THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Volume 22, Number 7 | Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing | March, 1998

...FROM THE EDITOR...

- Do you see any value in sharing with students personal stories from your own writing history?
- Do you agree or disagree that tutorial interaction is firmly and appropriately based in social-constructionist theorizing?
- Do you have clear-cut guidelines for when and when not to be directive in a tutorial?
- Do you agree or disagree that a tutor should have discipline-specific knowledge?
- Do you know when and where your regional writing center association is meeting next?
- Have you listed your writing center in the directory being compiled?
- If you're going to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Chicago, in April, do you want to join the breakfast get-together? And do you know about the special interest session for writing centers?

A lot of question, and a lot of answers in this issue of the newsletter, and for those of us gathering at the CCCC, more to talk about, debate, share. See you there, I hope!

Muriel Harris, editor

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Narrative as response to writers: Making connections

A tale of woe and intrigue

Karen was one of those many writers who wanted me to tell her the "right" way to write her paper. She had been successfully indoctrinated into the five-paragraph theme mindset, had received good grades in her required composition courses (perhaps because of her successful indoctrination), identified herself as a "good writer," but was visibly on edge as we met in the center. She had, it seemed, been given an assignment not comfortably addressed by her clean and formulaic thesis-support-conclusion approach. It was unsettling to her to "know how to write" but not know how to write that paper. What Karen hoped for from her trip to the center was the "other" formula—the one that fit the assignment she had been given.

This was a pretty typical challenge for me—many writers come to the center asking for the answers, unaware that what they need are questions. I had a number of choices for how to work with Karen, to help her realize that she would be best served not by another static model, but by a mindset

that allowed her to analyze writing situations based on the rhetorical context and draw from a large repertoire of strategies. My response choices included explaining to her that this breakdown of her five-paragraph model was just the first in a series of breakdowns of familiar and comfortable models; providing her with a model that would be appropriate for the assignment; asking her a series of questions to lead her to a more appropriate model; or telling her a story.

I chose the story. This is the one I told her:

The Writing Lab Newsletter, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the National Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by Purdue University. Material will not be reproduced in any form without express written permission.

Editor: Muriel Harris; Asst. to the Editor: Mary Jo Turley, English Dept., Purdue University, 1356 Heavilon, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356 (765)494-7268.
e-mail: harrism@cc.purdue.edu
mjturley@purdue.edu

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of $15 (U.S. $20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the editor. Prepayment is requested from business offices.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

When I was packing to leave the college where I got my MA, the phone rang. At the other end was my professor, the one I had just turned my final paper of my degree in to. I figured he was calling to say good-bye.

But no. Instead he said, "I can't accept this paper."

HELLO! Wait—this call couldn't be for me. So I said "Excuse me?"

He continued: "This paper doesn't have any bibliography. I can't accept graduate work like that."

"But wait," I countered, "wasn't this supposed to be a heretofore never attempted examination of the parallels of androgyny in Shakespeare's sonnets and the *Faerie Queen*? Wasn't the point to do something odd and new . . . of course I couldn't get cites on this exact perspective. Weren't you interested in how I could pull it together."

"No," he retorted, "I was interested in whether you could engage in graduate level scholarship."

"Have you read it?" I queried.

"No, I saw no point."

After about ten minutes I succeeded in convincing him to read it. After he read it he decided to give me credit for it. Apparently it had some merit although I had missed the boat entirely on an important piece. This piece was so important that the mistake could've held up my degree and threatened my impending entrance into a doctoral program.

That was over 13 years ago and the memory of that episode still stings. Boy, did I make a stupid mistake. It wasn't that I couldn't write well— I just wasn't paying very close attention to my audience or purpose. Karen gasped at all the appropriate places, and filled the pauses with "geez" as I finished. Then she broke in with "So you did what you figured was right and almost got screwed. I don't want that to happen to me."

I wasn't absolutely sure where I was going with this story when I started it, but I sensed that some of the misconceptions I had about writing when I submitted the inappropriate paper were the same misconceptions Karen had. I had assumed a universal definition of "good writing." I had written the way I had always written (and been praised for). And I had my worldview shaken when my rhetorical choices were so clearly inappropriate. Karen seemed to be experiencing a lower level of that worldview-shaking panic.

I have told my story of inappropriate choices many times; I have used it to warn my classroom students about the importance of conventionality in writing, about the concept of discourse communities, about the general necessity for communication between teacher and students. But one reason I always tell it is to help the writers I work with see that I, a university professor, writing center director, published writer, also make errors in rhetorical judgment. This story serves to help writers see their confusion as a necessary developmental step, rather than as a signal that they "can't write." After hearing about my close brush with disaster, Karen and I laughed, and she didn't see her inability to fit her paper into its usual mold as such an enormous problem.

Karen was also able to see what might have been her lack of insight without being defensive—since it was presented as my lack of insight. Since I often find defensiveness to be a significant impediment to learning, eliminating it while still addressing the issue is a major pedagogical advantage. Using stories to diffuse defensiveness and create an environment where response can be heard by writers seems an extension of the rather common writing center practice of owning all comments by phrasing them as 'Y" statements.

Advocating story as response

In *The Call of Stories*, Robert Coles writes about two teachers he had when he was studying psychiatry. One gave him information and directions—admonishing him to do this and not that, reminding him of the great theories in the field. The other told him stories. At first he thought the storyteller was goofy and eccentric. Coles listened to the clinician. Then Coles had a case that stumped him. The only thing that rescued him, that gave him patience to let his own wisdom well up, were the stories his second mentor told.

Stories will do that, I think. They will let our wisdom well up as we examine the variety of perspectives and approaches we can take from a story, as we relate pieces of the story to our own lives, as we hasten to the rhythm of the words, and realize that the storyteller cares enough for us to reveal a piece of her real self. In "Landscape and Narrative," Barry Lopez helps define story by describing the storyteller's task. He says:

> The storyteller knows that because different individuals grasp the story at different levels, the focus of his regard for truth must be at the primary one—with who was there, what happened, when, where, and why things occurred. The story will then possess similar truth at other levels—the integrity inherent at the primary level of meaning will be conveyed everywhere else. (70)

The stories I am talking about, even when they are called "narratives," are the descriptions of who, what, when, where, and why that I learned in junior high school. They are not fancy or specialized. They are simple, straightforward, and somehow true. It seems almost ironic that in the simplicity of a story there can be so many levels of interpretation— levels that allow the audiences of stories to ponder them and create a long chain of new meanings.

I think that stories are among the most undervalued, underused, and powerful ways to respond to writers. They are richer than questions, more engaging than evaluations, more motivating than minimal marking. Stories enrich a context. They foster a real relationship between the teacher and student, one that invites the student writer into a real, literate conversation—the same, ongoing literate conversation that started in a Burkean parlor.

