

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R
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...FROM THE EDITOR...

This issue is a blend of new technology and perennial questions. Kathy Evertz recalls the “liberatory” view of our work raised fifteen years ago by Tilly and John Warnock and explores the question of whether a writing lab that is now also a WAC center can still maintain its liberatory role. In the “Voices from the Net” column, Libby Miles and her tutors use the electronic listserv WCenter to raise a question we constantly ask ourselves: “How much tutor talk is too much?” They bring together for us a summary of that discussion with their added suggestions.

Two reviews of *Wiring the Writing Center*, edited by Eric Hobson, examine the collection in terms of how technology and our basic people-centered approaches can reinforce each other. (Future reviews of the next book on technology in writing centers, *Taking Flight with OWLS: Research into Technology Use in the Writing Center*, edited by James Inman and Donna Sewell and forthcoming from Lawrence Erlbaum publisher, will appear soon in the newsletter.) And an article by Marilyn Lutz and two of her tutors review software choices for their Writing Center.

On page 8, you’ll find ordering information for the new *Writing Center Directory* compiled by Paula Gillespie.
• Muriel Harris, editor

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Can the writing center be a liberatory center when it’s also a WAC center?

In “Liberatory Writing Centers: Restoring Authority to Writers,” Tilly Warnock and John Warnock write that “the philosophy of liberatory learning requires that students take responsibility for themselves. Thus, students take an assertive role in deciding what happens to them and to their texts when they come to the center” (20). In other words, by keeping a distance from students’ texts, we are empowering the students.

Marilyn Cooper has something else to say about the business of agency, though, and it’s her argument around which my essay will pivot. In “Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers,” Cooper *inverts* the sort of liberatory aspirations that the Warnocks describe. She explains:

“Agency in writing depends not on owning or taking responsibility for a text but on understanding how to construct subject positions in texts. . . . [T]utors can best help

students become agents of their own writing by helping them understand how and the extent to which they are *not* owners of their texts and *not* responsible for the shape of their texts.” (101).

I find Cooper’s ideas both inspiring and challenging. And while I endorse in many ways the agenda Cooper is promoting, I’ve wondered, too, whether her goal is a viable one when a writing center is in fact the center of a writing-across-the-curriculum program.

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As most of you probably know, writing centers that work with WAC faculty often conduct workshops for, or in collaboration with, those in other disciplines. Writing centers assist instructors across campus with writing assignments and writing instruction. And writing centers often work with those instructors’ students on their writing. Many writing centers survive because of the good will they have earned—because of the good will they often need to earn—from faculty across the disciplines. In this essay, I’d like to think a bit about the ways in which liberatory pedagogies and notions of agency might converge *and* conflict with the aims of a writing center when it’s also a WAC center.

The questions I’m struggling with go like this. If we can agree that the writing center’s goal is to help students achieve agency, how can we achieve that within the WAC environment? Is the goal of liberatory pedagogies possible when a writing center works closely with WAC faculty who rely on the center’s tutors to promote and teach rules, and to offer instruction in disciplinary conventions? When the writing center is a WAC center, can it be anything but the conservator of the academy’s value system: is such a center really a conservative, rather than a liberatory, force?

Before I try to deal with those questions, I want to acknowledge the tremendous diversity of writing centers and WAC programs. The local variations are tremendous. And I think those differences testify to the adaptability of writing centers. Having used the word “adaptability” to describe writing center people, rather than faculty across the disciplines, I’m getting at an issue that I think needs to be addressed when we talk about liberatory pedagogies. Most of the literature about writing centers’ relationships to WAC programs articulates for us that the writing center is a support service, that it exists to help instructors in the disciplines use or teach writing in their courses. I

suspect you all know the general tune: writing center tutors sometimes act as consultants for faculty who feel uncertain about how to teach writing in their courses; and the writing center often functions as a referral service for students who need help (Freisinger and Burkland 167, 176; Wallace 195; McCall 33).

By reading the literature and talking to each other—at conferences and on the electronic listserv WCenter—we can get a sense of the range of “services” different writing centers provide. The image I want to stress here is one in which the writing center serves others (i.e., students and faculty). Were the writing center not in the service business, we’d probably be outta business. Now I’d like to return to Marilyn Cooper’s essay—one that is so rich, I’m afraid I can’t do it justice in this essay. But I want to make some connections between the idea of the writing center as a service station, and Cooper’s characterization of the writing center as a place for radical intellectuals.

Cooper explains that “students and tutors [here, she’s referring to undergraduate peer tutors] know how institutions coerce them in writing classes” (102). She says, “Students and tutors respond—quite rationally—by trying to make the papers match as perfectly as possible the specifications of assignments while at the same time—quite irrationally—trying to believe that in doing this students are asserting ownership over their texts and learning to write” (102). And now for the liberatory twist: “Agency,” Cooper argues, “is not a matter of simply taking up the subject positions offered by assignments but of actively constructing subject positions that negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs” (102).

How is this supposed to happen? Cooper turns to John Trimbur’s discussion of cultural studies and the role of the radical, or “organic,” intellectual—

that is, someone who, because of his or her “contact with everyday practice[,] ensures that the philosophy of the group more accurately represents the real historical situation” (105). In this framework, writing center tutors are best suited to become “organic” intellectuals (as opposed to “traditional” intellectuals, who defend the status quo in the face of a changing society) (104). Cooper argues that tutors’ daily contact with student writers and their everyday reality positions tutors to do the work of the organic intellectual, which is to produce “what Richard Johnson has called really useful knowledge, knowledge that arises out of everyday practice.” (105).

Cooper says that writing center tutors who both learn from their student-clients and “critique theories of writing and language in light of their practice are better positioned to be organic intellectuals. . . . [tutors], along with their students, develop really useful knowledge of writing practices and of ways of teaching writing that help students achieve agency” (106). And certainly, Cooper writes, “the main prerequisite of empowering students as agents of their own writing . . . is, as Freire has long pointed out, having some idea of what students’ purposes and experiences are” (106).

To my mind, this is all great stuff. I embrace Cooper’s notion of the writing center as a place where students’ public and private lives meet and collide, as a place where tutors-as-organic-intellectuals can work with students in mediating between institutional demands and the students’ own needs and goals. That notion is right in line with Ira Shor, who explains, “The teacher is the person who mediates the relationship between outside authorities, formal knowledge, and individual students in the classroom”(13), and, one might say, in the writing center.

Cooper says that the writing center’s marginalization “in relation to the central institutional structures of writing

pedagogy” makes it possible for tutors to critique the practices of the dominant group of composition theory on the basis of their own experience with students. She writes that “one of the benefits of being excluded from the dominant group is that in this position one has less to protect and less to lose. Undergrad students who serve as tutors have little investment in disciplinary beliefs and practices, and they are thus less responsible to its standards and expectations than they are to the needs and experiences of their peers” (106).

