

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

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.....from the editor.....

All too often, the obvious has a way of eluding me. Comments from readers in our newsletter group indicate that conference announcements are among the first items read in each issue. Yet announcements can be difficult to locate later. Recently, when a reader called to ask about a particular conference that had been announced, I hunted unsuccessfully through back issues (as she had done). "Why not keep a running list?" she suggested. Hence, the obvious finally hit me. As often as space permits, I'll include a calendar of forthcoming writing center association conferences (see p. 10 for the first calendar).

I'll continue to include one-time notices of other conferences along with a full notice for each writing center assn. conference. This calendar will only list basic information for writing center association conferences. To help those planning next year's budgets, send me notices now for this calendar even if you don't want a full notice to be included until next fall. Any other obvious omissions I should be tending to?

-Muriel Harris, editor

....inside....

Scenarios for Tutor Training	
*David Hutto	1
Coordination and Cooperation:	
A Writing Center Serves a	
Hearing Impaired Student	
*Brenda Ameter and	
Coralyn Dahl	4
Martin Buber and a	
Collaborative Learning Ethos	
*Tom MacLennan	6
Tutors' Column	
*Jennifer Anderson and	
Lori Nakayu	9
Conference Calendar	10
NCTE Centers of	
Excellence	11
Lab Troubleshooter Column	
*Paula Gills	12
TSU Surveys Campus	
Writing/Learning Practices	
*Joan Word	14
New from NCTE	16

Scenarios
for
Tutor Training

What is the best way to train tutors? Probably there is no best way, given the diversity of both tutors and tutees. What is best is probably to have available a similar diversity of training methods, to be able to choose for the circumstances. While working on an English M A , I investigated the case study technique and adapted it for use in a writing center. Though I based my training method on case studies, my approach differed sufficiently from traditional use of case studies so that I used the term "scenarios" to describe the material. For this project, I created ten scenarios of an encounter between a tutor and tutee. These were then used for training nine tutors in the Writing Center at Western Carolina University.

In drawing up the scenarios, I intended them to present situations which were likely or possible in a writing center. The first step, therefore .

was to choose possible encounters, which I did both by drawing on my own experiences as a tutor and by talking to other tutors about problems they had found while tutoring. From the information I gathered, I found that tutors were dealing with more types of problems concerning the tutees themselves than with the papers per se. Consequently, I decided to put more emphasis on tutee problems, using six situations from this category. One of these was a language problem (ESL student), while the other five were about tutee behavior (intransigence, laziness or inability, lack of time, desire to socialize, offer of money). Two scenarios were used for problems with the paper (entire paper poor, poor organization) and two concerned problems with the tutor (nervousness about tutoring students of a particular teacher, uncertainty about tutoring skills).

The intent in writing these scenarios was to give the tutors enough information to analyze the problem, but I tried to present information about the student being tutored in such a way as to reveal only what could logically be known or discovered by a tutor in that situation. This allows tutors in training to make decisions based only on the kind of information which generally would be available to them. I also took into consideration such things as length (set in my original format at approximately three printed pages) and a need for realistic and interesting presentation. Since these scenarios were to take the place of real-life situations for the sake of training, it was assumed that the more realistic they could seem, the more effective they might be. Finally, as I wanted the tutors to put themselves into the scenarios, I tried to increase the interest by making extensive use of dialog,

One of these scenarios, called Show Me What's Really Wrong, about a tutee who does not allow sufficient time for the tutoring session, begins as follows:

"Could I get a paper proofread?" Jim was working as a tutor on Tuesday after-noon, when Randy came in. Randy was tall and thin, and he seemed to have an awkward way about him, perhaps because he was carrying a stack of books and papers, hurrying, and drop-ping a few papers as he came up.

"Yeah. I'm free right now, Come on, in," Jim said.

"I need to run look at a book in the library," Randy replied. "Can I just leave this and have you look at it?"

"We don't look at papers without the writer there," Jim told him. "We like to work with you to improve it."

Randy leaves and returns. After dim has examined the paper, this scenario concludes:

Jim explained changes in the introduction, while Randy squirmed and glanced at his watch. With every change Jim suggested, Randy made a quick notation. When Jim began to talk about the first body paragraph, Randy looked at his watch again, then said, "I really appreciate this but could you just show me what's really wrong and has to be fixed?"

"Are you in a real bad hurry?"

"Uh, yeah, kind of. I need to copy this over because it's due in twenty-five minutes."

"Twenty-five minutes?" Jim looked at Randy in surprise. What was he even doing here?

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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.

All ten scenarios are written in this style ending, as this one, with presentation of a problem. In using the scenarios for training, I asked the tutors to read and consider them one week ahead, and we then gathered for a group discussion of the problems presented. Discussions were held on two occasions a week apart, during tutor staff meetings, with five scenarios discussed at each meeting (the second five scenarios were given out after the first discussion ended). Staff meetings lasted for one hour, and this hour was roughly divided equally in discussing each scenario. I attempted to analyze the results of this training by tape-recording the discussions, by giving pre- and post-tests and by conducting a final survey of the participants.

