

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T E R

Volume 37, Number 5-6

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

Jan./Feb. 2013

— FROM THE EDITOR —

A new year can mean starting anew, but it can also be a time to take a fresh look at the tried-and-true, dig more deeply into what we think we know, and come up with new knowledge that enlarges and invigorates what we do. The authors of the articles in this issue of *WLN* have done just that.

R. Mark Hall challenges his tutors to ask questions that cause them to inquire more deeply into what they think they know, to assume an “inquiry stance” that sends them off to research their answers. Eric Sentell draws from principles of situational leadership to think about how individualized tutoring moves beyond the familiar dichotomy of directive/non-directive.

Do staff and faculty who work in writing centers view their jobs differently? Do they talk on the same frequency so that there’s no interference in their communication? When Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas surveyed both groups, they found differences not likely to be apparent in conversation. Can tutors who aren’t English majors be competent tutors? Alexandra Yavavrow considers how principles in her design major equip her to be a skilled tutor.

This issue of *WLN* is also, as you’ll see, somewhat overcrowded with job announcements, conference proposal calls, updates about IWCA’s Summer Institute, and the winner of the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing’s Maxwell Award.

The others who also work on *WLN* join me in wishing you a happy, productive, peaceful 2013.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

INSIDE

Problems of Practice: An Inquiry Stance Toward Writing Center Work

◆ R. Mark Hall ◆

Page 1

Situational Tutoring

◆ Eric Sentell ◆

Page 5

What’s Your Frequency?: Preliminary Results of a Survey on Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Writing Center Work

◆ Michelle LaFrance and
Melissa Nicolas ◆

Page 10

Tutor’s Column: “From the Interior Design Studio to the Writing Center: One Tutor’s Unconventional Journey to Designing a Tutorial”

◆ Alexandra Yavavrow ◆

Page 14

Calendar for Writing Center Associations

Page 16

PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE: AN INQUIRY STANCE TOWARD WRITING CENTER WORK

◆ R. Mark Hall

University of Central Florida

Orlando, FL

Once tutors complete a course of study or gain significant experience, they may feel done, certified to be effective writing consultants. With time, they may slip into familiar and unquestioned routines. Staff meetings may become narrowly focused on the practical, neglecting the writing center as a site of research and knowledge-making. But courses are just the beginning of tutor education. They scratch the surface of complex topics and nuanced debates in writing center work. And as tutors become more deeply immersed in the writing center, they discover areas of interest that are important to them, ones that may not have garnered much attention in the tutoring course syllabus or the staff meeting agenda. Tutors want to know more. They want to delve more deeply. They want to address challenges that become visible only with experience. Such self-motivated and ongoing study is needed if tutors are to engage in writing center work, not merely as something they do, but as a field of knowledge.

To address this need, I have created an assignment called the “Problems of Practice Inquiry.”¹ This assignment invites tutors to do the following:

- Form small inquiry groups.
- Identify topics, build background knowledge, and develop questions.
- Search for information, synthesize sources, and discover answers.
- Share what they learned and collaborate to

continued on page 2

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published bi-monthly, from September to June, 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 *Writing Lab Newsletter*. 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. Proper acknowledgement of title, author, and original publication date in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* should be included.

Editor:

Muriel Harris
(harrism@purdue.edu)

Assoc. Editor:

Janet Auten
(jauten@american.edu)

Development Editor:

Alan Benson
(bensonat@uwec.edu)

Assistant Development Editor:

Lee Ann Glowzinski
(glowzinski@duq.edu)

Book Review Editor:

Kim Ballard
(kim.ballard@wmich.edu)

Managed and Produced by

TWENTY SIX LLC
1835 E. Hallandale Beach Blvd #178
Hallandale Beach, FL 33009
(866) 556-1743
<www.writinglabnewsletter.org>
support@writinglabnewsletter.org

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures but can issue invoices through the website. Yearly payments of \$25 (U.S. \$30 in Canada) by credit card are accepted through the website or sent by check, made payable to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, to the address above. 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 (including Works Cited). Please send files to the *WLN* website.

generate a plan to act on that knowledge.

This article explains some key principles of the Problems of Practice Inquiry and describes examples of projects that have resulted from three years of using this approach to tutor education. Importantly, unlike the tutoring course, whose content is determined by the writing center director, the Problems of Practice Inquiry fosters tutors' questions and creates space to pursue agendas important to them. The purpose is not simply to solve problems or to correct practice. Its aim is to examine what we do and the rules and reasoning—the habits of mind—that govern what we do. One result is that, together, tutors develop a collective inquiry stance toward writing center work.

An “inquiry stance,” as Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle explain, “is perspectival and conceptual—a worldview, a critical habit of mind, a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice” (120). This habit of mind invites us to see writing center work not merely as a set of instrumental strategies or tasks, but as a process of research and knowledge creation. An inquiry stance includes ongoing questioning, wondering, researching, generating alternatives, testing, reviewing, and revising options. Three main processes are involved in an inquiry stance: question posing, collaborative conversations, and purposeful use of a variety of resources (Whitin 20).

QUESTION POSING

Key to a good Problems of Practice Inquiry is a researchable question that engages the local writing center community. A good question is one that specialists have wondered about and discussed, perhaps in writing center scholarship, perhaps in other disciplines. A good question is open-ended, allowing for a wide range of answers. Consultants need not begin with a clearly formulated inquiry, however. Some of the best questions emerge only after preliminary research, or in pursuit of some other question altogether. Consultants first need time to work in a writing center and to engage in close, sustained observation. They need time to build background knowledge. They need guided practice in framing questions and pursuing answers, sometimes to frustrating dead-ends. With these challenges in mind, the Problems of Practice assignment is best introduced long before consultants begin on their own inquiry projects. Working by example beforehand, writing center directors may draw attention to possible subjects of inquiry and relevant resources.

For instance, in his third week as a novice consultant, Jackson described a tutoring session in which he had worked with a student who was writing a paper about dyslexia. The tutee, Kyndra, explained that she had recently discovered that dyslexia was the cause, since childhood, of her reading and writing difficulties. In her paper, Kyndra explained that she wanted to inform others about what she had learned as a result of studying her disability. Jackson invited her to a staff meeting to tell consultants about dyslexia, to answer questions, and to explore strategies tutors might use to support writers like her. As this instance demonstrates, good questions emerge from tutors' work with writers, who, like Kyndra, may be invited to collaborate with writing center staff in inquiry-based learning. Inquiry is not a closed loop. Including tutees in writing center inquiry might lead them to join us, not only in formulating answers, but also in generating questions and going public with findings. This meeting with Kyndra led us to read Julie Neff's “Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center.” I recommended *The Writing Center Resource Manual* for additional reading (Silk IV.1). We also consulted local resources, including an expert in our campus Office of Disability Services. Such repeated modeling of question posing and resource gathering helps to engender inquiry as a collective habit of mind.

COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS

Good questions, which allow for alternative possibilities, encourage tutors to collaborate with one another in order to make shared understandings. “In its simplest terms,” write Alexandra Weinbaum et. al., “[C]ollaborative inquiry is the process by which colleagues gather in groups to pursue, over time, the questions about teaching and learning that the group members identify as important” (2). Questions with multiple and perhaps conflicting answers prompt consultants to negotiate dissensus, to accept sometimes uneasy disagreements among themselves and with experts. In another Problems of Practice Inquiry, Ezra and Tia questioned how writing centers are assessed. They began by wondering if students' papers were better after tutoring than before.

