

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

Volume 13, Number 8

April, 1989

...from the editor,...

At the top of this page is the phrase which describes the newsletter as "promoting the ex-change of voices and ideas." For most issues, the ideas predominate. This month, it is the voices you'll hear most of all as Rick Leahy tells us about the people, topics, and setting of a regional writing center conference; Irene Clark recaps Mike Rose's book about his struggle out of the slums of LA; and Myra Kogen, a writing lab director, answers the interview questions of Teri Haas, another writing lab director.

In addition, there is a clamour of calls for conference proposals, reports from regional groups, a tutor's story of what her writing lab has offered her, and a reader's response to a recent issue of the newsletter. Steve North has called the newsletter a "monthly gathering of the writing center family." This month the noise level is a bit high with all those voices, just as it is when we hear the hum of conversation in a well-functioning writing lab. But then we all know how important talk is.

Muriel Harris, editor

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**Rocky Mountain Diary
Thursday**

It must be chronic with us writing people. Here I am, 37,000 feet over the Colorado Rockies, on the way from Boise to Denver, headed for the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association meeting. Task: to chair the sessions and write up a report on them. And what am I doing? Already starting to write the report, before the conference has even begun.

Boise to Denver, then a three-hour layover, then on to El Paso, then an hour's van ride to Las Cruces, New Mexico - an easy trip compared to the routes some of us must take to get there. Distance in the Rocky Mountain region is only part of the difficulty. Transportation is the other.

The region stretches from Canada to Mexico, from the California border to the edge of Nebraska. Each year when we get together, only a handful of the same people show up. The rest are new. We add the new people to the mailing list in the hope that some day, years from now, when the conference

returns to their locality, we'll see or hear from them again.

Friday

For the second time, we are meeting conjointly with the Rocky Mountain MLA. Without their much larger membership, we wouldn't be able to meet in a nice place like the Las Cruces Hilton, or enjoy discount hotel rates.

Turnout is always small at RMWCA functions. We feel lucky to have attracted 15 people to today's sessions. At first I worried that the eleven presenters would only be talking to each other, but now and then other people drop in from the RMMLA sessions. For a regional conference we are fairly cosmopolitan; presenters have come from as far away as California and New Hampshire. And the variety of presentations is good: tutor training, expectations conflict, computers, writing across the curriculum, and high-school tutoring.

Joy Rouse, of Miami University, and Barbara Olds, of Colorado School of Mines, both address tutor recruitment and training. Joy describes a training course for tutors in all disciplines. Tutor-trainees practice tutoring in their own subject areas each week, each in partnership with an experienced tutor or pairing up in a "mentor team" with another new tutor. I am especially interested in the program for Interviewing prospective tutors. Each candidate role-plays both as a tutor and as a client, so that the interviewer can get an idea of how they would perform in a one-to-one situation,

Barbara reports that her tutor-training course generates a variety of research. Tutors work on projects such as "how-to" guidelines; studies of other writing centers; surveys of faculty, tutors, and students; and reflections on various aspects of tutoring and writing (e.g., what it's like to write in your second language).

Lee McKenzie, of Weber State, and Rich Edmunds and Desiree Moore, of Yuba College, give some new insights into computer labs. Lee uses marriage as a metaphor for the merging of the writing center at Weber State with the English computer lab: the child by a previous marriage, sex, children, in-laws, and the question of who's going to take what name. It gives us a fascinating inside view of what's given up and what's gained when two existing units "marry."

Rich and Desiree tell how they have gradually turned around the teaching methods of the faculty in a community-college English department. A new computer lab gave them the leverage they needed to convert the faculty to teaching the writing process. Result: a drastic drop in the attrition rate and a new spirit of cooperation among the instructors.

One of my worries has been laid to rest. We have scheduled two speakers for each ninety-minute session, whereas RMMLA has scheduled three for each of its sessions. Would we have too much slack time? Right now, there seems to be no problem. Each presenter has generated so much interest, it's hard to contain the discussion in the allotted time.

Saturday

Today's first session is about expectations. The first presenter, Karen Rod's*, of Dartmouth College, lies indisposed in her hotel room. But she has written out her talk, and her husband Patio is here to read it. His reading, relaxed and informal, comes as close to a talk as you can get. Karen has researched "expectation conflict" at three Ohio campuses. She has found that writing centers which started out as remedial shops (as so many of us did years ago) have a hard time changing their image. Faculty send students there to "fix" their grammar. Students go there to improve their grades, not their writing, and tutors find themselves caught

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

in the middle, unable to help clients with higher order concerns except, as it were, on the sly. At the one writing center in Karen's study that managed to avoid expectations conflict, the director refused to set up the center as a remedial lab and refused to allow faculty to require students to go there for help.

Bill Shakespeare discusses another aspect of expectations conflict: the clash between what teachers expect from an assignment and what their students produce. Instructors tend to expect the kind of writing they see in their professional journals. The students do not read that kind of writing and so have no idea what is expected of them. To prepare his tutors for the problems resulting from this conflict, Bill takes them through several different genres of writing, asking them to study the characteristics of each. He then teaches them to help the client look not only at what sort of writing is called for in the assignment but also at what the instructor says to the class.

Saturday moves from informal to down-right casual. The AV equipment for 10:45 fails to show, but then so does the speaker who wanted to use it. Anne Johnstone, of UC Santa Barbara, has the whole hour and a half to herself. She sits down in front of the podium and asks the audience to join the discussion at any time. The subject, writing centers and writing-across-the-curriculum, turns out to be a hot topic. Most of us here are seeking to involve our centers more in WAC. Anne relates several instances of faculty who have had varying success using writing in their classes. Those who succeed best rethink their courses entirely to integrate writing into the design, rather than trying to tack journals or other writings onto the existing structure. She explains how the writing center at Northern Iowa, where she worked before moving to Santa Barbara, functions as a resource for faculty, helping them integrate writing into their course design.