One of the benefits from the scenario/ discussion technique was that tutors felt they gained from the variety of approaches proposed during the discussions. It is apparent that the discussions are a critical part of this process. For all but three of the scenarios, there were from three to five suggestions made for dealing with the problem (and in one instance slid. One of the major benefits of the scenario/discussion approach may in fact be this variety. Addition-ally, all tutors said on the final survey that the discussions provided useful information. Examples given ranged from the abstract (the need for a tutor to play various " personalities" when tutoring) to broadly applicable techniques (get students to talk about their writing) and ways to handle specific problems (make more use of handbooks). Another effect of these discussions was that in every case at least one related topic arose. One scenario, for example, about a tutee who is either unable or unwilling to do her own writing, gave rise to brief discussions of tired students, perceptions of the writing center, and faculty use of the writing center.

A number of tutors also said that following the training they now had new approaches to tutoring. Most of the examples offered by those who said they began to tutor differently can be summarized in two ideas: (1) do not be so quick to offer solutions and corrections to the tutee, and (2) get the tutee to talk, to make suggestions.

Another benefit seen from this training (and which could perhaps be seen in any training program) was an increase in tutor self-confidence. Of the nine tutors taking part, five claimed to have gained greater self-confidence

in relation to their tutoring. Clearly, a positive attitude toward tutoring is necessary for tutorials to be successful. One tutor also indicated coming to the realization that tutoring is a more complex activity than was originally thought, while another gained the idea that a tutor is a facilitator and can only help those who are willing to be helped. Overall, it seems evident that tutors found reading the scenarios, and especially taking part in the discussions, useful for several reasons. In part the benefit arose from learning new approaches to problems and to tutoring in general, but an increase in positive feelings about their own tutoring was also an important benefit.

As for future use of scenarios, there are a number of possibilities beyond those used in this project. The scenarios may be used more dynamically than simply being read and discussed. Many writing centers use role-playing as a technique. In *The Tutor Book* (New York, Longman, 1982), Marian. Arkin and Barbara Shollar suggest that tutors new to role-playing begin by following a script and that the script be eventually reduced to a scenario, setting up the situation (196). As a further suggestion, scenarios might be used as a point of focus for experienced tutors to share their experience with new tutors.

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12th Annual East Central Writing Centers Association Conference

April 20-21, 1990
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana

"Bridging Learning Communities"

For information or registration materials, contact Peter Carino, Coralyn Dahl, or Brenda Ameter, Dept. of English, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809.

Coordination and Cooperation: A Writing Center Serves a Hearing Impaired Student

Discussions of writing centers usually focus on writing; however in this paper, the emphasis is on the word "center" in describing how Indiana State University's writing center coordinated a special services program for a hearing impaired student. Establishing a good working relationship between instructors and tutors is always important, but in the case of a student with a severe physical impairment, even more cooperation is essential.

Alex, a student with a severe hearing impairment wears bilateral hearing aids and has a moderate speech impairment. His fresh-man composition instructor felt that Alex would benefit from the services of the writing center. She discussed Alex's situation with the writing specialist, and together they decided to implement a carefully structured program of assistance. Although their primary goal was to improve Alex's writing, they also were concerned with his hearing impairment as it affected his ability to function in the college environment. They organized a meeting attended by the university audiologist, a graduate student in audiology, and the Director of Student Support Services.

The following program was instituted for Alex: The audiologist, who had been in communication with Alex's parents, continued in that role; the graduate student agreed to evaluate Alex in the areas of speech, language and hearing; the director of Student Support Services counseled Alex concerning his classes other than writing and assigned a tutor to help with his health and life science classes; and the writing specialist agreed to coordinate all services as well as provide writing tutors. Two writing center tutors were chosen to work with Alex, who in many ways lacked native linguistic competence. One tutor has a master's degree in linguistics and several years' experience in teaching English as a second language. Another tutor, a junior English major, was assigned to tutor Alex.

During a subsequent meeting, the audiologist confirmed the hypothesis that Alex's hearing affected his writing. Alex had not been fitted for his first hearing aid until he was six. Essentially he missed all high frequency

consonants: f, ch, z and s. He did not receive a second aid until the spring prior to attending college, and thus for his twelve years of mainstreamed public school education he probably missed a great deal of speech and language information. Language tests showed Alex's major area of deficiency to be vocabulary development. Grammar was only slightly better with most of his errors related to verb forms, dependent clauses, and prepositional phrases. He also had difficulty hearing low energy, high frequency consonants, such as s which made it hard for him to hear endings of words and resulted in his using verb endings indiscriminately. Frequently, his choice made no sense at all. When asked why he chose a certain ending, he said he always got them wrong; so he was choosing them at random, trying to improve his writing.

A student who has never heard word endings, especially a verb ending, has a problem with the concept of endings. In "Strategies for Teaching Writing Skills to Hearing-Impaired Students," Wray and co-authors recommend reading themes aloud to hearing-impaired students to help them catch errors. This technique did not work with Alex. The instructor had read themes aloud to hearing students having difficulty with tense and they had improved, but Alex could not hear the endings. Explanations of singular, plural, and tense failed to improve his work. Verb drills did not help. Since many students with little writing experience make careless errors with verb endings, the instructor and tutor attempted to have him proofread more carefully. He caught other problems, but he could not correct the word endings.

Alex had commented during the articulation testing that he had difficulty with certain speech sounds due to a dental problem diagnosed at the time of his first visit to a dentist at age sixteen. Another faculty member specializing in neural-physical speech impairments was then consulted, and he confirmed that Alex's one-half inch open bite was a major contributor to his speech difficulties. Alex was referred to a dental school for possible remediation options and is now undergoing pre-operative treatment. A comprehensive one-semester speech re-

diation program has been written for Alex upon correction of his oral impairment. Alex re-requested this short program because of his years of frustrating speech therapy.

