

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 28, Number 8

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

April, 2004

...FROM THE EDITOR...

With the arrival of the first balmy breezes of spring (for those of us in the U.S. and Canada), we begin to look forward to the summer lull that allows us some reading and planning time. Toward that end, you'll find two book reviews to consider when choosing your summer reading/planning agenda. Bill Macauley and Al DeCiccio's review of *The Center Will Hold* considers the contributions of each of the book's chapters to important professional concerns, and the review, by Harry Denny, Rebecca Day, and Dawn Fels, of the second edition of *The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* suggests how this tutoring manual can be useful for tutor training next fall.

In addition, Valerie Perry discusses concerns tutors must be aware of because of differing discourse styles preferred in various disciplines and among different instructors. Serkan Gorkemli reflects back on his tutorial with a student whose political viewpoint enters the tutorial interaction. Similarly, Joan Malerba-Foran also writes about a tutor's conflict over the perennial question of whether or not to challenge a student's thinking about a topic. Each of these articles reminds us again of the many layers of complexity when tutoring writing.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

*"My Teacher Hates Me!"
The Writing Center as
Locus for a Rhetoric-Based
WAC Program*

• Valerie Perry 1

Review of The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship, Ed. Michael Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead

• Reviewed by William J. Macauley, Jr., and Albert C. DeCiccio 5

"This is a Redneck Argument!": The Politics of Tutoring Paragraphing

• Serkan Gorkemli 9

Conference Calendar 10

Review of Gillespie, Paula, and Neal Lerner. The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring, 2nd ed.

• Reviewed by Harry Denny, Rebecca Day, and Dawn Fels 11

*Tutors' Column:
"Poetic Justice"*

• Joan Malerba-Foran 14

"My teacher hates me!" The writing center as locus for a rhetoric-based WAC program

Students—even, and perhaps especially, "good" students—are aware of the duality of their learning, the need to learn both disciplinary material and specific conventions of writing and thinking. However, these conventions may not be recognized as discipline-specific, but seen as "hoops" to jump through, a "game to play" in order to satisfy the immediate audience—the instructor. Perhaps especially at a school the size of Eureka College (approximately 500 students, 40 full-time faculty), word gets around quickly that "this is what Professor So-and-So wants;" "don't write about X or make Y mistakes in Dr. Z's class, or you'll get a bad grade." These unwritten "rules" refer less frequently to lower order concerns such as pronoun-antecedent agreement, first vs. third-person narrative, or active voice vs. passive (which can and do vary widely between professors teaching the same subject or even the same course) than to broader issues of topic, purpose, audience and stylistic voice. Even more

distressing is the propensity of students to engage in “pseudo-academese,” an artificially inflated prose style that they believe is the key to success, and for writing center consultants (unwittingly) to perpetuate this belief. “Writing smart” is a tendency for which undergraduates are often penalized

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(losing points for “clarity” and “organization,” among other things), but in which graduate students and many academics frequently engage, creating a paradox which leaves most people bewildered.

The good news is that such “hoop-jumping” and academic doublespeak indicate students' awareness of two basic rhetorical concepts: audience and voice. They hear about this in first-year composition, and possibly in later courses, but successful “bottom-up” implementation (advocated by Martha Townsend and others) of a rhetoric-based Writing Across the Curriculum program depends on support from faculty and writing center consultants. These two groups bear primary responsibility for reinforcing the basics of rhetoric that are inherent in every discipline, and for helping to raise students' awareness of the audience, voice and purpose involved in each writing task. The anecdotal evidence discussed here indicates students' awareness of writing to please a specific audience, desire to elevate the writing voice to a (perceived) level of expertise, and frustrated search to find something “new” to say. These, most writing instructors might agree, are not problems in themselves—in fact, they motivate many of us to write and publish in our academic fields.

Who cares? Writing for those who “know”

“Everyone” knows that if you write about gender and feminism in British Literature II, you'll get more points than if you write about almost anything else. Clearly, in some students' minds, this is due to British Lit Professor's personal preference for such topics, and not to the relevance of topics to course material or objectives. This catch-22 can also bind students when given their choice of a topic for a writing assignment: in an effort to present material that will appear “fresh” and provide them with their own moment to speak, students may pass over topics they know to be close to the instructor's areas of personal interest.

As one writing center consultant puts it, “Why tell the butterfly guy what he already knows?”

Why indeed? Kenneth Burke's “parlor” model serves to address at least part of this concern (and many concerns of voice and purpose, as we shall explore later). Students, or anyone else who explores a new subject or area, can envision themselves as entering what Burke calls “the unending conversation”:

When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a . . . discussion . . . too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent. . . . However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late; you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110-11)

The search for a “solution” may occasionally drive a conversation in a given field, but far more frequent (and useful) are those discussions that are ongoing dialogues. The conversation does not end when a student—or anyone else—withdraws.

The Burkean parlor model is central to the effectiveness of interlocking WAC programs and writing centers, and serves to illustrate the connections between audience, purpose and voice. Thus the “butterfly guy” may not be looking for his undergraduates to tell him something he has never before encountered about lepidoptery; rather, he may be assessing their ability to determine the discourse climate, and gaug-

ing their understanding of and engagement with the material through their contributions to the conversation. “New” contributions, while not discouraged, are not necessarily the primary objective of the students or the instructor. The audience, then, goes far beyond the immediate one of instructor and/or peers provided in the classroom context; students are training themselves to listen to their own voices, and anticipate the value of their contributions—who will listen, and who won’t? Who will contribute in turn, and what will they be likely to say?

“Writing to get it done:” Three views of purpose

The parlor discussion model also serves to address the closely-intertwined concept of purpose. The same consultant (a biology major) who questions the purpose of telling professors what they already know expresses frustration over the “devaluing” of personal observations and experience in the sciences, and the need to couch everything in someone else’s words in order to achieve credibility. Once we discuss the rhetorical and pedagogical benefits of grounding oneself in the conversation in order to achieve the necessary dual-level of expertise in content and style to have something worth contributing, he appears more comfortable. It’s still not the same thing the British Lit professor wants, though—she constantly asks students for more original ideas and critical thinking, steering them away from recitation of quotes and facts toward ways of thinking that are “new” to them. On the other hand, every time a student tries to break up the monotony of a history paper with a little bit of humor or creativity, the professor runs a red line through these personal touches and deducts points from “voice.” If only all professors could get together and decide once and for all what it is they *want*, my comp classes have sighed, it would be so much easier for them to deliver.

Writing center consultants represent the very best student writers—both in

terms of higher-order and lower-order proficiency, and adeptness at figuring out what various audiences “want.” My lingering concern is that these “wants” are being ascribed to individual professors and not to the discipline, and that this view of writing-across-professors is reinforced in the writing center. Of course, many professors themselves foster this view, with well-intended advice to the class such as “Go to the writing center—they’ll tell you what I want!” The “I” in this case is interpreted quite literally (and may even be meant literally by some).

Through a series of WAC workshops based on John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas*, Eureka faculty are encouraged to have their students determine the purpose of the assigned writing task: writing-to-learn or learning-to-write. When I suggest to the writing center consultants that they too can raise students’ awareness of the purpose of their own writing by asking them to identify into which of these two categories their papers fall, one offers a third purpose: writing-to-get-it-done. Undoubtedly this will occur at least some of the time. But since students already have a known fondness for attempting to determine the motivations and desires of their professors, why not use this to everyone’s advantage? Students who visit the writing center are now asked to identify the assignment as a writing-to-learn or learning-to-write activity (always allowing for the possibility that it could be both); this can help them become more adept at guiding themselves toward the objective of the assignment, rather than simply “getting it done.” Central to any WAC program, after all, is the view of writing as a form of thinking and learning.