The time is up before we know it. As the session nears its end, one person in the audience thanks Anne - thanks all the RMWCA speakers - for talking, not reading papers, and for involving the audience in discussion. His ears ache from hearing too many speakers in other sessions read their papers in deadly monotones. He has written a poem about it, which he shares with us -but not in a mono-tone.

Then lunch, and a talk by Steve Bernhardt, of New Mexico State University,

about composition classes in computer labs, and how to make the best use of class time. Questions abound; we delay the start of the final session. I feel challenged; I gave up teaching classes in our computer center last year because I'd grown tired of it. Steve has suggested some interesting new approaches I'd like to try.

When the last session does begin, the attendance has dwindled to seven. (Was it a mistake to schedule into Saturday afternoon? How many people have skipped off on the tour to Ciudad Juarez?) The presenters, Claire Anderson, of Houston School District, and Kate Gadbow, of the University of Montana, arrange us in a circle. Discussion flows so freely we can hardly, any longer, tell the speakers from the audience.

Claire describes Houston's RAP tutoring program for high-school students. The district requires falling students to attend tutoring sessions after school or on Saturdays. The most interesting innovation is the concept of the tutoring itself. It centers not on subject matter but on learning. For instance, the tutor, rather than teaching chemistry, talks about discoveries and experiments. Students learn how to go about learning.

Somehow, at about the time scheduled for Kate's presentation, the conversation comes around to her topic, tutoring and writingacross-the-curriculum in secondary schools. The University of Montana offers a course in WAC required for all secondary education majors. Students learn how to teach the writing process and how to respond to the broader concerns of student writing, not just grammar and conventions. Kate ends with a proposal, or perhaps it's a challenge, for high schools. If their resources are already strained, and teachers help out with the writing center because their "free" time goes into hall and cafeteria duty, why not let those who want a pleasant alternative spend the hour tutoring in the writing center?

A small knot of RMMLA people hover outside our door, nervously eyeing the room. They want us to leave so they can begin their session. They must wonder if we're going to just sit there talking all afternoon. We take our discussion out into the hall, up the stairs to the lobby.

(Cont. on page 8)



the TROUBLESHOOTER

-- Paula Gills

A reader recently asked for information about tutoring dyslexic students. Since this is a topic on my list for troubleshooter articles and I have some background in this area, I'd like to concentrate on this topic for a while in this column. This is an increasingly important area of concentration for support services as more and more students are being assessed and identified, and more are encouraged to attempt college. It wasn't too long ago that learning disabled students were generally counseled away from college because they were deemed unable to face the intellectual rigor of higher education; we now know that this is not true in most cases. Our discovery of such capable LD individuals as Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Woodrow Wilson and Winston Churchill have helped dispel the fallacy that a learning dysfunction impairs basic intelligence. New and revised methods of evaluation and remediation are assisting educators in their attempts to focus learning on strengths that can be enriched and problem areas that can be accommodated. But the process is a deliberate and painstaking one; still, certain established procedures can be our guide in providing the help these students need.

The first thing that college educators need to be aware of is the basic provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This Federal Law provides:

- A. That no student may be excluded from any program or any course solely on the basis of handicap;
- B. That modifications in degree or course requirements may be necessary to meet the requirements of some handicapped students;
- C. That auxiliary aids, such as tape

recorders must be permitted in the classroom when they are required to ensure the full participation of handicapped students;

- D. That alternate testing and evaluation methods for measuring student achievement will be necessary for students with impaired sensory, manual or spelling skills (except where those are skills being measured).

Appropriate and comprehensive evaluation of a learning disability should be provided before a student is deemed dyslexic or learning disabled in some other way. Because there are so many variations and manifestations of dyslexia (affecting auditory and/or visual channels of processing) and specific learning disabilities in general, it is imperative that assessments be administered by a licensed clinical psychologist or trained educational specialist in the area of LD assessment. A detailed psycho-educational evaluation with recommendations for educational programming be submitted to the campus office designated to receive and review information on handicapped students. The 504 coordinator should be a part of this team, overseeing compliance and handling disputes and grievances. Since this information is highly confidential and cannot be distributed to anyone not working directly on the student's program, the college administration should develop a delivery service network, ideally with a coordinator of LD services who would be responsible for disseminating information to appropriate personnel including classroom teachers and writing lab tutors. (It is understood that the student's permission be secured in writing before any information is given.) The coordinator can assist those working with the student

to choose the most appropriate learning strategies. This should be somewhat similar to the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) process on the secondary level. (The IEP lists students' educational strengths, weaknesses, and remediation/tutorial recommendations.)

As mentioned earlier, appropriate assessment is a key factor. Dyslexia cannot be diagnosed by reading tests or writing samples alone. These must be used in conjunction with a basic aptitude/intelligence measure such as the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale- Revised (WAIS-R), a general aptitude test assessing verbal and learning behaviors. Vision and hearing tests are also important, as well as auditory and visual learning measures. Achievement tests in reading, writing, and math round out the procedure. It is essential that the results be interpreted by a qualified professional at all levels of diagnosis and educational programming. Misguided instruction can do more harm than good to these students; the principle of something is better than nothing definitely does not apply in these cases.

