Outreach: Expanding Writing Center Third Space

Elizabeth Coughlin, Jennifer Finstrom, Elizabeth Kerper, Kevin Lyon, Sowmya Sastri
DePaul University

In his review of *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation*, Harvey Kail placed the writing center “at the busiest intersections of academic literacy work – faculty lane here, student lane there, everyone moving at rush hour intensity . . . situated . . . right in the middle of the exchange . . . The writing process, with all its freighted institutional context, walks daily in the writing center door and makes itself available for discussion” (315). At our writing center, as at many writing centers, we have taken the discussion beyond our doors; and as we have extended our reach, we routinely reflect on outreach’s role in our program and on the ways that outreach can support our mission and constituencies. The 2012 ECWCA annual conference offered us an opportunity to talk with others about writing center outreach, theorize and reflect on our practices and their implications, and talk with fellow writing center people about our research and experiences and theirs. This paper is an expanded version of our presentation, and in it, we offer our thoughts about the ways that we have conceptualized our outreach.

Continued on page 3

This Issue: A Note from the Editor

This issue is our biggest yet! With eight articles, two featured writing centers, and many tutor voice pieces, there is plenty in this issue for everyone. Proving there are great things happening in our region, this issue (extended print versions of presentations from this year’s conference) presents a variety of ways to contextualize the work we do in writing centers. As we push through our terms, quarters, blocks, or semesters, these submissions should provide each of us with conversation/discussion materials for our WC meetings, scholarship, and training sessions.

If you like what you find in this issue, feel free to let us know. If you want to see something more from these newsletters, let us know. If you have something you’d like to contribute, see the last page of this newsletter and let us know. If you use these newsletters in creative ways in your centers, let us know.

We can be contacted at ecwcanewsletter@gmail.com.

-Anthony Garrison
Preparing to write this letter caused me to think about why I love my job and why I ended up running a writing center instead of being a veterinarian, the goal I’d had since grade school.

One of the main reasons is that college classes for me were like a big buffet full of tasty dishes. I wanted to sample some of everything, a scoop of literature, a big helping of science, a dab of French for spice. I didn’t want all of anything; I craved a little bit of everything. Still, that’s not the whole reason.

The fact is that once I got to know the kind of people who work in writing centers I was hooked. Finally, I’d located a bunch of people like me. Sure, each of them was studying a particular discipline, but almost all of them dabbled in other areas and reveled in learning about subjects outside their fields of expertise. There was the tutor with a Ph.D. in biology who could talk for hours about Shakespeare, had read every interesting novel published since he was an undergrad, and knew all the Three Stooges movies by heart. Then there was the journalist with a degree in plant pathology who studied philosophy and religion in her spare time. From the moment I started tutoring among these people, I recognized that the variety of interests and skills among them was directly connected to their success as tutors.

That still isn’t it entirely, though. The clincher is that those tutors, the people I work with today, and the tutors, administrators, and scholars I meet through ECWCA share some core values that unite us as a community of teachers and learners:

**Meet the Associate Editor**

*Franklin K.R. Cline*

Franklin has been active in writing centers, on and off, for four years. He has worked for two years at Truman State University’s Writing center and is currently employed by Western Michigan University as both a graduate teaching assistant and a writing center consultant.

He has previous editing experience as an Associate Editor of the student newspaper at Truman State University and has worked with print and electronic literary journals as well as sports blogs. He recently taught a first-year writing course at WMU and was mentored in writing pedagogy by WMU’s composition director.

**Intellectual Curiosity**

Each of us has a grounding discipline, but we are all voracious readers who want to know more about almost everything. As a result, whether students come to us with a research paper about the foraging habits of urban deer or with a social policy paper focusing on early childhood education, we are genuinely interested and ready not only to act as an engaged audience, but also eager to learn what the student and the assignment have to teach us. Whatever the subject, we want to know more, and the students and faculty who seek our help can sense that.

**Respect and Empathy for Teachers and Students**

All of us have been students, and whether we have been teachers or not, we know from experience that both are demanding roles. Looking at hundreds of student papers has convinced us that most students are making an honest effort to follow their assignments and produce papers that are clear and logically organized. We’ve also seen enough assignment sheets to know that teachers don’t set out to confuse students. In fact, when confusion results, we understand that it’s often because a teacher has tried—perhaps too hard—to give students everything they need to succeed. Our steadfast respect and empathy for teachers and learners go a long way toward helping us win the trust of faculty, of students, of each other.

Those two points may seem fairly simple, even obvious, but they have underpinned every hiring decision I have made since 1987, and I believe they are the reason that those who meet through ECWCA seem to have a natural affinity, a tendency to talk easily even upon first meeting. We are inherently curious about how other centers operate, and we trust one another to respond charitably to our inquiries and explanations.

I invite you to join the conversation about tutoring, teaching, and learning that is ongoing in the ECWCA newsletter. If travel is an option, join us at our next conference at Clarion University in April 2013. You’ll find there people eager to learn from you and delighted to share what they know about a wide range of subjects, writing center work first among them.

*Sincerely,*

Jo Ann Vogt
collaborative for multilingual writing and research. faculty development & workshops, and the ucwbdl programs: writing groups, writing fellows, (ucwbdl) and participated in the formation of four other the university center for writing-based learning (ucwbdl) programs: writing groups, writing fellows, faculty development & workshops, and the collaborative for multilingual writing and research.

as our center has grown, we have ratcheted up our outreach to offer a wider array of support for writers and writing as well as our efforts to support the ucwbdl’s mission to enlarge and enhance the role of writing in the greater academic and professional conversations. as a result of our internal and external focus, we initiate and respond to requests for partnerships with other university offices and several nonprofit organizations in the chicago community. our outreach team works with each partner in a variety of ways and locations to collaboratively assess and provide the resources needed to fit the missions of all. in reflecting on these experiences, we have seen that outreach can bridge and integrate the many spaces that writers occupy and support their efforts to negotiate their way and find their voice.

our theoretical approach to our outreach can be put into context by jonathan mauk’s 2003 article in college english, “location, location, location: the ‘real’ (e)states of being, writing, and thinking in composition.” mauk’s piece opens with a discussion that compares academia to the real estate industry in the sense that each community seeks to engage their “buyers” in a conceptualization of what their purchase

affords them—mainly, what they can envision themselves being, doing, or becoming by investing in that location. for real estate agents, this is done by discussing the physical amenities such as local school districts and proximity to shopping and nightlife. in academia, university admissions brochures often portray depictions of lush green quads filled with students playing games or book-filled libraries where students are deep in conversation. in each scene, in each moment for investment, both the real estate and academic promotions are not necessarily displaying a connection to the physical spaces but rather are selling a conceptualization and ideology of those spaces.

but the reality that sets in after the deal has been closed, which mauk points out—and that we see, as well—is that instead of feeling part of the academic enterprise, many students feel a great sense of dislocation. although students who squeeze classes into already overcrowded lives certainly might feel that way, students across all demographic and academic profiles can experience this disconnection. mauk follows his opening real estate metaphors by arguing that in academia, we are missing an opportunity to truly engage students in the formation of conceptual spaces. he writes, “in other words, the value of academia for students depends upon their interpretation or creation of academic space . . . as students enter into academic space, they must, at the same time, enter into its making. and succeeding at such a feat requires significant guidance” (mauk 368).

we view the “significant guidance” that mauk refers to as a collaboration. we recognize the challenges of decoding and interpreting new spaces, for those challenges are universal and lifelong. they present opportunities but also require accountability, which adrienne rich captured so effectively in her famous 1977 convocation speech at douglass college, “claiming an education,” in which she calls for students to “demand to be taken seriously so that you can also go on taking yourself seriously” and to “[assume] your share of responsibility for what happens in the classroom” (6). essentially, rich argues that students must take part in their own trajectory within academia—that they must determine their path through academic space and work to give that space meaning. in our experience, we have seen that once students are able to find, own, and assert their voice, once they have a better sense of their intellectual surroundings and their ability to scope out the landscape, they are better able to negotiate their way, make connections, carve out a space of their own, and claim their education. we have learned that if we reach out to students where they
are, our conversations can engender powerful connections that in turn empower all of us. For the UCWB’s Outreach Team, this presents us with a moment of Kairos: this is our opportunity to invite students to connect with and begin to create their own sense of academic space and to make it their own.

Mauk calls for rigorous exploration of “the changing academic space outside of our offices and off our campuses,” arguing that “it is appropriate for writing theorists and teachers [...] and, we would add, writing center practitioners – ] to lead [...] this enterprise [...] because our field emerges from the study of classical rhetoric (and its focus on situation or kairos)” and because of the particular ways that students and academia interface (369-370). Moving from the language of real estate to that of critical geography, Mauk “calls for a pedagogy and theoretical lens that accounts for and engages the spatial and material conditions that constitute the everyday lives of students” and toward that end proposes “a heuristic for orienting the acts of teaching and learning writing in increasingly spaced-out college environments: third space, a concept [that] projects a “real and imagined” realm of intellectual-social action” (370).

For this discussion, we have, in turn, examined “third space” and its potential usefulness for theorizing and reflecting on writing center outreach’s purpose and potential. The term “third space,” derived from critical geography and post-colonial theory, has been used to describe and conceptualize writing centers and writing center work as well as composition for many years now. As Nedra Reynolds points out in “Imagined Geographies” (1998), “Spatial metaphors have long dominated our written discourse in the field of Composition Studies (‘field’ being one of the first spatial references we can name) because, first, writing itself is spatial” (14). The same certainly can be said of Writing Center Studies. Witness its multitude of spatial imagery: liminal space, “in-between-ness,” border-crossing, intersections, interstices, hybrid discourse, Burkean parlors, Pratt’s contact zones, Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness, Hannah Ashley’s Literacy Dula, Nancy Effinger Wilson’s bodega, Vandenberg’s and others’ theories of location, and so forth. Theories of “third space” and its precursors can be traced far back in composition and writing center theory, as well: Martin Carnoy’s “Education as Cultural Imperialism” (1974), Bruffee’s “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind” (1984), Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” (1986), James Paul Gee’s “What is Literacy” (1987), Berlin’s “Rhetoric & Ideology in the Writing Class” (1988), as well as Reynolds’s “Composition’s Imagined Geographies: The Politics of Space in the

Frontier, City, and Cyberspace” (1998) – to list but only a few notable publications.

As Angela Petit cautions us, however, both Peter Carino, in “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Our Metaphors” and Thomas Hemmeter, in “The ‘Smack of Difference’: The Language of Writing Center Discourse” “suggest that only through continual self-reflection will we understand how [all of these definitions and metaphors] influence our theorizing about writing centers and our activities within centers” (111). Undergraduate and graduate students are constantly navigating in and out of a variety of third spaces. These interactions with other students, staff, faculty, and institutions might cause them to question their own understanding and identity, and they may not always be reminded of their agency: recognizing this, writing center outreach seeks to lift the veil that may disguise the third space as simply “guess what the teacher is thinking” exercises and instead invites students to share their voices.

For us, outreach work is the creation or extension of third space in a writing center, and we define third space as the location or ideology that is negotiated and/or created when different identities or spaces come into discussion with one another. The first space of an individual can be seen as the person’s intimate identity as he or she perceives it. This includes elements of home life, education, and life experience, not to mention socioeconomic status and sex/gender identity. Second space is the idea of an assumed or secondary identity – such as a person’s broader home life, his or her job, office, or discipline. Third space can be created through any interaction of first or second spaces. In the context of writing center work, this could be a writer’s first space interacting with a tutor’s first space, a writer’s first space interacting with the second space of the writing center, a writer’s first space interacting with a tutor’s first space and the second space of the writing center, the course, the university, etc. Third space does not exist until two separate spaces come into contact or conversation with one another, and it is the interaction of individuals in the writing center where third space happens. What is significant about third space for us in the writing center is that it encourages and ensures agency for the writer.