Pitching student voice

John Harbord, of the Centre for Academic Writing at Central European University in Hungary, correctly observes that issues of commodification enter the discussion as well: “the grade does not come from the academic discipline, it comes from the professor. . . . We can’t blame students

for wanting to dance the tune the piper calls. They’d be fools if they didn’t.” He cites variations in personal preferences over first, second- or third-person, passive voice, and “contribution” among professors, as well as significant differences in feedback and grading styles. It is worth noting that many of these personal differences address lower-order concerns of grammar and phrasing, although the line between these areas and “voice” can become obscured. The history professor may not have a personal affinity for dry, colorless prose, but recognizes the need for objectivity in that discipline and encourages students to keep personal voice from “interfering” with content.

Students strive to master the discourse style of the discipline they are studying at the same time they strive to please their professors; at the same time, those in academia perpetuate these discourse conventions even as we demand clarity, organization, and a strong writing voice—while not always practicing what we preach. Some professors will claim in class, on syllabi, and on students’ papers that logic and structure are more valuable than the “entertainment” factor, and yet we choose to read books, articles and papers that entertain us, that mesh with our own interests and views; we reward, consciously or not, papers that do the same. How can this confusing mix of signals—about what we want, what we value, what builds credibility, what type of thinking profits the writer and the audience—be addressed?

Writing center consultants can familiarize themselves with a variety of discourse styles through studying advanced undergraduate and published papers within each field, and can become more adept at identifying writing-to-learn and learning-to-write assignments and encourage other students to do the same. At the same time, much of the “guesswork” on the students’ part can be reduced by clearer guidelines from professors about what exactly the standards of

“good” writing are for each respective field or writing task. The Eureka College Writing Center is in the process of compiling roughly standardized guidelines for stylistic and rhetorical conventions across the curriculum, to be used as resources for training and consultations. These ask professors to examine and articulate their expectations and objectives for writing assignments—which can open up insightful dialogues among members of a discipline and strengthen the structure and objectives of assignments themselves, to avoid unwittingly setting “traps” for students.

The October 2003 launch issue of *Praxis: a Writing Center Journal* is an

invaluable resource for new and experienced consultants alike, and is a good way to introduce students to *kairos*, Burke’s “identification” with audience, Toulmin’s concept of warrant, and other key rhetorical principles. Above all, students’ essential rhetorical awareness and desire to write for and with a perceived audience, purpose and voice is to be recognized and commended; guidance and reinforcement from all academic areas (both faculty and peer-tutors) can provide direction on how to shape this innate awareness and diligence into productive processes and results.

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IWCA Web site

In December 2003 a new International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Web site was launched: writingcenters.org. With the help of an IWCA committee to explore ways to make the Web resources both stable and more dynamic, our first task after securing a new domain name was to look for a non-institutional host server. Nick Carbone was instrumental in hooking us up with Eric Crump, who will oversee the hosting role; Bedford St. Martin’s has agreed to pick up the tab on the costs of hosting. The committee then turned its attention to finding an innovative Web editor. We chose Clint Gardner, at Salt Lake Community College, and he agreed to a three-year term as Web editor. Thanks go the Web committee formed by past president Paula Gillespie (Lisa Eastmond and Jane Love as members), and to Vivian Rice, who took good care of the site that was originally developed and maintained at Syracuse University by Bruce Pegg.

Following the launch, Clint was offered suggestions and kudos. The site has become a hub for both information and interaction. As Clint tracks posts on WCenter and trends in our field, he updates the site regularly and has created several exchange opportunities through discussion forums. Jon Olson, IWCA president, is eager to see the site bring the organization together for online meetings and voting as well. The site provides an important supplement to the lively exchanges on WCenter listserv and houses the most current information on conferences, job postings, and other news in the field of writing centers. Clint has made certain that peer tutors, directors, and the IWCA board each have a “place” to interact on the Web site. Future plans include providing a searchable database of online writing centers and ways to renew memberships and subscribe to our publications. The editorial board for writingcenters.org welcomes your ideas and feedback.

Michele Eodice, Editorial Board
writingcenters.org

Symposium on Second Language Writing

Call for Proposals
Sept. 30-Oct. 2, 2004
West Lafayette, IN

“Second Language Writing Instruction in Context(s):
The Effects of Institutional Policies and Politics.”

Proposals are sought for 20-minute presentations that address how instructional policies and politics affect instructional practices. Each presentation should include (1) a description of a particular L2 writing instruction context, (2) an analysis of how institutional policies and politics shape the curriculum in this context, and (3) a discussion of implications for second language writing theory, research, instruction, assessment and/or administration, and the professional development of second language writing specialists. A special event, a Graduate Student Conference on Second Language Writing will be held in conjunction with the Symposium. Proposals must be received by May 15, 2004. For more information, please visit <<http://symposium.jslw.org/2004/>>. Tony Silva and Paul Kei Matsuda, Chairs.

Book Review

Pemberton, Michael, and Joyce Kinkead, eds. *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*. Logan: Utah: U of Utah P, 2003. ISBN 0-87421-570-6. \$21.95.

Reviewed by William J. Macauley, Jr., (Mount Union College, Alliance, OH) and
Albert C. DeCiccio (Rivier College, Nashua, NH)

The allusion to Yeats' great poem, "The Second Coming," in the title of *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*, edited by Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead, makes all the sense in the world. Both longtime (and gray-ing) and new writing center workers will find the book sustaining, even as it ponders a writing center community in which one of its most exemplary founders welcomes the voices of new leadership. A Festschrift of sorts to Mickey Harris (author, mentor, innovator, and, in a very real sense, founder of the writing center community), the book contains ten articles by writing center scholars on a variety of topics central to the future of writing centers as well as the editors' introduction—an exciting tribute to Harris ("She has left us a remarkable legacy, and it isn't over yet" 12) and the authors in the book.

The Center Will Hold is neatly framed with an introductory piece by Pemberton on the evolution of *The Writing Lab Newsletter*—Harris' attempt to build a writing center community, offer a site for research, and establish a way of mentoring new writing center workers—and a final piece by James Inman and Donna Sewell on how the writing center community, embracing cyberspace (and especially WCenter), looks for more of the same in electronic spaces. In between, the eight articles treat issues that continue to complicate the writing center community. From Nancy Grimm's call that we make writing center research the center's 'featured character,' to the article by Leslie Hatfield and her colleagues on the role writing center workers should play in the physical de-

sign of the center, the contributors look forward to the kind of leadership that will prevent the bankruptcy of writing center work. Pieces by Neal Lerner and Jo Koster treat the importance of writing center assessment and administration. Rebecca Jackson, Carrie Leverenz, and Joe Law discuss graduate courses and programs in writing center theory, practice, and administration. In separate articles, Harvey Kail, Peter Carino, and Michele Eodice deal with the work that takes place in the center: collaborative learning, in general, and peer tutoring, in particular. Together, these ten pieces maintain that writing center work continues to be higher education's promise for the future.