While the Warnocks, like Cooper, endorse the idea of a marginalized writing center, Peter Carino offers a word of caution: “In opposing the center to both classroom and institution,” he writes, “the Warnocks construct a false binary of inside-outside, suggesting that the practice they endorse can exist only covertly.” (28).

But what about writing centers that are linked in all sorts of administrative and institutional ways to WAC programs? Earlier, I noted the prevailing notion that the writing center is often seen as a support service for WAC programs. At my own school, The University of Wyoming, where Writing Center tutors do a tremendous number of outreach activities—including classroom presentations, workshops, and Writing Center introductions—there’s a lot of pressure to give the teachers what they want—and “what they want” can range from Writing Center tutorials with their individual students, whom they’ve required to make one or two visits to the Writing Center . . . to classroom presentations on, say, the writing process or “how to write a critical analysis,” or how to write a “college paper.”

Cooper asserts that the marginalized status of writing centers can be thought of positively—as a situation that encourages critique of the dominant group of composition theorists and practitioners. In the writing center/WAC setting, one might extend that to

include critique of dominant beliefs and practices of other disciplines, as well. Yet I think it’s important to recognize that writing centers that serve as support centers for WAC programs must be aware of the consequences of such critique; they must be aware that they often need to give the faculty what they want, which doesn’t always dovetail with what “we” want, with what we think they need and perhaps “should” want.

And so I want to come back to liberatory pedagogies, as I understand them from reading the work of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and Henry Giroux. What I’d like to do is focus on the central role that dialogue plays in these pedagogies. Ira Shor says that students need to be authorized to speak; otherwise, they’re too weak to enact language, too weak to “utter.” In liberatory pedagogies, the mechanical transfer of information is not as important as the act of cognition. Shor echoes Freire’s emphasis on resolving the teacher-student hierarchy through dialogue. In his discussion of the “banking” concept of education, Freire says,

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-students with students-teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (218)

What I want to suggest is that, in institutions where the writing center is also a WAC center, where the writing center must support WAC faculty’s efforts to incorporate writing in their courses, the liberatory goal of helping students achieve agency cannot be achieved unless we revise the way we usually conceive of the teacher-student relationship. I agree with Cooper that tutors can and should become teacher-

students—that they need to critique their practice by learning more about their clients' needs and goals. But what I'm thinking about is a situation in which writing center tutors and WAC faculty are teacher-students and student-teachers. In our writing and in our conversations about liberatory pedagogies and this thing called "agency," we tend to focus, I think, on the tutor-student relationship. But if we're going to work with WAC faculty, to "support" them—however that might get defined in specific contexts—the tutors and WAC faculty need to become, in the words of Freire, "critical co-investigators" (219). In other words, writing center tutors need to have a dialectical relationship with WAC faculty, especially if the local WAC context wishes to go beyond the write-to-learn strategies championed by scholars like Toby Fulwiler. If the writing center is going to "support" WAC faculty and, at the same time, strive to help students achieve agency in their writing, there has to be a dialogue in which all parties are authorized to speak, to "utter," to enact language.

If we have a situation in which the writing center is operating as an extension of disciplines, as a place where students come to learn the conventions of writing in a given field without understanding why they should follow conventions (and without being encouraged to interrogate that practice), there's no real agency, either on the part of the writing center tutor or the student. The discipline instructor remains the authority—and thus one might say the discipline instructor is the real "author" of the student's writing; neither the writing center nor the student/client has the opportunity to question or learn, to become critically literate.

I absolutely agree with Cooper when she argues that writing center tutors can help students achieve agency in their writing by showing them the ways in which they do not own their

own writing, and then showing them that agency does have to do with "actively constructing subject positions that negotiate between institutional demands and individual needs" (102). It seems to me that the best way for writing center tutors to understand the negotiable subject positions available to students is to converse actively and constantly not just with students, but with WAC faculty. At Wyoming, we have made changes over the past couple of years in the ways in which we think about our outreach programs. We've instituted policies that now *require* faculty across the curriculum to collaborate with us well in advance of our outreach activities—so we (that is, writing center tutors and directors) can tell them what will and won't work, how students might respond to an assignment, how students might respond to a presentation as a faculty member has envisioned it. We also want to learn something about the boundaries of that discipline's knowledge-making and writing; we want to learn what the constraints of the discourse community might be, and we want to learn how students might traverse that unfamiliar territory without getting lost.

I'm talking about a situation in which writing center tutors become "critical co-investigators" with WAC faculty into the theory and practices of different discourse communities. In those outreach collaborations and conversations, writing center tutors can and should discover just what WAC faculty thinks "literacy" means, and to teach them what we know about multiple literacies, student writers in general, and student writers in those disciplines. It's through multiple conversations, between us and WAC faculty, between us and students, and between WAC faculty and students, that agency might be achieved.

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Book Reviews

Wiring the Writing Center, Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1998

Reviewed by Cindy Johaneck, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

Stop the party! Sober up! For technophiles who feel a writing center isn't real unless it's virtual, for the envious who wish to be online but can't, and for technophobes who long for Yahoo as only Swift could define it, Eric Hobson's *Wiring the Writing Center* is a smart, no-nonsense, reality-filled must-read.

In the Introduction to this collection, Hobson sets a tone of guarded optimism, a lens that readers should keep in mind as they proceed through the other fourteen chapters from seventeen contributors—all writing center specialists from varied institutions, who come together in this text to explore and fulfill Hobson's mission: never forget that the technology does not provide a writing center with anything that can replace the people who work there, who train the staff, and whose experience, intuition, and common sense underlie a very powerful form of guiding insight (xi).

This critical stance, informed by the understanding that technology does not pause to ask about its impact on culture (xiii), forms the foundation for Hobson's many questions—questions we must pause to ask as we read this volume: Does technology create hierarchies within our community, constructing not a collaborative, unified endeavor, but one that resembles a caste-based structure? Do we uphold or undermine our own philosophies by digitizing our filing cabinets, as many OWLs consist primarily of the contents of old filing cabinets and handbooks (xvii)—exercises, drills, and reference materials that do not (and cannot) highlight the essential, interactive work we really do? Is this current-traditional approach to writing centers (which is out) suddenly acceptable again as long as it's digitized (which is in)?

Our well-being depends on our answers to these critical questions, which prompted me in my own reading to more frequently respond to yet another call Hobson puts forth: a call for more research. Each essay in this volume, in some way, provides excellent research opportunities and questions in addition to other, more obvious purposes, such as its tutor training value and its much-needed dialogue about theory-practice.

Tutor training and research opportunities are obvious, for example, in Barbara Monroe's chapter, "The Look and Feel of the OWL Conference." Monroe gives several examples of online tutorials, though she sometimes uses quotation marks around conference, suggesting, perhaps, our hesitation to truly accept the online environment as a part of our conferencing work. I was struck by the tutors' language in the sample tutorials here—sample tutorials that would provide excellent fuel for tutor training in staff meetings or classrooms.

