, revealing a Writer who is ready to dismiss the less-than-confident Consultant.

Exchange Three:

C: I know that, at least for me ((gestures **broadly** to chest)), my instinct is always to over-((**extremely emphasized**))-comma

W: ((laughs deeply)) Uh-huh ((nods **in mock seriousness**))

C: instead of under-((**extremely emphasized**)) comma-ing, but ((slightly emphasized)) I think that in that place

W: ((**finishing thought**)) it
doesn't need it?

OK ((**confidently**)).

Exchange Three shows a power structure with both Consultant and Writer willing to play with conventional roles.

Certainly close vertical transcription goes a long way in helping consultants and researchers "obtain much more information to work with" (Gilewicz & Thonus 46), but depending on the analysts' backgrounds, knowledge, and interpretive frames, transcriptions can describe dissimilar experiences. How a writing center consultant sees the exchange will determine what is recorded; another consultant might see differently, and on and on.

In a wider sense, these differences also reveal a complication with the research we do. No story can ever be complete; and even with thicker descriptions, close vertical transcriptions are, at best, limited and biased. But since they represent a kind of evidence we use in writing center research, we need to make sure that they are as reliable as we can make them—not only by improving on Gilewicz and Thonus's suggestions but also by including more of what shapes our choices and recordings of data and more interpretations of those data. In another context that similarly questions conventional assumptions of a

field, Fausto-Sterling recommends that

individual researchers articulate—both to themselves and publicly—exactly where they stand, what they think, and, most importantly, what they feel deep down in their guts about the complex of personal and social issues that relate to their area of research. Then let the reader beware. The reader can look at the data, think about the logic of the argument, figure out how the starting questions were framed, and consider alternative interpretations of the data. (9)

This articulation should remind us all that the full and accurate accounts we aim for in our research are simply our interpretations. Similarly, to suggest the limits of the single perspective, our research could include multiple and different transcriptions of the same parts of consultations; or interviews from clients to show their viewpoints on, intentions about, and interpretations of the exchanges we record; or links to videos that represent those consultations (which, of course, remain partial accounts). Gilewicz and Thonus suggest that more sophisticated work in writing center research should demand more sophisticated research tools (28), but even close vertical transcription practices need to evolve to do justice to writing centers and the work we do there: trying to uncover interpretations when we read and acknowledging the interpretations we write are ways to begin. ♦

(Author's note: special thanks to English 604 students Chris H., Kate P., Rob T., and John V., who contributed to this work.)

Works Cited

- Aldrete, Gregory S. *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999. Print.
- Amigone, Grace Ritz. "Writing Lab Tutors: Hidden Messages that Matter." *Writing Center Journal* 2.2 (1982): 24-30. Print.
- Antaki, Charles. *An Introduction to Conversational Analysis*. Discourse and Rhetoric Group, Loughborough University. Web. 10 Oct. 2006.
- Austin, Gilbert. *Chironomia; or, A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*. Ed. Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonssen. Carbondale: So. Ill. UP, 1966. Print.
- Black, Laurel Johnson. *Between Talk and Teaching: Reconsidering the Writing Conference* Logan: Utah State UP, 1998. Print.
- Claywell, Gina. "Nonverbal Communication and Writing Lab Tutorials." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 18.7 (March 1994): 13-14. Print.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*. Rev. Ed. New York: BasicBooks, 1992. Print.
- Fowles, John. *The Collector*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1963. Print.
- Gilewicz, Magdalena & Teresa Thonus. "Close Vertical Transcription in Writing Center Training and Research." *Writing Center Journal* 23.2 (2003): 25-49. Print.
- Howells, Wilbur Samuel. *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971. Print.
- Kendon, Adam. *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.
- Matsuda, Paul Kei & Tony Silva. "Cross-Cultural Composition: Mediated Integration of U.S. and International Students." *Second-Language Writing in the Composition Classroom: A Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Paul Kei Matsuda, et al. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006. 246-259. Print.
- Mehan, Hugh. "Beneath the Skin and Between the Ears: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation." *Understanding Practice*. Ed. Seth Chaiklin and Jean Lave. NY: Cambridge UP, 1993. 241-268. Print.
- Neff, Julie. "Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center." *St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Ed. Christina Murphy & Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008. 237-250. Print.
- Phillips, Paul Gary and Joyce B. Phillips. *Essentials of Tutoring*. NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. Print.
- Quintilian. *The Orator's Education, Books 11-12*. Ed. Donald A. Russell. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001. Print.
- Ragland, Nathan. *Writing Center Tutorials and Gender Differences in Nonverbal Communication*. MA Thesis. U of Louisville. 12/2005. Print.