Michael Pemberton's "The *Writing Lab Newsletter* as History: Tracing the Growth of a Scholarly Community" is a creative and engaging look at *WLN*'s place in this field as well as Mickey Harris' loving, critical embrace of writing centers. What could have easily turned into lamentations about writing centers' lack of support and presence became one of the field's most optimistic and important professional publications. "We are launched," reads the first line of the first *WLN* issue, metaphorically reflecting the force of will it took to propel forward this community on a creative and scholarly trajectory. Clearly, the newsletter is a scholarly resource, but the real trick of the newsletter seems to have been its ability to maintain its very human character, while continuing to develop scholarship: "Harris believes that the core ethos of the *Newsletter* has remained essentially unchanged. It continues to be personal, practical, and accessible, providing an important

mechanism for new tutors and directors to enter the writing center community and immediately feel a part of it" (25).

Pemberton goes on to point out other essential *WLN* functions: news service, community organizer, manifesto, practical advisor, institutional consultant, and scholarly provocateur. "Through it all, the *Newsletter* has been there—connecting, promoting, publicizing, supporting, enhancing, stimulating, provoking, and publishing" (34). Pemberton has thoughtfully and carefully documented *WLN*'s importance as a continuing site of generative, professional, and scholarly activity while revealing its importance as a primary genealogical record of our field—and he even offers some facsimiles of the early and more mature *Newsletters* in order to illustrate for readers its physical transformation.

Nancy Grimm has always asked hard questions of writing center workers. Grimm asks the following hard question in her article "In the Spirit of Service: Making Writing Center Research a 'Featured Character'": "if there is so much learning happening in writing centers, what are the reasons for the untapped research potential, particularly research on the cultural and linguistic diversity that are the focus of so much writing center work?" (41). Grimm ventures an answer, saying that writing center work is seen as service, service, and more service—both to students and faculty. Using Brian Street's notion of an *ideological model of literacy* and James Gee's *New Literacy Studies*, and citing Mickey Harris as an exemplary writing center worker AND researcher, Grimm ar-

gues that writing center research might become a ‘featured character’ of writing center work. In becoming a ‘featured character’ of the writing center, writing center workers might develop research projects that focus not on the student needing help but the idea of working collaboratively with students to understand the social, cultural, and linguistic contexts for their developing expertise in writing. As is always the case when Nancy Grimm asks us a hard question, in attempting to answer it she and the entire writing center community, ultimately, move forward. Indeed, Grimm concludes by offering seven starting points that readers will find helpful for making research a ‘featured character’ in the center—all of them broadening the capacity for writing center workers to research, read, reflect, and disseminate.

In “Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the ‘Proof’ of Our Effectiveness,” Neal Lerner is forward-looking in examining two words that have grown in poignancy even as the writing center community has grown. Research, according to Lerner, is something done to writing center workers, something that writing center workers often lament that they do not have the time to contemplate. Assessment, he argues, is something writing center workers worry about because it is tied to the financial, institutional futures of many writing centers. Lerner reclaims these words in the article, and he attempts to critique previous studies of writing center effectiveness as essentially self-congratulatory. He looks at the assessment movement in higher education, and, using the research of those involved in the First Year Seminar movement, particularly M. Lee Upcraft and John Schuh, Lerner provides a framework for future writing center research and assessment. He emphasizes a model that assesses student needs and satisfaction as well as one that assesses campus environments and outcomes. “Collaborating with colleagues across our institutions,” Lerner writes, “can serve the dual pur-

pose of capitalizing on local expertise and sending the message that the writing center is serious about assessment” (73). Such an approach to assessment will prove meaningful and useful to the writing center community, helping writing center workers to be less defensive while assuring the center’s existence.

Harvey Kail’s “Separation, Initiation, and Return: Tutor Training Manuals and Writing Center Lore” maintains an important strand that runs throughout the book, what Michelle Eodice cleverly termed the “micro-macro view” (124): looking inward to discover our outward orientation, looking to tutorials to help us understand our roles in the larger institutions, examining tutor training and training manuals in order to understand more fully what we value most (124). Kail explains: “It is my thesis that an initiation story, a *bildungsroman* of sorts, can be read among the metaphors and minutiae of tutor training texts, an initiation story that can tell us, like all good stories do, a bit more about who we are and what we care most about” (75). Kail’s article argues convincingly that tutor training is a kind of initiation rite, that there is something special about becoming a writing tutor, and that “becoming a writing center tutor uniquely empowers individuals,” via Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (76).

Applying the Campbell heroes’ journey paradigm to Harris’ *Teaching One-to-One*, Kenneth Bruffee’s *A Short Course in Writing*, and Irene Lurkis Clark’s *Teaching in a Writing Center Setting*. Kail goes beyond taking stock, though, and queries each of these earlier tutor training texts on their representations of the tutor-hero journey. Kail finds these pieces reiterating the ideas that process enables growth and development, that collaboration provokes new kinds of academic relationships, that fear and alienation can be replaced with trust and mutual respect, and that these transitions are

difficult ones. “Breaking the traditional expectations of classrooms in exchange for the perplexing and unpredictable intimacy of the conference,” Kail points out, “calls for a radical change in the teacher’s orientation to learning and teaching” (80).

Peter Carino opens “Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring” thus: “‘Power’ and ‘authority’ are not nice words, especially to writing centers, who have always advertised themselves as nurturing environments, friendly places with coffee pots and comfy couches for the weary” (96). However, writing centers continue to struggle with these concepts and Carino describes the masking of power and authority in the rhetoric of “peeriness” (97).

Carino is persuasive in arguing the fallaciousness of nonhierarchical tutoring and in pointing out the assumptions inherent in seeing “direct instruction as a form of plunder rather than help” (98). He establishes that this question has been picked up by scholars and researchers more than once but has never been embraced by the field. Although Carino is persuasive here, at the same time, we hope that readers can apprehend the distinctions he is making between authority and control, between enabling choice and making decisions.

The rhetorical premise of the article is that writing center workers do not want to deal with power and authority. Taking this stance could make it very difficult for some to distinguish between what Carino sees as traditional, embedded resistance to dealing with these issues and questions about the clarity of some of his assertions. Does nondirective tutoring have to mean no advice? No admonishment? No pushing toward more productive decision-making processes? Is nondirective tutoring simply disinterested questioning? Is authority in critique synonymous with power in providing examples and strategies, correction versus cooperation? Carino provokes

important questions about what is and is not directive, and how accurately our assumptions represent the reality of power and authority in tutoring writing.

Carino thoughtfully probes the more theoretical questions of tutorial power and authority. We hope readers see also some important motivations for nondirective tutoring: the precarious academic positions of most writing tutors, the desire to curb tutors' desire to "just fix it," the need to differentiate tutoring from teaching for student writers, tutors, and faculty, or the often limited training resources available to writing centers. These are not the theoretical issues that Carino questions and addresses with the same sharp thinking and clear reason he applies the questions about tutorial power and authority. Carino is right and well-informed in his questioning of writing center hegemony; meanwhile, the issue of power and authority in the writing tutorial remain thorny, complex, and context-bound problems of not only theory but also local (often practical) constraints.

Michelle Eodice, in "Breathing Lessons or Collaboration is . . .," does what the best writing tutors eventually learn to do. Instead of, by force or constraint, pushing students toward what seem the best options, she turns the tables on us, helps us to do the work, helps us to figure it out for ourselves. We come away from the article feeling as though she helped us to say something that we understood all along. "Breathing Lessons" makes collaboration an externalized (outside the center), theorized practice obvious in everyday academic lives. She shows us that collaboration, even through her interactive and conversational writing, is not anathema outside of the center. By the end of the article, the reader feels as though new ground has been broken through genuine collaboration.