Since the program was carefully coordinated through the writing center, each person involved was given individual responsibilities. The audiology graduate student focused on Alex's strengths and weaknesses with language and demonstrated methods by which he could improve his language. Alex met with his English instructor to work on tense concepts. Because it had already been determined that Alex had problems similar to a student learning English for the first time, his instructor conferred with the linguist, who suggested using Side by Side, which are conversation-based ESL grammar texts. The instructor read the dialogue, and Alex responded with the appropriate tense. For the first time Alex was becoming aware of endings in speech. This dialogue-based instruction seemed to be more effective than written-tense exercises. He related the material to his speech: however, he still had no idea which tense to use when writing. The instructor then devised a "time line." She took a piece of yellow yarn and stretched it out the length of her office. On large cards, she wrote past tense words. She made smaller cards listing events in Alex's past. Orange yarn separated past from present, which contained Alex's daily schedule of classes. Present tense verbs were placed in this section. Blue yarn separated the present section from the future section. The future section contained words relating to Alex's chosen career. Future verbs were placed in that section. Alex had to walk to a section to get the correct verb and use it. The instructor hoped that reinforcing Alex's understanding of tense with physical movement would help the tenses become more meaningful. As the work progressed and Alex began to understand the concept of tense better, Dr. Ameter returned to traditional verb charts. She would ask Alex to tell her about students walking past her window, it seemed important that he learn to use tense in speech before trying to use it in writing. The most difficult tense to explain was past progressive. As all instructors who have worked with ESL, students are aware, it is a difficult concept to explain, and the time line did not help much with it.

At the same time that the instructor and Alex were working with tense, the linguist

tics tutor discovered another effective device. While working with Alex on sentence structure, she found that he could not see errors in his own sentences. They made sense to him. However, if she wrote a sentence using the same error and asked Alex what it meant, he would see the error in the sentence she wrote. Meanwhile, the English writing center tutor continued to work with Alex on his classroom assignments. The instructor had conferred with the writing specialist, and they agreed that Alex would benefit from having classroom material presented by the tutor who would use a different approach.

The importance of the writing center's role as coordinator cannot be emphasized too much. Each of the participants had certain insights into Alex's problems and each could provide help in different ways. This coordinated effort required many conferences, phone calls and written messages, but it resulted in what appears to be a successful program for students with extraordinary problems.

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Martin Buber and a Collaborative Learning Ethos

Past University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) Department of English composition directors have included Lil Brannon, JoAnn Seiple, John Clifford, and Christopher Gould. In that same time, the writing lab has been directed by Richard Veit, Lil Brannon, JoAnn Seigle, and Gary Olson. Their strong leadership and administrative backing from the College of Arts and Sciences have helped the writing lab concept at UNCW evolve from a voluntarily staffed grammar lab classroom in the mid-1970's to a collaborative learning center, currently staffed by a director, full-time secretary/receptionist, and thirty tutors and receptionists. When T became director in 1984, the name was changed to The Writing Place. AL present, we schedule from 2,300 to 2,900 tutoring and computer-assisted-composition appointments each semester. Whether we are working with a freshman on an I-Search paper in English 101 or a nursing student completing a research paper in a practicum, collaborative learning principles are the heart of our operation. Therefore, our work in training peer tutors is imbued with the theory, practice, and awareness of the ethos of collaborative learning,

Collaborative Learning: Theory and Practice

Several sources in our library reinforce the theory and practice of collaborative learning. Specifically, we want our beginning peer tutors to know John Trimbur's essay, "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing" because it provides an excellent overview of the origins, theory and current practices of collaborative learning. Also, we encourage our tutors to read at least a portion of Kenneth Bruffee's *A Short Course in Writing*. In particular, we recommend two of Drake's techniques, "Paired Interviews" and "Reading Aloud" (103-25), along with the questions and supplementary exercises found on pages 126-35. We also use tutorial scripts, journal prompts, writing tasks, class activities, and suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter in Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith's *The Practical Tutor*.

Collaborative Learning Ethos

We also want our new peer tutors to heed Ann Berthoff's advice in *The Making of Meaning* to become concerned with the teaching of writing as a philosophical enterprise. Berthoff

recognizes that peer tutors, like teachers, spend their days with "language and thought, theory and practice, intending and realizing, writing and rewriting" (v-vi). From the moment they begin their training, we encourage peer tutors to practice this philosophical stance by raising questions and engaging students in conversation. Here, The Practical Tutor is invaluable because it contains scripts that illustrate numerous suitable and unsuitable questioning and dialogical techniques. Our own experience has shown us that effective dialogue and questions flourish within a central interactive helping principle or attitude: a collaborative learning ethos. Our use of the word "ethos" conforms to Joseph Campbell's definition in *The Powers of Myth*: "a mode, an understanding ... the way we deal with people [*italics mine*], and so forth" (8-9).

When we changed our name to The Writing Place in 1984, we wanted to communicate to students how critical a helping ethos is for writers. Our positive evaluations over the past several years have convinced me that a collaborative learning ethos should permeate students' contact with everyone in The Writing Place: receptionists, tutors, and the director. I have also found that a useful way of categorizing elements of a collaborative learning ethos with new peer tutors is using some of the language of Martin Buber.