When I think how I have learned the most important lessons in my life, the first most influential thing would be my experience, the second would have to be story. I see stories as a sort of vicarious experience. Stories vivid enough to pull me in so that I almost think I have lived them. Sometimes I retell my own and others' stories and live in them through the retelling. A story has a power of persuasion and intimacy that a study, a taxonomy, an admonition, or a piece of advice can't have for me. I rarely shrug off stories. I listen or read carefully. I am much more open. I think my students are, too. I think they can hear much more challenging things if they are conveyed as stories instead of dictates.

Stories are dialogic—though perhaps not at first. I held the floor for the five or so minutes that I regaled Karen with my tale of woe and intrigue. But there was dialogue going on inside her head —I found that out as soon as I stopped talking and she started. I wasn't the distant expert, telling her about the theory behind discourse communities and constraints, I wasn't the all-knowing teacher, providing her with another model or a simple answer, and I wasn't teasing and withholding knowledge, questioning her until she came to answers I thought were useful. I was another writer who had angsted, lived, and learned, and I invited her into a dialog about writing. I think stories have a place in all response to writers—in writing centers and classrooms, from teachers and peers. I think stories are practical—everyone has stories about learning, and most people in the academy have stories about writing.

How to tell stories as response (and not spend all day doing it)

That first session with Karen started with the story, and nearly everything else we talked about came back to it. When we talked about what she wanted to say in her paper, she joked "but I don't want to just say what I want, like you did," and when she told me about the kind of sources she planned on using she said "but I'll be sure to use a bibliography!" The story was the touchstone for the whole session, but stories aren't always so central in my work with writers.

I can be inspired to tell a story by the content of the students' writing. Sometimes I share connected or contrary experiences. I also tell stories that are connected to the discourse type a student is trying to produce—I have some comical stories about getting lost in the library doing research. Or I tell stories about my writing process—things like how I had to use a ten-foot length of paper to map out my dissertation before I could get writing, or how my dissertation adviser had difficulty understanding that long outline I thought was so self-explanatory. Often there is a "once I made a mistake but then I learned from it. . ." quality to many of my stories. No matter what the stories I tell are connected to, and no matter when I introduce them into the session, they almost always have the effect of making the session more dialogic and of diffusing defensiveness. That usually makes it easier to deal with larger, more important conceptual issues, and to insure that real learning about writing, rather than paper-fixing, is what happens in the session.

By sharing stories with writers in a center, center staff can help develop a stronger sense of writing center community. A writing center can become a community in which people know each other because they know each others' stories. Then the stories of that community can be told in other communities, and the writers in our centers, and the people they interact with, can, as

Terry Tempest Williams puts it, be "healed by our stories" (57).

Another story that worked for me

I'm not sure that I'd have so much confidence in the power of story as response if stories weren't so powerful in my own writing life. There are many instances in which a story has rescued me from an error or from writers' block. One such instance was when I was stuck at a particular point in writing part of an introduction to the volume of writing center stories my friend Meg Woolbright and I are editing. I had called Meg to whine about being stuck. My call happened to come on the day when she returned from the San Diego 4Cs. She got me unstuck when she told me a story of what happened there—about how people were arguing that writing center work didn't need to be grounded in theory. She named names and quoted passages where people said that writing center work was practical and should be attended to only in that realm. She described how she felt her dissenting voice was in the minority, how there seemed to be this whole retro bandwagon thing going on where centers were discarding theory. "What a way to keep centers at the margins of composition!" I responded, and suddenly I was off and running. No longer was I stuck— I was suddenly full of energy—mad, even. I had a mission. My introduction had to address Meg's story, it had to engage the folks who were arguing against theory in writing centers. After Meg's story I had a clear purpose. I was engaged in a dialogue with Meg, with the people I didn't meet but whose names I now know, with others she met in San Diego who positioned themselves similarly or differently.

The vicarious experience conveyed by Meg's story clarified my purpose for writing and energized me. I would not have responded the same way if she had said "I think you ought to punch up the importance of theory more. That is a big issue in the field." By telling me her story she had made it my issue, too. Having an issue to forward in an ongoing conversation gave me the impetus to write. We can use stories to do the same for our writers. I know this because Karen had a breakthrough. She came to see me a couple of days later, quite excited. She exclaimed "I've totally revised that paper. I've decided to let the readers come to the conclusions I came to by seeing the evidence I saw. I am going to do it totally backwards from the way I usually do. I talked to my professor and she said it could work like that."

Since Karen figured out how to structure the paper on her own, after she heard a story that challenged her belief that there were pre-fabricated molds for writing, she was freed to draw from her intertext and structure the paper in the way that seemed most appropriate for the assignment. I am more confident that Karen won't slip back into the assumption that there are "right" ways to write than if I had given her a mini-lecture on it. I think Karen learned a big lesson with a little prompting. Sometimes a story is all it takes.

Lynn Briggs
Eastern Washington University
Cheney, WA

Works Cited

Coles, Robert. *The Call of Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
Lopez, Barry. *Crossing Open Ground*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
Williams, Terry Tempest. *An Unspoken Hunger*. New York: Pantheon, 1994.

CCCC Annual Writing Center Breakfast

The 4th (?) Annual 4C'S Writing Center Breakfast: Friday, April 3, 1998, 7:30 a.m, till whenever; Lou Mitchell's Restaurant, 565 W. Jackson Blvd. (directions will be provided). COST $11.50 per person (incl. tax and tip).

RSVP by March 30 to Jo Tarvers: inscribe@cetlink.net (or) 803-323-4557

OK, I am officially starting the headcount NOW. So please reply to the above address and let me know if you are coming. Please indicate your choice from these two lists. Majority will rule:

- PANCAKES or WAFFLES or 2 EGGS any style?
- BACON or SAUSAGE or HAM?

(The breakfast also comes with hash browns, homemade bread and marmalade, large OJ, and a choice of coffee/tea/milk.)

Hope to see lots and lots of you there! Shall we wear bowling shirts or Blues Brothers suits?

Jo Tarvers
Winthrop University

Electronic listserv for tutors

WRITINGC is an unmoderated listserv that hopes to foster discussion among peer writing tutors. While the discussion on another list, WCenter, tends to drift toward the administrative concerns of writing centers, WRITINGC is focused on concerns specific to peer writing tutors not necessarily within the context of writing centers.

To subscribe:

- *send e-mail to*: listserv@vm.sc.edu
- *leave subject line blank*
- *message*: SUB writingc <your first name> <your last name>

Remove any signature files in your message. If you have questions, please send to karlf@aiken.sc.edu (Karl Fornes).