Eodice points to our own undoing: "By consistently reviving the tropes of

marginality, disappointment, and disciplinarity-above-all-else, we have abetted our institutions, allowing them to draw our perimeters" (116). She proposes that we "flip the *working on the margins* thing to a *working with the margins* thing. . . . [In so doing,] we might see that every department, every member of our academic communities, is struggling with a range of issues—from budget to pedagogy—and that while our farm may be on the outskirts of town, our campuses need what we grow there" (117). Again, what does a good tutor do but enable a student writer to think differently about a problem, to see opportunities for collaboration as room to grow?

Eodice expands this idea by demonstrating collaboration and opportunities for cooperation until it seems almost stupid that we have not seen this for ourselves already. Boldly, she can claim that "Collaboration trumps the old tropes" (121). What is especially satisfying about this chapter is its honest discussion of the risks and provocations it undertakes through a warm, engaging, and collegial tone. At the end of our session with Michelle, we discuss the possible next step in our process: "We can and should *demand* collaboration and continue to work toward boundarylessness, even with the knowledge that these actions will never be fully accomplished, completed" (129). Will the student make another appointment with this tutor? Yes!

In "(Re) shaping the Profession: Graduate Courses in Writing Center Theory, Practice, and Administration," Rebecca Jackson, Carrie Leverenz, and Joe Law examine the growth of graduate courses devoted to writing center studies. They attribute this development to the reality (and availability) of various kinds of administrative work, to local exigencies, to the growing professionalization of writing center work, and to the growing interest among graduate students in writing center studies. In their examination of

the nation's programs and in their case studies of Wright State University, Florida State University, and New Mexico State University, Law, Leverenz, and Jackson point out, respectively, that new graduate students are better prepared to enter the real world of writing programs and writing centers because these areas have attained a more professional status. At the same time, the authors point out, graduate students will have to recognize that the place at the table for writing center workers continues to be questioned by those who inhabit the larger field of English Studies, including those involved in literary studies as well as others in composition studies. "The future (professionalization) of writing centers," argue the authors, "depends on those willing and able to define their work as both situated within local contexts and also as part of a larger disciplinary project" (149). Indeed, Jackson, Leverenz, and Law have raised the bar in using the phrase "writing center studies" to present their case synchronically, and they appear to be asking the writing center community to keep it at that high level as we study, diachronically, the writing center community's increasing professionalization within the field of English studies.

"Administration across the Curriculum: Or Practicing What We Preach" is yet another example of what writing centers enable when they apply what they know from inside the tutorial to their own concerns outside of the writing center. Jo Koster acknowledges our tendency to miss these applications of the micro to the macro, the inside to the outside, and advises us: "we must overcome our resistance and listen to our C[entral] A[dministrator]s' perspectives even when we disagree with them, just as we ask our tutors to do with their clients" (153). Koster is very clear that, as administrators, we must develop our openness to and developing senses of the discourses and audiences with which we must deal on a regular basis.

Like other authors in this collection, Koster is arguing that we must challenge our own hegemony *and* that we could benefit greatly from applying to our own work that which we have been telling our tutors for so many years. “Rhetorically,” she says, “this seems like such a simple decision: it doesn’t mean changing what we do or what we value, the nature of *our* trust market, but how we *talk* about it. We tell our tutors and our tutoring clients this all the time” (158).

What is most memorable about this chapter, beyond the idea that we already have the tools we need to address the problem, is the idea that administrative work is rhetorical. Koster is consistent in asserting that we must resist the temptation (and the history) of segregating our administrative work from the administrative work of others, as well as seeing our administrative duties as something outside of our “real” work with writing centers. “Unless we see writing center administration as a rhetorical act,” warns Koster, “unless we theorize it, interrogate it, and practice it as such, and until we value doing so, we handicap ourselves and the centers we represent” (161).

One question remained unaddressed in this discussion, however. Is the dynamic of providing support (tutoring) the same as seeking it (from institutional leaders)? If not, this might enable a more hands-on understanding of student resistance as well as provoke our thinking more deeply about the discourses we encounter outside of the writing center.

One might come away from this chapter, as well as others, wondering why it isn’t easier for us to apply essential tutoring theories to our own concerns. Koster’s thoughtful article is a great boon in that transition.

“The environment where interaction between and among people occurs is

crucial as it affects the way people feel and, therefore, the way people interact” (175), write Leslie Hadfield, Joyce Kinkead, Tom C. Peterson, Stephanie H. Ray, and Sarah S. Preston, the research team charged with designing a writing center site at Alchemy University. In “An Ideal Writing Center: Re-Imagining Space and Design,” Hadfield and her colleagues studied the three-volume series prepared by Christopher Alexander, University of California at Berkeley’s Center for Environmental Structure. The team found Alexander’s ideas resonant with the philosophy of writing center workers, that is, with respect to a site, the best concept is one “of organic architecture based on piecemeal growth and participatory decision-making” (168). The authors designed a center for a student population of 10,000, with 4-6 tutors available at all times, a director, an assistant director, and a receptionist, including enough space for this staff, for one-to-one tutoring, for group study and conferencing, and for an adjacent computer lab. The environment developed is one that the writing center community might aspire to construct. As the diagrams and accompanying explanations show, the “ideal” writing center is like the “idea” of writing center work: “calm, non-threatening, and easily understood” (171).

In other places, one of us, AI, has argued that writing centers are not just the next best thing in writing instruction—they are the best next things in education. It is fitting, then, in our postmodern world, that the writing center would go international, global, and that it would take up in cyberspace the issues raised in *The Center Will Hold*. James Inman and Donna Sewell, in “Mentoring in Electronic Spaces: Using Resources to Sustain Relationships,” offer a fitting peroration to the book—as well as a fitting final tribute to Mickey Harris, whose online writing lab at Purdue paved the way for the OWL phenomenon in a

way similar to how her involvement in just about every other area of the writing center proved to be hallmark work. Inman and Sewell present “part of a road map for the future success of the writing center community—a truly global writing center community, where electronic media help us span great distances to work closely together and guide each other to professional success” (179). Using primarily Bill Condon’s and Rebecca Rickly’s work, and examining discussions on WCenter, Inman and Sewell attempt “to keep the positive possibilities of [electronic] mentoring relationships without losing sight of their problematic implications” (181). In so doing, they invite us to continue the conversation—indeed, the hallmark of all writing center work—about electronic mentoring.

Pemberton and Kinkead’s *The Center Will Hold* is engaging as both entrée into current scholarship about writing centers and as a reflective benchmark in the field’s ongoing development. Muriel Harris’ 30 years in this field (her presence is pronounced throughout the text) pervade and provoke the writing centers scholarship encountered here. Honestly, one must wonder how much of the common ground of this field *did not* develop through Mickey’s efforts. The temptation to quote Toni Basil, in this regard, is nearly overwhelming.

Center not only reconsiders our past but promotes optimism about the future of writing centers as continuing and conspicuous models for intellectual community and rich sites for serious, challenging, and significant research into what learning, teaching, and writing can be. *The Center Will Hold* is well worth the price.