Martin Buber and a Collaborative Learning Ethos

Early loves always leave a lasting impression, and Walter Kaufman's translation of *I and Thou* left its mark on me twenty years ago. A reading as an undergraduate introduced me to the importance of effective dialogue in education and also suggested why dialogue might break down. Several years later, while reading Peda gogy of the Oppressed, I noticed that Paulo Friere used I/Thou/It concepts in explaining his own dialogical theory of action (167).

Buber wrote about the importance of reciprocity and suggested a way of talking about reciprocal relationships in very concrete terms. In the mid-seventies, when I first started working in a writing lab, I found myself using his terminology in talking with other

tutors about how a student might respond to a writing tutorial or in trying to describe my perceptions of attitudes expressed during a tutorial. His terminology was also useful in explaining the kinds of problems that might come up in a difficult tutoring session. Reading Buber has provided me with a continuing wealth of philosophical insights over the years. Recently, I have been impressed with the ways his terminology both complements and parallels what Trimbur, Bruffee, Meyer, Smith and many others are writing about collaborative learning. Buber was such a prolific writer that it is easy to be overwhelmed with the richness of his thought. For the rest of this article, I would like to discuss three of Buber's concepts that we use the most in discussing collaborative learning ethos in *The Writing Place: I-It, I-Thou, and Relation is Reciprocity*.

I-It/I -Thou

Briefly stated, I-It indicates a relationship of separation; I-Thou establishes a reciprocal relationship. Allowing a student to become defensive, self-conscious, overwhelmed, or frustrated during a tutorial is characteristic of I-It. An I-Thou relationship, on the other hand, is evident when a student senses that the tutor is open, supportive, and helpful. Using these terms in training sessions helps us describe the importance of orchestrating a reciprocal relationship with the student writer at all stages of the tutorial. We feel that if students are regarded only in terms of development, organization, spelling, or grammar problems, they have become an It before the tutorial begins. To guard against this happening, we stress the importance of maintaining the genuinely reciprocal meeting in the fullness of life between one active existence and another" (Friedman 166). Peer tutors learn to regard a piece of student writing as a human communication. We think that students discover truths through their own thinking processes when our peer tutors raise questions and engage them in conversation about their papers.

The first five or ten minutes of a tutorial are when we try to establish an I-Thou relationship as we get to know the student and the demands of the assignment. Starting a tutorial this way sets the tone of the entire session by having the student do most of the talking while the tutor supports, expands, and raises questions. Meyer and Smith point out that students are more apt to feel secure and confident at the outset of a tutorial if early questions are

couched in an informal and friendly manner. They also point out that establishing a healthy reciprocal relationship helps a tutor "create the supportive atmosphere that is vital for good collaboration" (8).

As a way of assessing how successful we are in maintaining an I-Thou relationship, we ask student writers to evaluate us after each tutorial session. We ask them to rate the cooperative nature of our receptionists, the quality of tutoring, their assessment of the progress made during the session, and any other aspect of our service they may care to comment on. We have been pleased to find that almost every student who takes the time to write a comment will praise the helping relationship they sensed during the tutorial. Last semester, one student wrote: "I enjoy coming to *The Writing Place* because of the learning atmosphere. The tutors here work very well with the students and I feel comfortable in raising and answering questions." Another noted: "I had Sue for a tutoring session. She made me feel confident and was very helpful in drawing my ideas out of me. She talked to me and not at me."

Relation is Reciprocity

In re-reading *I-Thou* last summer, I noted a passage that summarizes the kind of healthy reciprocal relationship we seek to establish in our tutoring: "Egos appear by setting them-selves apart from other egos. Persons appear by entering into relation to other persons" (112). Buber also wrote that "relation is reciprocity ... Our students teach us, our works form us ... we live in the currents of universal reciprocity" (67). Meyer and Smith underscore this point by noting that reciprocal questioning can lead students to examine an assignment's key question, to determine some boundaries for an acceptable response, and pinpoint the question the student draft answers (100).

Our brochure states that there are several principles that underlie our work with students, embodied in the ethos of raising questions and engaging students in conversation. Specifically, we act on the following principles:

1. Successful writing depends upon a positive attitude about writing.
2. Although tutors monitor and guide an evolving draft, they will not write a

student paper,

3. Our tutors spend a lot of time with what Reigstad and McAndrew call higher order concerns: focus, voice, organization, structure, and development,
4. Our goal in every tutoring session is improvement.

Student evaluations help us gauge the degree of reciprocity occurring in The Writing Place, We know we're succeeding when we read what one student recently observed: "I felt like Dan was listening to me and not just using me to listen to himself speak. There was a nice give and take going on in our session. He's a cool guy and a great tutor."

Conclusion

Space does not permit elaboration of other useful concepts in Buber's work. Nor does it allow me to elaborate on some of the reservations I have about Buber, such as some of his notions about the model of the ideal teacher. Also, his writing is often prolix, though counterbalanced, fortunately, by some truly insightful translations and Introductory chapters by both Walter Kaufman and Maurice Friedman. As difficult as he sometimes is to read, Buber offers many riches and connection points. I would use his term "mutuality of dialogue" to describe the reflexive, questioning and responding relationship the student evaluation above indicates Dan and his student had in their tutoring session. I also like to paraphrase Buber's own self-definition with peer tutors. In Meetings, he writes: "I am no philosopher, prophet, or theologian, but a man who has seen something and who goes to a window and points to what he has seen" (4). Within that definition is a description of what we want our tutors to become: persons who, without self-proclaimed superiority or exclusivity, patiently point to both the problems and the potentiality they see in student writing.