1998 Writing Center Directory

We are in the final stages of data entry for the *1998 Writing Center Directory*, and we want to double-check that the information we have on your center is current. Since we asked for it in 1996, we feel sure that many of you have added websites, that some of you have changed area codes, and that a few places will have new contact people. Please send us the name of your school and any changes you want us to incorporate into your directory entry. If all your information is up to date, there is no need to reply. Some of you are seeing this form for the first time and will want to include your writing center in the directory. Please send amended or completed forms to me by completing the form below. (Deadline for changes: April 15, just like taxes.)

There will be an announcement soon about date of availability and price. Directories will be published by NWCA Press. We expect them to be available in late spring or early summer. Mail to Paula Gillespie, Dept. of English, Marquette University, P.O. Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881; fax; 414-288-3591; e-mail: paula.gillespie@marquette.edu

State (or Country and Province, etc.):_____

Name of Center: _____

School Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone Number/Fax/E-mail: _____

Academic Level (college, secondary, middle school, etc): _____

Web Page Address: _____

Contact Person/Title: _____

Department Affiliation: _____

Director Reports to: _____

Associated with (Check all that apply: WAC:_____ Fac.Dev:_____ Dev. Ed:_____ ESL:_____ Other (Specify below):__

_____

Center's Age: _____

Center Purpose (thirty words or less): _____

_____

_____

Number of Hours Open_____ Staff _____

Unique Characteristics (thirty words or less): _____

_____

_____

(Note: Did you remember to include your school's name so we can locate your data in our data base?)

Theorizing a "social-expressivist" writing center

In her 1991 essay, Andrea Lunsford distinguishes between three different epistemological views of the writing center: a "Storehouse" center, where knowledge is parceled out in bits to students; an expressivist "Garret" center, where students discover knowledge "within" them; and, the one Lunsford champions, a "Burkean Parlor" center, where a collaborative learning environment is fostered. At the time it was written, Lunsford's essay helped to reinforce our view of the writing center as a site for learning consistent with the dominant paradigm in composition studies, the view that knowledge is socially constructed.[1] Lisa Ede, too, has suggested that the social-constructionist model provides a "theoretical foundation" for the work that goes on in writing centers (7). Both Ede and Lunsford, like so many other theorists of the social model of composing, suggest the incompatibility of writing center practice with the foundationalist tendencies of an expressivist model of writing: "[A]s long as thinking and writing are regarded as inherently individual, solitary activities," Ede asserts, "writing centers can never be viewed as anything more than pedagogical fix-it shops to help those who, for whatever reason, are unable to think and write on their own" (7). Since we *know* that writing centers are more than mere ''fix-it shops," Ede contends, we need to draw upon "the work of those who have recently challenged us to view writing as a social, rather than a solitary and individual, process," and we need to "place writing centers at the heart . . . of [this] current theory" (5-6).

Eric Hobson, though, has suggested that writing center professionals should resist attempts "to mold the writing center and the work it does to fit [any single] epistemology's specific contours" (71). No single theoretical vision, he argues, adequately describes the various ways writing is approached in a center, nor does a single theory encompass the variety of services that most writing centers provide.[2] Some of the reasons Hobson cites for writing centers' amorphousness include the variety in the institutional environments centers inhabit, as well as the differences in ideologies that may exist among writing center administrators. Hobson's was a timely essay, one of many in the last few years suggesting that the clean epistemological divisions that have historically been supplied—to describe either classroom practices or composing methods—are neither realistic nor desirable. Hobson's criticism of the sort of taxonomy Lunsford offers for writing centers is mirrored by other calls for the elimination of such theoretical boundaries in other areas of composition studies. Acknowledging the varied sorts of methods writing centers undertake, Hobson concludes his essay with the proclamation that writing centers "have one foot planted in both expressivist and social epistemologies, while [they] keep at least one hand in positivism" (74).

If we talk in terms of these categories, few would debate that expressivism and social constructionism are the principal epistemologies for writing centers; we see them in the reflections of Murray-esque conferences and in Bruffee-esque collaborations and other images of tutoring that make up the rich history of writing centers. These two theoretical approaches to writing, though, form the basis of one of the central debates in the field of composition studies: one that pits a personal or expressive view of writing against a social view of writing. But more and more critics are saying that the task of writing is never really undertaken within the bounds of a single theoretical matrix like "expressive" or "cognitive" or "social-constructionist"; different theoretical approaches to teaching writing, it is argued, often make use of the same pedagogical methods. One work that has attempted to dismantle the divisions erected between theories of composing is Sherrie L. Gradin's *Romancing Rhetorics: Toward a Social Expressivist View of Writing*. Gradin's book is one of many recent attempts to draw connections between expressivist and social-constructionist theories of writing, noting their similar classroom practices and aims.

Aware that many theorists have suggested a basic incompatibility between expressive and social theories—usually in terms of each theory's conception of the writing self and in that self's relationship to the rest of the world—Gradin provides a revisionist view of expressive theories and their romantic roots. She contends that

> Current critics of expressivism envision an expressivist subject who both refuses to participate in the social world altogether and who is somehow internally constructed separately from social influences. A social expressivism, however, with roots already embedded in the tradition from which expressivism arises, suggests that all subjects negotiate within the system; they act and are acted upon by their environment. (xv)

Gradin does not try to do the impossible, does not try to work with existing theoretical views and reconcile their contradictory elements. Rather, she steps outside of existing theoretical views to provide for us "the ignored

version of expressivism—a social expressivism—that the current taxonomy keeps invisible" (xiv).

This essay suggests ways that writing center pedagogy is in keeping with a "social expressivism." I propose that we learn to recognize the social-expressivism tendencies of writing center pedagogy, seeing it as a way of teaching writing that finds its purpose in both self-discovery and an awareness of the self's relationship to others. As a way of representing this symbiotic role of self and other in the production of discourse, I will employ the concept of Vygotskian inner speech, a way of looking at writing that acknowledges both the personal and the social influences that shape writing. "We need social-expressivisms," Gradin asserts, "that envision subjects both acting and being acted upon" (109). It is this sense of social expressivism that I want to focus on—one that conveys the everyday *interactions* of student and tutors in the writing center. And note Gradin's plural "social-expressivisms," suggesting that this way of conceiving writing is not static—because it has a *social* element, it changes by degrees with each new interaction.

As many critics have argued, descriptions of expressivist theories often don't account for influences outside of the writing subject. And, it is similarly argued, social theories often don't account for the personal stake of the writing subject in the production of discourse. When we're describing the one-to-one interaction writing center students partake of, though, we really must acknowledge *both* the personal *and* the social elements involved. We need to account for the two bodies—both the student and the tutor—that work side-by-side in the writing center, and the idea of a social-expressivism does just that. And seeing both the expressive and the social elements helps a writing center tutor to understand better both the complexity of the activity of writing and the part the tutor plays in helping students write better.