Together, they read widely about the challenges inherent in writing center assessment. Early work such as Harvey Kail and Kay Allen's "Conducting Research in the Writing Lab" and Janice Neuleib's "Evaluating a Writing Lab" helped to establish background knowledge. Neal Lerner's "Counting Beans Wisely" and "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the 'Proof' of Our Effectiveness" introduced some methodological complications. With so many variables to consider, making meaningful judgments about improvements in individual papers quickly proved more vexing than Ezra and Tia had first imagined. To learn more, they followed conversations on the WCenter discussion forum about formulating learning outcomes for writing centers (Cain). They examined assessment plans from other writing centers, considering outcomes statements and both direct and indirect measures. While they could see the value of formulating outcomes, Ezra and Tia also wondered about the limitations of such statements, taking up Gordon Wells' observation that outcomes may be both "aimed for" and "emergent." As he points out, "Outcomes of activity cannot be completely known or prescribed in advance; while there may be prior agreement about the goal to be aimed for, the route that is taken depends upon emergent properties of the situation—the problems encountered and the human and material resources available for making solutions" (58). An effective writing center assessment, then, would need to be flexible enough to capture unanticipated outcomes. This insight led Ezra and Tia to draw a connection to The Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project, developed by Bradley Hughes, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail (12). By valuing not merely improved papers or better writers, but the growth and development of tutors themselves, The Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project inspired these two consultants to see their own experiences as an important measure of their writing center's effectiveness. With this in mind, we set about revising our assessment plan.

Collaborative conversations generate collaborative work. In another Problems of Practice Inquiry, consultants began with observation over time of online tutoring in their writing center. One consultant, David, talked with staff at other writing centers to learn about the variety of available technologies and their underlying assumptions about writing pedagogy. As a result of his research, our writing center sought to make online consulting more consistent with face-to-face tutoring. To that end, we abandoned e-mail consultations, which, in our experience, tended to foster little back-and-forth collaboration. Alternatively, we embarked on a joint venture with the campus Center for Teaching and Learning to pilot a new method of distance tutoring, using a web-based platform of synchronous chat, live audio and video, and document sharing. David designed user documents for consultants and tutees, along with a web page of resources. The Center for Teaching and Learning designed and delivered training for tutors. Nevertheless, the pilot of the new platform revealed that users found it clunky and off-putting. Thus, David's project prompted further inquiry, including examination of alternative technologies for distance tutoring. This project illustrates a central principle of the Problems of Practice Inquiry: An inquiry stance is not aimed merely at efficient problem solving; rather, its goal is to be open to wonder, puzzlement, partial or provisional answers, and continued exploration.

PURPOSEFUL RESOURCES

Consultants use multiple resources in the Problems of Practice Inquiry to confirm and to complicate their observations of local practice and to generate ideas about intentional actions to address the questions they research. Sara's inquiry into reading is a good example. She began by noticing that she frequently works with clients on reading challenging texts. What, she wondered, do tutors do to support reading practices? How might writing centers enhance tutor education to give more attention to reading? Sara began by consulting resources from a course she was taking on reading pedagogy. While she found lists of strategies from her reading textbook, such as "questioning the author" (Beck, et. al. 389-90) comforting, W. Gary Griswold's "Postsecondary Reading: What Writing Center Tutors Need to Know" complicated her thinking, introducing the idea that different kinds of texts require different reading strategies, and thus different interventions, such as mapping and annotation.

“Fostering an inquiry stance toward writing center work, the Problems of Practice Inquiry is a powerful tool for the professional development of tutors.”

A second consultant, Simon, picked up on Sara's inquiry into reading. Immediately, he hit a dead end. A query to the blog PeerCentered yielded no response. I then posed a question about tutoring reading to the WCenter discussion forum. One answer reminded us to investigate local knowledge (Fels). Discussing their own wide variety of reading practices, consultants began to view tidy lists of strategies with skepticism. On the one hand, they provide good ideas, many of which are confirmed by tutors' experiences. On the other, strategies may be applied in a rigid, mechanistic way. A third consultant, Anna, interested in writing development among students with learning disabilities, posted several videos, excerpts from Richard Lavoie's *How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop: Understanding Learning Disabilities*, on our writing center blog. A segment about reading comprehension helped consultants to understand that, no matter what the reader's abilities, a bottom-up, skill-and-drill approach to learning vocabulary is ineffective. Proficient reading requires more than words. Readers need background knowledge to understand the context for words. Through multiple, intersecting tutor inquiries and a range of resources, consultants developed a deeper understanding of reading. As a result, they insisted on further study, including explicit attention to tutoring reading. With revisions to the tutor education course, texts such as Robert J. Tierney and P. David Pearson's "Toward a Composing a Model of Reading" now prompt consultants to consider the ways facilitating reading mirrors facilitating composing in a writing center.

CONCLUSION

Fostering an inquiry stance toward writing center work, the Problems of Practice Inquiry is a powerful tool for the professional development of tutors. It encourages tutors to join in conversations about writing center research, theory, and practice, to debate the merits of received knowledge, and to test it against their own experiences in local contexts. This assignment has worked well to structure weekly staff meetings, after novice tutors have completed a semester-long course in writing center theory and practice. In this way, the Problems of Practice Inquiry extends and develops tutor education beyond the course. Alternatively, other writing center administrators might include this assignment as part of a tutor education course. Whatever its placement, this project has proven equally generative for newcomers and veterans. Novices deepen their understanding of writing center studies, while old-timers, who may slip into an instrumental view of tutoring as merely a set of routines they do, are prompted to more reflective practice and enlivened by new ideas and forgotten professional conversations about tutoring. Although the writing center is not studied systematically, it is, nevertheless, a research site, a starting point for inquiry, whose findings are related back to the center, prompting further research. Rather than discrete steps in a linear progression, as the examples mentioned above illustrate, inquiry processes are recursive, overlapping, simultaneous. As tutors pose questions, look critically at the work they do, talk to one another, and explore a variety of resources, they generate new knowledge and initiate change. ♦

Note

1. R. Mark Hall has made the assignment, "Problems of Practice Inquiry," publicly available on the web: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7xy14m3vaombwau/RMHall_Problems_of_Practice_Assignment.doc>. Or to request a copy, contact him: <rmarkhall@ucf.edu>.

Works Cited

- Beck, Isabel L., Margaret G. McKeown, Cheryl Sandora, and Linda Kucan. "Questioning the Author: A Yearlong Classroom Implementation to Engage Students with Text." *Elementary School Journal* 96.4 (1996): 385-414. Print.
- Cain, Kathleen Shine. "Learning Goals-Outcomes for Writing Centers." WCenter. *Texas Tech University*, 2 Oct. 2010. Web. 8 Oct 2010.
- Cochran-Smith, Marilyn, and Susan L. Lytle. *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation*. New York: Teachers College P, 2009. Print.
- Fels, Dawn. "Re: Writing Centers as Reading Centers." WCenter. *Texas Tech University*, 29 Aug. 2010. Web. 8 Oct 2010.
- Griswold, W. Gary. "Postsecondary Reading: What Writing Center Tutors Need to Know." *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 37.1 (2006): 61-72. Print.
- Hughes, Bradley, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail. "What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project." *Writing Center Journal* 30.2 (2010): 12-46. Print.
- Kail, Harvey, and Kay Allen. "Conducting Research in the Writing Lab." *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs*. Ed. Muriel Harris. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982. 233-45. Print.
- Lavoie, Richard. *How Difficult Can this Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop: Understanding Learning Disabilities*. Films Media Group, 1989. *Films on Demand*. Web. 8 Oct. 2010.
- Lerner, Neal. "Counting Beans Wisely." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 26.1 (Sept. 2001): 1-4. Print.
- Neff, Julie. "Learning Disabilities and the Writing Center." *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*. Ed. Joan A. Mullin and Ray Wallace. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994. 81-95. Print.
- Neuleib, Janice. "Evaluating a Writing Lab." *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs*. Ed. Muriel Harris. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982. 227-32. Print.
- Silk, Bobbie Bayliss, Ed. *Writing Center Resource Manual*. 2nd ed. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA P, 2002. Print.
- Tierney, Robert J., and P. David Pearson. "Toward a Composing Model of Reading." *Language Arts* 60 (1993): 568-80. Print.
- Weinbaum, Alexandra, et. al. *Teaching as Inquiry: Asking Hard Questions to Improve Practice and Student Achievement*. New York: Teachers College P, 2004. Print.
- Wells, Gordon. "Dialogic Inquiry in Education: Building on the Legacy of Vygotsky." *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research: Constructing Meaning Through Collaborative Inquiry*. Ed. Carol D. Lee and Peter Smagorinsky. New York: Cambridge UP, 1999. 51-85. Print.
- Whitin, Phillis. "The Ties That Bind: Emergent Literacy and Scientific Inquiry." *Language Arts* 85.1 (Sep. 2007): 20-30. Print.