Suggested Readings

Martin Buber's prolific career as a thinker is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that Matt-ric Friedman's bibliography in Meetings runs fifty pages. Since most writing lab directors have barely enough reading time to stay current with journals and newsletters, let me suggest four of my own personal favorites.

First, Walter Kaufman's translation of I and Thou is the volume I return to again and again and is Buber's best known work. The 1970 translation contains an excellent prologue by Kaufman and an afterword that Buber completed in 1957. Second, A Believing Humanism probably contains the best overview of his writings on a wide range of topics: art, religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, education, architecture; some of Buber's poetry also appears in this volume. Third, Between Man and Man is useful because it contains a clarification and amplification of the dialogical principle Buber introduced in I and Thou. Finally, Meetings contains autobiographical fragments of Buber's life and a comprehensive bibliography of his work. The last three volumes will also bring you in contact with Maurice Friedman, whose lucid introductions, readable translations, and comprehensive bibliographies have been indispensable to my understanding of how Buber's thought shapes my own time as an educator.

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(cont. on page 13)

Tutors' Column

(Editor's note: In *this Tutors' Column* we hear from two tutors at Weber State College.)

It was one of those days, one of those sweltering hot days when nothing goes right and the temperature magnifies the problem. The heat reached out from the computers and wrapped its flannel fingers around my neck and further added to the frustration brought on by a full day of being told by obstinate students that I didn't know a thing about English and that I shouldn't be trying to help others as a writing assistant. "Help" and "trying" are the key words here, but no one else seemed to recognize that, and I was tired of the grind. My shift as a computer aide hadn't gone well either. Two printers jammed, an entire network shut down, everyone had a question that I could not answer, and the man I threw out of the lab for messing with my equipment turned out to be a fellow computer aide I had never met. I decided that no one wanted my opinion and that anyone who asked for it would never believe it anyway. I sat down on the chair by the desk and ignored everything around me as my head sank down to my arms and I attempted to recuperate. Then it happened. the phone rang.

Sneering at the phone and growling out "Writing Center" in as obnoxious a tone as I could, I noticed the crowd of people around the computers laughing at me. They weren't being cruel; they just couldn't believe what a mess I was. The phone rang again, and this time I picked it up and answered as nicely as I could, "Writing Center, may I help you?" A nice, calm, sweet voice said, "I need to talk to a writing assistant." Since my ego now needed patching, I told the caller I was available. "Well, I need help with English grammar for a monument, . . . you know, . . . a grave marker."

I could feel the laughter begin to grow deep inside where it had been banished for the day. Trying not to let it escape. I asked what the problem was. "Well I have this rhyme, and I want to make sure it is correct. It says 'Some-day, somewhere, he'll take my hand, and we'll

be there.' Should it be 'we'll be there' or 'I'll be there?'" I could feel the smile begin to spread across my face as I gave her my sage advice that it depended on the meaning she was intending. We discussed it for a few minutes while I tried not to giggle, and then she decided on, "we'll be there."

As I hung up the phone I started to laugh and laugh. Then it occurred to me: even on your worst days, if you have the title "Writing Assistant" behind your name, every word you say could end up sketched in granite, literally.

Jennifer Anderson
Peer Tutor
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As a tutor I show students tools that can help improve their writing. The greatest tool I have been able to work with is the computer, I have taught students to use computers to brainstorm, revise using WordPerfect's block-moves, and analyze their paper with Writer's Workbench. At Weber State College, our Writing Assistance Center is combined with a computer lab. We have about fifty computers set up with word processing for student use. We mostly work in WordPerfect Version 4.2, but we also use ALPS and a few other word processing programs,

Often I have taken confused students over to the computer side of our Center and shown them how to brainstorm on a computer. One student, Greg, wanted to write a comparison/contrast essay on living with your parents versus living on your own. That's about as far as Greg had gotten with his idea, so I took him over to a computer, showed him how to get into WordPerfect, and then the two of us threw out

ideas and keyed them into the computer as fast as we could. In a few minutes we had a potpourri of ideas on the screen, and we sent these to the laser printer. Then with the page full of ideas, we went back to a table, and Greg picked three main areas to compare and contrast in his paper. Then he was ready to begin his rough draft.

When another student, Earl, came into the Center with a paper that needed organizational revisions, I took him over to the computer and taught him block-moves in WordPerfect. His paper had three main ideas that were expressed quite well, but Earl bounced from one idea to another, and back again, without any transitions. Using the block-move function in WordPerfect, we were able to reorganize the paragraphs so that the essay went from the first main idea, to the second, then third.

In addition to using the computer to brainstorm and revise, I tell students about Writer's Workbench- a style analysis program. Even though it didn't help me much in my writing, Writer's Workbench impressed me when I first tried it last quarter. The program analyzes sentence length, vagueness, spelling, punctuation, grammar, verb choice, etc. In my writing courses I have learned how to overcome problems in these areas, so I had few basic mistakes in my paper that I put through the analysis. But I found Writer's Workbench was a great asset in tutoring.

Dalene, a non-traditional student in remedial English, came into the Center for help with an essay. Sentence after sentence started with "There is," "There are," and "There was." I cringed reading it. I tried to tell her to state the sentence more strongly. I wanted her to delete the "There area and restate the sentence in an active voice. I had a hard time pointing out to her what I meant and why she should do that. When we ran her papers through Writer's Workbench, it highlighted all the problems that I had been trying to verbalize and even capitalized and bolded all the "there's? It was great.