Writing lab instructors are sometimes the last to know that a student has a specific learning disability. Students have no obligation to identify themselves on the college level, and many institutions do not address this as comprehensively as they might. Still, there are no short cuts in dealing with these students. The exact nature of the dysfunction must be known before a tutorial program can be developed. It is also important for instructors to realize that a learning disability cannot be cured; it is a permanent part of the individual's brain structure/function. It can, however, be accommodated, worked around. Since basic intelligence remains intact in most cases, the only thing that a learning disability affects is the way an individual processes and adjusts to information. It is the educator's challenge to learn each individual's unique intellectual process and develop ways to enhance learning. "Canned" approaches are of little use.

There has been much discussion as to whether or not remediation is possible at the college level, I agree with those who believe that remediation must take place close to the time that a skill is developmentally introduced. It is of little use to spend a semester working on phonics with a college freshman; time would better be spent working on specific

problem areas with actual reading and writing assignments. Of course, there are some individuals who will have specific activities programmed in their report; it would be worthwhile to explore these, but not at the expense of things discovered in trial and error work. In my experience in working with these students the past ten years, I've found that a pragmatic, one-step-at-a-time approach works best. Trying to do too much at once most often overloads an already overloaded, compensating neural processing network.

I'll leave you with several resources that will be of help to those seeking practical advice and educational strategies. The first is a text that I have found invaluable in its presentation of practical teaching methods: *Teaching the LD Adolescent* by Alley and Deshler (1979), available from Love Publishing, Denver. The authors devote whole chapters to reading and writing, outlining specific strategies for class-room and tutorial work. A key article by M. S. Kahn is "Learning Problems of the Secondary and Junior College LD Student: Suggested Remedies"; this appeared in the *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Vol. 13, pp. 40-44. It's short but chock full of specific information. I have authored a handbook for my institution entitled *College Students With Learning Disabilities*. If you would like a copy, send a check for \$2.00 to me, and I will send you one.

My next column will address the most common problems tutors face in working with these students and will outline specific strategies for instruction. Until then, if you have questions, write me at Harmon Hall, Norwich University, Northfield, VT 05663 or call 802-485-2130 and I'll do what I can to help.

Summer Writing Fellowships For English Teachers

The Center for Learning offers six-week fellowships to co-author educational materials, for high school and junior high English teachers (in Cleveland, June 19-July 28, 1989). Also offered for high school teachers are summer in-service seminars (at various locations and dates). For further information, contact The Center for Learning, 21590 Center Ridge Road, Rocky River, Ohio 44116 (216-331-1404),

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Midwest Writing Centers Association

Oct. 20-21, 1989
St. Louis

The Midwest Writing Centers Association invites proposals for one-hour presentations for its annual fall conference. One group of concurrent sessions will be presented on Friday afternoon and four groups of concurrent sessions will be presented on Saturday.

The theme of the conference is Models, Methods, and Movements: the Multi-faceted Writing Center; proposals may be related to any part of the theme or to all parts of it.

We prefer but do not require presentations that include some audience participation. We strongly urge presenters not to read papers but to present their ideas in a more informal way. Please send a one to two-page proposal describing objectives, activities, method of presentation, absolutely necessary audio-visual equipment, and intended audience (high school or college or both) to: Anne Wright, Writing Lab, Hazelwood West High School, #1 Wildcat Lane, Hazelwood, MO 63042, (314-731-3333, ex. 220).

Deadline: May 15, 1989. Notification of decision: no later than September 1, 1989.

Wyoming Conference on English

June 19-23, 1989
Laramie, WY

"Margins of Overlap: Schools, Communities, and Cultures"

Invited speakers: Alma Flor Ada, Madalena Freire, Mike Rose, Jerome Harste, and Cecelia Tichi. Seminar leaders: Ann Cummins, Dan Kirby, Mary Pratt, Renato Rosaldo, Robert Torrey.

For further information call or write Tilly Warnock, English Department, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071 (307-766-5140).

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Sixth Annual Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference

Nov. 3-5, 1989
Youngstown, OH

The conference theme is "Partnerships: Teaching, Learning, Growing." The keynote speaker will be Dr. Jay Jacoby, U. of North Carolina at Charlotte. Proposals for sessions/demonstrations/workshops/panel discussions (75 minutes) or single presentations (20 minutes) exploring the conference theme, are due by May 15, 1989. Please submit three copies of a one to two-page summary, indicating the target audience. Indicate the type of presentation (single or full session) and names of participants, titles of their sections, and their institutions if you are proposing a full session. Mail proposals to Sherri Zander, Director, Writing Center, Department of English, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH 44555.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Annual Meeting

October 20-21, 1989
Las Vegas, Nevada

The Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association will meet conjointly with the Rocky Mountain MLA and WPA. The RMWCA is a small conference, emphasizing informality and a leisurely pace. If you would like to submit a proposal, please tell how you might use 45 minutes, e.g., with a team of speakers, a demonstration, a discussion period, or some other format. Also, please specify audio-visual needs.

We will consider any topic having to do with writing center administration: recruitment, training, and supervision of tutors; professional and ethical concerns; collaborative learning; computers; and other topics connected with writing centers and tutoring. Address proposals to Richard Leahy, Dept. of English, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho 83725. Phone: 208-385-3585. Deadline: June 1, 1989.

Book Review

Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared, Mike Rose (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan, 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022, 1989, 254 pp, \$22.95)

Only a short time ago, anyone even remotely interested in education was debating the merits of Hirsch's concept of "cultural literacy," the notion that in order for disadvantaged students to be integrated into the culture, they must be introduced to a canon of great works. Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, to some extent, is a response to Hirsch, in that it proclaims that there is a great deal more to literacy acquisition than the mastery of a tradition. Citing his own emergence from the slums of Los Angeles, as well as his experience with disadvantaged students, Rose demonstrates how difficult it is to transcend cultural limitations; his message is that in order to foster the development of literacy, we need to understand the complex social, economic and cultural forces which affect it. The book is packed with lively anecdotes and thought-provoking questions; moreover, it is of particular value to anyone involved in teaching or tutoring writing.