For instance, while some online tutorials in this chapter were of fine quality by f2f standards, I cringed while reading one extremely I-centered tutorial in which the topic of initial discussion unfortunately seemed to shift from the student's paper to the tutor himself. Later in the same tutorial—one that alternated its focus on development and diction—I winced again as I read the tutor's potentially misleading evaluation of the student's text: "This is pretty much perfect, as far as description of the weather, I think. It's beautifully detailed" (5). Though the tutor went on to discuss a quibble, the student seems to have received what he might have hoped for: confirmation that his paper is good, perhaps good enough not to deal with a mere quibble that follows such powerfully positioned praise.

In another tutorial, a similar dangerous assumption is made on the part of the tutor: "It seems to me that you've satisfied the requirements of this assignment just fine . . . I'm not sure how much latitude you have with this assignment (although I would imagine you have some)" (12). Here, we see a tutor simultaneously guessing at the assignment parameters while assuming that the student is satisfied them—a dangerous combination, f2f or online. For both training and research purposes, then, these sample tutorials (and others like them) will help us understand new constraints we put on ourselves when we tutor online without the benefits of facial expressions, pauses, or even the knowledge that a student is still paying attention past the good parts.

Further, sample tutorials such as these give rise to research questions we must explore (pause to ask) as we venture forth in our online world: Do tutors establish credibility differently in an online tutorial? Do we feel a need to spend more time with our own credibility (I-centered portions) in online tutorials than in f2f tutorials? How can we train tutors to adopt an appropriate online tone while tutoring via computers? Do tutors online tend to cover too much, lose focus, and edge closer to the fix-it shop we have for so long fought?

These questions fit well with Peter Carino's chapter, "Computers in the Writing Center: A Cautionary History." Carino's focus on history provides a larger context from which our much-needed research may emerge. With the tension between technological endorsement and technological resistance as a starting point, Carino unpacks the conflict-as-thesis in our history in order to explore the less ob-

vious issues regarding centers and computers (172). Carino concisely outlines a brief history of computers and composition, highlighting major movements and works in a chapter that new tutors should explore as a part of their training and old tutors would find a necessary reminder of our place in the larger issues of computer-aided composition.

Of special interest to Hobson's call for research (and my own heightened attention to that call) is Carino's discussion of a genre he calls success stories—essays that begin by raising concerns about technology, usually to ease humanist anxieties, and then move to an ameliorative narrative of successful pedagogical implementation (179). Indeed, we can cite numerous case studies (success stories), but Carino suggests an excellent research opportunity when he wonders about the relationship between success stories and more restless discourse (180). Perhaps one part of Hobson's call to research, then, should include unsuccessful stories, critical examination and doubt, or as Carino contends, "If OWLS are going to carry us into flight rather than eat us like rodents, if MOOs are going to produce more milk than dung, if we are going to cruise the information super-

highway without becoming roadkill, we will need to remain vigilant against the intoxication of our enthusiasm" (193)—a position that carries out Hobson's guarded optimism, call for research, and critical questions.

Other chapters in this collection provide much-needed inquiry and resources for writing centers. Bruce Pegg's "UnfURLed: 20 Writing Center Sites to Visit on the Information Highway" and Steve Sherwood's "Computers and Writing Centers: An Annotated Bibliography" are both useful resources for those who are new to online tutoring (and even those who are not so new). For readers in community colleges and high schools, rest assured that Hobson's collection does not focus exclusively on university concerns. Ellen Mohr and Clinton Gardner both offer chapters on community college issues, and Pamela Childers, Jeannette Jordan, and James Upton offer "Virtual High School Writing Centers: A Spectrum of Possibilities."

Readers will sense Hobson's guarded optimism throughout this collection—an important work that informs us, challenges us, questions us, doubts us, and inspires us—all at the same time.

Our community has needed such a collection for quite some time, and as someone who is also guarded but only sometimes optimistic, I found Hobson's framing of this text to be refreshing and sensible. His words sound like my own thoughts as Hobson concludes his introductory remarks: "the optimist in me strongly supports the efforts that are underway in the writing center community to explore what opportunities that await them in the virtual frontier of online education. My pragmatic/realist side whispers into the virtual wind, Be prepared before you go . . ." (xxv).

If we answer Hobson's call for more research, attempt to answer the critical questions raised in this collection, and engage in more elaborate tutor training in the history, theory, and practice of computers and writing centers, we will, indeed, be prepared with our own guarded optimism as a necessary vision before we continue, before we go in the first place, or even before we look back. *Wiring the Writing Center* gives us the tools we need to find a sense of direction at a time when the virtual winds seem to swirl around us all too quickly.

Putting a "human face on complex skills": The hidden (human) message in *Wiring the Writing Center*

Reviewed by Kelly Lowe, Mount Union College, Alliance, OH

In the essay "Random Memories of a Wired Writing Center," which I found towards the end of the wonderful new collection from Utah State University Press, *Wiring the Writing Center*, Ray Wallace writes:

In an effort to reinvent the writing center, we must look at how we became so successful in the first place. We were successful against many odds because we offered a service that people needed—we put a human face on a complex [sic] skills, we offered a helping hand when others refused to reach out, and we offered a relaxed atmosphere to

those who needed reassurance that they could indeed learn to write well. (169)

Indeed, it is this human element, the interaction between tutor and student in the face to face [f2f] tutoring session that gets brought up again and again, in a myriad of ways—as metaphor or memory or model—in nearly all of the pieces in the collection. It's about time.

As Pete Carino shows in his important piece "Computers in the Writing Center: A Cautionary History," the idea of adding computers to the al-

ready complex mixture that is the writing center is nothing new. What this book does is caution us to slow the land rush towards recklessly and relentlessly wiring up—often in a senseless bid to spend grant money or please the suits who are inevitably peering down (with powerful binoculars) from the administrative tower—and asks writing center administrators and professionals to consider the very human costs (as well as some amazing benefits) of an electronic writing center.

This collection attempts to address this dilemma—how to join the march

towards the new millennium but do so intelligently. The fourteen pieces in *Wiring the Writing Center* run the gamut from theory to practice, although nearly all of the theory has been tested, and nearly all of the practice is saturated in theory. I was delightfully surprised by the range of theoretical work that undergirds much of *Wiring*: Michel DeCerteau's "The Practice of Everyday Life" coexists comfortably with Neil Postman's "Technopoly;" and both exist in harmony with a variety of historical pieces from *Writing Lab Newsletter*, *Writing Center Journal*, *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *Computers and Composition*. (In fact, the bibliography and resources that make up Chapters 13 and 14 are, and will be, excellent resources in their own right).