Lori Johnson Nakayu
Peer Tutor
Weber State College
Ogden, UT

Conference Calendar for Writing Center Associations (WCAs)

- Feb. 24: CUNY WCA, at Borough of Manhattan CC, New York City.
Contact: Gail Wood, English Skills Center, College of Staten Island, Sunnyside Campus, 715 Ocean Terrace, Staten Island, NY 10301 (718-390-7794).
- March 1: South East WCA, at Georgetown U., Washington, D.C.
Contact: Wilkie Leith, Writing Center, George Mason U., 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 (703-323-3470).
- March 22: National WCA Special Interest Session, at Conference on College Composition and Communication, in Chicago.
Contact: Pamela Farrell, Red Bank Regional High School, 12 Essex Drive, Little Silver, NJ 07739 (201-842-8000).
- April 7: Mid-Atlantic WCA, at Widener U., Chester, PA
Contact: Sandra Gamble, Humanities, Widener U., Chester, PA 19013 (215-499-4332).
- Apr 20-21: East Central WCA, at Indiana State U., Terre Haute, IN
Contact: Corky Dahl or Brenda Ameter, Writing Center, Indiana State U., Terre Haute, IN 47809.
- May 4: North Shore Writing Center Conference, in Illinois.
Contact: Betty Brockelman or Paula Williams, Maine Township High School West, 1755 S. Wolf Road, Des Plaines, IL 60018.

List of NCTE Centers of Excellence Includes Writing Labs

Among the 130 elementary and secondary school programs in the U.S. and Canada that were named Centers of Excellence by the National Council of Teachers of English are the writing labs listed here. Teachers and administrators are invited to send for written descriptions of Chest' programs and to observe them in action.

COLORADO

- Lou Marchesano
Writing Center
Rocky Mountain High School
1300 West Swallow Road Fort
Collins, CO 80526

- Susan He! arty
Writing Center
Pattonville Senior High
2497 Creve Coeur Mill Road
Maryland Heights, MO 63043

ILLINOIS

- Janice Jordan
The Writing Resource Center
Deerfield High School
1959 North Waukegan Road
Deerfield, IL, 60015

NEW JERSEY

- Carol Lefelt
Writing Center
Highland Park High School
North Fifth Avenue
Highland Park, NJ 08904

- Mike Davis
The Writing Center
Naperville North High School
899 North Mill Street
Naperville, IL 60540

NEW YORK

- Barbara Bologna
The Write Place
East Hampton High School 2
Long Lane
East Hampton, NY 11937

IOWA

- James Upton
The Write Place
Burlington High School
421 Terrace Drive
Burlington, IA 52601

OHIO

- Cynthia Home
Writing Center
McKinley Senior High School
2323 17th Street Northwest
Canton, OH 41708

KANSAS

- Carol Halley
Writing Lab
Shawnee Mission North High School
7401 Johnson Drive
Overland Park, KS 66202

QUEBEC

- Lorraine Gillmelster-Krause
Writing and Reading Workshop
Soulanges Elementary School 1135
Chemin St. George
St. Telesphore, Quebec
CANADA JOP 1YO

MISSOURI

-Anne Wright
The Write Place
Hazelwood West Jr. High/High School #1
Wildcat Lane
Hazelwood, MO 63042

-Rosemary Stocky
Reading/Writing Center
Parkway North High School

A reader comments....

I always read the Writing Lab Newsletter in its entirety. However, seldom does an article elicit as much laughter as David Chapman's "Requiem for a Writing Center" (December, 1989). His piece was a wonderful treat at the end of a demanding semester. More such humorous submissions, please.

Sharon Green



the TROUBLESHOOTER

-- Paula Gills

In my last column, I discussed common difficulties students with learning disabilities encounter when they face academic writing tasks. In general, researchers have found that LD students have problems with mechanics, organization, development, style, spelling, subject-predicate-number agreement, compound/complex sentence structure, combining kernel sentences and preparing for writing tasks. In this article I'll explore some ways we can help students (and ourselves!) cope with and accommodate to their difficulties. Before I do this, I'll identify one more helpful resource:

Algozzine, Bob, et al. "Reading and Writing Competencies of Adolescents with Learning Disabilities." *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 21.3 (1988): 154-173.

In previous columns I have discussed evaluation procedures and psycho-educational reports: there are, however, other invaluable tools we can use to get as much information as possible from the student. Writing, reading and study habit inventories, samples of timed and untimed writing, reading with sion cheeks timed and untimed- these informal measures under tutorial supervision can prove very valuable. The results of such measures can then be coupled with the objectives and recommendations in the report and the historical practices that have been shown to be successful. These can then can be documented in a series of tutorial recommendations to be kept in the student's confidential file at the lab. Tutorial personnel can be briefed in staff meetings about students who have special needs, and they can take the time to familiarize themselves with these individualized programs. It is a good idea to try to assign one tutor at a

time, one per semester if possible, to insure consistency of approach and effective follow-through on objectives. These students are often very anxious, and the unknown is quite frightening for them; tutorial support is one area where they can be made to feel more comfortable in the atmosphere of increased demands on their tim^e and processing abilities.