Lives on the Boundary begins with a narrative of Rose's own journey from first generation Italian street kid to UCLA teacher/ scholar. It recounts his own struggles with the canon and his ultimate rejection of traditional English scholarship in favor of activities more directly involved with literacy acquisition. His narrative also includes numerous anecdotes and vignettes from the lives of others he has taught and helped- East L.A. kids he worked with in the Teacher Corps, veterans attempting one last shot at education, poorly prepared college students unable to understand what is expected of them at UCLA. In his preface, Rose states that he views his own "journey from the high school vocational track up through the latticework of the American university" as representative of the struggles of others "to participate in the lives of the mind." Placed by mistake in a vocational track, Rose can state from his own experience that what is called "vocational education" is simply "a dumping ground for the disaffected." This experience enables him to relate easily to those similarly dumped.

Rose, though, was luckier than most. Rescued from the vocational program by a concerned teacher at Mercy High, he is placed in an academic track where he has the good fortune

to work with Jack McFarland, a passionately committed English teacher, who immersed his students in intense language experiences-extensive reading, writing, summarizing, late night discussions, the sort of activities writing centers like to promote. To some extent, Rose's account of his progress in high school is a 'There but for the grace of God' story. His point is that it could so easily have been otherwise. Rose's story of his journey to literacy is a testimony to the influence of his teachers. Inspired by McFarland, Rose becomes "hooked" on reading and through McFarland's Influence, gets admitted to Loyola, where he struggles with concepts for which he has no historical or philosophical context and where his attempts to write academic jargon often result in sentences like this one:

In 1517, when Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, he unknowingly started a snowball rolling that was to grow to tremendous repercussions.

Once again, though, he is rescued by other teachers- Dr. Frank Carothers, who invited students to his home to talk about literature, Dr. Ted Erlandson who "cared about prose" and "who got in there with his pencil and worked on my style." and Father Clint Albertson, who taught his students to understand Shakespeare by reading closely, whose classrooms were characterized by "historically rich" conversations. Rose's college experience is populated by teacher/heroes, and for those of us in writing centers, overwhelmed by too many students, tutors, papers, and administrative headaches, Rose's account helps us remember why we got into this line of work in the first place.

The critical importance of concerned teachers is a recurring theme of each chapter. Rose's work in the Teacher Corps fosters his awareness of the conflict between individual possibility and environmental limits, of the tendency to overemphasize diagnosis and overlook the importance of the individual. In particular, he tells about one little boy, Harold Morton, who was diagnosed as "subnormal,

aphasic, neurologically impaired.' Yet with all the diagnoses, no one ever bothered to find out that Harold was abandoned by his father and lived in ultimate squalor, that, in fact, it was the sadness in his life which rendered him incapable of learning, that, he was "made stupid by his longing." Despite the problems of the system, though, Rose demonstrates that enthusiasm and effort can result in at least partial success. He has the children write about pictures which interest them and creates books from their stories, encouraging them to see themselves as readers and writers. His experience in the Teachers Corps brings him to the realization that "the more I've come to understand about education, the more I've come to believe in the power of invitation."

This perspective is reiterated in subsequent chapters, which recount Rose's work with disadvantaged students of various types and ages, from the Veterans Program to the Tutorial Center at UCLA. We who train writing center tutors will find the UCLA chapter particularly valuable, in that it illustrates through narrative many of the principles of tutoring we all advocate- the importance of creative listening, the use of modeling, the necessity of discovering the "logic" of student error. It depicts the loneliness of the college freshman at a large university and reminds us that there are many manifestations of "under preparedness." One student writes fragments because she doesn't want to keep repeating "she was." Another is able to memorize information, but is completely unfamiliar with analysis and critical inquiry. Many lack the cultural context for understanding assigned reading. All are shortchanged by the emphasis on statistics, SAT scores, head shaking about the decline in skills. In fact, Rose maintains, "the curriculum in developmental English . . . keeps students from becoming literate."

In his conclusion, Rose questions the narrow optimism of Hirsch and Bloom which suggests that a canonical approach can provide an easy solution to the inequities of our society. Rather, his own experience suggests that to enable the disadvantaged to acquire literacy requires a serious investigation into the societal roots of poor performance and the untiring effort of committed teachers. Lives on the Boundary eloquently reminds us of the ultimate goal of our profession.

Irene Lurkis Clark
U. of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Rocky Mountain Dicey

(cont. from page 3)

Talk drifts to the subject we always return to: the vastness and inconvenience of the Rocky Mountain region. After six years of conferences, we still can't seem to form a regular, cohesive group. We don't even have a constitution or officers. This is partly by choice; we've decided from experience that conventional structure, at least for now, doesn't make sense for us. What keeps us going is a small cadre of regulars scattered about the region, who know how to twist arms and get things done. For us, it's what works.

After everyone else has drifted off, I linger on with Robin Magnusson, of Washington State. We germinate a plan to form our own mini-region-within-a-region, comprised of that neglected north-south strip running up the borders of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Maybe we can gather the writing center directors -- there are at least a dozen of them, if you beat the pines and sagebrush- bring along our tutors and sleeping bags, get acquainted and find our own identity. The Inland Northwest League of Writing Centers, perhaps. Who knows?