SITUATIONAL TUTORING

◆ Eric Sentell

Northern Virginia Community College
Annandale, VA

Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood state that “the purpose of tutoring is to meet the needs of individual writers” (1) while Muriel Harris emphasizes “personalized, individual help” (91). Yet I was ignorant of the importance of individualizing tutoring until I observed both new and experienced tutors who worked with every student identically, despite clear differences in each student’s needs. Upon reflection, I realized that I also gravitated to a standard tutoring method with little variation. But of course, “no single method of tutoring . . . will work effectively with every student in every situation” (Murphy and Sherwood 1). Such “auto-pilot” tutoring precludes individualized instruction (Harris 91) and “overlooks variation in student need” (Clark and Healy 245). Yet unreflective individualization can lead even experienced tutors into “trial-and-error” tutoring—trying various strategies until one works or the session mercifully ends (Harris 95). For these reasons, tutors need training in recognizing individual differences and how such differences influence the dynamic between tutor and student.

Though methods of training tutors to individualize already exist, I advocate a fresh perspective that can help both new and experienced tutors: Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard’s theory of Situational Leadership. A “Situational Leader” adopts the best leadership style for meeting a particular follower’s unique needs and developing that follower’s competence, confidence, and independence. The theory provides a systematic framework for those who do not naturally adapt their leadership. Though systematic, the framework is also very flexible since it emphasizes adapting one’s leadership to another person’s specific needs regarding particular tasks; as the person’s needs change, so does one’s leadership style. In a tutorial context, Situational Leadership can help new tutors individualize tutoring, refresh experienced tutors on “auto-pilot,” and reduce “trial-and-error” tutoring. Common sense? Yes. Natural behavior? No. Hersey and Blanchard have enjoyed 40-plus year careers at “the forefront of leadership studies” (Wren 144) as authors, lecturers, and consultants¹ precisely because the concepts of Situational Leadership are seldom implemented without training and conscious effort. Some leaders, or tutors, may intuitively identify and adapt to a follower’s, or student’s, needs, but I believe even the most intuitive leaders and tutors can be more effective if they are trained in Situational Leadership. Others, like me, may need training to individualize their tutoring in the first place. Also, Situational Leadership should not be considered an attempt to control students and their writing. It does not transform tutors into “leaders” who appropriate students’ sessions or texts; rather, it facilitates tutors’ efforts to empower students. A “Situational Tutor” uses Situational Leadership’s framework to better identify and adapt to each student’s unique needs, facilitating his or her development of competence and confidence.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPLAINED

Among contemporary leadership theories, Situational Leadership is most similar to writing center philosophy, pedagogy, and practice. The writing center hallmark is individualized writing instruction that develops a student’s writing abilities “from where the student is” (North 438). Similarly, Situational Leadership begins with identifying the follower’s starting point and individualizing leadership to best facilitate his or her growth. Other leadership theories assume fixed abilities and rule out growth; exalt one leadership style as the best and preclude individualized leadership; or focus on the leader and de-emphasize the follower’s development (“Leadership Theories”). Situational Leadership fits writing center values and practices better than any other leadership theory, and equally important, uses more accessible terms than other leadership theories. In the Situational model, there are four basic styles of leadership: Directing, Coaching, Supporting, and Delegating. Each leadership style consists of a combination of directive and supportive behavior (Blanchard et al. 31). Directive behavior may include explicit explanations, recommendations, modeling, and close supervision. Supportive behavior may comprise asking questions, offering praise or encouragement, and promoting responsibility. From Directing to Delegating, the amount of directive behavior decreases as the amount of supportive behavior increases. Again, there are clear parallels with writing center theory and pedagogy. To individualize tutoring is to provide a customized combination of directive and supportive behaviors, seeking, ultimately, to maximize supportiveness and minimize direction.

TAKE NOTE

MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

April 5-6, 2013

California, PA

“Writing Centers in 3D:

New Dimensions in Theory, Practice, and Research”

Keynote speaker: Kerri Jordan

California University of Pennsylvania

MAWCA will award both merit and need-based scholarships. For conference information, contact Kurt Kearcher: <kearcher@calu.edu>; (724-938-4585). Conference website: <mawca2013.wix.com/calu>.

MIDWEST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals

October 17-19, 2013

Skokie, IL

“Writing the ‘L’”

Keynote speakers: Ben Rafoth and Mary Adams Trujillo

Deadline for proposals: April 1, 2013

Conference chairs: Carol Martin: <chair@midwestwritingcenters.org> and Rachel Holtz: <treasurer@midwestwritingcenters.org>. MWCA website: <www.midwestwritingcenters.org/>.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Coordinator, Writing Resources Center University of North Carolina Charlotte

UNC Charlotte invites applications for the position of Coordinator of the Writing Resources Center (WRC) with tenure-track appointment at the rank of assistant professor in the Department of English.

Applicants must have an earned doctorate in rhetoric and composition or a related field, and a record of research publication. Experience in graduate as well as undergraduate teaching and experience in writing center tutoring and administration are preferred. Additional expertise in ELL and/or instructional technology is desirable. For additional information, visit the current site at <wrc.uncc.edu/>.

Please apply online: <jobs.uncc.edu>, and include a letter of application, your curriculum vitae, and the names of three references. Although applications received by November 15, 2012, were assured full consideration, recruitment will continue until the position is filled. Applicants subject to criminal background check. AA/EOE.



Director, Writing and Communication Center New Economic School (NES), Moscow, Russia

Qualifications: Master's or a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, English, TESOL, or related field; profound knowledge of writing center theory and WAC/WID principles; 4+ years of experience in teaching or tutoring written and oral academic communication at the undergraduate and/or graduate level; knowledge of Russian is preferred but not required.

Please send the following to Olga Aksakalova, Director of the NES WCC, at <oaksakalova@nes.ru>: Cover letter, CV, three letters of recommendation sent directly by recommenders to <oaksakalova@nes.ru>, and an academic writing sample (no longer than 20 pages). The successful candidate will be expected to start working in mid- or late August 2013. Information about NES can be found at <www.nes.ru/en/home/>. Student enrollment: 400-450 people per academic year. EOE.

To choose the appropriate leadership style, one must first observe the follower's competence (knowledge and skill) and commitment (confidence and motivation) with a given task (Blanchard et al. 49). In "How Tutors Model Students," Sharon Derry and Michael Potts support Situational Leadership's focus on these variables; each of the tutors in their study evaluated both competence and motivation when working with students (65). Situational Leadership posits four combinations, or "development levels," of competence and commitment, each corresponding to an optimum leadership style (55). In general, people with less competence with a given task need a Directing style whereas people with less commitment may need Coaching (specific direction plus support) or Supporting (less direction, more encouragement). Those with high competence and commitment can thrive under Delegating. Though this terminology seems negative, a crucial distinction must be made. Situational Leaders do not judge the person; rather, they judge the person's readiness to complete a task. As Blanchard et al. point out, everyone has had to develop competence and commitment with something, and it is often easier with appropriately tailored leadership (55).