Expressive *and* social: A guide for tutors

This section provides a quick look at recent criticism that has led to the position Gradin takes regarding theoretical divisions. I provide this information because I think it important that tutors have a basic understanding of the debate between social and expressive theories, as well as a knowledge of how that debate has recently been problematized, both in composition studies generally and in writing center criticism specifically. Because writing centers have always had the reputation of being "instructional hybrids" (Murphy, "Writing Centers" 282), the need exists to be aware of the limits of any theoretical mode—especially the limits of the dominant social constructionist mode, the one that tutors will likely receive the most enthusiastic instruction in. Christina Murphy makes a case for this sort of awareness:

> [I]t is important to consider whether social constructionist theory—with its valorization of collaborative vs. individual learning strategies, its limited understanding of the role the emotions play in the writing process, and its emphasis upon only those aspects of knowledge that can be socially constructed—gives us a broad enough understanding of the meaning-making activities of individual writers to assist us in providing the most effective instruction we can. ("The Writing Center" 29)

Alice Gillam makes a similar argument, suggesting that strict theoretical models—like those seen in Kenneth Bruffee's works—are often too "idealized, unproblematic, and acontextual" to provide one with a clear view of writing center practice (39).

The debate over the viability of strict theoretical divisions has been undertaken not only because of certain undesirable elements of the dominant social paradigm, but also because of a sense that the expressive view holds a certain usefulness and intuitive honesty that cannot be denied. Maureen Neal voices important misgivings about social constructionist thought and, in doing so, suggests the importance of an awareness of where the personal and the social intersect in theories of composing. "[G]iven this theory of socially constructed knowledge," Neal asks, "how does anyone account for the physical realities of text production? The 'text' that is communally generated—how does it get on the page? How do words and thoughts inside individual heads get made into text?" (43). Conversely, she notes that the classroom practices advocated by expressivist theorists—things like "dialogue journals, class logs, peer editing and group evaluation, brainstorming, small group work"—are "grounded in the social constructionist principle that knowledge and language are communally generated" (45), an idea emphasized as well by Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy (659). Tim Keppel, too, cautions against foregrounding in the classroom a strict social-constructionist view that "erases the individual author" because such a view of writing "is not only counterintuitive to our students, but also denies them important access to control over their own writing" (123). And Christopher Burnham's "Expressive Rhetoric: A Source Study," provides an analysis of expressivist texts and theories, arguing that expressivism is "a view of writing as an inherently social process maintaining both individual and social identity and value" (154).

The wave that these essays are riding crested in Gradin's book-length study. Dissatisfied with the narrow view of expressivism that taxonomists like James Berlin have historically supplied, Gradin shows it is possible to blur the theoretical lines critics have constructed between expressive, social, and cognitive theories of composing (xiv). She wants also to show "that social-expressivist rhetorics . . . are already at work in the field, but that they need to be more fully articulated and enacted" (xiv), something I am setting out to do here. As a way of getting at Gradin's method, we can look at the

case of James Berlin's characterization of expressivism: "[m]ost expressionist theories," Berlin states, "rely on classroom procedures that encourage the writer to interact in dialogue with members of the class" ("Contemporary" 772). Berlin, however, sees the *purpose* of that dialogue as being merely "to get rid of what is untrue in the private vision of the writer" rather than as "an attempt to adjust [one's] message to the audience" (772-73). In a social-expressivist re-examination of Berlin's portrayal of expressivism, it becomes clear that we ought to pay more attention to the dialogue—the "interaction"—that Berlin admits is central to expressive pedagogies. Regardless of Berlin's view of the *purpose* of the interaction, it seems clear that the writing self in his expressionistic model *needs* the dialogic other, is simply unable (or at the very least *less easily able*) to undertake the search for meaning without the cooperative interaction of another. This is what Gradin would call a *social* expressivism.

In the collaborative situation described by Berlin, the action moves both from *inner to outer* (in the form of the writing being shared with others) as well as from *outer to inner* (in the form of the influence of others upon the writing). In that sense it shows a writer "both acting and being acted upon" (Gradin 109). This interaction is something that we intuitively recognize when we work with students, but a consciousness of the workings of this interaction will supply writing center tutors with an awareness of how they help bring about meaning for students. The inner element, I suggest, can be seen in terms of "inner speech," a concept explored in the next section. An awareness of this concept allows tutors better to envision the *personal* element of a student's draft while they participate in a *social* exchange with that student.

Inner *and* outer: Recognizing inner speech

One way to bridge the gap traditionally theorized between personal and social notions of discourse production is through the concept of "inner speech," a phenomenon one experiences privately and internally, but which has its roots in the social world. Familiarity with the concept of inner speech will help writing center tutors see what is at the heart of the inexplicitness so common in the work of beginning writers. When we encounter writing that lacks adequate detail or that compresses the steps of a line of reasoning, our response, when working one-to-one, is to get students talking, to get them to articulate *in speech* the steps they failed to put in writing. And, as most of us have experienced, students are generally able to provide these missing steps when we get them talking; it is as if this information is "within" them, waiting to be released. To view a student's inexplicit text as a form of inner speech is ultimately an optimistic step; by doing so we may view that text as a too-brief version of what that student is *able* to say—what that writer "knows" implicitly—but hasn't yet put into words.

James Moffett believes that it is "by internalizing the whole give and take of conversation" that young writers learn to be more articulate and to put more meaning into their words (*Teaching* 78). Students learn more highly-developed linguistic forms, he says, such as embedding and conjoining, by learning the need to qualify statements in a conversational context. And when the learner is actually one of the participants of the conversation, he adds, that student will better synthesize the two (or more) voices that converge in it. Moffett gives the following as an example of the sort of question-and-answer exercises that are useful in the development of this skill:

> A: The bill will never pass.
>
> B: Never?
>
> A: Well, I mean it can't until after the elections. The bill can't pass *until after the elections* (*Teaching* 79).

