

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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

April, 2005

...FROM THE EDITOR...

The articles in this month's issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* offer a look at a new direction for writing centers and solutions to recurring problems. Tiffany Rousculp presents a detailed description of how writing centers are becoming integral to service-learning and moving into the community with outreach projects. In order to offer you several perspectives on a new book, Anne Raines, Judy Artz, and Susan Mueller each review Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch's book on peer review as it moves into the virtual world. Bithyah Shaparenko finds a new solution to getting peer group members to participate more actively in peer review. And Jane Bowman Smith helps us see how Donald Schön's work on reflective practitioners can guide the training of tutors.

As this academic year draws to a close and as regional writing centers begin to plan next year's conferences, please remember to have your listings included in *WLN* as soon as you have a date and a conference site. If possible, send the information to me (harrism@purdue.edu) by mid-May so that I can include it in the June conference calendar. That would be a great help to those of us who need to start budgeting now for travels next year.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Connecting the community and the center: Service-Learning and Outreach

• Tiffany Rousculp 1

Review of Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch's Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments

• Reviewed by Anne Raines, Judy Artz, and Susan Mueller 7

Tutors' Column: "Focus on Focus: How to Facilitate Discussion in a Peer Group"

• Bithyah Shaparenko 11

Tutor Training as Reflective Practice: Problem Setting and Solving

• Jane Bowman Smith 13

Conference Calendar 16

Connecting the community and the center: Service-learning and outreach

Community service is in the air. Across the country, various volunteer "corps" are on the rise—Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the new USA Freedom Corps. Educational institutions have incorporated service-learning and community outreach objectives into their mission statements, and many universities have established themselves as "community partners" in local neighborhoods. Writing centers would seem to be a natural fit for this type of work, given the collaborative and reciprocal nature of our core pedagogies.

In fact, many writing centers are taking on the responsibility to develop community service/partnerships, either directly or in collaboration with other departments/programs on campus. In October, Tamara Miles, from Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, sent in a post to the WCenter listserve looking for information on service-learning and writing centers. She explained that "[OC Tech] is developing a service-learning curriculum—and as part of the justification for building/

growing our new Writing Center, I am expected to show specifically how it will support/advance the service-learning curriculum.” Her message set off a flurry of responses which were the catalyst for this article that explores the ways writing centers are developing community outreach programs and partnerships.

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Some, like the Casper College Writing Center in Wyoming, are directly involved with the community, while others, such as the University of Missouri Kansas City Writing Center, work through service-learning initiatives on their college campuses. Still others, including the Writing Center at Ohio State University—Lima Campus, do both. Some institutions, such as Salt Lake Community College where I direct the Community Writing Center, have set up—or are working towards establishing—writing centers outside college boundaries.¹ In recognition of this movement, *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* dedicated their Fall 2004 issue to writing center outreach in which Ginger Cooper, from Casper College, wrote in her article “Building a Community Around the Writing Center,” that “writing centers are as much a community resource as libraries.”

Education and community service

These ripples of writing center outreach are, in some ways, a response to the exponential growth of service-learning and community service that has heavily influenced educational reform over the last two decades. Service-learning combines community service and learning objectives together with the intention that all partners experience change through structured opportunities for service, self-reflection and acquisition of new knowledge. Presented as a solution to decreasing academic achievement levels among K-12 and higher education students, and steadily eroding community involvement across the nation, service-learning/community outreach is on the increase. According to the report *Learning in Deed* from the National Commission on Service-Learning, “between 1984 and 1997, the proportion of high school students participating in service-learning grew from 2 percent to 25 percent” (qtd. in National Service Learning Clearinghouse, “Service Learning Is...”). The American Association of Community Colleges notes that, “half of all community colleges offer service-learning

in their curricular programs. Another 35-40 percent of colleges are interested in starting service-learning programs.” Across the nation, “more than 900 college and university presidents” make up Campus Compact, a non-profit coalition “committed to the civic purposes of higher education.”

Though not without controversy—especially in the area of mandatory community service—these service-learning initiatives are funded by a wide variety of governmental programs and private/corporate foundations. In fact, service-learning has developed steadily alongside other national community service movements for the past several decades. As the federal government established volunteer service programs such as the Peace Corps and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to Community) during the 1960s, higher education federal work study programs emerged as well—some of them devoted to community service positions. During the 1970s and 1980s, federal initiatives such as the National Center for Public Service internships, strengthened ties between education and community service. At the same time the White House established the Office of National Service and the Points of Light Foundation, in 1989-90, a coalition of service-learning grassroots organizations launched a number of national projects, including production of the *Wingspread Principles of Good Practice in Service Learning* that laid the foundation for service-learning curriculum and institutionalization (National Service Learning Clearinghouse). In the early 1990s, service-learning received official recognition and financial support from the federal government when they included the “Learn and Serve” program in the National and Community Service Act of 1990. This act, over the next few years, established the Corporation for National Service, a governmental body with the power to authorize federal grants to schools to support service-learning. Today, the Corporation for National Service is housed within the newly-established

USA Freedom Corps; and along with the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, Campus Compact, and the National Commission on Service Learning (among many others), form a nation-wide network of service-learning/community service in education programs.