GEEK IN THE CENTER

“CLOUD 9”

◆ Jackie Grutsch McKinney
Ball State University
Muncie, IN

“Cloud computing” is one of those terms that have recently gained momentum in the mainstream. In simplest terms, it describes computing done on the Internet instead of on stand-alone computers. Many current applications that work within your browser, that do not require you to download software, or that allow you to upload files to retrieve or share later foster this cloud computing. If you have ever used Blogger, Gmail, YouTube, or Flickr, you’ve cloud computed. According to a 2008 Pew Internet Survey, in fact, 69% of online Americans do some cloud computing, with webmail being the most popular (Horrigan). This month’s column introduces nine other cloud-based programs worth knowing about for their potential use in writing centers, administration, research, or teaching.¹

MOZY: AUTOMATIC BACKUP

Mozy is a program that automatically backs up your files online. You download Mozy onto your computer, select the files or type of files you want backed up, and Mozy backs up those files whenever they are created or modified. The program runs quietly in the background while you work on other tasks. If disaster strikes, it helps you restore your files.

- *Best for:* Not losing years of hard work because of virus, hardware failure, or theft.
- *Similar Applications:* Carbonite, Memopal, SOS Online, Wuala

DROPBOX: FILE STORAGE, SYNCHING, & SHARING

Dropbox is a program that adds a folder to your desktop called “Dropbox.” It works like every other folder on your PC or Mac; you can create subfolders and such. However, what is different is that everything you add to your Dropbox folder is copied to your online Dropbox account. This means that you can sync files across more than one computer; for instance, you could start writing a report on your work computer and pick up where you stopped on your home computer. Additionally, you can access or share your files from any computer or smart phone by logging into your online Dropbox account.

- *Best for:* Use it and you won’t have to e-mail files to yourself as you shuffle between computers. Also ends wondering where you’ve saved the most recent file. Great for a campus with several writing center locations; a file in the Dropbox folder updated at one site will be automatically updated at all.
- *Similar Applications:* Box.net, Syncplicity

SCRIBD: EMBEDDING DOCUMENTS ONLINE

Scribd is a site that allows users to upload documents (e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint, text, and pdfs) to embed into their websites or blogs. Scribd converts the documents to a format they call “iPapers,” which is something like a document player. Users can embed the iPapers or link to them, and viewers can see and page through the document right in the browser. Think of it as the YouTube for papers. Users can share documents across the Scribd community or set the document as private.

- *Best for:* Getting documents online quickly and having them in a readable/printable format that does not require downloading or leaving the browser. Would be good for handouts, manuals, or other information that readers might want to read online or preview before downloading or printing out.
- *Similar Applications:* Issuu

GOOGLE DOCS: ONLINE DOCUMENT CREATION, COLLABORATION, & SHARING

Google, of course, has a whole suite of cloud-based programs. Google Docs is their version of Microsoft Office; you can use it to create texts, spreadsheets, or presentations that are saved into your Google account. There are hundreds of templates available, and it is easy to export files as common office file types, including pdfs. Users can publish documents as web pages very easily as well. With each document you create or import, you can share it with others, allowing them to be readers or collaborators. Google automatically saves versions of your files, so you can always go back to see what changes another author has made since you last saw the document. Recently, Google Docs has enabled users to upload non-office file types, making it a place to backup or store all kinds of files.

- *Best for:* Collaborative writing, saves having to e-mail a document around and subsequent version confusion. Instead, one person

starts the document and invites others to join in.