Such exercises are aimed at promoting an awareness of how the interaction of a conversation is inherent in the creation of adequately elaborated statements. This sort of interaction is the meat and potatoes of writing center work, and it is through an awareness of the workings of conversation that those students who come to the center become better writers. An important distinction between external and inner speech, according to L. S. Vygotsky, to whom the concept is generally attributed, is that "while in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought" (149). As a result, inner speech is characterized by "the tendency toward abbreviation and predication" (144), qualities that are suggestive of writing common to many students in need of tutorial assistance: inexplicitness, too little detail, a drift toward short, unelaborated sentences.[3]

Moffett, whose theories of discourse production are heavily influenced by Vygotsky's notion of inner speech, believes the most productive pedagogy for teaching writing "has to be based on a continuity of thought into speech and speech into writing" (*Coming* 142), precisely the sort of interactions undertaken regularly in writing centers. Vygotsky's explanation of the difference between inner speech and external speech helps to make it clear why these continuous steps are necessary, providing us, as well, with another way of understanding the nature of the abbreviated and inexplicit writing that students bring to the center. He explains:

> In mastering external speech, the child starts from one word, then connects two or three words; a little later he advances from simple sentences to more complicated ones . . . in other words, he proceeds from the part to the whole. In regard to meaning, on the other hand, the first word of a child is a whole sentence. Semantically, the child starts from the whole, from a meaningful complex, and only later begins to

> master the separate semantic units . . . and to divide his formerly undifferentiated thought into those units. (126)

When we recognize inexplicit student writing as "written-down inner speech," we give it credit for being "a meaningful complex," and so we must set out to help them understand just how to translate it—"to master the separate semantic units"—through conversation, into sufficiently specified external speech.

The development of inner speech is not, of course, a "just add water" sort of affair, where one's thoughts exist in dehydrated form, ready to swell into their true, complete form. Rather, inner speech is "so saturated with sense that many words would be required to explain it in external speech" (Vygotsky 148). And inner speech's development can never be so complete as to do justice to the saturation of meaning it contains. In the context of student writing, written down inner speech may develop any number of ways depending on the specifics of the interaction between a writer and a tutor.

In an expressivist model of writing, according to Berlin, a writer's "inner vision finally exists apart from language, but language is necessary in order for the individual to shape an interpretation that constitutes a better approximation of [that vision]" (*Rhetoric* 153). In the parlance of a discussion of inner speech and a social expressivism, we would have to revise Berlin's quote to say that "*sufficiently-elaborated external* language is necessary for an individual to shape an interpretation" of his or her private vision. In order to get to that elaborated external language, though, we first have to recognize the abbreviated inner speech that exists in its place, waiting to be transformed.

Inner speech and "social-expressivism" in the writing center

Through this movement "from thought into speech and speech into writing," students are given practice fleshing out their abbreviated prose, providing the sort of details necessary to convey meaning. As the term suggests, "inner speech" is an interior phenomenon, something that is experienced inside a person's head. And the movement towards "external speech" completes the "inner to outer" metaphor of discourse productions, long considered the trademark of expressivism. But since inner speech has its roots in conversation and the social world, the development of inner speech constitutes a writer's increased awareness of the social interaction at the heart of that inner speech. By viewing inexplicit writing as a form of written-down inner speech, then, we can see both the expressive and the social constructionist tendencies of this model.

Interestingly, Vygotsky's ideas have been used to explain both social and expressive theories of writing.[4] According to Kenneth Bruffee, Vygotsky's notion that "reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized" is an idea central to the understanding of social constructionist thought ("Collaborative" 639; see also LeFevre 58). Vygotsky's ideas also serve as a source for theories of expressive writing. Vygotskian inner speech is the model James Britton uses to describe "expressive language," or language important only to the user. When, however, a writer creates a text that meets the demands of a reader, that writer moves from the role of "spectator" to the role of "participant" (79-80). The move from spectator to participant mirrors the development of inner speech into external speech. Britton refers to language in which the participant function dominates as "transactional" language; the source of effective transactional language, though, is expressive language, that language which does not yet adequately conform to the communicative needs of another.

In order to create effective transactional discourse, students must learn to participate in what Daniel T. Lochman calls "a dialogue of one" (19). In the center a tutor "provides a model of the critical mind at work—a model that a student might plausibly emulate while attempting to discover and articulate ideas," Lochman says (21). The student's task is to imitate and internalize the example of critical thinking the tutor provides. A problem common to many weak writers, suggests Patrick Hartwell, is that often "the more [they] try, the less they improve, because their model of writing enforces behavior that is counterproductive to the mastery of adult literacy" (58; see also Trimbur "Collaborative" 97). But in the one-to-one environment of a writing center, Hartwell observes, "[t]he teacher-tutor is . . . constantly demonstrating adult literate behavior," behavior best transferred from tutor to student "through dialogue, through tutor talk" (59). In addition, students must exhibit a certain amount of "engagement" and "a willingness to learn," Hartwell adds (59).

Hartwell points to the *interactive* nature of writing center pedagogy. In order to get from inner speech to well-elaborated written discourse, a student who brings a rough draft to the center must be willing to explore his or her thoughts and to make a real effort to relate to another how those thoughts are connected to the words on the page. And the tutor must be willing to ask the sort of questions and provide the sort of supportive atmosphere that will help transform written down inner speech into something understandable. It seems, then, that when Gradin says, "We need social expressivisms that envision subjects both acting and being acted upon," she (and we) need look no further than the writing center, where active writers and interested readers are involved in a back-and-forth pedagogy. In further explaining "[t]he change from maximally compact inner speech to maximally detailed written speech," Vygotsky says that what is required is "deliberate semantics" or the "deliberate structuring of the web of meaning" (l00). In a writing

center, tutors have the means to help student writers achieve this "deliberate restructuring" of their texts. But, as Hartwell points out, both the tutor and the student must supply the "deliberate" part.

As Gradin explains her project, she "either read[s] more fully, or reread[s] when necessary, both romanticism and expressivism to adjust the field's general understanding of romantic rhetorics in the face of disparaging attacks on expressivism" (91). She clarifies the theories at work in the poetry and prose of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and others, concluding that the romantics were much more intellectually grounded than is often thought, but that the myth of "writing as inspiration" was what unfortunately became central to the modern understanding of the romantic ethos. And with such an understanding of romanticism came—as romantic ideas became associated with expressivist rhetoric—the notion that the expressivist subject produced writing solely for the self.

Gradin, however, argues that just because the romantics placed importance on the "individual vision" of the writer doesn't mean that they disregarded their audience when theorizing about writing; neither do expressivists such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, she adds. "It is a major shift in artistic orientation," Gradin says of the romantic era, "when the mind in the act of creation and composing becomes a major part of the rhetorical situation, and the role of the audience seems subordinate to this vision" (103). "Subordinate," Gradin stresses, is not the same as "ignored altogether." Her re-reading of expressivist theorists produces a parallel finding—that their work, too, signaled a major shift in the way we approached writing, one she is attempting to renew and foster.