“This is a redneck argument!”: The politics of tutoring paragraphing

When I finally sat down to write about this particular tutoring experience, I was certain that I did not want to preach, and I also realized that I still had conflicting voices in me about the situation. Attempting to convey fully all of these competing voices, I believe, does more justice to the entire situation than straightforward prose, which, I feel, by its very own linear nature, is too neat to talk about a complex tutoring situation. So, the following is my double-voiced account of a tutorial. As a reflective piece, this essay is comprised of two interlaced threads of prose: one, in italics like this one, reflecting the voice of me as an experienced tutor now, and the other, in normal characters, reflecting what happened during the tutorial based on my memory of that time in the past. (SG)

That day, like any other in our writing center, a folder was left on the table as I was wondering how on earth I would wrap up the current tutorial on time. As soon as I was done, I grabbed the folder, took a look at the name, and said it out loud, like I always do. John (not his real name) was a tall, white, male student wearing a baseball cap, jeans and T-shirt, typical college gear. After the usual civilities, John and I sat down, and he told me that his teacher referred him to the writing center to work on his paragraphing. He was having trouble with topic sentences and paragraph development.

As I read his paper, paying special attention to his paragraphs, I realized that he was writing an argument against publishing driver's manuals in Spanish for the benefit of non-English speaking Mexican immigrants in our

state. Among the main points in his argument were that this is the U.S. and that everybody had to learn English anyway, so why publish manuals in Spanish; that “these people” are illegal, and that they don't do any good for this country anyway, so they should be sent back to where they came from. Although I was also simultaneously making an effort to follow his teacher's marginal comments about organizational issues in the paper, I was constantly distracted by John's interspersed comments that to me seemed strongly xenophobic. My entire reading experience was a true moment of indecision and conflict concerning how to handle the tutorial. As I was juggling these thoughts and concerns, the teacher's end comment scribbled on the last page only helped to compound the problem: “This is a redneck argument!” and on a separate line, “Go to the Writing Lab to work on your paragraphs!”

One route I could have taken at this point would be to tell John about what is and isn't acceptable in formal academic prose. I didn't want to pursue this directly since I thought that such a strategy would be no more effective than what the teacher had done in the remarkably blunt end comments. John was certainly aware that what he had written was unacceptable in the eyes of some, though such a realization had ironically come in the context of his teacher's inappropriate and possibly hypocritical comment, given the meaning of the term “redneck.”¹ He was rather quiet and distant throughout the tutorial, possibly the result of the same unfortunate comment and its negative implications about where he is coming from. Knowing that such implications are off-limits and also following our lab's policy of not discussing teachers'

controversial comments with tutees, I decided not to talk to him about why he thought his teacher reacted to his paper in such a manner, even though I was clearly taken aback by the comment.

Thus, and in hindsight, I saw that my task as a tutor was to get him 1) to talk to me as a tutor rather than as someone with a professed authority over him, and 2) to appreciate the complexity of the issue he is dealing with rather than to have him temporarily put on a “politically correct academic hat” and obediently satisfy the powers that be, who already chastised him for doing what he had done.

After a spell of indecision, I ended up working with John on two things during the tutorial: his particular use of the genre of argumentation with claims, evidences, and counter arguments; and his “voice” in the paper and how he would be “heard” in various ways by different audiences.

First, we read his paper paragraph by paragraph, and every time I came across a part of his argument that dismissed the issue without actually engaging it, I asked him to provide evidence for his particular claim. For instance, whenever he made blanket generalizations, I tried to guide him gently to think of “these people” as flesh-and-blood individuals, as real people, by asking him if he knew anything in particular about the living conditions and transportation needs of the persons to whom he was constantly referring. In addition, I reminded John of possible counterarguments related to his subject by asking these questions: Why did the city government decide to publish manuals in Spanish? Where do immigrants get jobs? Why is it important for them to get driver's licenses as soon as possible? And so on.

Second, I emphasized to him how he sounded in his sentences. I was aware that his argument would be offensive to many, and it was my duty as his tutor to let him know about the possible repercussions of what he had written. However, as I said before, John had already discovered the effect of his writing on at least one person, his teacher. I still felt it was important to address this issue on some level, because I wanted him to genuinely see what his teacher's blunt manner might otherwise have obscured for him: that informed inquiry that is carefully and caringly worded is essential to the act of arguing, since beyond the classroom in the "real" world, arguments have a life of their own and resonate with audiences in powerful ways.

To illustrate these points, rather than talking "at" him about them, whenever I saw what seemed to be a xenophobic comment in his paper, I paraphrased it for him, showing him a more openly negative way his words could be interpreted by different audiences and asking him what exactly he meant to write and how he wanted to sound. Hearing and becoming aware of possible, differing reactions to his writing, John agreed to revise most of his "ambiguous" sentences.

As I look back, this tactful manner of questioning did two things for me, and hopefully, for John: 1) Even though, like his teacher, I clearly disagreed with what he was saying, I was able to carve "a conversational space" where I could talk to him in a gentle, respectful manner without alienating him through brusque confrontation; and 2) rather than regarding me as just another condescending partisan, I hope he gave me the benefit of the doubt, listened to me, and maybe reviewed his point of view.

I believe that what we focused on during the tutorial helped get him to think about argumentation, the issue of voice in writing, and audience. Even though at first I was concerned because we

could not get to paragraphing in his paper, these issues were more urgent and were perhaps conducive to writing better paragraphs in the long run through better understanding the genre of argumentation and determining what he wanted to say and exactly how he wanted to sound.

As I said, however, these are exactly "what I have thought then and still believe today." I wonder what John thought about the tutorial. I am wondering about this on a couple of levels: First, we never got to talk about paragraphing per se, so I wonder if what we talked about throughout the tutorial was relevant, from his standpoint, to why he was there. I am thinking that if I had not been so insistent about the distinction between content and form and had instead linked the two by referring to paragraphing as a written form of his thinking, I could probably have done better in addressing his concerns and what I, as his tutor, considered important simultaneously.

On another level, I wonder what he thought about what I said during the tutorial based on who I am: a non-native tutor who is mistaken at times for a person of Spanish or Indian origin by persons who are unfamiliar with both peoples. As is the case with all other issues related to tutors' personal ethos in tutees' eyes, this is something I won't ever know, but nevertheless, it still keeps me on my toes as a veteran tutor by driving home this point: who we are affects what we do in inscrutable ways at times, and just because of this, we need to be all the more aware of and sensitive about this fact in our everyday dealings with our tutees and students, tutoring gently without alienating them.

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End Note

¹ Redneck n. *Offensive Slang*. 1. Used as a disparaging term for a mem-

ber of the white rural laboring class, especially in the southern United States. 2. One who is regarded as having a provincial, conservative, often bigoted attitude. (Source: *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd ed., p. 1144)

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

- April 2-3, 2003: East Central WCA, in Greensburg, PA
Contact: Conference Web site: <http://maura.setonhill.edu/~wc_conf04/ecwca.html>.
- April 17, 2004: Northeast WCA, in North Andover, MA
Contact: Kathleen Shine Cain, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA. E-mail: Kathleen.Cain@merrimack.edu; Conference web site: <<http://merrimack.edu/newca>>.
- April 17, 2004: Pacific Northwest WCA, in Centralia, WA
Contact: Linda Foss: lfoss@Centralia.edu. Web site: <<http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~writepro/PNWCA.htm>>.
- April 24, 2004: Mid-Atlantic WCA, in Dundalk, MD
Contact: Brenda Stevens Fick, Student Success Center, CCBC Dundalk, 7200 Sollers Point Rd., Baltimore, MD 21222. Phone: 410-285-9877. Online Submissions: bfick@cCBCmd.edu
- November 4-6, 2004: Midwest WCA, in St. Cloud, MN
Contact: Frankie Condon, Department of English, 720 Fourth Avenue South, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498. Web site: <<http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>>.
- October 19-23, 2005: International WCA, in Minneapolis, MN

Book Review

Gillespie, Paula, and Neal Lerner. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, 2nd ed. NY: Pearson Longman, 2004. Paper, 224 pp. \$25.80.