Outreach seeks to bring students from across the university into the writing center to discuss the choices that they make in their writing and to question the clashes that they may have with subject matter (when their personal background or understanding – first space— might differ from the discipline’s understanding or expectations – second space). Students begin to
interact with a tutor (thereby creating a third space) by being asked to explain their choices and terminology, who they perceive as their audience(s), and their understanding about a piece of writing or a subject. This conversation is the creation of third space, and our outreach is deliberately designed to extend and promote these conversations about writing as well as to promote the UCWbL and raise awareness. Our university-based outreach includes National Day on Writing “I write because ___” activities and the Peer Tutor and Mentor Summit, as well as Banned Book readings and an array of other undertakings and free-standing workshops. Each in its own way promotes and enables conversations about literacy, liberty, and writing. Their interactive structures enable us to talk with constituents to learn and understand their interests and concerns. In so doing, we demonstrate that we genuinely are interested in their needs and what they have to say. Awareness-raising and promotional events seek to reinforce and spread the mission of the center through the active experience of it rather than through the repetition of pre-packaged phrases and information. We extend the third space of our center by intersecting with our constituents to experience the work of the center on a personal level, and we extend the third space that we create daily in the center to members of the university community beyond the writing center. Through outreach, we also are extending an invitation for them to view themselves in a new conceptual location—one that offers encouragement to voice their thoughts, to ask questions, to either intersect or disagree with new ideas. This extension of third space happens when we bring the ethos of the writing center to the university beyond our physical doors.

As we visualize ways to bring our conceptual space out of the physical boundaries of our two writing centers, we keep perceptions of who writers are and why they write in mind, as part of our ethos is that everyone is a writer and that academic writing and “real world” writing are not as alien in relation to each other as is sometimes perceived. One example of these events is our involvement in National Day on Writing. National Day on Writing was created by the National Council of Teachers of English in order to give attention to the daily writing that almost everyone does. For this event, we set up tables in common areas on the two largest campuses and provide materials for members of the university community to create a poster where they fill in blanks regarding what, to them, writers are and how they self-identify as a writer. The response has been downright thrilling; after glancing at the display, students stop to read the posters and then write up a poster of their own. Some students fill in the blanks spontaneously and immediately; others take a little time. The responses have been thought-provoking and, in many cases, illuminating. Here are but a few examples:

-Writers are: “individuals,” “parents,” “creative,” “revolutionary,” and even “ridiculous”

-As a ____, I write [because or to]: “get the job done,” “explore what I think,” “change the world”

-Some of the things I write are: “position papers and reports,” “blogs,” “poetry,” “rap,” “code,” “in translation,” “for myself.”

The event generates some lively discussions, and more than a few students stop by later on, to see what others have written and to show their friends. This pattern has attracted a steady stream of people, and by the end of the day, the tables at both campus locations have been covered. Many of those posters now hang in our office, where they never fail to draw the attention of our visitors and generate further conversation.

Among the people trying to find their way across their academic and professional landscapes are tutors themselves, and another event that takes place in the university is the Peer Tutor and Mentor Summit. This day-long event reaches yet another constituency: that of offices and programs that also offer mentoring and/or tutoring services to the university community, such as the Career Center, Student Support Services/TRiO (an office which works with low-income, first-generation students), the Center for Students with Disabilities, Athletic Academic Advising, the Office of Veterans Affairs, the Office for International Students and Scholars, the departments of Chemistry,
Mathematics, Psychology, and a growing list of others. Altogether, the Summit brings together approximately 100 student, staff, and faculty participants. Exit surveys and personal testimonials indicate that all of those involved appreciated the opportunity to interact and share best practices through small group conversation, round robin discussion, and share materials – and several offices offered to partner with us for the next event. All of these interactions make each year’s Summit vital and evolving.

The changing nature of the Summit is apparent in that each year it is centered around a different theme; a past theme, “What They Take with Them,” was inspired by Harvey Kail, Paula Gillespie, and Brad Hughes’s article of the same name regarding the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project (PWTARP). This theme focused the Summit on both what we hope our target populations take from our work and also what we take from that work. Round Robin topics ranged from “Common Ground: Minority Student Peer-Mentoring,” by student mentors in the McNair Scholars Program, to “What We Bring with Us,” from the Office of Veteran’s Affairs, to “Before They Take it With Them, They Have to Find It: Mentoring in the DePaul Libraries,” by the University’s Research Librarians. The theme for this year’s Summit is “Journeys,” which we hope will lead participants to reflect on the journeys – including the high roads and low roads – they encounter in their peer tutoring and/or mentoring work. We are able to discuss and learn from the ways in which other offices create and utilize third space through their own interactions and practices. Through events like these, we are able to reach a greater spectrum of the university community who are outside the scope of our more traditional writing center operations, increase awareness that everyone is a writer, and share best practices with other peer tutoring resources. In this sense, we create third space through the summit by inviting these offices on campus to converse about their experiences and where they converge and diverge from one another, as offices or programs and individuals within these spaces.

When outreach moves physically and conceptually outside of the university, the conversation opens up even further. As the constituency changes so do the interactions of first, second, and third spaces. In effect, the intimate first space that the writers we work with bring to the places (physical and conceptual) where we interact might differ in significant ways, namely in age. One of the nonprofit community partners that we work with is Open Books, an organization dedicated to promoting literacy through a variety of programs for K-12 students in the greater Chicago area. Outreach has facilitated the involvement of peer writing tutors (from both our writing center and our Writing Fellows program) alongside community volunteers in one of these programs, Adventures in Creative Writing field trips, where we have interacted with fourth and fifth graders as they learned about and wrote creative non-fiction and slam poetry. The work we do here helps students connect with writing in ways they may not have thought of; these students are introduced to poetry as a way of viewing and responding to the world around them, and at the same time are experiencing working with a tutor in a mentoring relationship where the student can ask questions about more than just poetry. The students often ask about their other homework projects, school life, college life, and other issues they may have questions about but don’t have anyone to discuss them with. In turn, our tutors learn about tutoring younger students in writing, and sometimes interact with students from different socioeconomic and/or ethnic backgrounds. For each group, this third space is made possible only by expanding beyond our campus and expected constituency.

Another community-based outreach activity showed us the potential of a writing center alumnus’s role in expanding of outreach-based third space. We worked with writers from True Star magazine, which is produced by high school students for high school students. The instructor who recruits and shepherds student writers through the process is a peer writing tutor alumnus of ours. In his work in our center, he drew from his own experiences decoding and creating academic space to support university writers as they created their own. He
took the same collaborative approach with his high school writers, and when he brought them to our writing center, though they initially masked their wariness with silence, their conversations with our tutors soon encompassed not only story development, research, and writing, but also their personal concerns, goals, and dreams.

Two other external outreach partners that we have been involved with are the Howard Area Community Center and After School Matters. The way that we interact with these groups differs, even though the constituency, in both cases, is made up of Chicago-area high school students. In the case of the Howard Area Community Center, members of the Outreach Team and other peer writing tutors from our center volunteered at the Computer Clubhouse Arts and Technology Center for teens in the Rogers Park neighborhood on the north side of Chicago. In that location, students are able to make use of computers, not only for their homework, but also for other “real world” writing projects such as college application cover letters, which we can discuss with them as a document belonging to a specific genre and for a specific audience, but despite that, not altogether different from other academic persuasive writing. There we join other regular volunteers, bringing the ethos of the UCWbL to another physical location where we interact, not only with the high school students themselves, but with those other peer tutors and mentors as well. After School Matters, on the other hand, brings high school students to our campus where they work with the UCWbL’s peer writing tutors on a different “real world” writing project, their articles for On the Money magazine, another magazine written by teens for teens, this one dealing with financial matters, such as saving money, finding a job, and making decisions about student loans. Even though the students don’t come to the physical location of our writing center, they are on the same campus in a computer lab. Over the course of all of these activities, participating tutors had the opportunity to reflect on their pedagogy in light of these experiences, while helping these groups understand the communal and reflective benefits of talking about their writing with others and see that academic writing and “real world” writing are not diametrically opposed, that writing for a different audience helps us to understand communicating with others and participating in the discourses of private and public life, or first and second spaces.

Mauk ends his argument by positing, “If we want students to move into academic space, if we want them to buy into the real estate, it is time for academia to embody and become embodied in the new spaces of student life. Or perhaps we should avoid the idea of buying and selling altogether, and, as Robert Haight suggests, “approach the classroom community [...] as a climate to be created” (386). Throughout all of our outreach – from the “I write because ___” events, to the sharing of mentoring practices with other university offices during the Summit, to the slam poetry workshops with fourth graders, to the resume-writing sessions with high school students and other writers – we have seen how outreach stretches the third space of the writing center and how this work can motivate everyone involved to create new climates and spaces. Having a greater awareness of both physical and conceptual space and how what we bring interacts with what the writers that we work with bring, we also have become more aware of the creation of third space in ourselves, as together, we all negotiate the complex, changing landscapes of our personal, academic, and professional lives and “enter into the making of [those spaces]” (Mauk 368).

In “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind,” Kenneth Bruffee (1984) writes, “To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively – that is, we must learn to converse well. The first steps to learning to think better, therefore, are learning to converse better and learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life, that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value” (640). At the most basic level, what we hope for in our outreach work is that our efforts will foster those sorts of conversations. Theorizing about third space has helped us not only to think well, both individually and collaboratively (to repeat Bruffee’s words), but also to understand how our writing center’s mission extends far beyond appointment-based work in our center and to appreciate that the energy in Kail’s busy intersections, the empowerment in Rich’s calls to claim an education, and the mutual learning, listening, and engagement that characterizes the most productive outreach efforts are both the “stuff” of third place interactions and their most exhilarating effects.

Works Cited

Bruffee, Kenneth, “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind.” *College English* 46.7 (Nov. 1984): 635-652.

Carino, Peter. “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Our Metaphors: A Cultural

Works Consulted

Bruffee, Kenneth, “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind.” College English 46.7 (Nov. 1984): 635-652.

Authors

Elizabeth Coughlin is the University Center for Writing-based Learning’s Associate Director and Writing Center Program Director and Director of Outreach and Community Relations at DePaul University in Chicago. Liz also is on the faculty of the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse (WRD), and for many years
The anticipated moment has finally arrived. Weeks of tutor training have prepared Kara for this moment, and she is ready for the challenge—her first Writing Center tutorial. As she looks over the writer’s paper, she is relieved, for there are several higher-order concerns that she has been trained to address, thus resisting the editing habit that she has been urged to avoid. The tutor begins to speak to the writer about the structure of the essay, when much to her dismay, the writer interrupts her.

“I don’t want to have to re-write the whole paper. Can you just check my grammar and spelling?”

And there it is. Tension!

Regardless of the quality of tutor training or the expertise of the tutor, tensions are bound to arise in the daily practice of the Writing Center tutor—tensions that develop from a variety of sources, such as clashes in expectations or values between the tutor and tutee. Though tensions are inevitable, a reflective approach to tutoring will help the tutor successfully manage those tensions.

Expectations are also value-laden. Often the tutor and tutee do not share similar values. For example, a tutor may value the tutee’s progress as a writer, while the tutee may be more concerned with getting a quick edit to result in a higher grade on the writing assignment. When values clash, it may be difficult to resolve the resulting tension.