Situational Leadership's goal is to correctly identify the follower's needs, adopt the most suitable leadership style, and develop the follower's competence (knowledge and skills) and commitment (confidence and motivation) so less directive leadership can be used effectively. It is a very dynamic, fluid model of interaction. A Situational Leader might shift from Directing to Delegating and back again multiple times, depending on the follower's experience, competence, and commitment regarding various tasks (Blanchard et al. 81). Similarly, a student may need both directive and non-directive tutoring in the same session, depending on his or her experience, various writing concerns, or progress within the session. Unless the tutor adapts as needed, the student could be forced to struggle with tutoring that fosters frustration rather than learning. If the tutor individualizes effectively, however, the student can gain knowledge and confidence.

Correctly identifying needs is crucial. Hersey and Blanchard caution against quick assumptions; rather, a "diagnosis [of needs] is based on the actual display of ability" instead of "beliefs about what followers should know" (46). Perhaps most importantly, Situational Leaders also communicate with their followers to set goals and determine the most appropriate leadership style to help them reach these goals (Blanchard et al. 82-3). Situational Leadership prevents "snap judgments" of someone's abilities, confidence, or motivation by reminding its practitioners to observe a person's actual behaviors as well as dialogue with that person about his or her needs.

While Situational Leadership goals sound like normal agenda-setting—negotiating a "mutually understood direction" with the student (Newkirk 313)—identifying a student's needs can be very different. Asking students what they want to work on often yields vague, unhelpful answers that neither set the agenda nor clarify the student's needs. Yet even the most specific agenda-setting does not tell the tutor whether the student learns best from a particular tutoring style. Instead, tutors consciously or intuitively judge students' competence and motivation based on their writing, verbal communication, behavior, and body language. The framework of Situational Leadership complements this judgment by preventing "snap judgments" and guiding observations.

Moreover, Situational Leadership prevents tutors from interpreting a student's frustration, apprehension, or diffidence as poor motivation, the most common error in diagnosing a follower's commitment (Hersey and Blanchard 46). A tutor operating under such assumptions about the student's knowledge or motivation would likely adopt a disastrous approach to the student, such as repeatedly encouraging the student to take responsibility for a problem that he or she simply does not know how to solve. Instead, the tutor trained in Situational Leadership can avoid false assumptions; determine if the "commitment issue" stems from apprehension, diffidence, unwillingness, or insecurity; and then adopt an effective strategy.

Apprehensive and/or diffident followers need encouragement and affirmation to motivate their work. Unwilling followers are characterized by defensive, argumentative, or complaining behaviors; they may be hesitant, resistant, or resentful (think “required visit”). Insecure followers may display uncomfortable body language, confused behavior, and fear of failure (Hersey et al. 197). They often question their abilities, focus on problems, and want the leader closely involved (198). Appropriate responses to both types include affirming improvements, giving information in “digestible” amounts, reducing anxiety, explicitly discussing the consequences of not fulfilling requirements, “encouraging and sharing responsibility for decision-making,” and “discussing apprehension directly” (Hersey et al. 202-05). Students who appear to shirk responsibility may really be struggling with deep insecurity and fear. Tutors must be able to accurately identify the students’ needs and then adjust accordingly.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPLIED

As explained before, Situational Leadership posits four general “development levels” that each correspond to an optimum leadership style. Table 1 summarizes the relationships among students’ development and tutors’ styles and methods (adapted from Blanchard et al.).

<u>Inexperienced</u> Low Competence + High Commitment	<u>Directing</u> Provide Specific Directions and Close Guidance
<u>Disillusioned/Frustrated</u> Some Competence + Low Commitment	<u>Coaching</u> Provide Specific Directions, Solicit Suggestions, and Encourage Progress
<u>Diffident</u> High Competence + Wavering Commitment	<u>Supporting</u> Facilitate Efforts, Praise Progress, Encourage Decision-Making
<u>Peak Performer</u> High Competence + High Commitment	<u>Delegating</u> Pure Minimalist Tutoring

Table 1: Relationships Among Students’ Development and Tutors’ Styles and Methods

At first glance, Situational Leadership appears to require multiple interactions. However, it is very applicable to one-time sessions and even brief discussions. When using Situational Leadership, tutors observe students’ competence and commitment regarding particular tasks. For example, a student might be a very competent rhetorician as well as highly confident. Such a “highly developed” writer can thrive under Delegating leadership. But what if this student has never used MLA style before? With this specific task, the student is inexperienced, probably diffident, and possibly apprehensive about plagiarism. Ascertaining the student’s experience and confidence with MLA (or any other task) requires little time. The student may volunteer a self-assessment, or the tutor might ask about his or her knowledge. The tutor can also observe the student’s writing and non-verbal cues. Then the tutor can adopt the most effective approach for the student’s needs, possibly progressing to Delegating and regressing back to Directing multiple times as the student comprehends or struggles (Blanchard et al. 81). Ideally, the Situational Tutor will develop the student’s competence, confidence, and independence as a writer, whether working with a “regular,” a one-time required visit, or a specific issue.

Kristin Boyd and Ann Haibeck’s case study, “We Have a Secret,” exemplifies Situational Tutoring. Haibeck’s student was struggling with her first attempt at film analysis. Haibeck observed that she was frustrating the student by “unintentionally quizzing” her with non-directive questions (14). Haibeck might have assumed the student was unwilling or unmotivated—rather than unable—to answer the questions and thus continued using non-directive methods, inhibiting the student’s learning. Or she might have recognized the student’s legitimate need for more explicit instruction on an unfamiliar topic but still used non-directive methods as the one-and-only “best” approach. Instead, she adapted to the student’s needs by offering directive examples of film analysis. Once the student understood these

TAKE NOTE

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Papers
April 12-13, 2013
Clarion, PA
Clarion University

The Writing Center at Clarion University is exploring the idea of language as “commons” and writing centers as sites of commons activity—like the Boston Common or the Critical Commons. We invite you to help think through ethical, philosophical, and practical questions on this theme. For suggestions about proposals on this theme: <ecwca.org/annual-conference/ecwca-2013-call-for-papers/>.

Deadline for proposals: Feb. 15, 2013.
Conference website: <ecwca.org/annual-conference/>. For further information, contact the conference chair: Chris McCarrick: (814-393-2739).

CANADIAN WRITING CENTRES ASSOCIATION

May 31, 2013
Victoria, BC, Canada
University of Victoria
“Writing @ the Centre”

For information, contact
<proposal@uvic.ca>.

TAKE NOTE

ALABAMA WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION

January 25, 2013
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Samford University
Birmingham, AL
"Building Rapport in Writing Center Conferences"
Keynote speaker: Glenda Conway

Lunch provided. A registration fee of \$5 may be paid upon arrival. For further information or questions, please contact Tony Ricks (256-216-6670); <tony.ricks@athens.edu> or Charlotte Brammer (205-726-2014); <cdbramme@samford.edu>.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
April 13, 2013
Sacramento, CA
Sacramento City College
"The Role of Writing Centers in Redefining Student Success: Sharing Our Practices and Research"
Keynote speaker: Tom Fox

NCWCA invites proposals for 15-minute individual presentations, 45-minute panels or roundtables, or 60-minute workshops. Conference information can be found at <www.scc.losrios.edu/Current_Students/Student_Services/Writing_Center/NCWCA2013.htm>.

examples, Haibeck returned to non-directive questioning (15). The non-directive "Supporting" style was inappropriate for the student's initial lack of competence and confidence with film analysis. By choosing the best approach for developing the student's abilities, Haibeck empowered her to receive Supportive tutoring and "become responsible for [her] own learning" (15).