Reviewed by Harry Denny (Stony Brook University [SUNY], Stony Brook, NY)
 Rebecca Day (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA and Rock Valley College, Rockford, IL)
 Dawn Fels (University City High School, St. Louis, Missouri)

Carol Mattingly remarks on the back of the second edition of *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, "Writing centers vary greatly. It's difficult to address the needs of all in one text, and I have found none that does so as well as Gillespie and Lerner's Guide." We agree. *The Guide* addresses the needs of tutor training in any institutional setting, and the second edition adds to the strong foundations of the first.

Gillespie and Lerner revised *The Guide* with an eye toward overcoming the concerns they heard from writing center directors, professionals and other tutors. The second edition works to expand the reach of the book from conventional tutoring contexts to meet the needs of writing-across-curriculum mentoring outside writing center spaces. Gillespie and Lerner also wanted students at all levels and other writing center professionals to have a better source for insight on the field's history, debates, and theory. Besides repackaging the text to broaden its audience and scope, Gillespie and Lerner also expanded and updated recommended readings to make it effective in whole or chapter by chapter for tutoring training course adoption.

In a university setting

The new edition effectively meets the unique needs of institutions like Stony Brook University where Harry works. Stony Brook is a medium-sized public university in the New York City/Long Island suburbs. The Writing Center operates as a tutorial component of the Program in Writing & Rhetoric. Although the SBU Writing

Center has a long history, directors have had disparate experience with writing center theory and research, so staff training varied from drills on sentence-level grammar to injunctions to follow minimalist tutoring. The staff composition would also vary: some years the staff would be primarily undergraduates, other years graduate students would dominate. At present, the staff has a nice balance between advanced undergraduates and graduate students from across the disciplines. The population that uses the center also varies widely. While about sixty percent of the usage comes from the Writing Program composition courses, other sessions focus on writing from classes throughout the undergraduate and graduate curriculum. Stony Brook's proximity to New York City as a flagship SUNY institution leads to unparalleled diversity: only thirty-five percent of our tutees speak/write English as a first or home language, so non-native English speakers (NNES) (both immigrants and international students) dominate our tutorials. On top of these complications, no tutor pedagogy class is offered; as a result, staff development is a delicate dance of on-the-job training as well as meeting-based instruction and collaboration.

To respond to these competing factors — our tutees' needs, the different levels of experience among the tutors, academic and professional identification with writing center practice, diversity, a lack of a formalized academic course on writing — Harry has depended on Gillespie and Lerner to teach writing and tutoring process, ex-

pectations management, and agenda setting, and he uses chapters on these issues as introductory material for tutors to read before staff meetings. With the readings a common background, the tutors pose problem issues happening in the writing center, in video-taped sessions, or in transcripts of audio-taped tutorials. Unlike other tutor training texts, *The Allyn and Bacon Guide* is accessible to less experienced undergraduates and still challenging to graduate students who often lack coherent pedagogical training. Gillespie and Lerner talk about composition as a recursive process and tutoring as a fluid, talk-based dynamic, but their biggest intervention for Harry's tutors is their discussion of HOCs (Higher Order Concerns) and LOCs (Lower Order Concerns) and their chapter debunking myths about ESL writers. For many of the novice tutors, the impulse to dive-in, as Mina Shaughnessy would say, often results in premature treading water in the deep end of the error analysis pool. Gillespie and Lerner's discussion of the need to focus and prioritize ideas and organizational issues over sentence-level error gives the tutors a rhetoric for most situations. When sessions turn to grammar and prose problems, they also extend that reasoning to prioritize needs so that error correction becomes more manageable and less overwhelming, especially with our NNES population.

Beyond this strong foundation that carries on from the first release, the additions in the new edition complement the earlier. The chapters on writing center research and history and on the

“what if” scenarios meet gaps in Harry’s current staff training. Like attendance at regional or national tutoring conferences, the writing center foundations chapter places the tutors’ work in a larger context and conversation that makes them feel less isolated (both intellectually and affectively) and more professional. By inflecting their tutoring with an awareness of an academic rhetoric and scholarship movement, the tutors understand that their work is more integral to students’ lives than most on-campus jobs or internship experiences. Alongside that exploration of writing center thinking and doing, the “what if” work offers pragmatic suggestions for dilemmas that often arise in the Stony Brook center. The section reads more as a rapid-fire catalog and less of a deliberate engagement (as the rest of the book does), but the scenarios are still quite useful for conversational starting points in staff meetings.

In a high school setting

Several chapters from Gillespie and Lerner’s *Guide* also served as the backbone for The Writer’s Room peer coaches’ training at University City High School, an urban-suburban high school where Dawn works. The coaches, whose prior “tutoring” experience consisted of conversations with classmates about writing assignments, read selections from the *Guide* and followed them with written reflections. What they learned not only helped them adapt to their new roles as writing center coaches but also legitimized their experience.

Dawn’s coaches praised “The Tutoring Process” as being “especially helpful in explaining exactly what our job was. . . .” One section titled “The Tutor Does Not—And Does—Have To Be An Expert” lifted some of the anxiety that many of the peer coaches brought to the first training session. As many of the coaches’ reflections indicated, they felt they would have to be the expert, the standard bearer responsible not only for “the reputation of the writing

center” but also “whether the writer will return.” The chapter’s sections on “Breaking the Ice” and “Questions to Ask” helped define the coaches’ new role; especially helpful were tips on helping the writer feel comfortable and a list of session-starting questions. The coach-friendly discussion of HOCs and LOCs helped the coaches prioritize during the session. In their reflections, the coaches fluently articulated the difference between the concerns and expressed surprise at this unconventional “hierarchy of needs.” One coach wrote, “In the past, we’ve been taught to look at little, specific errors, but looking at HOCs causes us to look at the paper as a whole.” Another wrote that she wasn’t aware “writing center coaches looked at writers’ texts ‘holistically.’” As their responses show, these peer coaches learned how to work as more writer-centered tutors.

Goals for the session are further explored in “Examining Expectations.” Gillespie and Lerner ask tutors to examine their assumptions about the roles of editors, teachers, and writers as well as the tensions that exist between those roles that could affect tutoring. This chapter helped further frame the peer coaches’ growing perception of themselves as writer-centered coaches. In describing her new role, one coach wrote:

One doesn’t want to model their tutoring after personal experiences with teachers and teaching techniques because a tutor is not supposed to be an authority figure . . . who dictates [to students] what he or she needs to do to their paper A tutor with an authoritative approach shapes the writer’s work into theirs and leaves the writer with no new knowledge.

Armed with confidence and a firm sense of purpose, the coaches waded into the waters of writing center life. After their first session, they read “Reflecting on the First Session,” where they learned the importance of self-reflection. Later in the training, the

coaches discussed the “Writing Center Foundations” chapter. This chapter made the coaches aware of the academic legitimacy of their work as well as its growing body of scholarship. The knowledge of the theoretical constructs of what we do in the writing center, which this chapter provides, is also invaluable in preparing coaches to work in a post-secondary writing center.