Even if we do that, we wouldn't want to change our huge, ungainly Rocky Mountain region. By now there are too many old friends and new friends scattered from Wyoming to Arizona. We may only see them once every four or five years, but when we do, we're glad of it.

Sunday

Back on the plane headed north toward Denver, I watch the high peaks and ridges of the Rockies glide by below, reduced by our perspective to wrinkles in an unmade bed. My suitcase is overstuffed with a four-by-six-foot woven wool rug from the mini-mall in the El Paso airport. Usually I resist impulse souvenir buying, but this one has precisely the right colors for our bedroom. I worry about the zipper on my suitcase, stressed nearly to pop-ping, and I mentally try to measure the distance from the foot of our bed to the dresser, which I hope is at least four feet. And I enjoy the fact that this exotic artifact from the southern border will find a home amid the high northern deserts of Idaho.

Richard Leahy
Boise State University Boise,
Idaho

Tutors' Column

I have heard it said that the writing center, at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, is the best kept secret on campus. Having served there for three hours per week as an intern this semester, I have to wonder about the validity of that rumor. For it has been my observation that word is getting around.

I "found" the writing center as a first semester freshman. My Comp I teacher gave us a handout which told a little about it. The thing that drew me to the center was the promise to teach me how to word process. I was a little intimidated about coming in the first time. Graduating from high school twenty years before entering college placed me among the ranks of the "non-traditional" student. I was not a product of the electronic generation, so I was sure I would blow a computer to pieces with a wrong command. I expected to have someone hand-hold me through the steps of learning how to word process. To my horror, I was handed a self-teaching program and turned loose on a computer to fend for myself. Sure, the thing beeped at me a few times, but I was relieved to learn that I was able to master word processing in no time at all. I felt pretty smug about the whole thing.

Sandie was the intern on duty during the times I went in. She was so laid back- slow talking, easy going. I remember her saying things like, "How are you doing today?", "Hey, you got it!". and "How's it going?" I watched her move about the room as though she had a sixth sense in response to a furrowed brow, a frown, or a look of anxiety. She would say one or two words and move on to the next poor writing-blocked soul. She wasn't teaching us, but whatever she said to us worked. Before the semester was over, I felt confident.

The staff and the computers are not the only drawing cards, either. The room itself is inviting and cheerful. A bulletin board filled with clippings relating to the writing process, travel posters on the walls, thoughtful arrangement of the computer desks, tables for conferences, storage areas well located- all factors which draw me back every semester. The writing center is one of my favorite places to be. There are some "good vibes" happening there.

Then this semester I had the opportunity to serve an internship there, so I jumped at it. Sally Crisp, the director of the center, has a philosophy about interns and their relationship to help-seekers which exactly parallels the "connected" way of knowing as outlined in *Women's Ways of Knowing*. A "connected" way of knowing is a way in which the learner acquires knowledge by working directly with the subject to be learned. A "separate" way of knowing is a very removed method, such as taking notes while the teacher lectures. Mrs. Crisp believes in letting the learner (writer) do for herself. As interns, we can encourage, listen, smile, show where reference material is located, and make comments and suggestions. Mrs. Crisp encourages us to talk with aid not to the students. When a student wants us to read a paper and make suggestions for improvement, we are to find all the positive things to say before we make a single suggestion. Mrs. Crisp has reminded us that writing is a very ego-invested process. This very "connected" way of learning has positive effects for the helper as well as for the help-seeker.

I was inspired to put this method to the test with my very first student, a young black man. His Comp I teacher had instructed the class to write about a person. He elected to write about a niece. As I read over his paper, I was shocked at the lack of skills. I knew this was the kind of paper in which a "red marking teacher" could have a field day. I could think of dozens of criticisms- sentence fragments, spelling errors, grammar, tense switching, not knowing when to start a new paragraph, no conelusionary paragraph-you name it. I searched my brain for something positive to say. I realized that in spite of the garbled structure, I got a pretty clear idea of the nature of the child. I told the young man that he sure had some good descriptive skills and that I felt like I knew the little girl after reading his paper. His high-riding shoulders relaxed and he ex-haled a deep breath. His beaming face was so receptive as we walked through the paper and put the "physical appearance" things together, the "actions" things together, the "how other people perceive her" things together, etc. He saw how much more powerful a little organization made his paper become. He used a word I

had never heard of as an adjective to describe the child- the word "fass." When I told him I was unfamiliar with the word, he seemed shocked. Together we looked it up in the dictionary, but it was not there. He explained that he was from a rural Arkansas town which used words the rest of the world did not. He said the word roughly means "sassy, smart, and feisty". He went back and used those adjectives in place of "fass" and by now the paper was really beginning to take shape. We both learned something, and we learned it together.

He was just one of my interesting learning experiences. There was the foreign student, the blind student, the older student, the athlete,- oh, I could go on and on. I came in here expecting to get that gratifying feeling from helping others and wound up helping myself even more. I have enjoyed a "connected" experience in the writing center this semester. I'll be back. I want to serve again this fall. I'm hooked. I'm connected, and I'm loving it. And I'm not the only one. The connected method of learning seems to be very popular with the users of the writing center too, because word is getting around. The writing center is no longer the best-kept secret on campus.

Nina Mills, Intern

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Books for your resource library

If your writing lab has a resource library, the National Education Association has some useful, inexpensive paperback books for your shelves. The NEA catalog is available from NEA Professional Library, P.O. Box 509, West Haven, CT 06516, (phone: 203-934-2669). Among their books is the series Teaching Writing in the Content Areas, for college, senior high school, middle school, and elementary school. The college level book, by Stephen Tchudi, discusses writing projects in different disciplines, evaluation of such writing, examples of content writing projects, descriptions of writing-acrossthe-curriculum programs, and suggestions for faculty workshops. The books for the high school and elementary schools, by Tchudi and co-authors, discuss teaching writing in content areas and offer model units. These books can be useful resources for labs involved in writing across the curriculum programs.