The biggest surprise, however, is how human the articles are. As I read the text, I noticed (and it didn't take long) that every piece stressed the necessity of considering the human element of an electronic writing center—and not just the human "costs" that we hear so much about (insert your own snarky HAL 9000 reference here).

Some examples: Barbara Monroe writes that, in her writing center, "each OWL conference reflects a tutor's own persona and conferencing style" (3). David Coogan writes about both "the social construction of meaning online" (29) and the e-mail tutoring session's ability to help "forge new intellectual partnerships online" (30). Rebecca Rickly writes about the desire to place an "emphasis on interactivity and communication rather than the informational aspect of the web" (46) when her writing center went online. Sara Kimball writes that

Technology . . . creates collaborative texts that can bring together diverse points of view and sources of knowledge in addressing a common concern and, in doing so, create a sense of community. (71)

It goes on. In fact, I was able to find, in every essay (except Steve Sherwood's "Computers and Writing Centers: A Selected Bibliography" which is extraordinarily valuable in its own right) some mention of the interaction between humans and the machines and what this might mean for writing centers. No more are computers viewed as the great panacea for all that is wrong with the world. And this is a good thing. Since panaceas, especially in composition studies, are a dime a dozen, the last thing the world needs is another "cure all/solve all" book about the marvels of technology.

Of course, like any book, there will be, in the future, pieces that are of lasting importance, and while there is some obvious psychic hotline work in predicting which essays may stand the test of time, I think this book has three essays that will be of lasting value (or have a lasting impact) on the writing center community: Neal Lerner's massive and complex micro-history "Drill Pads, Teaching Machines, and Programmed Texts: Origins of Instructional Technology in Writing Centers," Peter Carino's aforementioned meta-history "Computers in the Writing Center: A Cautionary History," and Eric Hobson's introductory essay "Straddling the Virtual Fence," which goes beyond shilling for the contents of the book and stands on its own as an impressive argument about the complexities of the digital revolution.

It is, I assume, no mistake that Lerner's essay sits in the center of the book. Lerner offers the central caveat of the collection: "Our writing centers might focus on the writer and not merely the writing, but the lure of technology to offer 'easy' solutions to complex problems is powerful" (120). Like Carino's piece, Lerner's offers up a cautionary tale, a mix of optimism and cynicism that is, in my mind, the mark of a good administrator. Lerner traces this history of the writing laboratory "from as early as 1895" (122) through the metaphorical Skinnerian

"Teaching Machines" theories of the fifties and sixties and up to the linguistic/metaphorical "split" (courtesy of Muriel Harris) of writing assistance in to writing labs and writing centers. The conclusion Lerner reaches is one that ought to be etched into the cornerstone of every writing center:

Until writing assistance is more substantial than symbolic, until responsibility is more equally shared among institutions, instructors, and students, and until inclusiveness commands the resources necessary, our technological future will merely reflect our technological history. (135)

It is this tone of hope and challenge that informs Eric Hobson's introduction as well. Hobson, taking a cue from the Wallace quote in this essay, writes that

While I am concerned by the rush to do everything imaginable with the available technology within the context of the writing center, it is not the experimentation that gives me pause. My abiding hope is that in the midst of our enthusiasm, we do not abandon the very powerful set of ideals and values that have been the writing center community's hallmark. (xxv)

Indeed. I hope that, as the National Writing Centers Association prepares to gather again in Bloomington, Indiana, in the spring of 1999, the questions posed in this book become the basis for some good old fashioned shouting, screaming, and breast beating about the overall effects of computer technology on the writing center. It can do no harm, and in fact, might do some good.

NWCA News from Eric Hobson, President

The new year is upon us, and while most folk look at 1999 and begin to contemplate the end of a century, most of us in the writing center community are focused on more pragmatic concerns—the start of a new academic term.

1998 was a busy year for the National Writing Centers Association. Our regional affiliates met and continue to flourish. We went international with the addition of the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) as a regional organization. Many of us came together at the CCCO or NCTE meetings. And, we rushed to get our proposals in the mail for the 4th National Writing Centers Association Conference at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, April 15-18, 1999. Likewise, 1998 was a great year for writing center research and scholarship with six new books about writing centers and tutoring and many great articles published.

As in past years, the NCTE conference in Nashville, TN was a busy time for NWCA. At the invitation of NCTE, NWCA once again hosted the conference's Active Writing Center, housed at the NWCA booth. In addition

to working with the writing projects of conference attendees who requested such assistance (for example, we worked with a group of three secondary school teachers to plan and draft a book prospectus for a new teacher's survival guide), we displayed available writing center materials, including informational flyers, books, and journals of interest. This service was made possible by the strong volunteer spirit in the writing center community. Our friends and colleagues Sonja Bagby, Pamela Childers, Al DeCiccio, Peggy Ellington, Paula Gillespie, James Inman, Francie Jeffrey, Neal Lerner, Jim McDonald, Michael Pemberton, and Donna Sewell gave their time and enthusiasm while they worked to provide conference attendees access to all that NWCA has to offer language arts educators working at all educational levels.

The minutes of the NWCA Executive Board Meeting held at NCTE demonstrate the variety of items on the organization's active agenda: recommendations for a name change; up-dating of the Constitution; creation of a NWCA Research Grant; final decisions on writing center accreditation, etc. You will see more about this in the

next few weeks. Because several items recommended by the Board require ratification by the NWCA membership, I will be sending a mailing packed full of NWCA information, activities, and ballots for voting on important initiatives. Please take time to read and respond to the information contained in that packet. Your voice is essential in helping the organization move in directions that meet the needs of everyone who makes up NWCA.

1999 promises to be a great one for NWCA. We will come together in Bloomington, IN for the National conference in April. We will meet as regional groups with Southeast Writing Centers Association kicking off the year's meetings with a 20th Anniversary celebration February 3-6 in Charleston, SC. My New Year's resolution is to be as much a part of all this activity as I possibly can. As such, as NWCA President, I want to be available to provide whatever support I can to everyone in the writing center community—just let me know what you need.

Happy New Year.

Eric Hobson
Albany College of Pharmacy
hobsone@panther.acp.edu

Writing Center Directory Available

Paula Gillespie has compiled a current *Writing Center Directory* that is now available for \$21 per copy. In the continental U.S., the price includes shipping and handling. For orders from Alaska, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and abroad, special shipping arrangements (including added cost) can be made with the company. Orders can be placed by phone or FAX from Metagraphix, 5499 Westridge Court, New Berlin, WI 53151. Phone: 414-641-5700; FAX: 414-641-5711. Complete credit card information can be sent to the company. To order, please call or fax your order with the following information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ FAX: _____ No. of copies requested: _____

You pay your money and you take your chances: Selecting software to enhance and reinforce writing consultations

Marilyn Lutz (Writing Center Director):

In the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), our philosophy and practice confirm that computer technology cannot take the place of working in the context of the students' own writing. However, we have found that using writing-related software packages as tools to enhance and supplement the tutoring session can reinforce student learning. Choosing the best software is a concern whether you are starting a new writing center as I did or updating the computer technology for a center already well established.