Situational Tutoring can be effective for lower-order concerns as well. While a student and I were discussing commas during a recent session, the student showed that she did not understand when to use them. She believed commas were placed where "you take a breath" and "always before 'because'" and "sometimes 'and.'" Yet she leaned over her draft, pencil poised, contemplative. Regarding commas, she possessed low competence but high commitment. I chose a "Coaching" approach, alternating directiveness and supportiveness. I explained reading aloud as a proofreading technique and the use of commas as representatives of natural, brief pauses. I emphasized this strategy's benefit to her writing, and I framed her "always use a comma before 'because'" misconception positively: she consistently applied this rule and simply needed to learn the correct rule. Then I directly explained it. Asking non-directive questions would have wasted session time and conveyed that I was withholding expert knowledge, but my situational "Coaching" style proved empowering. Later, without prompting, the student read a sentence aloud and eliminated an incorrect comma.

These examples demonstrate that identifying and adapting to a student's needs can be as simple as listening, observing, and then exercising flexibility in one's tutoring. By simply listening, Haibeck discerned that her student did not understand film analysis, and I discovered my student's misconceptions about comma rules. Noting her student's frustrated tone, Haibeck adopted a Directing style to provide requisite knowledge and avoid further frustration and de-motivation. I observed my student's engaged body language and adopted a Coaching style to tap into her extant motivation while also providing empowering knowledge. Our dialogues afforded multiple opportunities to hear and observe the students' needs, and our pedagogical flexibility enabled effective adaptation to those needs.

Applying Situational Leadership to tutoring is neither an extreme pedagogical departure nor difficult to learn. During training, tutors should become aware of the diversity of students' needs and the necessity of adapting accordingly. Experienced tutors can vouch for students' diversity, tutors can view videos of diverse sessions, and/or tutors can discuss differences in their unique writing processes. From there, training might focus on refining perceptions of body language, voice tone, agenda-setting, and writing itself. Reflections on previous sessions, mock tutorials, modeling, or video-recorded sessions could provide good material for such analysis. Then tutors can practice different tutoring methods based on their correlation of a student's needs with a customized combination of direction and support (see Table 1). Most importantly, tutor training should strongly emphasize achieving the purpose of both Situational Tutoring and writing centers: to develop a writer's competence, confidence, and independence.

CONCLUSION

To be clear, I do not intend to create a new binary (flexible vs. inflexible tutoring or "auto-pilot" vs. situational tutoring) to co-exist with other binaries (directive vs. non-directive tutoring). Simplistic dichotomies cannot help individualize tutoring because they do not encourage awareness of individual differences, needs, and approaches. Tutors must diverge from "generic pictures of 'the student'" and instead work with "each writer in ways that are appropriate for that writer" (Harris 99-100). Rather than replace existing binaries and ideas, I propose "Situational Tutoring" as yet another perspective on writing center work. This perspective can be beneficial both inside and outside the writing center, as it offers accessible language for discussing our work with the uninitiated. Directors can use the model to explain the writing center's purpose and methods to professors and administrators. Former tutors can use its language to explain the interpersonal, communication, and leadership abilities they gained through tutoring. Tutors' skills are both transferable to and highly valuable in today's workplace, but they must clearly explain their abilities

to potential employers who may not understand writing centers. Situational Tutoring provides powerful language for explaining our work to diverse audiences both inside and outside academia.

According to Muriel Harris, writing tutors “must not and cannot engage in collaborative discussion and question-asking which is so generic that it doesn’t matter who is sitting there.” She calls for training “in the ways that people can differ as well as the ways such differences affect both writing and the instructional conversation” (91). I doubt there is a “best method” of such training, but I do believe Situational Leadership training can guide both inexperienced and seasoned tutors in “producing better writers” (North 438) with its systematic, yet flexible framework for customizing one’s directive and supportive behaviors to most effectively develop each writer’s competence, confidence, and independence. ♦

Note

1. After collaborating early in their careers, Paul Hersey created the Center for Leadership Studies and Kenneth Blanchard co-founded Blanchard Training and Development. Their respective companies have trained millions of professionals in Fortune 500 companies and other organizations throughout the world. They are co-authors of *Managing Organizational Behavior*, now in its 9th edition (“Dr. Paul Hersey”; “Ken Blanchard”).

Works Cited

- Blanchard, Kenneth, Patricia Zigarmi, and Drea Zigarmi. *Leadership and the One-Minute Manager*. New York: William Morrow, 1985. Print.
- Boyd, Kristin and Ann Haibeck. “We Have a Secret: Balancing Directiveness and NonDirectiveness during Peer Tutoring.” *Writing Lab Newsletter* 35.3/4 (2010): 14-15. Print.
- Clark, Irene and Dave Healy. “Are Writing Centers Ethical?” *Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*. Ed. Robert Barnett and Jacob Blumner. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008. 242-59. Print.
- Derry, Sharon and Michael Potts. “How Tutors Model Students: A Study of Personal Constructs in Adaptive Tutoring.” *American Educational Research Journal* 35 (1998): 65-99. Print.
- “Dr. Paul Hersey.” Center for Leadership Studies India. *Center for Leadership Studies*. Web. 7 July 2011.
- Harris, Muriel. “Working with Individual Differences in the Writing Tutorial.” *Most Excellent Differences: Essays on Using Type Theory in the English Classroom*. Ed. Thomas Thompson. Gainesville: CAPT, 1996. 90-100. Print.
- Hersey, Paul and Kenneth Blanchard. “Revisiting the Life-Cycle Theory of Leadership.” *Training and Development Journal* (Jan. 1996): 42-47. Print.
- Hersey, Paul, Kenneth Blanchard, and Dewey Johnson. *Managing Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice 1996. Print.
- “Ken Blanchard.” The Ken Blanchard Companies: The Leadership Difference. *The Ken Blanchard Companies*. 2011. Web. 7 July 2011.
- “Leadership Theories.” Changing Minds. *Changing Minds*. 2011. Web. 7 July 2011.
- Murphy, Christina and Steve Sherwood. “The Tutoring Process: Exploring Paradigms and Practices.” *St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. 3rd ed. Ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008. 1-24. Print.
- Newkirk, Thomas. “The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference.” *Longman Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*. Ed. Robert Barnett and Jacob Blumner. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2008. 302-15. Print.
- North, Stephen. “The Idea of a Writing Center.” *College English* 46.5 (Sept. 1984): 433-446. Print.
- Shamoon, Linda K. and Deborah H. Burns. “A Critique of Pure Tutoring.” *Writing Center Journal* 15.2 (1995): 134-51. Print.
- Wren, Thomas. *The Leader’s Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*. New York: Free Press, 1995. Print.



IWCA Writing Center Summer Institute: June 23-28, 2013

The International Writing Centers Association (an NCTE Assembly) annual Summer Institute will be held on the beach June 23–28, 2013 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The Summer Institute is ideal for current or would-be writing center directors and assistants, writing program administrators, tutors, writing teachers, curriculum developers, graduate students, new PhD’s, and academic leaders—both in the U.S. and abroad. Institute leaders offer presentations and roundtable discussions on a variety of topics that connect theory and practice. Leaders are available to meet one-to-one with participants throughout the week. Enrollment is now open and limited to the first 30 registrants. Scholarships are available. For more information, visit <iwcasummerinstitute.org/> or contact the institute co-chairs: Kevin Dvorak <kdvorak@nova.edu> or Ben Rafoth <brafoth@iup.edu>.



Clint Gardner Wins 2012 NCPTW Maxwell Leadership Award

Clint Gardner, Student Writing Center Coordinator for Salt Lake Community College, has won the 2012 Ron Maxwell Award for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing.

The award recognizes a professional within the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing organization for dedication to and leadership in collaborative learning in writing centers, for aiding students in taking on more responsibility for their learning, and, thus, for promoting the work of peer tutors. Its presentation also denotes extraordinary service to the evolution of the conference organization.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Studio Coordinator—Communication Eastern Kentucky University

The Noel Studio for Academic Creativity in collaboration with the Department of Communication at Eastern Kentucky University seeks to fill a 12-month Noel Studio Coordinator position beginning Fall 2013.