The movement from thought into speech and speech into writing can certainly be understood through an inner-outer metaphor: in a sense, this is an "expressive" pedagogy at its most basic, where a student is attempting to "ex-press"—or "press out"—the thought inside her. But, as students in the writing center show us every day, many are unable successfully to "press out" their ideas until they engage another in a conversation. The written forms their thoughts eventually assume are the results of the particular social interactions we have with them, but without that social interaction, their ideas fail to make the transaction of meaning possible. In a sense, then, their poorly expressed ideas are still "inside" of them in the form of inner speech, waiting to be "liberated" (Moffett) from the limits of their thinking.

Conclusion

In the composing situations described in this essay, the task of a writing center tutor is to re-engage "the mind [of the writer] in the act of creation and composing" (Gradin 103) as a way of getting her to explain or clarify thoughts she failed to develop fully. When students' acts of composing yield instances of written-down inner speech, a tutor must identify these problem areas and get writers to revisit the ideas that gave rise to the poorly-developed text—only in the writing center, writers don't take that trip alone. Re-immersing themselves in their writing, trying to match words to their ideas, is the paradigmatic expressive act of writing. But when that activity is done in a writing center, aided by another human being, it assumes a distinctly social identity, as well. To Gradin's way of thinking, the old distinctions between expressive and social theories no longer work, and to theorize the writing subject as an island, isolated from others, is to misread expressivist theories and their romantic forebears. As I have argued here, Vygotsky's concept of inner speech helps us to see the intersection of the personal and the social. As Moffett explains:

> If I the writer envision an audience upon whom I want to work certain effects, I compose under the influence of that audience and thus modify my inner speech from what it would have been had I just been talking to myself, musing. In other words, to the extent I truly think *for* that audience I think *like* that audience. I must roleplay the other. ("Liberating" 307)[5]

Beginning writers are often unable to shape their writing until they themselves have been shaped by the right sorts of social interactions. When an active writer has a writing center tutor to "roleplay the other," then a social-expressivism is at work.

Don Bushman
University of North Carolina
Wilmington, NC

Notes

[1]For a fuller discussion on the theoretical alignment of writing centers with the broader field of composition studies, see works cited by Hemmeter and Healy.

[2]In a paper at the 1992 4C's in Cincinnati, Bob Child presented a critique of Lunsford's three different views of the writing center. Child's key point was that writing centers in the fullest sense encompass all of Lunsford's divisions.

[3]Linda Flower explains this phenomenon in cognitive terms and, like Vygotsky, believes that a writer must "transform" one's "writer-based prose" into "reader-based prose."

[4]Gradin states that composition studies' "historical inquiries and examinations of various traditions will reveal that our different theories and approaches share many of the same influences. For instance, while I might invoke Dewey as a player in expressivist history, he might as likely be called upon as an historical player in social-epistemic and cognitive theories" (xvi). Vygotsky, as I'm suggesting, is a similar sort of figure.

[5]The ability to "roleplay the other" is captured neatly in Lochman's "dialogue of one" and in Elbow's notion of "desert island discourse" (57).

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Midwest Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
October 23-24, 1998
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Propose an individual paper, group session, roundtable, workshop, or poster session. For proposal forms, contact Allison James, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C St., Indianola, IA 50125. Phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: james@storm.simpson.edu. Or check www.wisc.edu/writing/mwca/ Proposal deadline: May 1, 1998.

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WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Student agendas and expectations for writing center conferences (Part II)

In this month's column, I am continuing the discussion started last month about the potential ethical conundra raised by student expectations/agendas for writing conferences. My previous exploration of "the proofreading issue" sets the stage, I think, for a look at what I call the "quickfix" agenda.

Quickfixing

Another set of student expectations which is closely related to proofreading is the "quickfix" mentality. Students with this point of view do not want to spend a lot of time in conference with tutors, and they do not want to spend a lot of time answering questions or considering options. They want the tutor to read the paper and figure out what the problems are that need fixing, and then they want the tutor to tell them how to fix them. Unlike the students who expect a proofreading service, the Quickfixers don't necessarily expect the tutors to make changes for them. They do, however, want the tutor to be direct, explicit, and no-nonsense when telling them what they have to do to make the paper acceptable. Sometimes these students can be passive in conferences, professing to have "no idea" how to improve a paper and asking the tutor what he or she thinks; other times these students can be active and persistent in their questioning, trying every method they can to pry useful information out of their tutors that they can then include in their papers. William O. Shakespeare calls this type of student the "manipulative" learner:

> Their aim is to get as much information as possible from the tutor, to involve him or her as much as possible in the writing of the paper, to shift the burden of writing to the tutor. They often don't want to spend time getting acquainted or even allow the tutor to read over the paper before commencing the tutorial. They want to begin with line one immediately. (13)

Tutors sometimes have to make careful judgments about how to handle these students, and these judgments sometimes have to be modified on a moment-by-moment basis in conferences. In any writing conference, tutors must walk a very narrow tightrope between a variety of rhetorical consequences. They are supposed to give advice, but they are not supposed to be too directive. They are supposed to make suggestions, but they are not supposed to do the students' work for them. They are supposed to answer student questions about written texts, but they must be careful about how they answer those questions and how specific their advice, examples, and illustrations might be. They want to teach students how to become better writers, but they must always be sensitive to the point at which their textual modeling and presentation of rhetorical alternatives is being interpreted as explicit instruction. When, ethically, are they giving too much help to students? Does it depend not on the kind of information that the tutor is giving but how the student appears to be making use of that information? When a student asks a tutor to provide an example that would support a point in her paper, should the tutor provide that example? If a tutor notices his student is writing down every suggestion he makes, should he stop making suggestions? If the student says, "Look, I don't want to answer any more questions about this stupid paper. Just tell me what's wrong so I can fix it!" how should the tutor respond? Ethical responses to all of these cases will depend upon situational variables (except, perhaps, the last one), but the quickfix mentality will more than likely come into conflict with at least some writing center principles and tutorial policies. Consider the following scenarios that illustrate some facets of this point of view and reflect on how you would respond to them. As with all the scenarios I offer in this column, I do not believe (necessarily) that there are any absolutely right or wrong responses, but you should consider how you might respond in a manner that is consistent with your own—and your institution's—construction of tutorial ethics.

1) A student from a first year composition class comes into the center looking for help with his paper. His class is studying argumentation, and he has been asked to write a paper about a topic of current concern that states a thesis and argues convincingly for one side or the other. He has chosen to write about the objectification of women in advertising and says that he thinks he's done a pretty good job of stating his case. He just wants to make sure it sounds okay to someone else before he turns it in. When you read through the paper with him, you discover that most of his paper consists of generalizations about the ways women are portrayed as "sex-objects" in ads, and that except for one introductory anecdote, there are no other examples. When you ask him to provide some examples to explain what he means at different points in the paper, he seems unable or unwilling to do so. Instead, he asks if you could provide some examples so he could better understand what you mean.