Background

The Title III Grant funding the University Writing Center (UWC) at UNCP had provisions for the purchase of Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI), primarily during the first year of development. The grant also provided four computers in the Writing Center for student use, networked to the campus file server with access to the software available campus-wide. Thus, I elected to use the campus-supported word processing program, WordPerfect 6.1. In addition, we purchased Skills Bank 3 (later updated to Skills Bank 96), Writing Coach, Speed Reader for Windows, Typing Tutor 6, and Microsoft Works.

Rationale/criteria for software selection

Before I began reviewing writing-related software, I developed a student needs profile, a rationale based on our writing center philosophy, and specific criteria for what I would eventually purchase. Without the needs assessment and criteria, I might have been carried away by slick features of the software and selected something less appropriate than what I finally purchased.

The first criteria for selecting what to buy were guided by the requirements of the grant which had provisions for \$5,000 to be spent on CAI. The grant called for "a tutoring laboratory, using Computer Assisted Instruction . . . to provide highly interactive, low stress, and easily accessible material to remediate students with specific deficiencies in communications skills, who may often have suffered academic failure and are easily discouraged by more traditional and confrontational methods." The grant also stated that "students referred to the Writing Lab for assistance in writing projects from courses across the curriculum . . . after instruction from an assistant or the director, will use a self-directed program to develop skills in writing."

Appropriately, the grant called for interactive software. Students need to be doing something besides reading a computer screen; they should be involved and thinking. Further, the programs would need to be user-friendly, easy to teach, and easy to learn. Low stress and easy access are important criteria because many of our students are not computer literate when they arrive on campus.

The next consideration, after grant requirements, was compatibility with the software we already had on the campus file server; further, I did not want to duplicate what was already available. We already had word processing, spell check, a grammar checker, e-mail, and Internet access. So, I eliminated package deals that included these functions in the software. Students who were computer literate were already using the file server software, and there is a great advantage for students to be able to move back and forth from the UWC to any lab on campus using the same software.

A third consideration was to choose CAI most appropriate to student needs, their level of ability, and in line with the perceived needs of faculty for their students. As one might expect, I found a need to improve grammar and usage. This need was especially significant because many of our students come from backgrounds where non-Standard English dialects are spoken, and students are under-prepared for college writing. Approximately 1/4 of new freshmen test into the pre-college writing, reading, and/or math courses.

I also saw a need to encourage development and use of critical thinking skills. Students at Pembroke have difficulty generating ideas for papers, developing theses, making support logical—you know—all the strategies that are addressed in individual conferences wherever our writing centers are located. With the criteria in mind, I selected software to develop strategies related to the writing process and to improve grammar and usage skills.

Writing Coach

Writing Coach, which is invention software, helps students start papers and generate ideas. It also encourages composing at the keyboard.

Brian Dukes (Writing Assistant):

Writing Coach is designed to help the student write effective papers, reports, memos, letters, proposals, and other functional documents. More importantly Writing Coach helps students write these items easily and efficiently. Writing Coach contains 62 worksheets that lead users step by step through the various stages of the writing process: generating and developing ideas, audience analysis, organization, drafting, revising and editing. The outline bank contains a collection of thinking outlines that help users write organized,

thoughtful rough drafts for a number of common business, academic, and personal writing tasks. Also, several worksheets help students overcome writers block. Writing Coach worksheets encourage students to practice the habits of effective writers who often: 1) Break writing tasks into bite-sized chunks; 2) Use writing as a way to discover and clarify ideas, not just express them; and 3) Keep their readers' concerns, questions, needs and interests in mind as they write and revise documents.

Using Writing Coach is very simple since the program is installed into the word processing software. The student opens a Writing Coach worksheet or outline that matches her needs and responds to the questions, or prompts, in the worksheet. The student can save or print the completed worksheet and use it in the next stage of her writing. The worksheets and outlines are designed to encourage a reader-centered writing process. The student decides which stage of the writing process he would like help with, and then chooses a worksheet or outline designed for that stage. A student may find that using any worksheet will help with the most difficult part of writing—getting started. For example, if the student needs to do some brainstorming for a comparison and contrast paper, he would select brainstorming and then click on the comparison and contrast worksheet. Or, if he wanted to develop an outline for a persuasive essay, he would go to the General/Academic outline category and then select persuasive paper.

Writing Coach is an appropriate program to use when students start developing their papers. All students do is follow the prompts and answer the questions. At the same time, students do not have to feel enslaved to Writing Coach. They do not have to answer the questions in any particular order, complete them all, or even use the questions or suggestions the worksheet gives them. Students can cut and paste material together from different

worksheets, print out worksheets to use as notes while writing a draft, begin writing a draft in the middle of a worksheet question, or do anything else that helps get the writing done.

The worksheet and outline categories are varied for a full range of writing applications. While there are plenty of outlines to choose from, most students use only a few worksheets that pertain to specific problems. As the staff get more exposure to the software, we can in turn expose more students to its vast tools. From brainstorming to organizing, and from outlining to editing, Writing Coach is an extremely valuable asset and can only gain in value as students use it more.

Speed Reader

Lutz:

Because I am a firm believer that reading and writing are connected, I purchased Speed Reader for Windows. If the more one reads the better one writes, it stands to reason that improving reading comprehension and speed would improve writing skills. Besides, faculty and students were requesting software to help develop better reading skills.

Adam Hall (Writing Assistant):

Speed Reader, a reading speed and comprehension improvement program, takes an individualized approach based on an initial test of the student's comprehension and speed and then sets up lessons for the student. Speed Reader fights off the monotony and boredom of computer-based tutorials by offering over 130 different reading selections and six different types of activities. One of the more instructor-based features is the report function. The software's report function allows a student to monitor his progress or an instructor to monitor the student's progress.

Typing Tutor 6

Lutz:

Often, students' writing will improve by virtue of getting them to use word processing. Major hurdles many of our

students have to overcome to achieve the benefits of word processing are lack of experience with technology and lack of typing skills. It seemed logical to me to provide a way for students to learn to type and/or improve their accuracy and speed. Besides, faculty and students were asking me to get something to teach typing.

Dukes:

Recently a freshman came into the UWC with a paper graded as below average. As I reviewed the paper and the professor's comments with her, I discovered that her major problem was lack of typing expertise, not poor writing skills. I showed her how to use Typing Tutor and pointed out the benefits of learning to type accurately. A few weeks later, she was typing faster and more accurately, and her next paper grade was above average.