For high school writing labs offering workshops on preparing for writing tests, NEA has an excellent sourcebook: How to Prepare

Students for Writing Tests, by Frederick B. Tuttle, Jr. It discusses types of scoring (analytical, primary trait, holistic), construction of writing tests, and teaching strategies. An appendix includes a College Board Test Sample and a sample college admissions essay.

A reader responds....

Just received the January WLN today and, as usual, immediately read it front to back, which is unusual since I normally like to go from back to front, like most people. This issue looked good, and when I first saw the article on graduate nursing students, I thought, Ugh! Hey, boy, do you really need this? Then I started getting into Mary Feint's excellent piece and realized that she was actually presenting a model for how to prepare and offer any special topics course in a writing center setting and that's why you were publishing it. It's definitely a keeper. And I'll use it, too, as I try to do something of the same thing for sociology students, etc.

I thought Rebecca Boswell's (great name) tutor column was clever and effective, and Lord do I know the feeling. Reading it I thought how in my freshman English class I really should go totally to the writer's workshop method that I use in the advanced writing classes, especially fiction writing. And she also reinforced for me the importance of positive encouragement at the beginning of that kind of enterprise. Excellent. I think that girl'd make a fine writing teacher. I was really impressed with Roth, too. Tell him that I said it sounds like he's making all the right moves and that there seems to be a lot of creative energy in that place. I would definitely encourage him to get some peer tutoring going as soon as possible to complement the computers.

About Vets Hildebrand's request for teaching strategies for dyslexics, I think I'll send along a copy of my article for you to give to her. As you know, I'm a member of the Orton Dyslexia Society (which I highly recommend that Ms. Hildebrand join) and run a small program for dyslexics here at Moravian as well as work with some high school dyslexics.

David Taylor
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Bethlehem, PA

[Ed. note: If you are interested in David Taylor's very useful article on working with dyslexics, the citation as follows: "Identifying and Helping the Dyslexic Writer," Journal of Developmental Education 9.2 (1985):8-11,31.]



An Interview with Dr. Myra Kogen, Director of the Brooklyn College Writing Center

Q: Can you describe Brooklyn College so that your writing center is placed in context?

A: It's a branch of the City University of New York; there are about 11,500 full and part-time undergraduates and 3,500 graduate students. The college has strong liberal arts and it's well known for its core curriculum courses which a student must pass to graduate.

Q: Now let's talk specifically about the writing center. What population does your writing center serve?

A: Well, we've been asking ourselves that question, and looking at the issue very informally. Our perceptions are that we get one-third of our students from English classes, especially developmental writing and fresh-man composition courses, about one-third of our students from the core curriculum, and another third from departments all over the college. We're also now getting more graduate students coming to the center.

Q: How many tutoring hours does the center use each semester?

A: We use about 9000 hours per year or 4,500 each semester.

Q: What are the center's hours?

A: The center is open Monday through Thursday from nine to nine and on Friday from nine to five. We've had requests for week-end service since the college is open, but not enough requests to justify the budget expenses.

A: This was the writing center from which Ken Bruffee developed his theories of peer tutoring. Is Ken still active here?

A: Ken Bruffee is now involved with a project relating to our core curriculum, but he's always willing to act as general advisor and supporter and to come and talk to our tutors as he did last semester.

Q: How long have you been here?

A: I was hired as the first full-time director of the Brooklyn College Writing Center three years ago.

Q: What is the administrative arrangement at your center?

A: I am a member of the English Department, but I report directly to the Provost as well. My budget is derived directly from the Provost's office. This is a plus for the center because we get the support of the English Department and the Provost.

Q: Who else is at the writing center?

A: We have a secretary and three types of tutors: master tutors, staff tutors, and peer tutors.

Q: How many tutors work in the center?

A: We have three master tutors; there is always one supervising at the center. We have about fifteen staff tutors and forty peer tutors who come from several training classes.

Q: Could you differentiate among the tutors?

A: A master tutor is a graduate student who supervises tutoring in the writing center and also helps to train other tutors. A staff tutor is an undergraduate or graduate student who works in the writing center ten to fifteen hours a week for pay. A peer tutor attends a tutor training course while tutoring in the center about four hours per week for course credit. All these people have to work together as an integrated group.

Q: Do they get along well?

A: We've had lots of discussions integrating the tutors. When we first began, the peer tutors, who work only four hours a week, expressed concerns about feeling isolated from the regular staff, and we've tried very hard to make them feel welcome. This year our efforts have paid off because they all stated, when questioned, that they felt very comfortable and welcome.

Q: How do you recruit tutors?

A: There are more students on campus who want to become tutors than we need, so recruitment is never a problem. We always have long lists of prospective tutors. Also, we have peer tutors who have worked in the writing center and want to become staff tutors. Since they've had experience and training, we always consider them first.

Q: How do you train your tutors?

A: There are several training projects. Staff tutors meet as a group every two weeks for two hours. They do this as long as they work at the writing center. Training is very interesting because some of the tutors are new and some are very experienced, and each offers the other unique insights.

Q: Do you do the training?

A: I do the training, but I do invite guests.

Q: What are some of the training activities you use?

A: We role play. We video-tape sessions and evaluate them. We talk about case histories. We do free writing and read and comment on our own writing in the sessions.

Q: That's the training for staff tutors. What about the peer tutors?