Masters degree in Communication or Communication-related field is required. Review of applications will begin March 18, 2013 and will continue until the position is filled. Application materials should be submitted online at <jobs.eku.edu/applicants/Central?quickFind=71342> and should include a cover letter and curriculum vita. Eastern Kentucky University is an EEO/AA institution.



Writing Center Director Carson-Newman College

Carson-Newman College invites applicants for an Assistant Professor English and Writing Center Director in the English Department. The position is full-time and tenure-track, to begin August 2013. <www.cn.edu>.

Required: Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition or a Ph.D. in English, specializing in Composition, Rhetoric, Writing Across the Curriculum, or Writing Center administration. Additional specializations in business, technical, professional, and scientific writing is preferred.

To be considered, please send a letter of interest, references, and current vitae to: Dr. Naomi Larsen, Associate Provost
Carson-Newman College
2130 Branner Avenue, Box 71989
Jefferson City, TN 37760

E-mail: <associateprovost@cn.edu>;
Phone: (865-471-3471); Fax: (865-471-3502).

WHAT'S YOUR FREQUENCY?: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF A SURVEY ON FACULTY AND STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON WRITING CENTER WORK

◆ Michelle LaFrance, *UMass Dartmouth, North Dartmouth, MA*

◆ Melissa Nicolas, *Drew University, Madison, NJ*

What difference, if any, does the human resources category (staff, tenure-track or non tenure-track faculty) make to an individual's work practices? Our project attempts to answer that question. This work began in Spring 2010 during one of our weekly administrative meetings, while Michelle was Interim Director of the Writing Center at Drew University and Melissa was Coordinator of the WAC Program. Over soup and salad, our conversation turned toward the observation that, at times, we felt as if we were communicating on a different frequency than members of our staff were tuned in to; conversely, we sometimes felt that when our staff were speaking to us, we had a difficult time tuning into their thoughts and questions about our work.

We wondered if the different frequencies we were on—Michelle and Melissa on the faculty-administrator channel, our assistant director on the staff channel, and our peer tutors on the student-worker channel—were causing the static. In what ways, for example, might a staff member and a faculty member think differently of their writing center work? As scholars with professional interests in writing center work, we (Michelle and Melissa) acknowledged how much our work identities have been bound up with the writing centers we work in and the larger field of writing center research and scholarship. But, did it make sense—was it even really fair—to expect that everyone who worked with and for us felt the same way? After all, no matter how committed to the writing center's success the staff and tutors were, none of them expressed a desire to make a career in the field the way we did. For most of the people in our writing center, the work was a job: a way to pay bills, gain experience, help fellow students. These reasons for working in the writing center were legitimate and reasonable; we had a great staff. But as faculty who conducted academic research on writing centers, we realized we may see our writing center from a very different standpoint than our staff. What relationship might there be between a job classification and the amount of time a director spent in the center or on campus each week? Would we see differences in where staff or faculty completed most of their work? How might misperceptions about the nature of our work correlate with misperceptions of an individual's educational background, position in the university, or duties? In short, how might HR designations act to organize the work of writing centers?

OUR PROJECT'S FRAMEWORK: INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*, sociologist Dorothy Smith suggests that individuals' positions in organizations cause them to participate in the institution in particular ways. For Smith, this *standpoint* arises out of the interplay between the material conditions of an individual's work (for instance, where she conducts the majority of her work—in a classroom, office, or center) and that individual's social alliances (how she or the institution might define her professionally) and how these notions may or may not connect that individual to different networks within that institution (whom does she have access to, when, and why?). Smith argues that we must examine our "everyday experiences" within institutions to understand what most influences our daily practices, motivations, and attitudes (37-40). Institutions are social organizations that are rule-driven. Professions, one form of institutional organization, and their practices are particularly rich sites to interpret in terms of standpoint because professions bind individuals to particular practices through the force of cultural norms, institutional standards, and beliefs about the value of particular types of work. Concepts like standpoint explain how people who work in a writing center could share the same work—and even portions of the same work day, location, and mission—and yet have entirely different perspectives upon the nature, scope, and purpose of the work they do. Standpoint, in other words, helps explain the multiple channels and frequencies that are simultaneously operating in the writing center. Our first goal for this project, then, was to begin to tease out some of the different standpoints that operate in the writing center network.¹

OUR DATA COLLECTION AND INITIAL FINDINGS

Attempting to account for various standpoints in the writing center community is no simple task; as soon as we started to think about all the variations in job descriptions and related work practices in just our writing center, we were struck by the size of our task. For example, at our small liberal arts college we had undergraduate tutors, graduate tutors, an administrative assistant (staff), an acting director (visiting faculty), and an unofficial faculty advisor (permanent faculty). Therefore, to begin our investigation, we went to the WCenter listserv where we were certain to reach a large number of writing center workers. During the summer of 2010 and then again in October of 2010, we sent a request asking for participation in a survey about faculty and staff perspectives on writing center work. In hindsight, we realize this choice reveals something about our own standpoint: as faculty-administrators in the writing center community, we both subscribe to and regularly read WCenter. Our pool of respondents suggests that we are not alone; the vast majority were active leaders in the writing centers on their campuses—directors, coordinators, administrators, and scholars whose career work is shaped in some way by their affiliation to and with writing centers. Indeed, because the bulk of responses were from writing center leaders, not from tutors or other staff, we decided to analyze (for this preliminary report) only the responses of those faculty and staff who identified as having a primary leadership or administrative role in their centers.² While we recognize that the titles of these individuals vary from institution to institution, for the ease of identification in this article, we will refer to these respondents as “WC administrators.”

We had a total of 154 responses from WCenter members identifying themselves as writing center administrators (directors and assistant directors) in staff or full-time faculty positions. While WC administrators occupy just one of the many standpoints in the center, the responses from this group reveal some interesting information. For instance, the tables below tell us that there is a relationship between the HR ranking of an individual and the number of hours an individual may work on a weekly basis. They also tell us that HR classification correlates with how much time individuals actually spend in a center itself. Consider, for example, responses to the questions: “On average, how many hours a week do you work?” (Table 1) and “How many hours of your work week do you spend in the actual writing center?” (Table 2).

Hours per week	Staff N=42	Non-TT Faculty N=25	TT Faculty N=49
11 to 20	7.3%	4.2%	0%
21 to 30	2.4%	0%	2.1%
31 to 40	46.3%	25%	14.6%
40 plus	43.9%	70.8%	83.3%

Table 1: Hours worked per week

Hours in the Center	Staff N=42	Non-TT Faculty N=25	TT Faculty N=49
All Time	45%	16.7%	2.1%
2/3 Time	20%	16.7%	20.8%
1/2 Time	5%	16.7%	18.8%
1/3 Time	12.5%	37.5%	18.8%
Most Outside	17.5%	12.5%	39.6%

Table 2: Location of Work

In terms of average hours per week, members of both faculty groups reported working more than 40 hours per week on average while the majority of the staff group reported working an average of 31-40 hours per week. This finding alone seems significant, not as an indictment of anyone’s work ethic, but rather in terms of relationships to work-related tasks. If faculty see their work week as open-ended (nights, weekends,

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Saying Goodbye

For the last five years, Mike Mattison has served as one of WLN’s two Associate Editors, and as he rotates off the editorial staff, we bid him goodbye with much regret and deep appreciation for his unique abilities and cogent comments. Imbued with a writing-centered perspective, Mike nurtured potential authors and coaxed the best from reviewers. Many articles in *WLN* are stronger and more coherent because of Mike’s guiding hand. We shall miss him, and we thank him for his dedication and many contributions to *WLN*.



Tweet WLN? “Like” WLN?