The highly individual nature of these situations can sometimes seem an overwhelming impediment to effective instruction. Some labs and centers do not have the resources to provide the degree of individual attention each student may need. So-what most tutors want to know is if there are any general approaches/ strategies that work well with students with learning disabilities. The answer, as always, is yes and no. The following suggestions usually help to some degree, but it is important to be aware of direct feedback to the contrary even if it means starting again from square one,

Provide as much structure as possible

*Schedule appointments for the same time every day or with the same tutor whenever available, but make them ongoing, standing appointments.

*Involve the students in the writing of particular objectives and a schedule for following them, as well as a more comprehensive, overall study schedule; check progress at the beginning of each session.

*Assist the student with developing an individualized strategy for each task (e.g. essay exams, pre-writing, proofreading).

*Get as involved as possible with all others working with the student in order to create a visible support network.

*Agree upon and follow a particular protocol for tutorial sessions, starting with a brief review of the last session.

Find ways to accommodate non-essential skills while reinforcing them

*Many times deadlines will not allow complete mastery of weak areas- accommodations need to be realistically worked into programs to help with frustration and anxiety.

Do not use programmed or computerized instruction without close tutorial supervision

*One of the more frequent characteristics of these students is the tendency to perseverate, that is, to continue doing something that is not productive because it is a comfortable routine. It is also possible that some students may prefer a more impersonal approach because it feels less threatening, but it may not be as effective.

Be careful not to go too fast or try too much at once

*LD students often have problems with speed and "overloading." Check on progress/comprehension often, chunking work into manageable pieces.

Concentrate more on learning processes and strategies than on turning out perfect products

*Correctness is often a most intimidating factor; enabling the student to "learn about learning" is more important than achieving the perfect product, especially in early stages of work on a project.

Allow mistakes without failure

*Not all work needs to be graded. Helping students to become more comfortable with error is more important than eradicating it. Certain special assignments can be targeted as "clean copies," allowing for whatever limitations are indicated in the student's evaluation.

Use examples of the student's own writing

whenever possible to reference for program needs

*Making lists and organizing priorities from samples of work is preferable to assigning texts or other materials. Since these students often have very limited metacognitive awareness/ strategies, they need to learn about what they do when they think/react/write before they can improve.

Read and practice models of effective writing

*LD students often avoid reading and writing because they are difficult and frustrating tasks. Doing as much reading and writing as possible at this level will help some with "catching up" with their peers.

Be patient and flexible

*This might be the most important piece of advice of all.

My next installment will consist of answers to questions that you have about working with LD students. Write or call with your questions- as soon as I have enough for a column, I'll get right to it! You can still purchase copies of our pamphlet on working with post-secondary LD students. Send a check for \$2.50 to Paula Gills (it must be made out to me), and I'll send you College Students With Learning Disabilities.

Paula Gills

Director, Learning Support Center
Norwich University
Northfield, Vermont 05663
(802) 485-2130

(cont. from page 8):

Meyer, Emily, and Louise Z. Smith. *The Rae*. call Tutor. New York: Oxford UP, 1987,

Reigstad, Thomas J., and Donald McAndrew. *Training Tutors for Writing Conferences*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984.

Trimbur, John. "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing" *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition*. Ed. Ben W. McClelland and Timothy R. Donovan. New York: MLA, 1988. 87-109.

TSU Surveys Campus Writing/Learning Practices

Writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) at Troy State University is a writing-center based program. The heart of the program is writing-to-learn, a focus not chosen by chance. Our Title III grant gave us a year for research and planning. Research convinced us that most successful programs focus on writing-to-learn and that writing-to-learn should be the center of our program. We thought, moreover, that we should be aware of current writing/learning practices on our own campus to validate- or invalidate- our choice of focus and to guide our program planning, so we surveyed faculty throughout the University. To ensure as balanced a representation across disciplines as possible, we requested that surveys be distributed within departments and that instructors return completed surveys to department chairs. Of the 182 surveys distributed, 100 were returned, a better-than-average return rate of 55 % which offered a wide cross-disciplinary representation.

We divided the survey into four categories: job-related intellectual activities, writing assignments, forms of documentation, and writing patterns. A summary of responses to each part of the survey is given below:

PART 1. Which intellectual activities would graduates of your department or program expect to perform on an entry level job?

More than 80% of the respondents marked these activities: observing details, interpreting data, reporting data objectively, summarizing key points, categorizing information, recording a sequence of events, giving directions, and making comparisons. Approximately 70% of the respondents included explaining reasons, making recommendations, and analyzing parts. Others identified re-searching topics, following a format, and supporting arguments as being important to graduates of their school.

PART 2. Please indicate the types of writing tasks you require.

The survey showed that writing assignments most often given by the respondents are

short-answer quizzes, essay exams, short papers, and documented research papers. The next most frequently assigned writing tasks are the personal observation paper, article abstracts, journals, notebooks or logs, and book or reading reports. Tasks least frequently assigned, such as lab reports and case studies, are assignments closely associated with work in particular fields.

PART 3. What form of documentation do you require for a research paper?

Overwhelmingly, respondents marked APA: the Suite Manual of the American Psychological Association, a fact that is not surprising since APA documentation is generally used in the social sciences, earth sciences, education, and business. Other required documentation forms are MLA:MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers; CBE: Council of Biological Editors; Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations; and The Chicago Manual of Style.

PART 4. Please indicate the writing patterns you ask students to use in your courses.