- *Similar Applications:* Office Live Workspace, Huddle, Zoho Office

DROP.IO: CLOUD COLLABORATION

Drop.io (pronounced “drop-ee-oo”) is a file-sharing, real-time collaboration portal. From the home page, users can create a “drop” in one click. The drop includes the ability to upload and share files in real time and other unique features. Each drop, for example, includes a phone number for voicemail and an e-mail address. Users can call and leave a message (Drop.io converts your messages to audio files) or e-mail files to share. Drop.io can also be used for conference calls, for online presentations, and podcasting. Drops lend themselves to public consumption; an application like Dropbox or Google Docs will make sharing files easy, but Drop.io’s drops are formatted as meeting places.

• *Best for:* This application seems incredibly flexible, which makes it one of the more interesting ones out there, but it is hard to say that it will replace something that we used to do offline. That said, it would be possible to create a drop for each online tutoring session, or a center could create a drop for ongoing staff communication and collaboration.

- *Similar Applications:* Etherpad, Google Groups

SLIDESHARE.NET: PRESENTATION CLOUD

Slideshare is the YouTube for presentations (mostly PowerPoints, though it allows Word files and pdfs). Users upload completed presentations. In turn, slideshare converts them into slideshows that can be embedded in blogs or webpages or shared on social networking sites. Viewers can click through presentations without leaving the browser window. Creators can also add an audio track to the slideshow.

• *Best for:* Housing presentations on websites or blogs; tutorials; storing conference presentations for easy sharing and emergency backup.

- *Similar Applications:* Preezo, Prezi, Sliderocket

EVERNOTE: CLOUD NOTEBOOK

Evernote is a browsing and memory friend. Users sign up and download the program. They are able to add all sorts of bits (audio files, web pages, images, text) into “notebooks.” Users can create as many notebooks as they would like—one for “writing center sites” or “composition journals” or “to buy,” whatever. If you like, you can also download the mobile version of Evernote for your phone, which would allow you to add photos or audio memos quite easily. Evernote has pretty sophisticated photo searching that will even read the text in photos; and it has an available Firefox add-on that allows for one-click additions to your notebook.

• *Best for:* It can replace bookmarking on a computer with annotated, searchable, share-able notebooks available anywhere online.

- *Similar Applications:* Google Notebook

PIXORIAL: VIDEO EDITING, STORAGE, AND SHARING

Pixorial allows users to upload and store up to 10G in videos for free, with two additional neat features over a site like YouTube or Google Video. For one, it has an online video editor. (It is very basic, but sometimes basic is all you need.) It also will load videos you have physically in another form (VHS, DVDs, etc.) that you mail to them for a flat fee. Alternatively, if you upload a digital video to edit, you can purchase high quality DVDs of your creation.

• *Best for:* Converting and archiving writing center videos; simple editing; distributing videos.

- *Similar Applications:* Jaycut, Stashspace

PICNIK: PHOTO EDITING AND SHARING

Picnik is a web-based photo editor. Users upload photos and can use the very easy tools for adding text, cropping, and effects. Users can share photos seamlessly with other sites.

• *Best for:* For quick, easy editing or enhancing photos for websites, blogs, or print.

- *Similar Applications:* Fotoflexer, Photoshop.com, Splashup

The applications introduced here are just the beginning; there are hundreds of similar—and different—applications out there full of potential for use in writing centers and elsewhere in academia (look at <listio.com> or <http://emilychang.com/ehub/> for even more examples). As with any technology, one must weigh the benefits and costs, read the terms of use closely, and experiment; you might just find an innovative way to move your center to the cloud. ♦

Notes

¹ Each of these has a free version available that works on both Macs and PCs; most offer paid versions with added features or storage. All of these programs are .coms unless otherwise noted.

Work Cited

Horrigan, John. “Use of Cloud Computing Applications and Services,” *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. 12 Sept. 2008. Web. 10 Jan. 2010.



TUTOR'S COLUMN

QUITE CONTRARY

◆ John Brenner
University of Baltimore
Baltimore, MD

"I'm blocked," she gasped as she plunked into her chair next to me. "I don't know how to begin." The tutee's assignment was to design a family event for the local zoo that would attract new patrons, mostly parents with young children. With an embarrassed smirk, she showed me her instructor's comments on her first draft: "vague," "not directed to an audience," "needs more details." She revealed she was afraid to start, afraid to "fail" again. She had a vague idea what her professor wanted but was getting nowhere fast. I gave her a conspiratorial glance and suggested instead she write exactly the *opposite* of the assignment. That is, instead of trying to attract patrons to the zoo, she should try to repulse them. I, for one, don't like to be told what to do, I declared, but I'm usually happy to do the *opposite*. Why not try it?