If your writing center and/or tutors have Twitter accounts and/or Facebook pages, we invite you to “follow,” “tweet,” “like,” and/or “post” on our Twitter account and Facebook wall. You can post news of your writing center, photos, online resources, conference notices, other news you wish to share, and links other writing center folk would be interested in.



@WLNNewsletter



Writing Lab Newsletter



International Writing Center Blog



“Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders” is a blog intended for those of you in writing centers around the world to share blog entries, photos, questions, resources, and comments about topics relevant to your work. There is a link on the *WLN* home page, or connect directly to the blog at <www.writinglabnewsletter.org/blog/>.

holidays all fair game) and staff see their work week as finite (work begins and ends at a certain time, with clearly delineated break periods), there are bound to be times when people speaking the same language and agreeing on the same goals can enact that language and those goals in very different ways.

According to our data, the faculty director will probably spend most of her time outside the writing center, popping in and out in between the myriad other things she does while on campus. And, she may even try not to come to campus, or at least the writing center, in order to do some research, catch up on e-mail, write grant applications, and the like. Those with faculty positions most likely will order their work around tasks related to tenure, promotion, and/or contributing to a broader campus culture. The staff assistant director, on the other hand, most likely spends her entire work week in the writing center, dealing with the everyday business of running the center. Because of this limited movement within and across the various locations for instruction, administration, and research-development, it may be difficult for someone in this position to see or feel a part of the bigger picture. When both of these people think about what is best for the writing center, the way they relate to the writing center as a work space—their standpoint—inevitably filters their responses. They might misunderstand the degree of freedom and responsibility the other has, simply due to the ways these standpoints do and do not allow them to view the center and the center's activities. Another notable finding is that the overwhelming majority of people with tenure and tenure-track positions hold doctorates. By a smaller margin, the same is true for those with non-tenure track faculty positions; however, the majority of people in staff positions hold at most Master's degrees (Table 3).

Hours in the Center	Staff N=42	Non-TT Faculty N=25	TT Faculty N=49
Bachelor's	31%	0%	0%
Master's	64.3%	45.8%	16.3%
Doctorate	4.8%	54.2%	83.7%

Table 3: Highest degree held

These data suggest a tiered or stratified system within the writing center community. We are struck by the relationship of this finding to common arguments in writing center studies that directors should hold faculty appointments (Simpson). In light of our realizations about how our own standpoints have influenced the ways we approached this study, we cannot help but wonder how influential the standpoints of advocates for tenure-track appointments may also be on the prevalence of this discourse in the field. After all, those with faculty positions and the pressure to publish are usually the ones creating such arguments. Some of our findings, particularly those we examine below, do seem to echo the arguments that have been made for tenure-track faculty positions. However, because our data also represent responses from a significant number of people who run writing centers and hold Master's degrees and staff positions, we believe that further study is needed to more explicitly understand how these job classifications may make actual differences in the daily practices of writing centers. Without more information about the day-to-day realities resulting from different HR classifications, it is likely that the arguments for faculty writing center directors will only remain clear on one of the many channels playing in the writing center community. This idea of multiple standpoints and their connections to HR designations led us to consider the ways different frequencies might also lead to any number of misconceptions about the work life, influences, motivations, and attitudes of others within the writing center community. Keenly interested in what we might discover here, we asked:

Staff: What misconceptions, if any, do you think faculty and administrators have about your position?

Faculty: What misconceptions, if any, do you think staff and administrators have about your position?

Both staff and faculty WC administrators responded quite candidly, if not in altogether unsurprising ways. The trends we've identified in their responses demonstrate the degree to which we may or may not understand one another's daily existences.

Of our 42 staff respondents, eight stated that perceptions of them and their work were products of the prevailing notions that writing centers are "fix-it shops." This in itself was less ground-breaking than confirming of our own experiences in multiple institutions; writing centers and their professionals still do often struggle to shake off the image that those who work in them, regardless of professional background and institutional designation, live to make sure that no comma goes misplaced. Related to this finding, the most marked trend in staff responses to this question was a sense that as staff they are not recognized as educators by others in their institutions. Examples of staff responses:

- I suspect that many administrators and non-English faculty believe that I am an administrator rather than part-administrator, part-teacher. I have as much or more student contact as any instructor, but my title is "supervisor" and I have "staff"

status.

- They don't understand what the tutors or I do, my professional (rhet/comp) qualifications, or my time commitment in my complicated job.
- Because I am half-time staff, I do not believe faculty consider me a professional.
- Administrators don't realize how much teaching and student-interaction I have on a daily basis.

We also had 80 faculty (tenured/tenure-track and non-tenure-track) respond to the question about misconceptions of their position. Tellingly, seven of these respondents also felt that misconceptions of the writing center as a location for remediation somehow determined their professional identities. But also a number of faculty felt that WC staff and non-WC administrators understood neither how much time and effort it took to run a writing center (especially the administrative elements of the work) nor the value of their work to the campus community outside the center:

- Some don't realize that I am a tenured professor; some don't realize I work many hours at home.
- [They consider it] 'luxurious' release time; [little] awareness of workload and heavy clerical/administrative commitment to the Center . . . much more than a .25 addition to my job/workload.
- That it is a non-faculty position (perhaps because it is non-teaching). Also, little understanding of what is involved in managing a tutoring program (particularly HR-related tasks and procedures) and the amount of time it takes to adequately develop, implement, and assess the program (including in relation to the institutional Strategic Plan.)
- That it is equivalent to a traditional tenure-track position in the English department (in terms of work load). I often feel like I work 2-3 jobs.

These responses resonate with the demographic data in the table above—those who identify as faculty discuss concerns over workload expectations, time management, and the prestige of their work on campus. Those who identify as staff discuss being perceived in ways that are less visible and are granted less value by the institutions they work for. It is also worth noting here the ways in which tenure-track faculty responses echo the concerns over prestige and value present in staff responses. A number of our faculty respondents also seem to feel that their colleagues do not recognize their expertise, the labor-intensive nature of their work, and the value of their efforts on campus—all elements of prestige within a university setting. Our research suggests further questioning about the ways that HR designation and/or classification correlate with the ways individuals go about their jobs. We note the limits of what we can say about staff versus faculty experience based upon pilot survey data, even as we stress the ways in which the findings we've discussed lead us to think further about shared experiences within the classifications that order our working lives. Our questions about HR designation seem timely, especially in light of increasing financial pressures on our colleges and universities. Decisions about hires—staff versus faculty, tenure track versus non tenure track, the availability of professional development opportunities, our very working conditions—are clearly tied to financial decisions about how and when lines are funded. The ways HR designation makes a difference to the scope and nature of work in and around a center seems an important context to further explore so that we may better understand the day-to-day organization of our field. ♦

Notes

1. Our project draws not only from Smith's work, but also from researchers such as Cindy Johaneck, who have argued that writing researchers have increasingly valued the context surrounding and informing research sites and questions. In *Composing Research* (2000), Johaneck argues that an attention to our everyday contexts allows us to both effectively personalize and vary our approaches according to our research needs and to more deeply understand the very particular situations of our research interests (78). It is exactly this notion of "context" that the everyday nature of our institutional experiences calls up.

2. We now realize that to understand the perspectives of the larger writing center community, we cannot rely only on what is comfortable and familiar for us as scholars and administrators. As this project moves forward, we will continue to reach out to multiple populations, connecting with the writing center directors and writing program administrators at peer institutions near our own universities to make local introductions and to extend our reach. We will also call on our colleagues who use the list to help us connect with individuals they may know locally or professionally who do not use the WCenter list or regularly attend national conferences.

Works Cited

- Johaneck, Cindy. *Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2000. Print.
- Simpson, Jeanne. "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns." 1985. International Writing Centers Association. Web. 7 June 2011.
- Smith, Dorothy. *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. Lanham: Alta Mira, 2005. Print.