Consequently, the tutor questions his job performance, and the tutee leaves the tutorial frustrated that her requests for a quick edit have been ignored.

When tutors work with writers—especially in recurring sessions—they tend to develop a vested interest in their tutees. As tensions grow, tutors often seek validation that they are doing their job well. Sometimes the validation they seek is from their director . . . sometimes from one another . . . and sometimes from the tutee. Some tutors feel such responsibility and obligation toward the success of their tutees that any tension seems like a failure on their part. They wrongly assume that their tutee’s success or failure is a direct reflection of their performance or competency as a tutor.

Tensions that surface in the writing conference do not have to completely derail the tutorial. Honest, self-reflection on the part of the tutor can effectively salvage a tutorial that seems to be heading toward disaster.

A Reflective Approach to Tutoring

As directors of our university’s Writing Center and Tutoring Center, we set a goal last year to empower tutors to become intentional about three reflective processes which are integral to the appropriation of their role as tutors. We are now in our second year of training with the reflective emphasis: a training we call ROC – Reflection, Ownership, and Collaboration. In training and ongoing professional development, we stress the importance of tutors reflecting on their practice—individually and collaboratively—and owning their role. Several reflective practices have become key components of the reflective process of...
Reflective journals. Reflective journals give tutors the opportunity to think and write about their tutoring experiences. They may write about a specific situation, a particular student, a tutorial, or their role as a tutor. This journal requirement provides our tutors the opportunity to process current or past tutorials and to make adjustments for future tutorials. These reflective writings are sometimes private; other pieces are shared with colleagues and directors. We have found that some of our best tutors are those who are willing to honestly reflect on their practice, including the emerging tensions in the tutorials.

Self-Assessments offer a more formalized evaluation process for reflection on the tutorial. For this exercise, we ask tutors to choose one or two tutorials during the semester for self-evaluation in the context of an actual tutorial. With the permission of the tutee, tutors audio-record tutorials and, after listening to the recording, analyze and respond to specific reflective questions. This exercise offers tutors a tool for a more objective and focused response to the tutorial. Additionally, tutors can select another peer tutor to sit in on a tutorial and complete an observation sheet. Later, the tutor can reflect on the outside response to the tutorial.

Online discussion forums provide tutors another opportunity for community reflection. Using our university learning management system, the Writing Center and Tutoring Center directors post questions or prompts in an online discussion forum to guide a focused conversation. These forums, which are only accessible to tutors and directors of the Writing Center and Tutoring Center, allow tutors the opportunity to reflect together on their roles, practices, questions, and concerns. As tutors share ideas and learn from others’ tutoring experiences, they also bond as a team.

Professional reading responses, our final reflective exercise, expose tutors to larger conversations about tutoring in the professional literature and encourage their participation in these professional conversations. All tutors are asked to read and respond to several professional pieces, which have been selected from professional journals and tutor training handbooks. Professional reading can help tutors think through Writing Center theory and how they can put those ideas into practice in their own tutorials. We have also taken at least half of our working tutors to attend and present in professional conferences each year. Tutors have grown in professionalism and improved practice as they have embraced these opportunities to engage in reflective practice and participate in the larger professional conversations about Writing Centers and peer tutoring.

In order for novice tutors to succeed in supporting their tutees, they must be willing to reflect on their practice. This reflection must go beyond an evaluation of isolated strategies that combine to form a what-worked-for-me approach. Rather, tutors must be urged to resist the front of confidence, comfortability, and competence, and instead embrace the uncertainties that characterize their complex roles. Our goal is for tutors to strive for what Murphy and Sherwood (1995) describe as an “informed practice”—one marked by the development of a broad repertoire of tutoring strategies that reach beyond tutoring rules to further refine the “know-how” of good tutors which only comes “from a willingness to reflect on their efforts and keep learning” (p. 4).

Reference


---

The Rhetorical Triangle and Postmodernism Walk into a Contact Zone

Andrew Magrath
Kent State University and Stark State College

Many writing centers advocate the use of the rhetorical triangle as a way of assessing and understanding any potential rhetorical situation. The rhetorical triangle, as first proposed by Aristotle, identifies three concepts needed to understand any rhetorical situation: (1) credibility of the speaker (ethos), (2) the speaker's ability to evoke the emotions of the intended audience (pathos), (3) the logical techniques employed by the speaker (logos) (Aristotle, I.2, 1356a). In many sessions, tutors either explicitly or implicitly encourage their clients to think about the rhetorical triangle by asking questions such as: Is this source credible? (ethos) How do you think the audience will react to this paragraph? (pathos) Does this argument make sense? (logos) etc. The universality of these considerations allows tutors to be able to meaningfully enter into conversations about client's papers regardless of the paper's topic. The strength of the tutor, it therefore seems, is not that the tutor is intimately acquainted with all
forms of knowledge within the academy, but rather that the tutor has knowledge of a universally applicable schema that explains all potential rhetorical situations.

Many writing centers and writing center theorists also advocate some form of postmodernism. Providing a concise and definitive definition of postmodernism would be a contentious and laborious task, so I shall instead choose to focus on one tenet common to most definitions of postmodern thought: the rejection of the metanarrative. John Stephens, who uses the tools of postmodernism to critique children’s literature, defines a metanarrative as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.” (Stephens, 6). Thus, a metanarrative is an overarching explanation of the motivations, actions, experience, and/or knowledge of a single or multiple cultures.1 The philosopher Jean-François Lyotard sums up the postmodern stance on metanarratives as, “I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, xxiv). Thus, it can be understood that postmodern projects reject the possibility of a universal schema that explains knowledge and experience for all potential cultures—in other words, postmodernists hold that are no true metanarratives. This proves problematic, as it therefore seems that the postmodernist must reject the rhetorical triangle as a true schema that governs and explains any potential rhetorical situation.

In an attempt to accept both postmodernism and the rhetorical triangle, a postmodernist may claim that every culture has a unique worldview and the rhetorical triangle just so happens to work within that worldview, but may not be applicable in another worldview. In essence, each culture, while still grappling with logos, pathos, and ethos, nevertheless weighs the merits of each differently. For example, culture B may place a greater emphasis on pathos than does culture A. While undoubtedly every culture has a unique take on rhetoric, the metanarrative I see emerging is not one of how ethos, pathos, and logos are weighed. The metanarrative of concern is that this sort of consideration is universally applicable. No serious advocate of the rhetorical triangle would claim that there are fixed weights for all situations and all cultures. Obviously weighting schema can change even within a single culture. For example, an audience that typically values logos may nevertheless find a command issued from an aggressive assailant with a weapon (ethos) far more persuasive than a similar command issued from an infirmed philosopher (logos). The fact that the weights may change (both inter- and intra-culturally) is not in dispute. What remains problematic is the claim that the rhetorical triangle can be used within any cultural reference frame, as this seems to establish a metanarrative about all cultures: chiefly, all cultures' rhetoric is understandable based on some assessment of the rhetorical triangle.

This incompatibility is most clear when considering a version of Mary Louise Pratt’s contact zones. Pratt defines a contact zone as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths....” (Pratt, 34). Assume two cultures: A and B. Now let us place A and B into the most extreme contact zone possible, such that these cultures have the minimal possible in common. In other words, A and B are radically different cultures—perhaps A is a culture of communal pacifists that has been enslaved by B, who are a warmongering individualist society. Since a postmodernist must reject the possibility of any true metanarrative, the only commonality that can exist between A and B is cultural, but, by hypothesis, A and B have virtually nothing in common. Since the postmodernist does not allow for the possibility of a true metanarrative that can explain some aspect of both cultures, there is no reason to assume that A and B have enough in common to have a successful rhetorical exchange of any kind. Thus, a postmodernist cannot hold that the rhetorical triangle is universally applicable. On the other hand, advocates of the rhetorical triangle have cause for some optimism. If the triangle is universally applicable, then it exists as a metanarrative—it is true regardless of culture. Giving one hope that a successful rhetorical exchange—however unlikely—could take place between A and B by considering ethos, pathos, and logos. Thus, if hope is to remain, advocates must double down on the universal nature of the rhetorical triangle, but in the process reject postmodernism.

If the problem is to be resolved, then it seems some of our commitments to postmodernism, the rhetorical triangle, or both will have to be weakened. I am not sympathetic to many claims of postmodernism, particularly with regards to the stance on metanarratives. While it is undoubtedly the case that individuals’ cultures color their worldviews, it seems too strong a conclusion that there are no external non-culturally dependent realities. In other words, just because there are some false metanarratives it does not seem to follow that all metanarratives must necessarily be false.1 Once one grants that there exist some true metanarratives, the tension between postmodernism and the rhetorical triangle potentially dissolves.

It seems too much to ask the postmodernist to merely accept as true the metanarrative that all rhetorical situations can be understood by considering the rhetorical triangle. In addition, explicators of the rhetorical triangle are not always clear on how much weight culture plays in the consideration of the points of
the triangle. Postmodernists may have it right when they assert that ideas about ethos and pathos are deeply—or perhaps even wholly—dependent upon culture. In comparison to a culture of slaves, it is very likely that a culture of slave owners will have vastly different opinions about an abolitionist's credibility (ethos) and experience vastly different emotions (pathos) upon hearing the abolitionist's words. Since this discussion is couched within an extreme contact zone thought experiment, it is safe to assume—as the postmodernist does—that very little with regards to ethos and pathos can be assumed to be held in common. This leaves only logos as a potential metanarrative.

The prominent logician and philosopher Rudolf Carnap notes that, “Logic… is concerned with relations between factual sentences . . . If logic ever discusses the truth of factual sentences it does so only conditionally . . . if such-and-such a sentence is true, then such-and-such another sentence is true. Logic itself does not decide whether the first sentence is true” (Carnap, 110). This is encouraging because if logos is assumed to be a true metanarrative, then claims are only being made about a system of inferences: not about the world.¹ This difference can be understood as claims about the world take the form of declarative sentences: “x is true.” “y is false.” etc. On the other hand, claims about a system of inferences take the form of conditional sentences: "If x is true, then you can derive y." Rather than make claims about what is true, claims about systems of inferences (logos) make claims about how other statements fit together. Consider the following argument:

- **It is always wrong to force others to take the life of a human being.**

- **War forces individuals to take the lives of other human beings.**

- **Therefore, war is always wrong.**

A pacifist culture will likely agree with the above argument—will likely treat it as a sound. Yet a non-pacifist culture will likely have a different reaction to the argument, and, in the case of the extreme contact zone, a warmongering culture is guaranteed to have a different reaction still! This is because the three cultures' considerations of ethos and pathos are different. Each culture cannot come to an agreement on the truth of the statements—cannot agree on a single true metanarrative about how the world actually is. Yet, if Carnap is correct, then logic can largely circumvent this debate. From a logos standpoint the argument becomes:

**If it is true that** it is always wrong to force others to take the life of a human being. **And if it is true that** war forces individuals to take the lives of other human beings. **Then it follows that** war is always wrong.

Logos is silent on the actual truth of these claims. Logic asserts that these claims fit together a certain way, compelling the speaker and the listeners to believe something new. Logos leaves it up to the individual cultures to determine the truth of the premises.