Like Harry, Dawn found the *Guide* easy for her coaches—high school students with no pedagogical training—to access. Peer coaches found it “easy to understand and relate to” and enjoyed the “real life examples from coaches.” Gillespie and Lerner may not have had high school writing centers in mind as a potential audience for their expanded *Guide*, but its practical and comprehensive discussions of a wide range of topics related to writing center life, history, theory, and practice provided The Writer’s Room coaches their entrée into what we do and prepared them for the opportunity to experience first-hand why we do it.

As a research tool

As a graduate student working on her dissertation about tutoring D/deaf college students, Rebecca is interested in the possibilities and ways texts shape tutors. One of Rebecca’s potential research sites uses the *Guide* in tutor training, so she has an interest in examining the qualities and behaviors of a tutor trained using this text.¹

As Peter Carino writes, “The watchword in tutor training should not be nondirective peership, but flexibility” (110). A tutor who follows Gillespie and Lerner’s methods will not be a dogmatic rule-follower or editor, but will learn control, flexibility, trust, understanding, responsibility, ethical behavior, open-mindedness, and sensitivity to others’ cultures and writing processes, which are central values in writing center tutorials. Gillespie and Lerner cite Maggie, a tutor from the Marquette Writing Center, who also mentions the importance of warmth, friendliness, gentleness and

reassurance. The D/deaf students in Rebecca's study validate the need for these values in students. For them, understanding is an especially important quality for tutors to acquire, along with patience and rapport. In order to be sensitive to D/deaf students' culture, tutors should not assume cultural connections based on appearance or nationality. For other populations, such as ESL and Learning Disabled students, tutors need values that respond to their needs and learning styles. Reading the paper aloud is recommended by Gillespie and Lerner, except in the case of LD and NNES students, when that practice can cause embarrassment if reading is slow or difficult, if oral language is accent-inflected, or the student cannot rely on native speaker intuition. For LD students and other students with disabilities that involve speech or hearing or language processing, a different technique often is necessary (like placing a text on the table or on a computer screen to read together, tracing along with a pencil or a finger). For NNES students, the tutor can read aloud.

Gillespie and Lerner encourage tutors to become "writer-centered." Rather than do the work for the student, an effective tutor encourages the writer to do her own work. The tutor would focus on giving the writer techniques to use, but would be careful not to foist the same techniques wholesale on all writers. She would find the writer's thoughts to be important and interesting, and would be a good listener, "sensitive to the writer's needs and the context of any individual tutoring session" (5), making her a "strategic tutor" (6). The ideal tutor will set "a good tone for the conference and mak[e] the writer feel comfortable; know which kinds of issues to address first; be patient and listen to the entire paper." Also, she will ask open-ended questions, and use "techniques that let the writer make the decisions" (26). This tutor is a reflective tutor, who thinks about past experiences and expectations and doesn't create "inflexible rules and summary judgments" (48).

A tutor who has read *The Allyn and Bacon Guide* will avoid being an editor, an expert, or a lecturer. The tutor will ask real, readerly questions, not the type where the tutor knows the answer and the writer has to play "guess what's in the tutor's head." The tutor will learn to value active listening: "to be a careful observer and a thoughtful commentator" (59). A tutor trained in these methods will observe others tutoring and reflect on those observations. Some unique differences in this text are that the tutor will also help the writer be a better reader, the tutor will be a researcher, and the tutor will be familiar with the history and theory of writing centers, not just the practice.

Gillespie and Lerner also address feelings surrounding tutoring, mentioning joy, fulfillment, and the fact that "tutoring allows us to connect" and "tutoring can change your life if you allow it to" (9). A tutor trained by this book will be conscientious, reflective and reasonable. She will have "sensitivity, flexibility and an open mind" (185). And she will be relaxed and cool headed, able to handle what comes her way. Rebecca's research site has not yet produced any actual observations or study participants, but Dawn's and Harry's discussions and usage of *The Guide* seem to suggest positive results. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide* does not offer a substantive protocol for working with students with disabilities, but the values it extols to tutors (e.g. sensitivity, being writer-centered, responsive, etc) likely would make most tutors proactive to the needs of individuals not like themselves.

Since its first release, Harry has used *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* for on-the-job tutor training and to introduce graduate students to writing center-based composition pedagogy, and the second edition is even more useful for these purposes. Dawn used the *Guide* to complement the training program for her high school peer coaches. Rebecca analyzed it in a different way, to see if or how

training books actually do shape tutors. *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* is an exceptional text for a broad audience of writing center personnel and professionals interested in writing center pedagogy. While other foundational texts are geared to specific writing center constituencies like undergraduate peer tutors, graduate students, administrators and faculty, this book reaches everyone and provides a launching point for most interests.

End Note

¹Rebecca Day, whose research is sponsored by the IWCA Graduate Research Grant and The Rock Valley College Foundation Grant, notes that audiological deafness is indicated by the word "deaf, using lower case "d" while cultural deafness is indicated by "Deaf," capital "D." To include both, she uses the form D/deaf in this review.

Work Cited

Peter Carino. "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring" *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*. Ed. Michael Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2003.

Poetic Justice

continued from page 15

demand that the criminal courts take over. A small illustration showed an NBA athlete leaping into the air clutching a basketball, and around his ankles were thick shackles. Using the tone of reason, he'd skillfully buried a text of racism. Turning the student's paper over, I told him that before I looked at his words, we needed to discuss his thoughts. "Why?" he said, "This guy says it all." I patted the chair next to me and cleared my throat, knowing that I'd be remembering this tale with a sigh, ages and ages hence.

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TUTORS' COLUMN

Poetic justice

During my first semester as a writing tutor at a community college, I was nearly indistinguishable from the students. My eyes shone with the same desperate light they turned on me. They stared from every chair like hungry rabbits sensing night's approach, eager to record any corrections I suggested. Plowing through their paragraphs, I dug for ideas that could be propped up long enough for their slim shadows to lean all the way from the thesis statement to that holiest of phrases, "So in conclusion . . ." Since I was also once a student, I appreciated that the only thing they wanted from me was a quick-fix, and I struggled between pleasing them (which meant grabbing the pen and writing the paper) or pleasing me (which meant telling them what I'd write). At least that's how it was three years ago. Since then, I've worked through a much deeper ethical issue: how much influence should I have on their thinking?

I know exactly when and why this shift occurred. It was over a two-week period when assignments from half the professors converged on writing a response piece to an essay from *Newsweek* that supported the death penalty. The journalist wrote in tight, authoritative sentences. I could almost hear his keys rebounding as he pounded out consonant-filled declarations. It was the kind of writing that makes readers certain they've found a clear answer to a muddy problem, and my students were no exception. The last time I'd seen this assertive style, I'd been working on a paper about H. L. Mencken, an elitist who wrote that the death penalty would work nicely in curtailing violence if all death row convicts were killed.

One after another, students whipped out their final drafts and smugly announced that they were done—they just

wanted me to give-a-glance. After a cursory check, I'd slip each paper under a dusty dictionary or thesaurus and say, "Tell me what you think about the death penalty." Regardless of gender or culture, what I heard was: "This guy is right." And I would say, "How wonderful for him. Now tell me what YOU think." I was amazed at the explanations, which were brief and devoid of emotion. In a community college, it's a safe bet that most students haven't had an easy time. They're under economic stresses and time constraints, and they're usually handling multiple family responsibilities. All told, their lives are built on the hard grounds that have the potential to produce compassionate hearts. Yet to a student, there was no disagreement. As one young man said, "Let em' fry." I was speechless.