2) A student from a first year composition class comes into the center looking for help with his paper. His class is studying argumentation, and he has been asked to write a paper about a topic of current concern that states a thesis and argues convincingly for one side or the other. He has chosen to write about the objectification of women in advertising and says that he thinks he's done a pretty good job of stating his case. He just wants to make sure it sounds okay to someone else before he turns it in. When you read through the paper with him, you discover that the paper is mostly a long series of examples strung together without any sort of coherent organization or synthesis to pull it all together. Though he seems to understand your explanation of the problem with his paper, he also seems at a complete loss to find a workable solution. After twenty frustrating minutes, he finally asks if you could show him what you mean by a "logical organization" for his paper.

3) An ESL student brings a draft of her art history paper into the writing center, looking for help with her writing. You spend the first half of the conference talking about matters of organization and development with her, and she is very engaged and willing to contribute ideas. Overall, the two of you become relatively satisfied with the rhetorical structure and content of the piece. In the second half of the conference, however, you turn to grammar problems and difficulties with surface structure, and the tenor of the conversation changes. When you look closely at a few sentences, you point out some problems and ask how they might be rephrased. She replies, "I don't know how to rephrase them. That's why I came here. How can I learn to write sentences correctly if you don't show me how to do it?"

4) A student comes in to the writing center to do some preliminary brainstorming work on a paper she has to write for her American Literature class. She takes the assignment sheet out of her backpack (which asks for an analysis of selected metaphors in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*), and you spend some time discussing the requirements of the assignment and some general approaches that might be taken to fulfill them. As the two of you talk about the novel and the prospective paper the student might write, you notice that she is taking copious notes about everything you say, every suggestion you make, and every reference to the novel you remember. When you express some apprehension about this, the student says, "It's just that I'm getting a lot of great ideas for the paper from what we're talking about. This is really, really useful to me, and I need to take notes so that I can remember what we talked about."

The central issue underlying each of these scenarios is fairly clear, I think. In each case, the student asks for (or seems to be getting) explicit strategies for revising his/her text, and the question before us is whether or not the kind of help requested is in keeping with our ethics of tutoring. In the first case, the student wants examples; in the second, he wants an organizing strategy; in the third, she wants sentence-level revision, and in the fourth, she seems to want a little bit of everything. Where do we draw the line in these cases between "modeling strategies" for the student (which seems to be an entirely ethical form of tutorial instruction) and "writing the student's paper for him/her" (which seems to be an entirely unethical form)?

In all of the above scenarios, I can envision circumstances—drawn largely from my perceptions of the dynamic among student, tutor, text, and assignment—that would lead me to respond differently on a case-by-case basis. In the first scenario, for example, I might be willing to provide an example or two if I thought the student was truly having difficulty at a conceptual level determining how to illustrate a general point with specifics. On the other hand, if I thought the student was just being lazy and trying to get me to do work he could do on his own, then I would probably become a bit more obstinate and work harder prying examples out of him. I think both of these courses can be deemed ethical, and it's interesting to note—interesting to me, anyway—that my determination of an ethical tutoring strategy has as much to do with my sense of the student and what he/she could benefit from pedagogically than with the tutoring strategy itself. Or, to quote a William Shakespeare different from the one I cited earlier in this column, "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (*Hamlet*, II.ii. 389-90).

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois
Urbana, IL

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Writing Center Resource Manual

The NWCA Press is publishing a resource manual that includes information on starting and managing a writing center, plus information on special needs students and opportunities for research and public relations and community outreach. The manual will be available about April 1, and the tentative price is $10.

To receive ordering information or to be placed on the NWCA Press mailing list, send your name, address, and e-mail address to Carl Glover, Business Manager, NWCA Press, P.O. Box 7007, 16300 Old Emmitsburg Road, Emmitsburg, MD 21727; phone: 301-447-5367; fax: 301-447-5755; e-mail: glover@msmary.edu. Please indicate if you want to know when the Manual is available and/or if you want to be placed on the NWCA Press mailing list.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Much knowledge

With each passing year, as a tutor in the Writing Center, I have found myself disagreeing more with Alexander Pope's adage, "A little learning is a dangerous thing," while coming closer to embracing Chuang-tzu's notion that ". . . much knowledge is a curse." I experience the effects of the "curse" daily, since I generally feel more at ease with students who are writing on subjects of which I have little or no knowledge than with students who are writing on subjects with which I am very familiar.

A couple of semesters ago, I had a tutoring session with Frank, a student from the Automotive Technology Department. Frank had designed a new type of torsion bar as part of a class assignment. His professor was so impressed that he asked Frank to write a paper explaining his design and its advantages to apply for a patent and to send to various manufacturers. I found myself in an area where my knowledge was definitely limited—automobiles—and "torsion bar" seemed a foreign phrase. Because of my lack of knowledge in this area, I found it much easier to ask the right questions in areas of Frank's writing that seemed confused or vague. Regarding these areas, Frank told me (he did not reread the areas to me) what he wanted to say or what he meant to say. He looked over what he had written and realized he either had assumed too much on the part of his audience or he had not followed a logical order. I, on the other hand, could not impose my own knowledge of the torsion bar design because, as I was listening to Frank read his paper, I was learning about it. Frank's voice and his ideas clearly came through in his writing, making the session a success.

Yet when a student comes in to the writing center and has to analyze Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" or the relationship between Iago and Othello from Shakespeare's play, I often find it difficult not to impose my own knowledge of the work on the student. I know that nature's attacks on the wall is an important idea in the Frost poem, as does the student, but what if the student fails to see the significance of the wall as nothing more than something that "makes good neighbors"? It is very frustrating for me to see students miss so much beneath the surface of the poem. I want to tell them what they are missing, but as the tutor, I cannot. I have to keep telling myself, "I am not familiar with *this* poem. Now, how will I begin to analyze it? How will I develop my thesis statement?"

A few days ago, Jean had to analyze William Stafford's poem, "Traveling Through the Dark," for her Introduction to Literature class. I am familiar with the poem and the poet, so I began by asking Jean how she read the poem and how many times she read it. She answered that she read it a few times but was still unclear as to what it was all about. I suggested she read it aloud a number of times, if necessary, in order to "feel" the poem. I also suggested she write down passages or words she found interesting, amusing, perplexing; her reaction to certain words, phrases, characters, symbols, ideas; what she thought was happening or going to happen in the poem. Was she right when she came to the conclusion? If so, why? If not, why?

Perhaps these written reactions would serve as a rough outline, the beginnings of a thesis statement, or the start of more questions about the work. All of these possibilities would be formulated by Jean, the student, without receiving knowledge of the work from me, the tutor. She may come up with a reaction to the work which I never had, or she may find exactly what I have found in the poem.