This truth neutrality makes logos a powerful tool within the tutorial. While traditional tutoring methods encourage the client to contemplate ethos, pathos, and logos, if postmodernism is incompatible with the rhetorical triangle, then there is no guarantee that the client will be able to consider the ethos and pathos of the intended audience. While this incompatibility is most apparent in the extreme contact zone, the motivating thought experiment provides a prima facie reason to believe that postmodernism eliminates the ability for a speaker to meaningfully communicate with another culture. Put differently, for a listener to believe a speaker is credible, the listener must actually believe the speaker is credible. For example, if the speaker is a slave owner and the listener is an abolitionist, it is unlikely that the abolitionist will ever view the slave owner as credible no matter how many times the tutor asks him to consider the ethos of the other. Yet, certainly the abolitionist can begin to enter into a rhetorical situation by assuming if the slave owner were to be taken as credible, then… This shift to logos becomes a useful pattern in the tutorial. Rather than ask my clients to consider some potentially unknowable other, I ask them to think about the consequences of their own logic. For example, if a client makes a claim that killing is wrong, I may point out that war often requires soldiers to kill each other. The client’s statement implies that soldiers are wrong and/or there is no just war. The client may agree with this conclusion, or the client may not—which opens up a new conversation about how to better define 'killing' so that it does not lead to undesired conclusions. Similarly, considerations about the credibility of sources become conversations about the source’s logic in order to show how that way of thinking leads to undesirable conclusions. At no point do we talk about truth, only where ideas lead. In this way, sessions can still arrive at similar results as traditional sessions but do not directly rely upon overt considerations of ethos and pathos. Nevertheless, content and effectiveness are likely lost by only considering logos, but this loss seems to be attributable to the nature of the postmodern project.

Allowing logos to be a true metanarrative about how to draw conclusions seems to solve the original tension:
ethos and pathos are allowed to be wholly dependent upon culture—as a postmodernist would accept—but the applicability of the triangle is allowed to remain universal by way of a logos metanarrative. By necessity, this leaves the rhetorical triangle quite stunted. The functional roles of ethos and pathos have largely been replaced by logos. I fear a strong advocate of the rhetorical triangle may reject this proposal. Similarly, many postmodernists may assert that this solution also goes too far. Historically, postmodernism arose in part as a critique to this kind of logical positivism. As such, an even casual postmodernist likely will not accept logos as a true metanarrative. Yet, if this is the case, we are merely left with the original tension. It seems clear; additional scholarship should be done to better understand and eliminate the tension between the metanarrative inherent in the rhetorical triangle model and postmodernism’s rejection of metanarratives.

Technical Communication Writing Center: A Snapshot

Wanda L Worley, PhD, Ellen Harley, Jeff Russ, and Diana Poncar
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

What is our story? What are the challenges and rewards of a small, self-contained, discipline-specific writing center in a professional school on a large urban campus? This brief snapshot takes you inside the TCM (technical communication) Writing Center located in the Purdue School of Engineering & Technology at IUPUI (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis).

Our History

Our writing center began in the early 1990s as a collaborative effort between the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Engineering and Technology. At the time, the Technical Communication Program (TCM) was jointly housed in the two Schools. The Director of the University Writing Center and the former Director of TCM together decided that engineering and technology students were more apt to use writing center services if a branch of the writing center was located on site—so the TCM Writing Center began as a kind of satellite of the University Writing Center. Several years ago, the TCM program was moved solely to the School of Engineering and Technology.

When the TCM Writing Center was formed and for many years following, the University Writing Center shared its tutors with us. But as the years went by and the University Writing Center grew, they needed their tutors. Today our tutors are recruited from recommendations by our TCM instructors and our own tutors.

Our Writing Center is completely supported financially by the School of Engineering and Technology. The School’s Dean and other administrators fully believe in the value of and support the needs of the Writing Center.

Our Clients

The Technical Communication (TCM) Program provides classes for every student in the School, the second largest school at IUPUI. The TCM Writing Center provides a service to approximately 2400 undergraduate students, 300 graduate students, and several hundred staff and faculty. Our students, staff, and faculty come from three engineering departments (Biomedical Engineering, Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering) and four technology departments (Computer Information and Leadership Technology, Design and Communication Technology, Engineering

Works Cited


Technology, and Music Arts Technology). We have a large population of male students and international students. Our School programs also draw students from several other schools such as Liberal Arts, Informatics, and Science, so our Writing Center tutors also work with these students.

Our TCM Writing Center is a place where students can learn to be more efficient and effective communicators. The students who use our services are getting degrees in either engineering or engineering technology, so they come to the writing center with not only written and question-and-answer type homework assignments but also highly technical and complicated engineering and scientific reports, literature reviews, and even masters’ theses. We also help with resumes, cover letters, personal statements, instructional manuals, PowerPoints, and documents such as comparison, recommendation, and problem analysis reports. Occasionally, a faculty member needs our help with an article or presentation or a staff member will either make an appointment or stop in to ask a question about a document he or she is working on; some of them are taking classes; some need help with a work-related document.

Since we serve a smaller student population than the IUPUI University Writing Center, we have many students who are return visitors. Our lead TCM Writing Center tutor, Ellen Harley, refers to them as our “frequent fliers.” For example, in the spring 2012 semester, we held 221 tutoring sessions, working with 91 individual students (36 of them ESL), or 41 percent repeat visitors. Fifty-two percent of the tutoring sessions lasted 30 minutes; 21 percent were hour-long sessions. Working with these repeat students over the course of several semesters, the tutors develop relationships with the students. The tutors know their international students’ home countries, their majors, and aspects of writing that are the most troublesome for them. Likewise, the students often have a favorite tutor and will schedule appointments when they know he or she is on duty.

**Our Tutors**

Our tutors are students (undergraduate and graduate) and sometimes part-time faculty. They have an interest in and a love of technical communication; they are good writers themselves. They create a supportive environment for the students, a non-judgmental environment that makes every student feel “okay” about asking for help. Typically, we have 3-4 total tutors working each semester.

**Our Physical Space**

Our TCM Writing Center is located in a small room close to the Dean’s office; it is equipped with two computer stations; one station has two monitors, Skype access, and earphones, where we hold our online tutoring sessions. We have one tutor working at a time. Students register and make appointments online. Our online scheduling was designed and developed by two of our School’s computer technology students!

**In Summary**

We are very fortunate to have the unquestionable support of our School administration. Do we have challenges? Of course! Finding tutors who are not afraid of and who are capable of working on products that focus on very complex, technical topics and working with international students from all over the world who have varying levels of language proficiency is probably the greatest. But our rewards far outweigh our challenges.

Ellen Harley sums us up nicely when she writes, “Sometimes word choices or phrases can make you laugh, as when one international student wrote, ‘I want to be an asset to any company I am assassinated with in the future.’ Or the native-speaking Indiana girl who, in a paper about changing some workplace rules, wrote, ‘No profanity will be prohibited.’ In cases such as that, crying is also an option. Tutoring has taught me that in working with student writers, I should be prepared for anything! … Tutoring in the TCM Writing Center has given me the opportunity to read about science, engineering, medical devices, construction, and a host of other subjects, which I would not have had otherwise, and has also broadened my knowledge of and respect for other cultures.”

**Authors**

Wanda L Worley, PhD - Director, TCM Program (wworley@iupui.edu)

Ellen Harley - Lead TCM Tutor (eharley@iupui.edu)

Jeff Russ - TCM Tutor (jjruss@iupui.edu)

Diana Poncar - TCM Tutor (dponcar@umail.iu.edu)
Renegotiating “Nontraditional” Identity in the Writing Center: What it Means to Be a Peer or the Center as Mentor

Jennifer Finstrom and Lisa D. Lenoir
DePaul University

Nontraditional students who are also tutors in the setting of a university writing center may find themselves negotiating a plurality of identities: adults, students, peers, mentors, and mentees. Before beginning as peer writing tutors at our university’s writing center, we entered our respective programs of study. At this point, we became aware that we carried the identity of nontraditional students, though we did not fully understand what that definition entailed or that it was actually a subject of some debate. One of us entered the English undergraduate program with a large number of transfer credits, and, after completing the degree, immediately began a master’s program in writing and publishing. The other had already received a bachelor’s degree in journalism, worked as a journalist at a prominent newspaper for several years, and finally entered a master’s program in international public service as a returning student. But despite our different courses of study at our large urban university, we both felt that something essential was missing from our experience. However, we were unable to articulate what that element might be until we began doing writing center work as peer writing tutors.

After returning to academic life, we both felt that simply identifying as traditional or nontraditional was not only limiting, but also didn’t tell the whole story, and that this applied to other students, both traditionally aged and otherwise. When we entered our programs, we identified both as adults in the world outside of academia and as students in a specific discipline. And later, when we entered the writing center, we began to identify as peers. This last identification, though gradual, was a turning point. As we continued negotiating our multiple identities, it was writing center work that showed us how this could be done.

First, we asked ourselves what exactly was meant by “nontraditional.” We wondered if graduate students could be considered nontraditional as well, and in the course of our research, we learned that they could be. In “Teaching, Advising, and Mentoring the Nontraditional Graduate Student” by Benton H. Pierce and Melissa J. Hawthorne, the authors write that, “According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2009) . . . By 2018, approximately 3.4 million graduate students will be age 35 and older. These students are likely to encounter different obstacles in completing advanced degrees than traditional students who move from undergraduate programs directly into graduate school.” While twenty-four or twenty-five seems to be the age dividing traditional from nontraditional undergraduates, thirty-five seems to be the age at which a graduate student is considered nontraditional. Laura J. Horn and C. Dennis Carroll in The National Center for Education Statistics report from November of 1996 define nontraditional students through any of the following criteria: “delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, attended part time, financially independent, worked full time while enrolled, had dependents other than a spouse, was a single parent, or did not obtain a standard high school diploma” (2). Horn and Carroll go on to explicate that these criteria fall into a continuum of three categories: minimally nontraditional (one of the above mentioned criteria), moderately nontraditional (two or three of these), or highly nontraditional (four or more) (2). What we took from this system of classification was that a student might be more or less nontraditional, and if that student’s circumstances change, the roles that he or she negotiates might change as well. For example, transitioning from a part-time undergraduate student to a full-time graduate student (as one of us did) effectively changes the status from moderately to minimally nontraditional. But an alteration in these outward factors isn’t the only way that a change in self-perception can come about—the way that a student locates him or herself in an academic setting is also of importance.

In his article “Location, Location, Location: The "Real" (E)states of Being, Writing, and Thinking in Composition,” Jonathan Mauk writes of the “placelessness” of many college students, mentioning nontraditional students in particular, and proposes that what is needed is a new pedagogy that will connect the academic with the student’s everyday life (369). While we both had initially worked at reconciling our academic identities with “real world” identities—Mauk’s “placelessness” did not last long. After beginning work as peer writing tutors, we saw the connection between this sense of dislocation and Kenneth Bruffee’s ideas in “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind.” Bruffee writes that, “Students’ work tended to improve when they got help from peers; peers offering help, furthermore, learned from the students they helped and from the activity of helping itself. Collaborative learning, it seemed, harnessed the powerful educative force of peer influence…” (638).

At our university, there is an academic program specifically for adults, focusing on the idea of students utilizing their abilities and experiences. Entering students are provided with a faculty mentor who lends support as skills develop for
both academic and “real world” success. Conversely, a returning student who enters a more traditional academic discipline would not have this mentorship, and we both feel that being mentored might have aided our negotiation of our various roles. However, in our writing center work, we have found mentorship in the center itself: not only did its physical and conceptual locations help us to “locate” ourselves, but working with peers of every age and discipline helped us to define ourselves as “peer” as well. We felt ourselves moving away from the limitations of nontraditional just as the traditionally aged peer writing tutors that we worked with negotiated their own identities. In the Center for Women in Technology’s “Peer Mentoring Toolkit,” mentoring is expected to “generate both a desire and an ability to succeed personally and professionally”: exactly what we see writing center work doing (5). By viewing the self through the lens of writing center work— replacing the identity of “nontraditional” with that of “peer”—our perceptions changed and new self-definitions became possible, providing us with greater confidence to take on new roles either in academia or elsewhere.