That night I stayed up and studied the *Newsweek* essay. The viewpoints of the journalist were not original: criminals know the penalties . . . recidivism rates prove . . . an eye for an eye. Yet, it had power, for individuals exposed to the piece were displaying a mob-like reaction. I deconstructed the essay, whittling it down to its ridgepole of logic. What I found was that beneath the tone of assertion, the impeccable timing, and the polish of professional rhetoric, the reader was left with . . . nothing. It was the ultimate hand-washing of responsibility. The title could well have read, "They did it too themselves, so what do you want from me?" The writer was using the punitive tone of anger to express helplessness. Students were intuitively reacting to that sensation of diminution he'd created, that sense of being puny and ineffective when complex problems overwhelm us. Internally, they seemed to be agreeing that they felt helpless; most had never even reached the point of thinking about the death penalty.

What was left now was figuring out if my personal convictions should be exposed when guiding students in these response pieces. As a practicing Roman Catholic, I believe passionately in the sanctity of all life. I'd also chosen to follow a vegetarian life-style more than thirty years ago. Believe me when I say that I'm well seasoned in the art of debate. I knew that I could knock this journalist off his cushioned seat with my views. But wasn't that an abuse of my status as a tutor? He was being paid to give his opinion, while I was being paid to look for recurring problems in English 100 papers. I could hide my views by using the all-purpose disclaimer that I was only playing devil's advocate, placing my beliefs under the dark cloak of anonymity. But late at night, alone at my desk, hunched within a shaft of light that flickered with lost mosquitoes, I knew that this time, that wasn't an option. There was more at stake here than enthusiastically persuading a student to choose Robert Frost's poem "Birches" over Eliot's "The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock," simply because I adore Frost's poetry. This might be influencing them to take my philosophical viewpoint because I was authority figure.

That was the moment when I made the distinction between my job as a writing tutor and my avocation *as a writer*. As a poet, my contract with humanity is to reveal connections that lead to truths, while accepting the caveat that no thought can be separated from the thinker. If you're going to write words, you're going to expose intimate thoughts—no matter how dispassionate you try to be. I was so concerned with concealing my own definite views that I'd forgotten the other half of the equation: students also needed to be held accountable for their ideas. We shared a commitment to explore our own, and each other's, viewpoints. I could

probe their ideas, they could probe mine, and we could then probe the articles. From now on, I wouldn't sit silently alongside of students and pretend that I had no convictions. I'd share and argue—knowing that being a Catholic vegetarian with a love for poetry is as intricately wound into my thinking as the sound of waves slapping the coastline is to the ocean.

The next morning, students were clustered outside the locked door of the Writing Center waiting for me. I was rumped with red-rimmed eyes and

mosquito-laced hair while they glowed in their magnificent sturdiness. Unlocking the door, we surged in and I immediately seized one of the few deeply satisfying chairs. A student sauntered over wearing combat boots and a military cap boldly embroidered with the words *Corpus Christi*. He handed me his paper and smugly said, "I did a response piece agreeing with this journalist. I just need you to check it over." I looked down and saw the title: *NBA Players: Nasty, Brutish Athletes*. I'd already read this piece, and I knew that it was powerfully written.

But I also knew that it started from a false premise. The author assumed that all people receive equal treatment under our system of jurisprudence. With that premise as the springboard for his logic, he targeted the unruly behavior of NBA players as an affront to the American public. He described NBA players as a group of nasty, arrogant, and brutish men with no family values. He used the always-gentle demeanor of golfers as a standard for proper athletic behavior. In his opinion, if team owners weren't going to clean up the basketball courts, then the public must

continued on page 13

What's new and/or interesting on your Web site?

WLN invites writing center folks who want to share some special feature or new material on their OWL to let us know. Send your URL, a title, and a sentence or two about what you want to share, to the editor (harrism@cc.purdue.edu).

• East Central University Writing Center

We have a new home, in just remodeled space in the former library. We're smackdab in the middle of campus, ground flour, clean and bright. The layout could be better, but it's working nicely just the same. I've thrown up a few photos at <<http://www.ecok.edu/dept/writing/>>.

Kevin Davis, East Central University, Ada, OK (kdavis@mailclerk.ecok.edu)

• Lansing Community College Writing Center

Our Writing Center at Lansing Community College was completely gutted and renovated during the summer semester 2003. In designing this new space, we focused on student needs, flexible and multi-purpose work areas, architectural creativity, warmth and color. I was thoroughly impressed when the first question our architect asked me was NOT "What do you want it to look like?" but "What do you DO in this space?" He embraced the concept of "form follows function," and we benefited in the process. The URL is <<http://www.lansing.cc.mi.us/~penningj/newwc/>>.

Jill Pennington, Lansing Community College, Lansing, MI (penningj@lcc.edu)

• Marquette University Writing Center

We put together a before-and-after Cinderella story as we moved from the margins of our university to the center of a new library. You can see it at <<http://www.mu.edu/writingcenter/newdigs.htm>>. Since we've moved here, we've added lots of in-demand evening and weekend hours, we've had to hire a lot more receptionist time, and we've had many more faculty requests to talk to classes about and give presentations on good peer review, citation, and the like. It's been great! At the IWCA/NPTWC conference in Hershey, some of my tutors heard other people arguing that we belong in the margins, and they looked at one another as if to say that we've had it both ways, and like where we are now.

Paula Gillespie, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI (Paula.Gillespie@marquette.edu)

• The University of Kansas Writing Center

Our Web site at <<http://www.writing.ku.edu/>> has photos and a video about our center. To find them, click the link labeled "Multimedia Gallery" under the writing hand photo on the main page.

Sean Ringey, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS (writing@mail.ukans.edu)

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals
October 29-31, 2004
Hackettstown, NJ
"Writing & Beyond"

Please include the following in your proposal: name and title of contact person; address, phone number, and email address; format: interactive workshop, panel discussion, presentation of paper, skits, etc.; participants and their titles; description in 200-300 words; abstract of 50 words; program equipment needed. Please send complete proposals to: The HUB: Proposal Committee, Centenary College, 400 Jefferson Street, Hackettstown, NJ 07840, phone number: 908-852-1400. Conference Web site: <<http://faculty.centenarycollege.edu/writing/conference2004.htm>>. Proposal Deadline: April 26, 2004. Notification: Summer 2004.

Writing Center Director Drew University

Drew University seeks a Director for The University Writing Center. Applicants should have a Ph.D. (ABD acceptable) in Rhetoric/Composition or a closely related field, experience teaching and tutoring writing, training in writing center or writing program administration, and a related research agenda. WAC/WID experience an advantage, The Director will be housed in the English Department, and will be responsible for developing and sustaining the mission of the Center, managing day-to-day services, training and supervising college, graduate, and theological student writing consultants, and supervising the development of an on-line writing center (OWL). The Director will also work with the Director of Composition to provide professional development and support for graduate student teachers of composition and faculty teaching writing within the disciplines in

all three schools. This is a full time, non-tenure track faculty position, including full benefits, research support, and a competitive salary. Two-year contract.

Please send a letter of application, curriculum vitae, a writing sample, a statement of philosophy regarding writing center pedagogy, an academic transcript, and at least three letters of recommendation to: Sandra Jamieson, Director of Composition, English Department, Drew University, 36 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940. Application materials (aside from recommendation letters and transcript) may be sent by email to sjamieso@drew.edu. Review of applications began March 10, 2004, and will continue until the position is filled. Drew University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer and has a strong institutional commitment to diversity. More information about Drew is available at <<http://drew.edu/>>.

THE WRITING LAB
N E W S L E T T E R

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