A: The peer tutors are enrolled in an advanced writing course, English 5. They are carefully selected for the course, and the professor who teaches it discusses their own writing with them. Every two weeks I take the class, and we talk about issues that have come up during their hours at the writing center. Also, when peer tutors first come to the center, they receive a forty-five minute orientation with a master tutor. Then they're asked to observe sessions: then they are asked to do a session with another experienced tutor. They can continue to observe until they feel confident about tutoring on their own.

Q: The peer tutors change every semester, so you have a large fluctuating population?

A: Yes, but many of the peers make terrific tutors.

Q: What about training the master tutors?

A: The master tutors meet with me several times during a semester to discuss any issues that come up. Often they have a lot of good suggestions for changing and improving the center. They also attend all staff training meetings.

Q: I think you said the master tutors are graduate students, but what else? How does a tutor become a master tutor?

A: Graduate students are on staff and some of the best of them become master tutors, or I go out to the graduate programs and ask teachers to recommend good candidates.

Q: Since master tutors are in charge of day-to-day activities, do they evaluate the staff tutors?

A: There is an evaluation process, not one particular evaluation. The tutors are very comfortable with the master tutors and often will ask for advice or ask to be observed. Also, a master tutor has one or two conferences a semester with each tutor to discuss any issues the tutor brings up and also to describe the master tutor's observations. This process tends to solve any problems that come up.

Q: Problems as, for example?

A: Problems very rarely are about tutoring. Sometimes we have a social problem. The tutors adore each other and can socialize too much. They sit in a group and chat with each other. Sometimes, when a student arrives, he may feel intimidated by a group of tutors chatting away, or a tutor may not be eager to leave the group for a tutoring assignment. The tutors are very cooperative, however, and when this problem is pointed out to them, they immediately start to change their behavior. After all, they really wish to please.

Q: We have the same problem.

A: Other writing center directors have suggested creating a tutor lounge as a solution to this problem. We've requested space for a tutor lounge, but Brooklyn College is very short of rooms.

Q: Any other problems?

A: There was an absentee problem with some of the peer tutors which we've solved. We require that peer tutors make up all absences. That has totally eliminated the problem.

Q: Do you ever have a problem with tutors coming in late?

A: Every now and then, but we handle it immediately. We do not allow people to upset our schedules. If someone did, we'd have to ask him or her to leave the center, and nobody ever wants to leave the writing center, Tutors love their jobs.

Q: You mentioned that more graduate students are registering at the writing center. Why?

A: Some of them are back in school after several years and feel insecure about writing term papers. They also fear writing the thesis required for graduation. We've initiated a "Graduate Student Support Group" which helps students who are writing their master's theses. This is a group that the writing center initiates every fall.

Q: How does the group work?

A: We send out notices to all graduate faculty about the group, requesting that interested students phone us. We then set up a schedule to meet every two weeks in the writing center.

Q: Do you meet in the evening?

A: Yes, because many graduate students work. We usually meet from five to six-thirty.

CQ: What do you talk about?

A: This is a very interesting group because very often participants start by talking about their fears: they're not sure what their advisors want from them; they don't know what a thesis looks like: but they're afraid it's very difficult. They usually have to talk to each other to find out what a thesis is, and even though the group comes from the humanities and the sciences, they can discuss a thesis in general terms and then start making distinctions between what a thesis would look like in different disciplines, such as the physical sciences, social sciences or humanities. And then they look specifically at what is demanded in one discipline. Students learn from each other and give each other much encouragement.

Q: Approximately, how many students meet? A: About ten or fifteen usually. Q: Do you run the group all year?

A: We start it around October and it runs through the fall and spring semesters. People come and go. Students can enter any time of the year, and they leave when they believe they're ready. They don't stay all year, necessarily.

Q: Do you talk about doing research?

A: We talk about the writing process; we encourage participants to go on to the next step. They have to find a topic, start outlining, do their proposal and then go on to the first chapter, but many students feel stumped. They can't take the next step, so we spend a lot of time breaking the process down into small segments and talking about how to approach the next step.

Q: Do you have a form that you use?

A: No, because help often comes from group members. Some are more advanced and they can help the less advanced students. If someone has already done a chapter, s/he can talk about what it was like, for example, to develop a topic. Group members learn from each other.

Q: To go back to the undergraduate population you serve, is tutoring mandatory for any of these groups?

A: There is no mandatory tutoring at Brooklyn College. Of course, a teacher may tell a student, "Listen, you'd better go see a tutor or you're going to have serious difficulty in the class."

Q: I mean is tutoring a part of the structure of any course?

A: Only one program has that kind of structure. "The Prefreshman Summer Immersion Program" has ten tutors assigned specifically to the project. The tutors go to classes, talk to teachers, and return to the writing center knowing the students in the classes. Tutors are tied closely to this project.

Q: Do the students then visit the center?

A: Yes, or tutors may grab a few minutes during class to work with students. Some of these classes have computer projects attached, so the tutors may also see their students at the computer lab.

Q: Are there computers in your writing center?

A: We have one IBM computer, and we've re-requested more. The college also has a computer lab which is not connected to the writing center. Tutors in the summer program have always worked in the computer lab, and we're now going to staff this lab each semester so that tutors can help all students who are writing papers.

Q: Do you have tutors assigned anywhere else?

A: We have tutors assigned to the library. That's a new project started this year. I got this idea from Carol Stanger, director of the writing center at John Jay College.

Q: How many tutors are used?

A: We have one tutor assigned to the library: we change the tutor each hour because tutors complain that they are isolated. They prefer to be in the writing center where they feel they belong.