Works Cited

Bruffee, Kenneth, “Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind.” *College English* 46.7 (Nov. 1984): 635-652.

Authors

Jennifer Finstrom is a peer writing tutor for the University Center for Writing-based Learning (UCWbL), a member of the UCWbL’s Outreach Team, and in her role as a Graduate Assistant in the 2011-12 academic year, the Assistant Coordinator for the Outreach Team. Jennifer is a double alum of DePaul (BA in English ’10, MA in Writing and Publishing ’12), and she is joining the WRD First Year Program as an instructor this fall.

Lisa D. Lenoir is a peer writing tutor for the University Center for Writing-based Learning and a member of the Collaborative for Multilingual Writing and Research. She is finishing her master’s degree in international public service at DePaul University. She teaches both fashion and styling classes and business writing classes at Columbia College in Chicago. In addition, she does freelance writing and editing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005-2006</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>% change 05-06 to 11-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Visits</td>
<td>4396</td>
<td>5923</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL Visits</td>
<td>2809</td>
<td>4637</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of all visits</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of UG visits</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad ESL Visits</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>1550</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of grad visits</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UI International Enrollment</td>
<td>4807</td>
<td>8009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UI Undergrad International Enrollment</td>
<td>1440</td>
<td>4154</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recognizing the scarcity of writing resources for these students, the Writers Workshop has increased efforts to accommodate their needs. We consider our one-on-one tutoring the most effective way we support English language learners. All of our consultants learn about tutoring English language learners (ELL) writers in their orientation and receive excellent ratings for their work.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has increased our funding somewhat so that we can hire additional consultants and provide an Assistant Director for ELL Support. However, even with that assistance we struggle to meet the demand for our services. Additionally, our international students often have anxiety and confusion on a larger level than the focus of each individual tutoring session. Beyond a particular text, understanding assignments, genres, and standards of University writing in general can be a hurdle.

This article highlights one cost effective way we have supported these writers. For two years experienced writing center consultants have facilitated writing groups for graduate and undergraduate English language learners. Forming these groups demonstrates our conviction that writing is a social practice strengthened by guidance and support, as well as our commitment to encouraging and assisting students in their transition to American academic writing.

Graduate-Level Groups: Finding One’s Rhetorical Place

The graduate-level groups led by Jessica addressed major writing issues through discussion and analysis of writing resources with participants and focused on topics emanating from participants’ interests, including: writing processes; audience and context; logical organization and structure; and soliciting and applying feedback from colleagues and faculty. In addition, participants spent roughly half of each session reviewing one another’s scholarly and course-related writing.

Across all of the groups, one primary concern involved audience. Participants’ concerns ranged from how to construct an effective argument for an American academic audience to how to write an effective conference proposal for an interdisciplinary audience and how to write emails to their advisors and other scholars. Defining the “American academic audience” is no easy task, as that audience changes according to discipline, university/college, region, the genre in which one is writing, and the many other factors contributing to a given rhetorical context. This difficulty proved to be an area of frustration for all participants, particularly considering the additional challenges they faced addressing diverse audiences consisting of people whose cultural backgrounds are quite different from their own.

Participants found it useful to learn about and adapt to audience expectations not only by looking at examples of writing in a particular genre and field of study, but also by actively communicating with members of their audience. We discussed different ways to engage in this communication, including emailing professors and advisors, setting up meetings to discuss one’s project, asking questions during courses, and talking with colleagues. Many of the participants indicated that the cultural conventions guiding communication and networking in the American context are far different from those of their home cultures. Discovering that it is often acceptable and even encouraged to assert oneself as an active and vocal participant in a scholarly community, helped participants gain a better sense of their relationship to their audiences.

Continued discussion with participants across all of the groups indicated that international graduate students are concerned with how to communicate in a different cultural context, and that concern is deeply embedded in rhetorical awareness and the challenges of rhetorical adaptation. This concern guided many of their other concerns with such issues as organization, coherence, and structure. While participants were interested in how to adapt their writing to the rhetorical expectations of an American academic audience, it became clear that this was no simple matter of applying a set of rules to one’s writing. Rather, it is a matter of negotiating one’s place in overlapping rhetorical contexts and understanding the social, cultural, and discursive practices expected in those contexts.

Undergraduate-Level Groups: Finding a Safe Place

The Writers Workshop held two series of ESL writing groups for undergraduate students in both Fall 2010 and Fall 2011. Each session was comprised of four 1.5 hour writing group sessions preceded by an informational session. Like the graduate writing groups, each session was organized around a topic of concern: Writing Process; Genres and Audience, Logic & Structure; Plagiarism; Summarizing & Paraphrasing; Citation & Source Use. The participants also conducted peer reviews with the assignment papers they brought in. Unlike the graduate writing groups, however, the undergraduate writing groups were more structured with lecture-type instructions and controlled practice tasks for the first half of each session.

In Spring 2012, the Writers Workshop ran experimental single-language writing groups for undergraduate writers—one for Koreans and the other for Chinese students. The facilitator, Yu-Kyung Kang led the Korean writing group in Korean while a Chinese consultant led one in Chinese. The decision to hold only Chinese and
Korean groups was based on previous attendance data—the majority of the students who showed interest and attended the previous ESL undergraduate writing groups were Chinese and Korean, the two largest international populations at U of I. More notably, however, we theorized that using the students’ first language would facilitate the writing development process. Such belief derived from Yu-Kyung’s experience working with ESL students, Koreans in particular, in various literacy learning settings (e.g. writing center, ESL courses, Rhetoric courses, private tutoring) for many years.

The field of Second Language studies has long held that the target language is best learned and acquired through immersion. Therefore, one will rarely witness an ESL course/class composed of students with the same language background. Although this might hold true for oral acquisition, our single-language writing groups have shown otherwise for second language writing acquisition/learning. These single-language groups proved quite popular and effective and held unanticipated benefits for the students in particular. The writing center was able to learn much about Korean and Chinese writers (granting their individualistic differences) and their writing concerns.

As anticipated, for the Korean group in particular, using Korean in the writing group actually facilitated the metacognitive aspects of writing. In other words, talking about writing in their own language allowed the writers to think more fluently about writing in English in the American academic setting. It also helped create a safe zone for the students to share their concerns and anxieties surrounding the writing itself, about the expectation of assignments, courses, and instructors, and about their writing experiences before coming to college. Most of the students found comfort and relief that other Korean students were going through similar struggles and difficulties. They also exchanged strategies in coping with linguistic demands of writing in English.

Other interesting findings from the Korean undergraduate writing group increased our understanding of the Korean undergraduate writers. Among many, there are a couple worth noting. 1) Their current writing for assignments in college were significantly influenced by TOEFL writing “training” which limited their structure/organization and word/phrase choices. They confessed how difficult it was for them to break out of such ingrained/embodied practices. 2) Although they wanted to use better “expressions” in conveying their intentions in writing, they were reluctant/less proactive in finding and using resources to help them. Therefore much of the time was spent actually exploring and using various online resources to help the process.

Our Chinese group found similar concerns among students from China about expressing themselves and communicating with American professors and audiences. Both writing groups were successful in addressing not only the concerns and questions they brought with them but also some that they did not know existed. We believe holding the group in the home language promoted deep thought and honest expression between the members. Our plan is to continue these groups as often as possible given the language backgrounds of our staff.

---

Relax and Energize: Tools to Transform Writer’s Anxiety into Positive Creativity

Dorice Moylan
Simmons College

Writers of all levels experience anxiety at various times, for various reasons, and especially when under stacked up deadlines. Some manage to turn the anxiety into positive motivation, and although certain personality types might be more inclined to sail through deadlines seemingly unaffected, many, even the most experienced, can benefit from learning simple, effective stress relief tools that can enable the writer to transform the negative energy of anxiety into positive creativity. In “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors,” Muriel Harris explains that the writing center is a unique space in which we are able “to spawn new services and explore new writing environments” (27). Because we are in a unique position to offer workshops that might be considered a little “out of the box,” I propose offering a workshop to writing center staff that would familiarize tutors with tools such as Mindful Breathing (MB), Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), re-visioning, and tension targeted stretches. This article will introduce these techniques to encourage further exploration into the techniques themselves and their application. Once tutors put these tools to the test themselves, they can offer a workshop for the student body, having experience with incorporating the practices of their choice into their writing process.

In “Zen Tutoring: Unlocking the Mind,” Deborah Murray discusses the importance of remaining calm to set the student writer at ease. She stresses the importance of listening while being “present in the moment, being mindful, being fully engaged . . . and avoiding burnout,”
We will better serve the students who come to us if we exude a calm, positive energy. As we use these practices ourselves, we will have realistic tools to share with them. We guide writers with issues ranging from generating ideas to repeated grammar mistakes by asking questions and listening while offering suggestions and tools that empower students to find their writing voice on their own. We create a safe space for students by being conscious of the silent messages of body language and responding to nonverbal communication with compassion in order to instill confidence, and gain the student’s trust (Amigone, 25). We are in a unique position to consider the whole student – mind, body, and spirit – something that is less likely to be addressed in the classroom environment. We will be more comfortable offering a workshop covering anxiety relief if we are taught to use these tools ourselves first. Ideally, the workshop would be offered in segments so tutors can become familiar with each practice, incorporating them into their own lives so that when suggested, the student feels the sincerity that the tutor actually needs and uses these tools themselves.

**Mindful Breathing**

Mindful breathing is an ancient yogic practice that is utilized by athletes, physicians, and corporate leaders alike to improve performance and promote health from a proactive perspective. In a study published in the *Journal of Hypertension*, Grossman, Grossman, Schein, Zimlichaman and Gavish found that blood pressure can be significantly reduced with regular practice in as little as eight weeks (263). Additional benefits are improved oxygen saturation, which not only calms, but also energizes, as more oxygen means more fuel for the blood and the brain. Another benefit noted in the study is elevated heart rate variability, which is also a major benefit of re-visioning, the next practice on the agenda.

**Re-Visioning**

Re-visioning is the term I use for visualization in the writing center context. Athletes have used visualization for years as a tool that enhances performance outcomes during training and competition. Visualizing finishing a race at a new personal best or nailing a basket from the free throw line establishes neurological pathways that help the athlete make the goal a reality. Researchers at The HeartMath Institute use a version of this tool called Freeze-Frame (Childre and Martin, 72-79) which asks the practitioner to not only envision in the mind, but to recall a positive emotion, such as gratefulness or caring feelings for someone we love, and feel those positive feelings in the midst of a stressful situation. This changes the heart rhythm and synchronizes the heart and brain to achieve a better heart rate variability (HRV) in order to prevent or reduce the metabolic trauma when in a situation that causes anxiety. Childre and Martin explain that, “Freeze-Frame…creates a mood shift to harmonious feeling states…which helps to create and sustain entrainment between heart and brain” (77). This is an extremely effective tool and can be learned quickly and used immediately in the moment.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

Most people have heard of Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) but may not know much about it. In “Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Breathing Exercises, and ABC Relaxation Theory,” Matsumoto and Smith discovered that while PMR and breathing exercises both evoke relaxation and relief from stress, PMR results in greater mental disengagement while breathing exercises result in greater energizing effects and increased awareness (1551). Further, with regular practice, PMR has a delayed benefit, resulting in “increased Mental Quiet and Joy,” which were sub-categories of relaxation used in the study (1551).