TUTOR'S COLUMN

FROM THE INTERIOR DESIGN STUDIO TO THE WRITING CENTER: ONE TUTOR'S UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY TO DESIGNING A TUTORIAL

◆ *Alexandra Yavarow*
Endicott College
Beverly, MA

I sometimes feel a little bit out of place in the Writing Center. I come from a major that does not put as much emphasis on writing as some others. My sustainable interior design major focuses on interior architecture and design and how the two can be tailored to benefit the environment and consumers. It is a technical major with applications in art, science, math—and not so much in writing. Surrounded by peer and professional tutors with backgrounds in English, creative writing, or communication, I sometimes doubt whether I can conduct tutoring sessions as successfully as they can. What I needed to do is reset my outlook from thinking an interior design background is a hindrance to my tutoring to seeing it as a benefit.

What fascinates me about my major is that it is one of the few fields that utilizes both parts of the brain—the right (often called the creative side) and the left (often referred to as the technical side). The field is definitely not just about pillows and window treatments. Writing parallels interior design in that it also is both creative and technical. Creative ideas, sentence structure, word choice, and flow all make for an interesting paper, while proper grammar, spelling, and formatting make a paper technically sound.

As a student of interior design and architecture, I am taught to convey ideas often through images, diagrams, and plans rather than through words. When I am actually required to write, I write concept statements, or concise and expressive descriptions that highlight a project in as little as four lines. Even my textbooks instruct students to write as few words as possible while still conveying a strong and purposeful idea. While it may seem these teachings would hinder my tutoring skills in the Writing Center, I have instead used the knowledge from my teachers and textbooks to help in sessions. For example, I have had a couple of students tell me that they had completed plenty of research but could not seem to get thoughts out on a page. In these situations, I revert back to the ways of my major and simply ask the students to give me short phrases or sentences that convey important ideas in their research. These short phrases or sentences are like the broken-down parts of a future whole. As these informative yet loosely connected words, phrases, and sentences flow from the students, I jot them down on a piece of paper. By the end of the “free flow,” we can look at the short yet descriptive ideas on paper and often easily ascertain a strong direction for a paper. Interior design may be focused around diagrams, images, and plans, but writing can also be broken down into these individual segments and phrases to get to a final result.

After a day spent working with spaces and voids in an interior layout, I must transition into a tutoring session working with black text on a white page. However, when I tutor, I try to use my non-conventional background in the design field as a platform from which to develop a strategy for approaching a tutoring session. I have noticed that my techniques in tutoring at the Writing Center often mimic the way I approach a design assignment, and this parallel has been very helpful in making my tutoring sessions successful. For instance, when I start a design project, I begin by gathering bits and pieces of information to create a concept that can be used toward a final goal. This is also the stage of design where I plan what needs to be included in the project and how much square footage is available. The way in which I approach a tutoring session is similar. I start all my appointments with a minute or two of conversation, chatting casually about the bits and pieces of information I need to know to successfully guide the student to an end goal. It is beneficial to get an understanding of the assignment requirements and what needs to be included in the paper, just as it is beneficial to determine programming and square footages in design.

In the interior design world, another step in a design project is to work schematically. This involves quick sketches, diagrammatical planning, and a bit of organization. Within a tutoring session, the process is similar. This is the phase where I often help the student to create a “reverse outline,” or an outline highlighting topics in a written draft of a paper to make sure the intent of the paper is on track. Like schematic design, this writing approach allows the student to organize thoughts, recognize which ideas are similar and important, and progress forward to the next step in the writing process.

Design development refers to the phase of design in which plans are created, finishes are chosen, and most of the ideas come together. The “design development” of a writing piece is the step in which I work with the student to extract further details and develop deeper thoughts and ideas. We may look at specific sections or passages together, address grammar or clarity issues, and make sure that all ideas support a strong thesis statement or idea. This is also the phase in which my interior design background really comes in handy. Interior design projects often have a concept or a partí, which is a motif that runs through the entire project from beginning to end. If designers do not develop their concepts thoroughly, then the end results may fall flat. Because I have been trained to carry out these concepts from the beginning of a project to the end, I am also able to extract more and dig deeper to bring a thesis statement all the way through a paper in a developed way. Situations like these make me realize that a tutor does not necessarily need to come from an English background or a creative writing background. Sometimes, a tutor with a major like interior design can view a paper with a different perspective.

Before reaching the final stage of a design project, the designer must understand that the first idea is not necessarily the best idea. Designing is all about reworking ideas. New plans are drafted. Different finishes are selected. The pencil comes out and makes changes. There are always last-minute changes before a design is finalized. Sound familiar to the writing world? Here, too, the first idea is not necessarily the best. Writers need to understand that the ideas or the direction of their papers will likely change at least once throughout the writing process. I try to explain that although it may not be fun, editing and reworking is a part of almost all professions. By telling students about how many times and how many hours I must put into floor plan revisions before a final design is reached, I am usually able to convince them that doing just a couple drafts of an assignment is really not so bad. Still, students often come to me in the Writing Center searching for my “stamp of approval” or the “green light” to turn in an assignment. I cannot even count how many times a student has approached me and asked, “Can you just look this over and make sure it’s okay for me to pass in?” Often, the students have not once self-edited their work. This is the phase where I encourage the students to read portions of their papers aloud in hopes of exercising their editing skills. Just like the self-critiques I do for my own projects in class, the reading aloud gives students the gratification of making a piece better by their own means and not the direct means of the tutor. Help from others is great, but help from yourself is the best kind.

Writing and interior design, while unique fields, are similar in that they are both technical and creative at the same time. By combining these two different fields of creativity and technicality, a positive reaction occurs. One is analogous to the other as their processes are connected. I have been able to hone my tutoring skills by relating back to what I know I am comfortable with—design. Writing a well-structured paper is very similar to constructing a thoughtful floor plan. Therefore, by following some of the basic steps and principles of design, a tutor may be able to uncover a new perspective on tutoring in the writing center. ♦

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

January 25, 2013: Alabama Writing Centers Association, in Birmingham, AL

Contact: Tony Ricks: <tony.ricks@athens.edu>; (256-216-6670) or Charlotte Brammer: <cdbramme@samford.edu>; (205-726-2014).



February 21-23, 2013: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Fort Lauderdale, FL

Contact: Kevin Dvorak: <kdvorak@nova.edu>; Conference website: <www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>.



February 21-23, 2013: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Corpus Christi, TX

Contact: Noelle Ballmer: <Noelle.Ballmer@tamucc.edu>; (361-825-2254); Conference website: <www.scwca2013.com/#!/home/mainPage>.



April 4, 2013: Iowa Writing Centers Consortium, in Fayette, IA

Contact: Caroline Ledebor: <ledeboerc@uiu.edu>.



April 5-6, 2013: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in California, PA

Contact: Kurt Kearcher: <kearcher@calu.edu>; (724-938-4585); Conference website: <maw-ca2013.wix.com/calu>.



April 12-13, 2013: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Clarion, PA

Contact: Chris McCarrick: (814-393-2739); Conference website: <ecwca.org/annual-conference/>.



April 13, 2013: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Sacramento, CA

Contact: William Macauley: <wmacauleyjr@unr.edu>;

Conference website: <www.scc.losrios.edu/Current_Students/Student_Services/Writing_Center/NCWCA2013.htm>.



April 13-14, 2013: Northeastern Writing Centers Association, in Durham, NH

Contact: Harry Denny: <dennyh@stjohns.edu>; (718-390-41580); Conference website: <northeastwca.org>.



May 13, 2013: Canadian Writing Centres Association, in Victoria, BC, Canada

Contact: <proposals@uvic.ca>.



October 17-19, 2013: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Skokie, IL

Contact: Carol Martin: <chair@midwestwritingcenters.org> and Rachel Holtz: <treasurer@midwestwritingcenters.org>; MWCA website: <www.midwestwritingcenters.org/>.