Since she wasn't going to use any of the "wrong" material we'd come up with, I felt free to act as her partner in designing the event. That is, I wasn't too worried about asking leading questions or taking a bit of a lead in the brainstorming. We started with my question, "what's the *worst* thing children could do at the zoo?" Our answer: Shoot the animals. So we designed an event at which each child would be given a gun at the zoo entrance and the task of shooting as many animals as they could, checking them off a list as they proceeded from kill to kill. Children who completed the checklist would win a prize. We both agreed this was a tremendously horrid idea! I suggested, however, that it also had its virtues. So I asked her, "What is *right* about the event? What makes it *interesting*? What about it *works*?" In an ironic and faux-academic tone, she replied, "Well, it's interactive, the children are given an achievable task and a goal, and they are learning something about the animals (albeit how to kill them)." I recommended she jot down those virtues.

"Let's try another one," I proposed. We were beginning to feel a morbid pleasure in designing the worst possible event. (You could see it in our eyes, I'd bet). For our second attempt, we came up with the idea of feeding the children directly to the lions. Again, I asked her what was positive or right about this event. She answered that the children were learning what the lions ate (*them!*).

This was getting to be fun. One more try. This time, we decided to throw the children into the cages. Without my prompting her, she suggested, seriously this time, mini-environment playgrounds for the children, unthreatening "cages," in which the children would learn about how and where the animals lived. At each station, food that the animal would naturally eat would be provided (nuts, a lettuce leaf, and similar simple foods). At this point, she was scribbling notes and drawing diagrams furiously, without my saying much. In the end, she had two pages of notes and an outline for her event.

I call what we did in this session "the contrarian approach." True, my tutee's assignment seemed conducive to such a creative slant. However, even with a less creative assignment, such as a research paper or literary review, a contrarian approach could help the writer come up with interesting, or at least useful, ideas. In the "Overcoming Writer's Block" workshop I teach at the Academic Resource Center, I suggest a similar approach for answering sample prompts, such as "What caused the fall of the Roman Empire?" One student in the workshop answered that Spongebob Squarepants caused Rome's fall, a wonderfully cheeky answer! I asked why she thought her answer was wrong, beyond the obvious factual mistake. She opined that one person or one event probably couldn't bring down an entire civilization and there may have been several factors to consider. While that's not exactly an earth-moving insight, she was engaged immediately in the beginning stages of analyzing and writing, and we could have carried the exercise further to include listing what some of those other factors could have been.

How do I know when to use this contrarian approach? I try to look for any of these indicators in the tutee: frustration with the assignment, ironic detachment or boredom, missed chances for free-wheeling creativity, lack of ideas, or an already antagonistic attitude toward the assignment.

The more wildly contrary I can get the student to be, the better. It's an odd paradox, but the outrageously wrong direction has often led to an insightfully correct one. The contrary approach may not be suited for everyone, of course, such as the overly-serious tutee who comes in "all-business" or one who already has specific goals in mind for improving a paper. It's a judgment call. Mostly, I look for tutees who are frustrated early in the writing process or unhappy with what they've already produced.

Sometimes I've had to work to overcome the tutee's resistance against the contrary approach itself. My tutee in the zoo session and I had a history of comfortable and creative sessions, so she was receptive to a bit of "assignment sabotage." A frustrated tutee, however, might need particular encouragement to approach the assignment contrarily. To one I've said, "Look, you obviously aren't enjoying writing this essay. Instead of trying to be at your best, try to be at your worst. Jot down what you think are the most ridiculous ideas for this paper. Just get it all out." If a tutee is reluctant or too worried even to try the approach, the tutor could allay such fears by emphasizing the safe atmosphere of the session: anything goes because the tutee is in control of the session, and the instructor isn't going to see any of the preliminary work, only the finished, "right" assignment.