**Tension Targeted Stretching**

Simple stretches, targeted at areas where writers build up stress, can be done anywhere, anytime. The areas most commonly affected are the neck and shoulder blades. Taking five minutes at one’s desk to stretch can release pent up negative energy, which slowly builds and leads to anxious feelings, headaches, or worse, constant pain. All of these are hindrances to a calm, peaceful, and creative mind.

After participating in the Relax and Energize workshop, tutors will be better able to:

1) provide a more Zen environment which helps foster creativity that enables generation of positive energy in order to create a safe space for writes of all levels and,  

2) utilize the tools in order to genuinely recommend them to others.

I welcome inquiries on presenting this workshop in your writing center, or providing materials to create your own. Contact me at doricemoylan@yahoo.com.

*Presentation given at 2012 ECWCA conference with affiliation with the Marion E. Wright Writing Center at University of Michigan-Flint Peer Tutor.*
As a writing center administrator, I have approached and examined my work in writing centers through the lens of Donald Schön’s Reflective Practitioner Theory. According to this theory, we become professionals in our field only by continuously reflecting in and on our work. In this piece, I describe scenarios from my first year as an administrator that influenced my leadership style and afforded me opportunities to become a better leader. I describe challenges that I encountered—transitioning from being a peer to a leader, addressing staff resistance, implementing new training and policies, and adapting writing center practice for work with student-athletes. My aim is to characterize how change can happen in and impact a writing center and offer practical insights on how we, emerging and veteran writing center leaders alike, can navigate change while being responsive to the unique needs of our centers, staffs, and student populations.

Becoming an Academic Counselor

In 2008, representatives from the Football Academics Center (Center) at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) approached the University’s Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) for help with training their writing tutors in keeping with contemporary philosophy and practices. Acting as Community Outreach Coordinator for the UWC, I co-organized (with then-fellow UWC consultant Collette Chapman) for the UWC a training session for Intercollegiate Athletics based on the design of UWC Director Peg Syverson. Our “Summer Institute” consisted of an introduction to writing center principles and an examination of strategies and approaches for working with students throughout their writing processes.

After my work with the Summer Institute, I began tutoring at the Center, and, in July 2011, I became an academic counselor responsible for overseeing the Center’s reading program and Writing Lab. My initial task for the Writing Lab was to ensure that we did things “by the book”—in compliance with University and NCAA guidelines—and in the writing center spirit. What I looked forward to most was the opportunity to create best practices for working with our student-athletes on writing and engage tutors in the practice of writing tutoring.

Grasping for the Tangible

My department and supervisor allowed me great freedom to develop reading and writing programs. As the only one in the Center with a writing center background, I was responsible in large part for answering questions like: What exactly was my role as a writing center administrator? What should I be doing, and how? Additionally, as a new full-time staff member, I was unsure how to navigate the transition from tutor to supervisor.

I decided to first focus on tangibles. I created a handbook, largely based (with permission) on the UWC’s handbook, to delineate practices for working with students on writing. I also rearranged the physical space of the Writing Lab to better suit our writing sessions. Previously, small tables had been arranged as two long tables, which I felt could impose undesired distance between tutors and students. I separated the tables to create four smaller tables to accommodate more intimate, one-to-one writing sessions.

Reviewing the Handbook

The Summer Institute was a good start, but it was not enough. It did not encourage continued dialogue, reflection, and self-improvement among writing staff. After becoming acquainted with writing center basics, staff members were on their own to negotiate questions and issues that inevitably arise in working on writing and develop strategies in keeping with their understandings of writing center practices and philosophies and university regulations.

I started off the fall semester with the goal of promoting conversation and so scheduled a meeting with the writing staff to discuss the newly-distributed handbook. There were lots of questions, as I expected, for “non-directive” and “non-evaluative” are not self-explanatory concepts. My staff voiced some concerns. For example, given that we have limited time to work with our student-athletes, they worried about how to effectively incorporate strategies like asking students questions and modeling sentence-level revisions in writing sessions. This concern led to a productive conversation about working with students to prioritize and create timelines for starting writing early to allow for more writing sessions.
Moreover, the handbook introduced policies that some of the staff initially found problematic. A major change involved not sitting with a student for the duration of a writing session while he is writing at a computer. I explained the reason for the new policy—avoiding collusion. The staff wanted to prevent collusion and student over-dependence, but they felt that struggling or insecure writers could benefit from having someone next to them who could provide encouragement and serve as a sounding board for ideas. As a group we brainstormed strategies for assisting such students, like challenging them to work for set periods of time interspersed with writing tutor check-ins to build writing confidence.

In this meeting, I held firm on new policies but acknowledged that we were undertaking a shift and would re-examine and perhaps adjust some practicalities. I believe that the tutors appreciated that I was willing to work with them along the way and engage in conversations about how to implement writing center practices in the Center. I appreciated their willingness to move forward as a team.

**Conducting Training**

In the fall, I implemented monthly training in which various representatives from campus—the Department of Rhetoric and Writing and the School of Undergraduate Studies (both of which have writing-intensive courses aimed at freshmen, a primary population we serve), Services for Students with Disabilities, and Student Judicial Services—came to speak with the writing staff. I asked tutors to let me know in advance if they had scheduling conflicts. No one responded, so I was surprised when a tutor would tell me days before training that s/he would be absent.

I hadn’t considered how I would handle a staff member missing training. Should I hold a make-up session? Was I being too demanding of my staff by scheduling three training sessions in one semester? Even if I had only had one training session in the fall, some tutors may have resisted the additional obligation.

I employed several strategies to facilitate tutor participation. I gave tutors multiple reminders, and, after each training, I asked what they thought of the speaker, topic, as well as date and time. Their responses were useful to me in gauging interests and experience levels and assisting in scheduling. I soon learned that tutors did not like coming in on Fridays, and I agreed that we would schedule spring training if possible on other weekdays. I wanted tutors to know that I respected their input.

**Delivering Feedback**

In addition to monthly trainings, I met with writing staff individually or in small groups once a week and observed all tutors during a writing session once that semester. At the UWC, where I consulted for four years and then acted as Assistant Director for two years, observations were an accepted, albeit mildly stressful, part of the deal. I, and many others in my cohort, looked forward to (or at least did not mind) the opportunity to learn how to become better consultants.

A few tutors worried about the observations, feeling that they could impact job security. I explained why I was doing observations, assuring them that the goal was to gain a better sense of individual tutoring methods, and I gave them the observation form I would use to make the process transparent. Still, some staffers were anxious. Consequently, my supervisor wanted to be involved in the post-observation feedback process.

Having my supervisor, someone with whom tutors were familiar as a supervisor figure, in the room versus just me, the new authority figure, alleviated concerns. Writing staff seemed to enjoy hearing about their strengths and found the target goals/areas for improvement helpful. In reflecting on the arrangement, it reminded me of a UWC practice. The Assistant Directors, instead of the Program Coordinator, gave feedback to veteran tutors, freeing up the Coordinator’s time to focus on newer consultants and enabling veteran tutors to tweak their practices while eliminating the stress of meeting with “the boss.”

**Final Thoughts**

By the end of the fall, I felt that having a mandatory “this or that” each week was venturing into being overbearing. I wanted to do enough training to ensure writing staff had information they needed and felt supported, that they could grapple with the gray areas inherent to writing center practice. I was also conscious of wanting to make an immediate and concrete impact in the Center and distinguish my previous part-time, non-supervisory self from this new, full-time, and significantly empowered self.

But tutors needed to learn by doing, and, importantly, reflecting, as I was doing as a leader. I needed and wanted a motivating ethos surrounding writing center work, one that would showcase the possibilities writing center work affords and prompt excitement about new methods. But it was too much too soon.
I scaled back in the spring. In addition to monthly training, I made time to sit in the Writing Lab and computer labs to informally observe. I did a mid-semester group check-in with writing staffers and maintained an open door policy, encouraging individual discussions when questions arose. I also asked tutors to write process recordings, journal-like entries in which tutors describe and analyze writing sessions with students to promote self-learning.

Reflecting on my first year has helped me gain a better perspective on my assumptions and expectations. I found that the practices and training that work for one writing center and culture do not necessarily work for another. Clear and ongoing communication with my staff, the ones who carry out the mission of a writing center on a daily basis, is crucial, and taking off my leader cap and becoming a tutor periodically has allowed me to see what is coming up for them on the floor. Finally, taking advantage of resources-asking other leaders and writing center colleagues for advice and participating in professional development opportunities-has helped me learn new ideas and conceive different approaches for the future. Change does not always happen quickly, and leaders who praise good work, their own and others’, and demonstrate patience, with themselves and their tutors, can do a lot toward promoting change.

Work Cited

Three hundred nine registered participants gathered in Indianapolis for the 2012 Conference hosted by the Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis University Writing Center staff on the IUPUI campus. Consultants/tutors from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky were joined by colleagues from as far away as Oregon, Texas and New York to share ideas about how writing centers are coping with change in all its permutations. Muriel Harris was coaxed out of retirement to share her insights as our keynote speaker about how writing centers have changed and the particular pressures on us to change in ways we may or may not prefer. Pat Harvey chaired the second annual silent auction, which raised a little over $1,000 to be used for travel awards to future ECWCA conferences. Your generosity was commendable.

On behalf of my co-chair, Frank Smith, and the IUPUI staff, I want to thank all the people who made this year’s conference such a success. It was our first time hosting a conference, and we had a great time riffing on the Mayan apocalypse theme, decorating our space, greeting our guests, and sharing our passion for writing centers. I look forward to seeing you all in 2013.
The Writing Center at the University of Notre Dame serves a community of over 12,000 writers on our campus in northern Indiana. We work with writers from across the University’s four undergraduate colleges, the Graduate School, the Law School and the School of Architecture. With a staff of 32 undergraduate tutors and 3 graduate tutors, we provide over 3,500 hours of one-on-one feedback to writers each year.

DIRECTOR’S GREETING

Greetings from the Writing Center at the University of Notre Dame! It’s a busy time in the Writing Center this month as we hit our stride in our main center and in our three satellite locations on campus. This year we have 19 new tutors on staff who, along with 16 returning tutors, are keeping up with the high demand that the first round of major paper assignments brings to the Writing Center.

We’re also about to kick off our Power of Writing (POW) project for the year, bringing our tutors to two South Bend middle schools to work with children on their writing projects, one-on-one and in small groups. Now in our second year of the grant-funded POW project, we are fast approaching 400 hours of tutoring in our partner schools! The project has been incredibly illuminating and rewarding, allowing us to learn from our younger students as we help them to build their writing skills and foster their creativity.

Our participation in the POW project grew out of conversations among tutors on our Community Writing Center Committee. We sought to find a way to learn more about our community’s literacy needs and to put our skills to good use with writers who wouldn’t ordinarily find themselves in our campus Writing Center. When the opportunity arose for us to partner with Notre Dame’s Institute for Educational Initiatives to launch the POW project, we leaped at the chance.

Conversations in our Community Writing Center Committee also led to our partnership with the Upward Bound program at Notre Dame, where two of our tutors teach writing classes to local high-school students. This year, the committee is charged with initiating a new community literacy project that will serve both adults and children in the Michiana area.

At the Writing Center at Notre Dame, we’re deeply committed to helping writers find their voices and share their ideas. We recognize the transformative power of writing and feel honored to have the opportunity to collaborate with writers on and off campus. Through our Community Writing Center initiative and our face-to-face work with Notre Dame writers, we hope to help build a strong culture of writing where we live.