Q: What do the tutors do at the library? If I were in the library working on a paper, how would I know a tutor was ready to help me?

A: We've attempted to publicize this new program. Since the library won't let us put up signs, we've used flyers, but we may also be forbidden this method because the librarians have to pick up all the paper. Often students learn of our library service when they attend the writing center, or through word of mouth.

Q: Does the tutor help with research?

A: Tutors don't function as librarians; they are there to help students work on specific papers; they'll help students do research, conceptualize, write, revise.

Q: Brooklyn College has a large English-as-a-second-language population. Do you do anything special for ESL students?

A: We have special training sessions for the tutors, and ESL faculty visit the writing center every semester. Some tutors prefer to work with ESL students, and some dislike it. We try to honor their preferences. We have also run workshops for ESL students on the topic of the summary because the ESL program tests students' ability to summarize.

Q: Can you describe the special program you're doing with a New York City high school?

A: This program was developed by David Fletcher, director of the writing center at Lehman College and George McLaughlin, an English teacher at a high school called Bushwick. The outreach program was designed to attract students who had dropped out without graduating. Fletcher and McLaughlin developed a writing center for Bushwick students which they called the Write-On Center," and George uses Bushwick high school students to serve as tutors.

Q: How did you start working on the project?

A: The high school tutors needed training and experience in collaborative learning. Since Bushwick is located near Brooklyn College and our program is based on collaboration, I was asked to work in the project. We developed this system. About ten high school peer tutors visit Brooklyn College each week and meet one-on-one with our writing center tutors. The high school tutors work on their own writing, and they sometimes also bring samples of their students' work for discussion. They talk to our Brooklyn College tutors about how to behave. More important, they have role models; they observe the college tutors acting as tutors. Another part of the plan is that one of our Brooklyn College master tutors, who super-vises this program, visits Bushwick regularly and observes the high school tutors during their sessions with their students. Our staff tutors also go to Bushwick several times a semester and observe what is going on at the high school. The high school tutors very much like to have the college tutors visit their center.

Q: How do you fund this project?

A We initially volunteered our time and paid our own tutors. Now that the program has just completed its second year and the high school director has statistics illustrating the program's successes in retention and writing development, the Bushwick Outreach writing center has received a grant to continue the program. I want to add that George McLaughlin, the high school coordinator, is extremely dedicated and entirely responsible for the program's success. He and our master tutor are continually modifying and refining the plans as they find that certain parts work better than others.

Q: Before ending this interview. I have one more question. What do you like and dislike most about your job?

A: I love my job. I can't think of anything I dislike, but sometimes I worry that I might begin to coast, and I believe that an administrator must initiate new projects. I really think I have the best of both worlds. I'm a teacher and an administrator. As director of the center, I have the opportunity for teaching. I also administer a program that works very, very well and that gives me a great deal of satisfaction. It's a useful program

that serves the entire college, and my job has a great deal of variation and many interesting activities.

-Teri Haas directs the Writing Center at Hunter College, NY

Regional Report: CUNY First Annual Conference on Writing Tutorial Programs

The CUNY (City University of New York) Writing Centers Association held its first annual conference at Roosevelt House, Hunter College, on November 11, 1988. University Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Harvey Weiner, gave the welcome at the first of several anticipated conferences. Professor Lil Brannon, English Department, SUNY Albany, gave the keynote address, "Knowing Our Knowledge: Research in the Writing Center." In her address, Professor Brannon highlighted the richness and potential of tutoring conferences that now take place in many diverse educational settings: kindergarten classes, elementary schools, high schools and colleges. In addition, she noted that tutoring conferences provide many opportunities to develop specialized approaches to assist students from many diverse social and cultural backgrounds to develop and improve their writing. Professor Brannon also challenged participants to become aware of the composing theories that guide their work.

Participants included high school and college tutors and writing center directors, and composition faculty members, some traveling to the conference from Florida and Pennsylvania. Sign language interpreters were provided for deaf and hearing impaired tutors. The work-shops covered a wide range of issues, including incorporating writing tutorials in writing across the curriculum programs, developing high school and college collaboration writing tutoring programs, supporting research projects to investigate the dynamics of one-to-one and small group tutoring, training and supervising tutors, and developing specialized tutoring approaches and programs for students for whom English is a second vernacular or a second language.

A second conference is planned for 1989.

David Fletcher
Lehman College - CUNY New
York, NY



Regional Report:

Writing Centers Association: East Central "Update"

The proceedings of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Writing Centers Association: East Central are now available. Those who attended the conference and paid for copies will be receiving their copies in the mail; anyone interested in purchasing a copy may do so by sending \$10 to Lea Masiello, 203 Pratt, IUP, Indiana, PA 15705. Checks should be made out to the association. The proceedings, Collaborative Pathways, this year has been printed and bound, with the lead article, "Collaborating Effectively in the Writing Center," written by Muriel Harris, who provided the major work-shop of the conference. The articles within it are especially good, on topics in these general categories: Programmatic Collaboration, Computers and Collaboration, and Collaboration in Tutorial Development. All sections include articles both theoretical and practical, and reflect the conference theme. Presentations and

the resulting papers on topics such as interdepartmental writing projects, working with hearing-impaired students, and ways in which to prepare tutors to work with international students responded to the organization's efforts to diversify both its membership and concerns. Our current chair, Michael Benedict, is in the English Department at Fox Chapel High School. We continue to solicit the participation of teachers at all levels of education, and we encourage tutors to attend and participate in the conference.

For details about the association, please contact Lea Masiello, treasurer, at IUP; for information about the 1989 conference, contact Ulle Lewis, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware,



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