After recognizing that my tutee is open for the method and is open to experimenting, my first step is to intuit the kind of contrary suggestions that could lead to interesting ideas. For example, I suggested coming up with the most horrible possible event to the tutee with the zoo assignment. To a marketing student, I suggested he tell potential customers the worst qualities of the product he wanted to promote in an ad. To a tutee working on a research paper involving customer service at an airport, I suggested starting with a research question that would result in the opposite conclusions from what she needed.

In a typical 45-minute session, I've spent no more than 20 minutes using the contrary approach. Any longer and the tutee could mistakenly believe being contrary is the end and not the means. There's a ripeness I look for in the session. It could manifest itself as an "Aha!" moment, such as when my first tutee saw her correct event taking shape before her. In that case, I just got out of her way. For other tutees, I don't necessarily want to take the contrary ideas to the utmost. Rather, I look for the moment when we can re-direct the thinking to the serious assignment, the moment when I can tell the student is already thinking about it, even while working on the contrary. It's the point where we're ready to translate the wrong into the right.

At this ripest point, I try to get tutees to see the virtues of the contrary, misdirected position in order to redirect them to the needed, on-target paper. For me, this a big challenge: I don't want to take over the thinking from tutees. It's important for tutees to discover any virtues in the ideas generated by the contrary approach, along with ways out of the wrong and into the right. So I try to limit my involvement at this stage to asking questions. Here are a few I've tried:

- What *works* about your contrary idea?
- What basic, correct ideas underlie your "wrong" approach?
- What goals are common to your "wrong" approach and what the instructor expects?
- What's the *opposite* of what you've written or suggested?

Sometimes a little push helps if the tutee doesn't see any inherent virtues underlying the wrong ideas. If the fruit looks like it might rot on the tree (if the questions have failed), I give the tree a slight shake by suggesting a strength or two in the tutee's contrary ideas. This sometimes is all the tutee needs.

Ultimately, if the tutee was enthusiastically working on the contrary approach, I assume virtues and underlying correspondences really *are* there. Such engagement in the contrary approach can produce thinking that gets to the heart of a problem, even if we're approaching it from the opposite direction. *Something* about the wrong way could be working in the same way the right way works. The contrary ideas may be merely facing the wrong direction. We just need to turn them around. ♦



Muriel Harris, editor
The RiCH Company, LLC
260 E. Highland Ave. MH700
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Address Service Requested

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

February 5-6, 2010: Southeastern Writing Centers Association Mini-Regional Conference: The Carolinas, in Wingate, NC

Contact: Laura Bokus, lbokus@cccti.edu. Conference website: <<http://backtothetutor-carolinas.blogspot.com/>>.

February 6, 2010: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Burlingame, CA

Contact: Jennifer Wells, jwells@mercyhsb.com; conference NING: <<http://norcal-wca.ning.com/>>.

March 5-6, 2010: Florida/Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Fort Lauderdale, FL

Contact: swcaflorida@gmail.com; conference website: <<http://backtothetutor.blogspot.com/>>.

April 8-10, 2010: East Cenral Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI

Contact: E-mail: ecwca2010questions@gmail.com; conference website: <<http://writing.msu.edu/ecwca>>.

April 9-10, 2010: Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Monmouth, OR

Contact: Katherine Schmidt: e-mail: writingcenter@wou.edu; phone: 503-838-8234. Conference Web site: <<http://www.wou.edu/las/humanities/writingctr/PNWCA.php>>.

April 9-10, 2010: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Newark, DE

Contact: Melissa Ianetta and Barbara Gaal Lutz (lutz@english.udel.edu). E-mail: MAWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu; conference website: <<http://www.mawcaonline.org/2010/index.html>>.

April 10-11, 2010: New England Writing Centers Association, in Boston, MA

Contact: Kathryn Nielsen-Dube: 978-837-3551; Kathryn.nielsen@merrimack.edu; conference website: <www.new-ca-conference.com>.

May 25-28, 2010: European Writing Centers Association, in Paris, France

Contact: Ann Mott: amott@aup.fr. EWCA website: <<http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>>.

November 3-6, 2010. International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Baltimore, MD

Contact: Barb Lutz and John Nordlof. E-mail: IWCAconference2010@english.udel.edu; conference website: <<http://www.mawcaonline.org/iwca>>.