Matthew Capdevielle, Ph.D.
Director of the University Writing Center
206 Coleman-Morse Center
University of Notre Dame
mcapdev1@nd.edu
(574) 631-3844
LEAH COMING,  
Undergraduate Tutor,  
University of Notre Dame  
Writing Center

When I gave a presentation for our new tutors’ training this year, I almost made a terrifying statement that could have given the fledgling tutors the impression that our work is impossibly difficult. After reflecting about the tutor-tutee relationship, I almost told these tutors (who were eager for encouragement and concrete advice before they started their first week on the job) that to approach their individual challenges, they’d have to keep in mind that “developing into a good tutor is a process that’s linked with developing into a good human being.”

Now, I didn’t actually say this because I thought it’d be too intimidating to set such a monumental task as “developing into a good human being” before them. However, once I think about it, I stand by this idea. Let’s think about the picture of an effective tutor: she is perceptive of the tutee’s need (needs spoken and unspoken, the latter perceived through being open to the tutee’s tone of voice or facial expression), she is genial and warm enough to put the tutee at ease, and she is mentally alert enough to respond and adapt to make the session as productive as possible. Basically, the tutor is able to give of herself: and although we usually think of self-gift as something that happens in sustained friendships among compatible people who have a level of intimacy, this self-gift happens without any of those favorable circumstances, between people who were strangers an hour ago.

Now, if I had accidentally told the new tutors that their capabilities as a tutor rested on becoming a more giving human being, I think their next question would have been “how do I do that?” And in this area, I do have some advice from experience. Just as I’m claiming that development as a tutor is similar to development in life, I’d like to go one step farther and say that developing as a tutor is the same as personal development and happens in the sphere of life outside the Writing Center.

As a younger tutor, I thought that all of this self-gift was an action that I could completely control in the moment. I thought that when I sat down in the tutoring session, I could control my attention, flexibility of response, and warmth to give the tutee everything he needed. But the problem was, the more that I consciously tried to be a warm and good tutor to my tutee, the more forced this process became.

In the end, whenever I think about controlling my actions in order to be a more giving person I always return to an idea from St. Augustine: “love, and then do what you will.” His idea is that once your heart is in a certain state – where its default motion is to love unconditionally – then all of your actions will naturally flow out of this place, and they do not need to be controlled. For me, it’s the same with tutoring. The way I will become a more effective tutor is not to turn on controlled actions during my session, but rather to sync my heart and my life to the kind of state that is required of being a good tutor and a giving person: openness, peace, and a pouring-out of appreciation for other people’s being that we could call love of neighbor. And although it’s quite intense to think of love as the pathway to effective tutoring, I think that is exactly what we tutors need to cultivate both inside and outside of the Writing Center.

RICKY BEVINGTON,  
Undergraduate Tutor, University of Notre Dame Writing Center

Eye contact. In my 3 years of tutoring at the Notre Dame Writing Center, I’m not sure if I have made eye contact with my any writer for more than 47 seconds in any given 45 minute session. Reflecting on this issue (and yes, it is an issue), I realized that I am not certain where I focus my eyes during a session. I sometimes look at their paper, occasionally I look at my notes, and I even periodically glance at the clock. But majority of the time, I think I am really looking at, well, nothing. And through observing other tutors around our writing center, I’d say I’m not the only one.

At the Notre Dame Writing Center, like many other centers across the country, we place great emphasis on the personal interaction between the tutor and the writer. We continually remind ourselves how “human” the moment is when the tutor sits down to aid a writer in the expression of his unique ideas. We individualize our tutoring techniques based on the writer’s project and goals. We focus on the writer. But too often, we focus on the writer, without focusing on writer.

Recently I have been wondering how I can reasonably claim that I am devoting myself fully to the development of an individual writer if I am not making a conscious effort to look at that writer. Usually I consider full, mental concentration on the session at hand as a success, since as we all know it is far too easy to get caught up in our own work, a previous session, or the world outside
the window. After reflection, though, I realize that concentrating with every inch of my mind is meaningless because without looking at the writer, I am not communicating that concentration to him. I am communicating questions, thoughts, concerns, and ideas, but I am not communicating the fact that I care about his development beyond the success of this individual assignment. By looking at nothing, I’m limited to focusing on the writing at hand and connecting to the writer only through these ideas, which have become little more than a common object of focus.

I guess there is an opportunity to claim that by physically looking at nothing we are actually looking at the ideas, both the writer and the tutor focusing on the same thoughts. Collaboratively focusing on the ideas allows the tutor and the writer to journey together to clear expression and articulation. And although this is a lovely image, I don’t think that many tutors would be satisfied with this result.

If I could go back and start my undergraduate tutoring career again, I would remind myself every time I walk into a session to focus on the writer, both in concentration and through expression of this concentration: eye contact. Clearly, no session should turn into an awkward staring contest, but each session should include a few moments when the tutor looks at the writer to remind him: “hey man, I’m here for you, and we are going to work through this together.” Support, motivation, inspiration, challenge, and all of the other abstract goals we have as writing tutors can be accomplished through a moment of real eye contact. Looking your writer in the eye and saying what you need to say—that is what makes a session so “human.” And only when you have established this human connection can both the tutor and the writer walk away from a session feeling that they have accomplished their goals.

For my senior thesis, I am researching food cooperatives—one in South Bend, in particular—and showing how the cooperative model is an ethical solution to food security issues. Since I first started writing at Notre Dame, I have been impressed by how much extra attention is given to first year students regarding their development as writers. What’s more, I have always craved this kind of attention for more confident upperclassmen writers, truly believing that the conversation about writing should never stop. My study of cooperatives gave me the idea of creating a place where writers can work together to help one another find room in their schedules to focus on their writing. Thus, the Writing Cooperative was born.

After our first meeting, I am finding that the program is off to a promising start. Thirteen undergraduate students began the meeting with a conversation about procrastination and writing anxiety. They shared with one another why they sometimes wait until the night before a due date to begin an essay or a report. I then shared with them what I know about the cooperative model. This model asks us to shift our priorities from efficiency and focus on grades to building relationship and focus on writer development. We talked about being committed to making space in our schedules in order to think about ideas in advance and bounce these ideas off of another person. Although it might not be the most “efficient” or “practical” way to get a writing assignment done, it will allow for the writer to grow.

The students agreed that this was an idea they wanted to try to apply to their writing work as undergraduates. We paired up and met with our partners to decide on a time and place to meet. I will be meeting with my fellow writer at a café on campus this week. We’ll spend some time talking about my upcoming assignments and ideas I have. My fellow writer will do the same. Through this intentional time we set aside to devote all of our attention to one another, I hope that we will become better at thinking creatively, expressing clearly, and working cooperatively.

These goals coincide with what we try to do at work in the Writing Center. Although the cooperative model is unique in that the writer/tutor distinction does not exist, I believe we will greatly improve as tutors if we take on the cooperative mindset. Believing that both tutors and writers are pouring out their talent and energy in order to gain mutual benefits will help us to remember the ethical nature of what we do. Our work will enrich our lives if we look at it as more than a job; it is a cooperative service that can make us better writers and better people.
The Writing Resource Center (WRC) at Case Western Reserve University provides writing consultation to students across the university in six campus locations and online. More than 30 consultants, consisting of English graduate students and full-time writing program faculty, staff our center. Each year, WRC consultants conduct about 3,000 individual sessions with more than 1,000 individual students ranging from first-year writers to those doing graduate and post-doctoral work. The WRC also offers a one-credit writing tutorial course that is popular among both undergraduates and graduate students in the university’s professional schools.

The WRC at Case Western is also involved with outreach: each term, the center offers a series of writing workshops and is integrally involved in the Writing Program’s coordination of its bi-annual Celebration of Student Writing on campus.

DIRECTOR’S GREETING
Megan Swihart Jewell

I am pleased for this opportunity to share information about Case Western Reserve University’s Writing Resource Center (WRC) with other writing center directors and staff in the region. Within the past 10 years, as the university’s writing requirement shifted from a two-course composition sequence to being grounded in the university’s interdisciplinary core curriculum, or SAGES (Seminar Approach to General Education) program, our writing center has grown exponentially in terms of its size and the scope of services we offer students. Prior to SAGES, the WRC was staffed by a handful of English graduate students working in various locations on the peripheries of campus. Today, we count full-time English and SAGES writing-faculty among our staff, which each term usually numbers around 35 consultants. The majority of our WRC consultants are PhD-holding writing specialists that we choose each year from a highly competitive national pool of candidates.

Given our commitment to offering writing support to all students at a research university, this shift in the composition of our staff represents tangible opportunities for all of our consultants to assist others – and to grow– in the areas of disciplinary writing. Indeed, graduate students in professional schools such as medicine, law, social work, and management, are increasingly taking advantage of our center, and we often find ourselves assisting with faculty publications and grant writing projects. The number of graduate writers we see each term is nearly comparable to first-year writers in the College of Arts and Sciences and the other undergraduate students in the School of Engineering, whose technical and professional writing projects represent the majority of all undergraduate work on which we consult. The size and recent growth of our center as well as the disciplinary writing in which we increasingly specialize brings up a host of opportunities and challenges relating to a writing center’s pedagogy as well as its institutional position.

As one might imagine, one such institutional challenge has to do with space. The small two-room office which housed the pre-SAGES WRC was no longer adequate to accommodate a staff that has grown to nearly triple its original size. To remedy this, the WRC has lobbied for and has been granted other rooms and café spaces around campus, and we have made the most out of these dispersed – as opposed to more centralized – work spaces. Students have still managed to find us when they are in need of writing consultation. While it’s been fundamentally instructive to learn about tutoring practices within each specific work-space, I probably do not need to spell out all of the administrative challenges involved in scheduling and supervising work in six different campus locations. This year, however, due to our efforts in lobbying for additional space – along with the serendipity of a donation for a new student center– the WRC was granted a more centralized space in the older student center, located the heart of campus. Therefore, this marks an exciting year for us as we transition from the peripheries to the center, coming closer to realizing the Writing Resource Center as both physically and symbolically central in relation to the university.
As conscientious writing tutors, we actively seek new ways to engage our students as learning styles evolve with technology. But how does increased technology usage affect our core tutoring? How has our tutoring changed or adapted to virtual sessions? Are they as effective as face-to-face consulting? As I “rethink” how we integrate technologies into pedagogy and tutorial styles, I support the need for balance in our quest to achieve technologic parity with our students, especially in writing tutorials. In the end, students’ willingness to help themselves and tutor ability to sometimes sit back are still parts of a successful tutoring session equation. And, as this discussion reveals, nothing compares to the f2f tutorial, especially one that is multi-modal, in which both the student and the tutor are comfortable with the technology.

I began bringing my laptop when consulting in a satellite location, so I could check the online schedule and write session reports if time allowed. I quickly realized how valuable carrying around an extra 5.2 pounds would become. I began preloading (and minimizing) the OWL @ Purdue, an online dictionary and thesaurus, our own WRC Instructor Resources page, wordpandit.com, and, for L2 learners, The Cambridge Academic Dictionary with audio in both American and UK English pronunciation. I find technology usage builds confidence in more passive students while establishing a good connection between the student and myself. Using Internet sites is also a new way to teach self-editing skills; and let’s face it a variety of methods to choose from is always welcome.

Three positive narratives of Internet usage during a multi-modal tutorial session

The first example of accessing the Internet during an f2f tutorial averted an instance of plagiarism, while also saving a student from extreme embarrassment and potentially career-damaging consequences. This student came to our appointment with a draft of a Statement of Purpose, required of first-year Law students. It was well organized into three distinct areas. However something about the second point of discussion concerned me; the writing style differed from the other points and the reference to one of the first lawyer jokes, seemed out of place. A quick Google search revealed “Dick the Butcher” as a character in Shakespeare’s Henry VI Part II. Pressing a bit further, mentioning her own voice changes in this section, the student revealed a friend assisted with this paragraph. Admitting her friend actually wrote the paragraph, this student realized my concern. She chose to delete the entire paragraph and start that section over with an example of her own choosing.