Respondents indicated that they most often ask students to use comparison/contrast, process, definition, cause/effect, narration, and description. These patterns are followed closely by assignments that require persuasion and classification,

A study of the survey results suggests that instructors tend to see themselves as needing to teach almost every kind of intellectual activity listed in Part 1. All but three items-proofreading text, drawing graphs, and revising text- were marked by more than 50% of the faculty who responded. Eleven of the nineteen items were marked by 70% or more. A comparison of responses to Part 1 and responses to Part 4 (patterns of writing that instructors use in Glasswork) revealed discrepancies between what faculty say students need and classroom practices. For example, 77% of the respondents marked " explaining reasons" in Part 1, but only 43% marked the corre-

sponding pattern, "causal analysis," in Part 4. Such discrepancies are hardly rare. Although a number of explanations could be offered, two seem particularly appropriate to mention here. First, while we may assume that all instructors have written for their particular field, we may also assume that few have been taught to teach writing in that field. Moreover, in days past even fewer have viewed writing as a learning tool. Often, especially in upper-level courses, writing has been seen primarily as a tool for evaluation. Now it has become evident that the kinds of writing students will use in their work will enhance their learning of course content.

While the survey indicated that most faculty were apprehensive about teaching the forms of writing used in their discipline, we maintained the premise that the instructor in a discipline can best teach the particular kinds of writing, research, and documentation pertinent to his field; for this reason, we decided to place the emphasis of our WAG training workshop on designing writing assignments that are an integral part of coursework. We were encouraged in this emphasis by directors of other WAC programs who had told us that initial participants are most often faculty who already include writing in their courses and are looking for ways to improve coursework. This proved to be true at Troy State University, and although it partially explains the enthusiasm of participants, the foremost reason for their enthusiasm may simply be that the writing-to-learn approach to WAC makes sense. When writing assignments are clearly tied to course objectives, both students and faculty benefit.

Student evaluations of writing-component (w-c) courses show that they believe w-c assignments help them learn course content more effectively and that their confidence as writers grows simultaneously. The w-c course questionnaire asks students to respond to a number of items by rating them excellent, good, average, or poor. Cumulative figures show that 31% have described their writing assignments as excellent learning tools and that 47% have rated them as good. A much smaller number, 18% have found them to be average, and only 2% have rated them as poor. Cumulative responses to questions regarding students' confidence in themselves as writers at the beginning and at the end of the w-c course show an increase of 10% in the excellent category- from 12 to 22%. Students rating

their confidence as good grew even more- from 41 to 62%, an increase of 19%. As students' confidence increased, those rating their confidence as average or poor dropped from 39 to 16% and from 7 to 1% respectively. Faculty evaluations of the program agree with student evaluations: students in w-c courses are learning more and becoming better writers.

In addition to supporting the focus of the WAC program on writing-to-learn, the survey served as a resource for planning at the Writing Center. We anticipated that the implementation of the program would prompt requests for a wider variety of writing work-shops than faculty had previously requested. Tutors researched writing tasks frequently assigned, such as article abstracts and critical reviews, to create a bank of files. Each file contains background information and a bibliography of relevant resources in the Center. These are useful to tutors preparing to work with students one-to-one or in small groups, as well as to professional staff designing class-room workshops for WAC participants.

Indirectly, the survey has generated the development of other workshops because instructors not only want students to learn the kinds of writing essential to their field, they also want them to write as clearly and as error-free as possible. Responding to this need, the Center offers workshops for students who need help beyond information on writing a particular kind of paper. This spring, for example, a series of workshops will be conducted at the Center on these topics: punctuation, structuring sentences, paragraph development, spelling, vocabulary, generating ideas for writing, APA documentation, and MIA documentation. Four topics will be offered in April and four in May. To accommodate as many students as possible, the Center will offer a morning and an afternoon session of each workshop weekly throughout the month. Faculty participating in WAC will announce these workshops in their classes, and flyers will be posted throughout the campus so that all interested students may come.

The WAC program at Troy State University is now in its second year. Quarterly pro-gram evaluations by students and faculty indicate that it has made a strong beginning. Undoubtedly, the writing/learning practices survey contributed to the establishment of a

sound basis for program focus and development. That we devoted the first year of the grant to research and planning has served us well. Various surveys were developed besides the one noted here, and the information garnered enabled us to implement a program that has benefited the students and won the support of the faculty. If you would like to know more about the survey or other aspects of Troy State University's WAC program, please contact the program director, Professor Gertrude Schroeder or me at The Writing Center, TSU, Troy, AL 36082.

Joan Word
Troy State University Troy,
Alabama

10738-0015. Price: \$12.95; NCTE members, \$9.95.)

Dennis Baron, the director of the fresh-man rhetoric program at the University of Illinois, explores a number of language issues in this collection of informal essays for teachers and general readers. He comments on language lore, popular myths about language, language usage, language trends, and the politics of language. Some chapters, such as "The Passive Voice Can Be Your Friend," challenge traditional views of language teaching; other chapters, such as "Nothing Like a Good Pun," are meant to be shared with friends. This is a book for all who enjoy the English language, who teach it, and who are intrigued by its curiosities and paradoxes. As Baron points out, it's a language rich in examples of words which mean both themselves and the opposite: dust can mean "to sprinkle with dust" and "to remove the dust from;" loosen and unloosen are synonymous; and with *Is this true?* and *Isn't this true?* we use both a positive and negative question to elicit the same information. This is a book both to learn from and to enjoy.

Declining Grammar and Other Essays on the English
Vocabulary by Dennis Baron. Urbana, Illinois:
1989, 241 pp. (Available from NCTE, 1111
Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Stock no.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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