Just as each of us may react differently to the same situation, so may we react differently to words. The meanings we bring with us to the words come from our own experiences. A simple word, such as *mutt*, may cause one person to think of a beloved family pet, while someone else may think of a vicious animal that bit him/her as a youngster. And yet there seems to be a universality of meaning to other words for a majority of us. These words are the ones we react to in a similar way and, when reading a poem or story, often the writer will use these words to evoke a desired response in the reader.

With this in mind, I asked Jean to think about Stafford's choice of words. After reading the poem again, Jean began to write down a number of words and phrases, what they meant to her and what she thought they meant in the poem. Some of the words and phrases were: *death, traveling, swerve, doe, large in the belly, fawn lay there waiting, touching, warm, alive, hesitated, pushed her*. Jean's reactions to the words and phrases became the basis of her own thoughts written in her own voice, and she began to understand more of what the poet was saying to *her*. She was on her way to writing a good paper, making this session a success too, albeit a harder one for me.

Maureen E. Sandford
Professional Assistant
Suffolk County Community College
Selden, NY

Writing Center Coordinator Governors State University

Governors State University, located in the southern suburbs of Chicago, seeks an experienced, flexible, creative individual to serve as the Writing Center Coordinator. This 12-month position reports to the Director of Student Development in Student Affairs and Services. This person must possess foresight, vision, and leadership skills to fulfill the mission of providing writing support services to students.

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

March 6: Northern California Writing Centers Assn, in Belmont, CA
Contact Marc Wolterbeek, English, College of Notre Dame, 1500 Ralston, Belmont, CA 94002-1997. Phone: 650-508-3708; e-mail: Mwolterbeek@cnd.edu

March 6: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in New York, NY
Contact: Steven Serafin, Writing Center, Hunter College—CUNY, 695 Park Ave. New York, NY 10021. Phone: 212-772-4212; fax: 212-650-3953

March 7: New England Writing Centers Association, in New London, CT
Contact: Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Freshmen, Connecticut College, New London, CT 06320; e-mail: tpamm@conncoll.edu

April 2-4: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in San Antonio, TX
Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 English Dept., Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs1.ttu.edu

April 18: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Largo, MD
Contact: Richard Profozich, Writing Dept., Prince George's Community College, Largo, MD 20774-2199. Phone: 301-322-0598; e-mail: rlp@pgstumail.pg.cc.md.us

April 23-25: South East Writing Center Association, in Macon, GA
Contact: Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan College, 4760 Forsyth Road, PO Box 8463, Macon, GA 31210-4462. E-mail: peggy_ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu; phone: 912-757-3904; fax 912-757-4027.

May 8-9: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Youngstown, OH
Contact: Sherri Zander, Writing Center, One University Plaza, Youngstown State U., Youngstown, OH 44555. Phone: 330-742-3055; e-mail: sdzander@cc.ysu.edu

Oct. 8-10: Rockey Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Salt Lake City, UT
Contact: Jane Nelson, U. of Wyoming Writing Center, Center for Teaching Excellence, Coe Library, Laramie, WY 828071. E-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu; phone: 307-766-5004; fax: 307-766-4822

Oct. 23-24: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Milwaukee, WI
Contact: Allison James, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C St., Indianola, IA 50125. Phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: james@storm.simpson.edu

English/Writing Center Instructional Staff
Texas Christian University

Instructional staff position, non-tenure-track. Twelve-month contract, renewable; 40 hours per week. Responsibilities include teaching three composition courses per semester, tutoring in the Writing Center, preparing the Writing Center Newsletter, and advising students during summer orientation. M.A. required, Ph.D. preferred; writing center experience desirable. Salary competitive.

Send dossier, including three current letters of recommendation, to: Jeanette Harris, Director; William L. Adams Writing Center; Box 297700, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas 76129. Deadline for receipt of applications 15 March 1998; interviews possible at CCCC. TCU is an EEO/AA employer.

NWCA News from Al DeCiccio, President

I am writing this month to remind you of the role NWCA will play in the upcoming 1998 CCCC Annual Convention in Chicago (April 1-4). NWCA Press and NWCA will have a booth in the exhibition area of the convention; the site will afford us the opportunity to demonstrate NWCA publications and upcoming scholarly endeavors as well as to explain our goals and to describe our activities.

As a result of the persistence and hard work of many people, particularly Neal Lerner (Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences), there will be a half-day workshop, entitled Writing Centers in Context: Concerns, Strategies, Solutions. New and veteran writing center workers will benefit from participation in this workshop which will explore topics such as marketing, evaluating, and assessing the writing center; tutor training; strengthening writing center and WAC partnerships; contributing to faculty development; investigating the writing center director's institutional role; and working with nonmainstream students. Workshop leaders bring a wealth of knowledge and diversity of experience that will be of value to those who participate. In addition to the half-day workshop, there will be a number of provocative panels devoted to writing center theory and practice.At the NWCA special interest group meeting (SG1.3; Thurs. evening, April 1, entitled "The State of the Writing Center Community: An Assessment and Discussion"), I'll provide an appraisal of NWCA from my position as president. While I plan to discuss the accomplishments and activities that continue to make NWCA viable in the field (including our conferences, the NCTE Active Writing Center, our publications, our work toward accreditation, our move to become international), I plan to involve participants in a discussion about whether or not there is a bankruptcy of scholarship on writing centers—an opinion offered at the NWCA conference in Park City. Some of us believe we are mired in the language of apology about what we do and lament that we are not about the language of redefinition. In light of movements that bring up the A-word (assessment), we sometimes feel the need to justify what we do, rather than to reflect upon what we do and to describe what we do in such a way as to highlight new directions for writing centers to take. Like all good issues, there is a wide spectrum of opinion on this topic, and I hope that this will be shared at the session on April 2. (In fact, should anyone wish to have a few minutes to take a position on this issue, please contact me as soon as possible.) As is our practice, at the session, I will have the honor of announcing the winners of the best article and book about writing centers. Also, a business meeting will follow the session and include discussion about changes to the Constitution, whether or not we can begin implementing the accreditation plan, approving the European affiliate, membership on the Executive Board, and holding meetings online. Anyone interested in the activities of NWCA is invited to the meeting.

Finally, those attending the conference may want to take advantage of meeting with colleagues at the annual breakfast, and may also be interested in purchasing a pin. The newsletter and WCenter listserv have details about the breakfast and the pins; however, contact me if further information is necessary. I am looking forward to meeting with many of you in Chicago.

Al DeCiccio, Merrimack College,
adeciccio@merrimack.edu

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Muriel Harris, editor
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Purdue University
1356 Heavilon Hall
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