Skills Bank 3/Skills Bank 96

Lutz:

Our largest purchase was CAI to improve grammar and language usage. My selection for this one-time opportunity to buy a relatively large and expensive software package was Skills Bank 3, updated to Skills Bank 96 for Windows last fall. Although each Skills Bank module may be purchased individually, Title III bought a site license for the entire program. It includes five modules—language, writing, reading comprehension, study skills, and math. Of course, we do not teach math in the UWC, but because of a pricing promotion, we purchased all five modules for the price of four. Our Title III director liked the idea that the software should serve the entire campus, not just the UWC.

Hall:

Skills Bank is an excellent program for reinforcing important points covered in a writing consultation, and it has also proved valuable to students who wish to perfect their mastery of the English language in written form. The program may be used when there are recurring problems in the student's paper and the student needs more prac-

tice on certain skills, when an entire class is required to use the program, or when individual students want to review on their own. Skills Bank allows three different ways to assign lessons. The first method is for the student to choose the modules and lessons. She may work on topics covered in a writing consultation or skills she knows but just needs to brush-up on. The negative aspects of self-assignment are that students may choose only sections in which they are already proficient (human nature is to gloss over our weaknesses) or may not get help in needed areas, due to random selection of lessons.

The second method for assignment is by computer. The student takes a pretest that evaluates his proficiency, and the computer makes assignments based on the pretest. The only bad side to this method is that the student has no choice of which lessons he works on. On the other hand, the student does not have to pick from the myriad of lessons, and usually the computer accurately chooses sections in which the student needs to work. The third way Skills Bank may be assigned is for the instructor to choose the student's path through the software. This method only allows students to receive help in the areas the instructor believes they need and gives students absolutely no choice of lessons. However, this keeps the student from wasting time, and it focuses the student's efforts on what she needs to improve. Skills Bank has eight different types of reports to monitor student progress in the program: student, parent, assignment, work style, diagnostic, class, roster, and administrator. These reports allow the student, professor, and administrator to monitor a student or class's progress in Skills Bank.

Lutz:

The Skills Bank software is being used in ways that are not UWC specific. For example, Education students use all modules to review/study for the Pre-Professional Skills Test, on which a passing score is required before they

can begin their major courses. The Social Studies Education Professor uses Skills Bank to help her evaluate the writing/language skills of Social Studies Education majors in her introductory class. An English Education Professor uses some of the lessons as a review of traditional grammar in preparation to teach non-traditional grammar systems. Finally, the College Opportunity Program, for students at risk who begin the pre-college composition classes during the summer before their freshman year, uses the Language and Writing modules in its writing lab. Skills Bank does not provide enough exercises by itself to teach a concept, but offers ample practice for review and mastery. Thus, the program is great for the UWC where the CAI is used to reinforce what writing assistants are teaching in the individual consultations and in the context of students' own writing. The software is not so great for students who want a program that alone can solve the problems they have with grammar and usage.

Word Processing

Although CAI software supplements our work with students, we do not have to buy special software to use computer technology to help students improve their writing.

Dukes:

Most students come in seeking help with one or two aspects of their paper. During these sessions I can mention the word processing on our computers. For example: One student had a knack for expressing ideas on paper, but needed major reorganization of his content. I mentioned the word processing capabilities, but he was shy of computers and did not want to "risk" messing anything up on his paper. I reassured him that this was only possible if he wanted it messed up. It was a joke of course to break the ice, and I soon found myself giving him instructions on how to use WordPerfect 6.1, particularly the cut and paste functions. The consultation had moved from the conference table to the computer terminal in just a matter of minutes. What

was even better was that the student caught on quickly and now uses WordPerfect all the time.

Hall:

Students have technical questions at the computer, and as a Writing Assistant helps a student, the Assistant "happens" to notice mistakes in the paper and suggests that the student bring the paper to a writing consultation after the student is finished on the computer. Usually, the student will be grateful for the offer and work with a tutor before he leaves the UWC. On other occasions, I have noticed that a student's handwriting in a paper is so messy that the Writing Assistant actually cannot read the paper, so the Assistant suggests the use of word processing to facilitate the consultation.

Microsoft Works

Lutz:

The most recent addition to the UWC's software is Microsoft Works, another word processing program, for use primarily by education majors. New technology requirements for public school certification prompted development of a state-of-the-art computer lab in the Education Department. Students will have to pass a competency test in Microsoft Works to be certified in North Carolina, so education students are now using that word processing program instead of WordPerfect.

Complications

Even though I carefully selected the CAI our grant monies purchased, some complications and setbacks have hindered the full use of the software campus-wide. The first complication was old computers in the computer lab in the English Department that were not compatible with Skills Bank, so the software was not available in the building where faculty would be most likely to give class time to use it. Composition faculty had been enthusiastic to try the software with their classes until we discovered this inconvenience. Now, two years later, new machines have been installed in that lab, so the technological problems are solved, and I

can more successfully encourage composition professors to promote the writing-related software.

A second technical complication involved upgrades. When the campus word processing program was upgraded, Writing Coach had to be upgraded, but no money is designated for software in the grant budget anymore.

Are we getting our money's worth?

The answer to whether or not we are

getting our money's worth lies in how effectively and how much the software we purchased is being used. In the total scheme of things, like some people will climb Mt. Everest because it is there, a few students will check out and try software because it is there. However, just as I would have to have some awfully strong motivation to start climbing Mt. Everest, most students need a strong motivating factor to spend study time doing non-required tutorials or to spend recreational time using educational software. I am very

pleased with the software we have, and so are the students who use it. I am satisfied that our money was spent on what is most appropriate to meet the needs of the UWC and the students at UNCP. As more students discover the software and understand how using it can benefit them, more will use it. And we will continue to get our money's worth!

Marilyn Lutz, Brian Dukes, Adam Hall
U. of North Carolina at Pembroke
Pembroke, NC

National Tutoring Association

May 2-5
Orlando, Florida
"Discovering New Oceans"

The conference offers opportunities to exchange ideas and expertise in tutoring, tutoring programs, training tutors, tutoring students who are members of special populations, techniques for tutoring specific courses, study skills strategies, online tutoring in various fields, research findings, etc. For information, contact Diana Williams, Alleghany University of the Health Sciences, Mail Stop 526, Broad and Vine, Philadelphia, PA 19102-1192; email: williamsd@auhs.edu; fax: 215-762-6199; phone: 215-762-7682.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 3-6: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Charleston, SC
Contact: Tom Waldrep, Director, The Writing Center, The Medical University of South Carolina, AA 113 Harper Student Center, 45 Courtenay Street, Charleston, SC 29401.
Fax: 843-792-9179; e-mail: motenb@musc.edu.

Feb. 26: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Redding, CA
Contact: Maria Madruga, Writing Center Director, Shasta College, P.O. Box 496006, Redding, CA 96049-6009.
Phone: 530-225-4689; e-mail: mmadruga@shastacollege.edu.