The second example of accessing the Internet during an f2f tutorial occurred during a brainstorming session for a second-year essay. This student had a solid draft with good organization and a fairly clear thesis. However, some of the phrasings and word choices needed attention, as they did not measure up to the sophistication of her argument. Going to Wordpandit.com opened up a door to a room this student found very exciting, and the remainder of the session was spent searching an online thesaurus for several other words being repeated or confining expression of thought.

The final tutorial situation in which the Internet proved invaluable in an f2f session also bridges this discussion into the use of Goggle Drive (formerly Docs) and virtual synchronous tutoring. Given a serious language barrier, this student arrived without hard copy and a laptop that I did not care to touch. Having my laptop was extremely fortuitous. I proceeded to walk the student through the process of uploading his document onto Goggle Drive, and invite me to share, open the Google chat stream etc. We then worked in a simultaneous synchronous and f2f session—actually “side by side.” Not unlike virtual distance, this small yet important physical distance established a safe zone of personal space, which eased tensions and actualized a comfort zone for the student and tutor, making for a more congenial and productive session.

Regardless of the type of tutorial situation and space, it is important for the consultant to set the tone for the session, with enough structure—in the forms of questions and/or directives for the student to explain their assignment, approach, writing, and particular concerns. This early effort will force “focus” as well as serve to get the conversation started, especially in distance settings. Admittedly, even in real time tutorials, many students are waiting for our lead, and indeed we, as tutors, should be comfortable in that position.
Mary K. Assad

My first student was 7 years old. I was 13, eager to begin my first job and earn a few extra dollars. P.J., the son of a family friend, was struggling with math, and we met weekly to review flashcards. I tried to make our meetings fun, devising a “cone game” made out of the little paper cups from our household water cooler. Little did I know that 10 years later I’d be walking into my university’s writing center for the first time as a Graduate Teaching Assistant.

This time, instead of numbers, I’d be helping students with words; with the complex task of making words sound academic; with the anxieties that come along with writing for professors with high expectations. For many students, all of these typical stressors were compounded by the daunting task of writing in their second language. During my first semester as a TA working in the Writing Center, I met countless ESL students – from undergraduates to doctoral students – whose brilliant minds and disciplinary knowledge were at the mercy of their nascent English language skills. I may have been their tutor, but these students quickly became my teachers. They taught me about topics ranging from nursing to business to biology. But even more importantly, they helped me learn how to communicate more effectively, how to work with people from various cultures, and how to create a space where the student’s voice can be heard, both in his or her paper and in the tutoring session itself.

And the learning kept on happening for all of us. I learned that a one-hour tutorial can evaporate like water on a summer sidewalk; my time-management skills were challenged on a whole new level. A stressed-out student would bring an eight-page paper just a few hours before it was due and panic at the thought of only reviewing one or two pages – pages filled with grammatical errors that I could recognize but barely find the technical terms to explain. Digging through my mental archive of verb tenses and preposition rules, I would feel just as stressed as the student, trying to offer explanations without filling the margins with corrections or re-writing sentences in my own words. As a first-semester Master’s student, I had never heard the word “appropriation.” All I knew was that this student needed help, and that the clock was ticking. And I knew that at the end of the hour, I wanted the student to leave feeling like something had been accomplished.

Over the past five years, I’ve had the opportunity to grow as a tutor, and I like to think my students have grown along with me. I’ve seen some familiar faces over the years. Some semesters I’ve spent teaching in the classroom, rather than the writing center, but I believe we use the same skills in both places, just in different ways. All college students – both ESL and native-speakers – need to feel valued as individuals and as writers. I’ve heard too many students tell me that a teacher or a classmate called their writing “bad.” I’ve sensed so much low self-esteem and discouragement among students of all ages. I feel it is my job to balance my “correction” comments with compliments. I know it is my job to help these students believe in their abilities and believe that they have something important to say.

There is, of course, no single way to achieve such morale-boosting. There is no flow chart or grammar rulebook. In this regard, we rely most heavily on our students to teach us. Each student’s individual story helps us realize the needs that are out there and the situations we can change for the better. I remember one particular student who was probably twice my age. Returning for her Master’s degree in nursing after years in the workplace, she felt far removed from academia and in need of someone to make her feel capable. We spent hours discussing organizational skills, note-taking, outlines, and the beauty of color-coding. She had so much knowledge, yet she needed someone to make her realize that she could fill page after page with her ideas. This student, along with all the others I’ve had the pleasure of working with, have taught me that when the “teacher” and “student” titles are removed, we are all just people trying to learn from one another, and we all need each other’s help and encouragement to get where we want to be.

Jessica Slentz
English Graduate Student Consultant

I am a doer. I like to get in, get it done, and go on, whether I’m making dinner or finishing up work for classes. I generally pride myself on my focus and efficiency and ability to make things happen, and happen quickly. The downside of this approach is that it does not translate well to minimalist tutoring. Even if the student ideally wants to get in, get it done, and go on with an efficient correction and proofreading session, this really does nothing for them in the long run. I try to think of my own writing education. If my teachers and professors over the years had not taken the time to discuss writing and grammar with me, if they had merely corrected my errors without showing me what changes I should be making and why, if they had rewritten sentences without...
giving me applicable feedback on sentence structure and word choice, if they had merely “fixed” my writing, I would not be where I am today.

I’ve been trying to keep this in mind over this past semester, as a new tutor in the Writing Resource Center at Case Western Reserve University. I have had to force myself to slow down and realize that I am not just there to problem-solve in the moment. I am there to help fellow students learn to take ownership of their own writing, to learn to recognize different corrections to make and strategies to take to strengthen their writing over a longer period of time. I found it very difficult at first not to jump in and rewrite my tutees’ papers for them. I realized that if I was going to be an effective tutor, I had to change my mindset and my habits.

Sometimes I have to put down my pen.

Laying down my pen is my reminder to myself that this is the students’ work, not mine, and with patience, understanding and clear communication I can guide a students’ editing of their own work without “writing” onto their space myself. The effects that I’ve seen in a short time after this one small gesture have been inspiring for me. I have watched as students, writing the corrections we discuss on their papers themselves as we read, start to recognize and pick up on needed corrections before I even point them out. I’ve seen the excitement students have when they leave the session with a sense of pride in and ownership of their work.

I don’t always put down my pen when I should. Sometimes I still feel old habits creeping back, and I want to “fix” as efficiently as I can. I can feel the difference in those sessions when I do. Maybe the paper is “corrected,” but it’s no longer truly their own, and I can sense their frustration, even though the end product might be the same.

Tutoring, like writing, is a process. It takes patience and a readiness to set aside our own tendencies for the benefit of the student. It takes practice. And for me it takes knowing when to put down my pen, when to stop “correcting” and instead explain, discuss, listen and guide.

The YSU Writing Center is pleased to announce that it will be hosting the sixth annual Northeast Ohio Writing Centers Association conference on Saturday, October 13, 2012. Most presentations including roundtable sessions, panels, and poster sessions will be scheduled in Kilcawley Center. Typically, conference attendees include about 100 current writing consultants from area colleges and universities as well as their directors.

Many of these schools use undergraduate or graduate students to work as peer tutors, but some rely on professional tutors, who typically hold at least a master’s degree. While English departments are often heavily represented among the staff majors, most of the writing centers, like that of YSU, tutor writing across the curriculum, so there are usually many different disciplines represented. The conference welcomes presenters and attendees from any field and professional level who are interested in the teaching and tutoring of writing.

We are please to announce that we will have two keynote speakers in attendance at our conference: Dr. William Macauley and Dr. Nicholas Mauriello.

If you would like to learn more about the NEOWCA or its annual conference, please contact Angela Messenger, YSU Writing Center Coordinator and active NEOWCA participant: ajbarwick@ysu.edu or (330)941-1781.
CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The things that we share in our world are far more powerful than the things that divide us.
--Donald Williams, American astronaut

“Commons” are resources owned or shared by everyone. This year, 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. Clarion will host the East Central Writing Center Association Conference on April 12-13, 2013, and we invite you to help us think through ethical, philosophical, and practical questions such as:

- Is language, in fact, a commons?
- Language is often a means of exclusion, for example, the long history of English only initiatives, shame inflicted on ESL/ELL students because of their academic writing. How might the idea of commons help mediate long-held assumptions about language and difference?
- What is the role of the writing center as a site of language-commons activity?
- Historically, the commons are often juxtaposed with enclosure. Are modern notions of authorship or ownership of language a form of enclosure? What about censorship?
- How do ideas of social authorship/collaborative authorship/communal authorship interact with “traditional” academic practice?
- In a world of increasing connectivity between media and text (that is typically encouraged, mind you), why has there not been a push for this same connectivity for authorship? What is the line between the individual and the communal and where/when do they collide?
- How can writing centers help students understand the gray area of authorship when experts still struggle?
- Where does intellectual property end and "common knowledge" begin? How do writing centers help student negotiate the boundary?
- The internet has changed the way we present ideas. Language has become abbreviated, and big ideas are broken down into short summaries that can be accessed and processed quickly. Is more basic information part of the commons, free of authorship, or do we have to attribute these summaries to those who compile them?
- What role does stewardship play in language-as-commons? Is there are responsible way to use language? A right way?
- Language-as-commons recasts received notions of collaboration and collusion. How do consultants share examples and ideas to the students without crossing this obscured line?

We invite proposals for individual or panel presentations and for poster session. Check the ECWCA website for submission information. For more information about this call for papers, contact Dr. Chris McCarrick at Clarion University: cmccarrick@clarion.edu or 814-393-2739.
‘Honoring the Past, Tutoring for the Future’
Join Us for Our 30th Connections Conference on Friday, October 26 at Michigan State University!

The Michigan Tutorial Association will be back at Michigan State University in East Lansing on Friday, October 26, for our 30th Connections Conference! Our first conference was held at MSU, so join us at the MSU Union for a day of sharing, learning, connecting, and re-connecting.

What works that’s tried and true? How do we handle classic one-on-one tutoring? What techniques and methods work for your students? How can we use technology to help students now and in the future? What works? What will work in the future?

We encourage conference attendance by student tutors, professional tutors and tutoring directors! It’s a great portfolio and network builder.

For conference information, proposal forms, and registration forms, visit the MTA Conference webpage at www.michigan-tutors.org/mta_conferences.htm
REGISTRATION DEADLINE: Oct. 15, 2012  (Late registrations are accepted, but lunch is not guaranteed.)
Submit registration to:
Michigan Tutorial Association
P. O. Box 895 Royal Oak, MI 48068-0895
Questions??  Contact MTA President Lorie Ermak at ermak@northwood.edu

Call for Engagement!

Submit content to ECWCA and keep the conversations going. There are many ways to contribute and be heard. ECWCA is a semiannual publication designed to open and extend conversations between people invested in writing center work in our geographic region. Tutors, directors, assistant directors, administrators, tutees, and more are encouraged to engage in the dialogue. Below are just some of the ways you might consider contributing. We look forward to hearing from you all and advancing the work we do.

Articles
Topics: Issues relevant to writing center work.
Length: 1000-2500 words.
Style: APA or MLA.

Tutor Voices
Topics: Opinion pieces/reflection pieces relevant to you and your writing center work.
Length: 500-750 words.

Send submissions and inquiries to ecwcanewsletter@gmail.com. Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis. Newsletter issues are released in September/October and January/February.

The deadline for the next newsletter is December 31.