March 5-6: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Little Rock, AR

Contact: Sally Crisp, University Writing Center, Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, U. of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 S. University, Little Rock, AR 72204; fax: 501-569-8279; e-mail: sccrisp@ualr.edu

March 20: Middle Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Dover, DE
Contact: Renee Young, English Dept., Delaware State University, N. DuPont Hwy. Dover, DE 19904. For further information: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/mawca> (or) ryoung@dsc.edu.

April 10: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Lewiston, ME
Contact: Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Freshmen, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320. E-mail: tpamm@conncoll.edu.

April 15-18: National Writing Centers Association, in Bloomington, IN
Contact: Ray Smith, Campus Writing Program, Franklin 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; phone: 812-855-4928; e-mail: nwca99@indiana.edu; <http://www.indiana.edu/~nwca99>.

November 5-6: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in San Bernardino, CA
Contact: Carol Peterson Haviland, English Dept., California State University, San Bernardino, 5500 Univ. Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407; phone: 909-880-5833; fax: 909-880-7086; cph@csusb.edu

TUTORS' COLUMN

Tutors are an odd species. To many, our roles in the writing process are unclear, but it is because of our efforts that many students feel confident enough to sit down at their computers and write a paper without experiencing a single reservation. Student empowerment is a top priority at the University Writing Center. We empower students in simple ways; we give the students positive feedback on what they arrive with, involve them in their conferences, allow them to maintain ownership of their papers, and make sure they leave with a clear sense of direction on where the paper needs to go. These may all seem like insignificant details in the tutoring process, but they are vital in giving the students their writing wings.

Positive feedback is perhaps the most important aspect of empowering a writer. Students often come to the writing center carrying with them the idea that they cannot write. At least once every shift I hear, "I can't write," or "I've never been any good at writing." In response to these comments I say, "Everyone can write, but just like anything else, it takes practice." Generally, people like to do only the things they do well. For many students, writing is not one of those. No matter how bad a paper is, I can always find something good to say about it; that is how I start my list of comments on the paper. Every time I have started off with something negative, I have lost the student for the remainder of the conference. We, as tutors, must realize that given the same situation, we would react in much the same way.

Involving students in their conference is the second important element in empowering students. Allowing them to co-conduct the conference

makes them more likely to voice their ideas on where they want the paper to go. It also helps in building a good working relationship between the tutor and student. Encouraging students to become involved in the conference helps remove the mystery from the writing process for them. Each person comes to the realization that writing is simply getting ideas from the brain to the paper. There is no big secret involved.

Student involvement in the conference also ensures they maintain ownership of their paper. This is a difficult concept for many tutors and students to grasp. Conferences should be collaborative instead of instructional, but students are often quite satisfied if we, as tutors, insert our own words, sentences and even ideas into their papers. Once this happens, their paper no longer belongs to them; it has become a joint venture in writing. It is unethical for us to take the ownership of a paper away, and it is not at all beneficial for the student.

Letting a student do all the work on her paper with only some direction from a tutor accomplishes three major things: the student's confidence is built up because she knows she can do it, she maintains ownership of her paper, and it fosters a sense of independence on her part. Every tutor at the Writing Center has heard, "Can I do this here," or "Can I say that?" Students often do not realize that their paper belongs to them, because so many times, teachers and tutors have taken over ownership of their papers.

I have reviewed papers where a teacher or tutor inserted words or sentences, and the student had no idea what they meant. For many students,

it is enough to tell them they need to work on transition sentences or they need a word that would work better in a particular situation; others need a little help. Because there are so many egos involved in the writing process, it is hard to let the ones who can do it go. All of us, teachers and tutors alike, seem to think that no one can do it like we can; therefore, we put our words or sentences in where we think they belong. In doing this, we show the student that we do not trust them enough with their own paper to do it themselves.

Eventually students begin to think they must ask permission to say what they wish to say in their own paper. When I am asked that question, I tell them that it is their paper, and they can say what they want as long as it is relevant to the topic. It usually takes a great amount of encouragement, but they will sometimes do it. When I can make a student feel comfortable at this point, I feel as though I have really accomplished something.

When I get them to where they can finally say what they want, I must make sure they are motivated to finish what they have started. This task is handled in different ways for different people. Some students are clearly motivated from beginning to end; these are the easy ones, because all they need is a little positive reinforcement and they are on their way. Others are a different story.

Throughout the conference, I make sure that students understand what I say and that they can explain it to me. Making a "to do" list on the paper is how I keep students focused on where they must go next. Clear direction is something most writers need, and it is

important in every stage of the writing process. If students have a clear sense of what needs to come next, motivation to complete their papers is normally not a problem.

If students come in for a brainstorming session, we work to develop an outline. That piece of paper will serve as their map from the time they start on the introduction until they finish the concluding paragraph. If these students return to me to have their rough drafts

reviewed, I usually see well focused and well organized papers as well as students who are not frustrated with the whole idea of writing.

All aspects of student empowerment are intertwined, and it is hard to discuss each one as a separate entity. The secret to successfully empowering students is to not break the process up into parts but to combine them into one smooth technique that, if used during every conference, will become second

nature. Of all the ideas behind student empowerment, there is one that needs to be remembered above all the rest. As long as students are dependent on teachers and tutors in every stage of the writing process, they will never feel comfortable enough to try it alone. Trust the students enough to let them do it on their own.

Christy Hicks
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC

VOICES FROM THE NET

(After an extended online conversation about “how much tutor talk is too much” on WCenter, the following message appeared from Libby Miles, Director of the Writing Center, University of Rhode Island, and her tutors. Neal Lerner’s bibliography referred to in the message is appended here.)

November 12, 1998

We have pulled together the good advice we received from you, and we’ve added some suggestions of our own, breaking them into categories we found useful. Also, we want to Neal Lerner for the fabulous annotated bibliography. Again, thanks all for your participation in what was a very fruitful conversation for us!

Best,

Carol Kaufman, Trissa Luzzi, Libby Miles, and Christine Fox Volpe
University of Rhode Island

How Much Tutor Talk is Too Much? A Compilation of Tips from WCenter

Techniques for Judging How Much Is Too Much

- Tutors observe one another and provide descriptive feedback.
- If you are hoarse at the end of a shift, you are talking too much.
- Shoot for no more than 50% of

the talking, unless the situation really warrants more.

- Tutors tape (audio or video) their own sessions and judge for themselves

Self-Monitoring During a Session— Attitudinal Shifts for Tutors

- Assume the role of the student’s audience, rather than the role of a writing “expert.”
- Periodically ask yourself whether or not you are talking too much, just to raise your own level of awareness.

Behavioral Techniques for Turning the Session Over to the Student

- Ask the student to read the paper aloud (rather than reading it aloud yourself) so that the student gets comfortable using her own voice.
- Give the student time and space to enact the revision principles you’ve discussed by leaving the tutoring space for a little while (get a handout, look something up, print something out, or just make up an excuse to leave the student alone a bit).
- If you are modeling in the session, do it once, then ask the student to try the next one. Follow up by asking the student to describe what she did.
- If the student seems to want the

tutor to do all the work (and talk), ask her to walk you through the paper, explaining what she has tried to do with each paragraph.

Behavioral Techniques for Tutor Self-Monitoring

- Ask follow-up questions like “How else might you say this?” or “What do you think?” or “Tell me what you meant by that.”
- Ask descriptive meta-analysis questions like “What have you done when you’ve encountered this problem in the past?” or “What do you think your strengths are as a writer?” or “What kinds of comments do you hear about your writing?” or “What do you know about yourself as a writer?”
- Ask speculative questions like “What would happen if . . . ?” or “How do you think your teacher might respond to . . . ?”
- Always offer multiple alternatives when modeling revisions or word choice for students. Afterwards, ask the student to make a choice and explain why she picks a particular option. See if she can add more to the list of possibilities.
- When you ask questions, wait for the answer. Be patient. When you think you’ve waited long enough, wait that amount of time again. In other words, wait twice as long as

you think you need to before stepping back in. You'll probably find that the student was really thinking during those moments, and not just staring into space.

- Make sure the student gets the last word. At the end of the session, ask the student to summarize what happened. You may need to prompt with questions like "What writing issues emerged as we worked together?" Next, follow up by asking the student to describe the strategies you developed together for attacking or sidestepping the problem. Finally, ask what the student plans to do next to continue the revision. The idea here is for the student to have the last word.
- Build regular reflective moments into your day (between sessions, before tutoring for a shift, after a couple of sessions, on a day off) to stop and ask "What else might I do to encourage students to talk more?"

Fri, 23 Oct 1998

Libby, my rule of thumb for how much tutor talk is too much is to ask if a tutor is hoarse after taking a shift in the WC. If so, she/he talked too much.

More empirically, as others have suggested, audio or video taping and transcribing the sessions and then analyzing the dialogue is one way to go. Still, it's hard to determine how much talk is too much or if the talk was productive or not. Various researchers have tried. You might check out Walker and Elias, "Writing conference talk: Factors associated with high- and low-rated writing conferences." *Research in the Teaching of English*, 21 (1987): 266-285. The authors conclude that "successful" conferences were ones not necessarily dominated by student talk, but instead in those conferences, students controlled the agenda and dictated the criteria for evaluating the text.

Some other useful references are (from an annotated bibliography I put together for Bobbie Silk's *Writing Center Resource Manual* [NWCA Press, 1998]):

Cook-Gumperz, J. (1993). Dilemmas of identity: Oral and written literacies in the making of a Basic Writing student. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 24, 336-356.

A study of a writing conference between "a returning African American student and her writing tutor." The author shows the difficulty the student has with fitting her rich oral rhetorical background into the more narrow confines of "traditional" academic prose—though the writing conference becomes the primary means for this process since "the presence of the tutor gives a continuous reminder that the writing is intended for a public arena."

Davis, K. M.; Hayward, N.; Hunter, K. R. & Wallace, D. L. (1986).

The function of talk in the writing conference: A study of tutorial conversation. *Writing Center Journal*, 9, 45-51. The authors study four writing center conferences in terms of how "classroom-like" the discourse was. They found that interaction ranged from having teacher-student features to being more like a "conversation."

DiPardo, A. (1992). "Whispers of coming and going": Lessons from Fannie. *Writing Center Journal*, 12, 125-144.

Traces the interaction between a native-American basic writing student and her peer tutor. The tutor struggles to overcome her preconceived notions of learning to write and to read more carefully the language the student presents in their tutoring sessions.

MacDonald, R. B. (1991). An analysis of verbal interactions in college tutorials. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 15, 2-4, 6, 8, 10, 12.

While the setting for this study is unclear (whether in a writing center or

not), the author analyzed tutorial discourse according to its dominant features: Who starts an interaction—tutor or student? How does the other participant respond? How does this interaction compare to typical classroom discourse patterns? Results showed that students initiated interactional sequences more often than tutors, unlike in the classroom.

Melnick, J. F. (1984). The politics of writing conferences: Describing authority through speech act theory. *Writing Center Journal*, 4, 9-21.

Author describes the process of tutors and students negotiating roles in a session as "membershopping," through which "speakers share varying degrees of intellectual and social belonging in a conversation." Tutors need to recognize and share their authority through "membershopping" in order to be more effective.

Severino, C. (1992). Rhetorically analyzing collaboration(s). *Writing Center Journal*, 13, 53-64.

In a study of two writing center tutorials, one conducted by a former high school English teacher and the other a freshman, the author concludes that the experienced tutor was more controlling, while the undergraduate "peer" said less and allowed the student to control the agenda. While the author claims that the peer conference was more successful, she does not present data to support that conclusion.

Wolcott, W. (1989). Talking it over: A qualitative study of writing center conferencing. *Writing Center Journal*, 9, 15-29.

A writing center director observes several sessions of her tutors' work. While the methodological rigor of this study is less than stellar, it does offer some approaches for analyzing tutorial discourse.

Good luck!

Neal Lerner
MCP/AHS

Writing/Reading Center Coordinator/English Instructor Riverside Community College

Riverside Community College District, located 70 miles from Los Angeles in Southern California, is seeking a Writing & Reading Center Coordinator/English Instructor to facilitate the District's large-scale, three-campus Writing and Reading Center. The Center serves English composition, ESL, and reading students who work each week in self-paced or collaborative learning opportunities as part of their required course of instruction.

Qualifications: In addition to possessing qualifications for an English instructor at a California community college, experience with and knowledge of computer-aided instruction is required. Successful experience teach-

ing English at a community college or baccalaureate-level institution is also required. Writing center experience and knowledge of computer networks are preferred.

Application Deadline: February 11, 1999.

For a detailed job description and its qualifications, as well as a required District application form, write to Riverside Community College District, Human Resources Office, 4800 Magnolia Avenue, Riverside, CA 92506-1299, or call (909) 222-8588, TDD (909) 222-8014, Fax (909) 222-8035, or visit our website at <<http://www.rccd.cc.ca.us>>.

Writing Center Director Columbus State University

Assistant Professor of English, tenure-track, to help develop a university writing center and teach courses in professional writing and freshman composition. Candidates should have a Ph.D. with specialty in rhetoric and composition. Experience in and/or knowledge of writing centers would be a great asset.

Apply by sending an application letter and vita to Daniel W. Ross, Chair, Department of Language and Literature, Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia 31907. CSU is a part of the University System of Georgia and is an AA/EO employer.

Deadline is January 15, 1999.

THE WRITING LAB
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