Writing centers

As we will see throughout this overview, the service-learning/community outreach movement has not by-passed writing centers in K-12 and higher education institutions. However, almost all writing centers are located outside of the credit-bearing system of an institution, and service-learning is nearly always identified as a credit-bearing course with community service (volunteer work) incorporated into the learning goals of the curriculum. Even though the National Commission on Service Learning has defined service-learning as “a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (qtd. in National Service Learning Clearinghouse, “Service Learning Is . . .”)—which is clearly demonstrated by all of the writing centers I discuss below—some centers have been creatively tenacious in establishing and maintaining their innovative programs outside of the service-learning rubric. As Kathleen Shine Cain notes, in reference to a collaborative tutoring project between Merrimack College Writing Center Tutors and Lawrence School District students:²

We are not officially affiliated with Merrimack’s Stevens Service Learning Center, in part, I think, because this is not a credit-bearing program and because the students are paid. I know that some scholars confine the definition of service-learning to unpaid work . . . [However,] I would argue that this program does represent service-learning in principle . . . the Merrimack students learn as much from the Lawrence students as the

Lawrence students learn from them.

In Merrimack’s case, external grant funding established this program, but Merrimack has funded it with hard money for the past several years.

While I would argue that all of the initiatives described below should be institutionally-recognized as service-learning endeavors, I have distinguished them from each other based on their institutional definitions so readers may recognize similarities within their own institutions and the potential that may lie within them. Some programs are mediated through service-learning initiatives, while others successfully operate outside these definitions. They all respond, intentionally or not, to the national call for educational-community partnerships and are re-defining the boundaries of writing center work.

Service learning

Institutionally-approved service-learning programs can provide a structure for a writing center to establish community outreach programs (or as noted earlier—at OC Tech—can provide the necessary impetus for the administration to support the creation of the writing center itself). If a writing center can tap into an established service-learning program, its staff may be able to form innovative community partnerships that bring institutional recognition for the center and, possibly, funding. For example, the University of Missouri Kansas City Writing Center collaborated with Students in the City (the university’s service-learning office) for nearly a year to establish the “49/63 Community Narrative Project”—a service-learning project in which students interview residents from the historic neighborhood surrounding the UMKC campus and then transcribe or draft their stories into an anthologized history of the neighborhood. With start-up funding from the Faculty Fellows program administered by Students in the City, the Writing Center—directed by Thomas Ferrel—developed the overall design of the

project and now acts as the liaison between the community organization, Students in the City, faculty, and students. Writing Center tutors provide training to students in interviewing and research techniques, then assist them as they craft the narratives and compose their reflective writing responses that are required for their courses. While tutors do not receive service-learning credit, their work on the project is considered professional development and goes towards their CRLA tutor certification requirements.

As I mentioned, most service-learning takes place in credit-bearing courses. Some writing center directors have taken advantage of this system and have developed courses for their tutors that incorporate off-site tutoring into their tutor training. These courses—usually in writing center and/or composition theory and pedagogy—are typically taught by the writing center director or administrator and involve students in partnerships with K-12 institutions or community organizations. At Ohio State University—Lima Campus, tutors who take English 467, Writing and Learning—taught by Writing Center director, Doug Sutton-Ramspeck—spend two hours per week working with students in the city’s high school or middle schools. In the St. Cloud State University Pen Pal Project, future and current Writing Center tutors in Frankie Condon’s Writing Center Theory and Practice course exchanged letters with first and second grade children at Lincoln Elementary School. After sending seven to ten letters to one another over the course of a semester, the tutors travel to Lincoln to work with their pen pals on a writing project. Condon notes the reciprocity of such work when she says, “Most interestingly and importantly to me, the Pen Pal Project has made possible a more reflective conversation about a writing center ethos and praxis that might be characterized by compassion, humility, and responsiveness.”

Sometimes, a writing center theory course can establish that the writing center itself is the “community partner” in a service-learning project. At Marquette University, Paula Gillespie’s English 192 course prepares tutors for their work in the Writing Center. This four-credit service-learning course requires that students contribute 20 hours per semester to the Writing Center. In addition, at St. Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, Ann E. Green taught a service-learning Writing Fellows course for several years in which tutors served both in the Writing Center and off-campus. Tutors divided their required 30 hours of service (per semester) between the Writing Center and different off-campus locations, including an urban K-8 school and adult literacy and English as a Second Language programs. According to Green, “[Tutors] report that they get much more hands-on tutoring experience from the [service-learning] experience, have an easier time directly addressing differences (race, class, gender, etc.) and must deal with global issues more directly and sooner (the differences in age, etc. sometimes make it easier not to focus on grammar and to address social concerns).”

Other writing centers are collaborating partners in service-learning programs, rather than facilitators or participants themselves. Many writing centers, like OC Tech, market themselves as resources for the reflective writing requirements found in most, if not all, service-learning courses. Also, some writing centers officially collaborate with other departments to create a multi-layered resource for students taking on service-learning writing projects for community organizations. This type of collaboration is found in Michigan State University’s Service Learning Writing Project—as described in the monograph “Writing in the Public Interest”—and at the University of Pittsburgh’s Public and Professional Writing Program. According to Jean Grace, Director of the PPW program and Associate Director of the Writing Center, “[these] initiatives in-

troduce the Writing Center to students and make it easier for them to come and work with a consultant one-on-one. . . . We also benefit from expanding the way students think about us—we get to be more of a center for writers of all kinds and less of a fix-it shop.” If an institution actively supports service-learning, either method of collaboration—official or unofficial—can be a somewhat straightforward way for directors to spotlight the writing center as a valuable campus-wide resource.

Community outreach

Writing centers also engage with the community in a myriad of ways outside of institutionally-defined service-learning initiatives. Such programs often require additional advocacy or external funding for their creation and maintenance, such as the Merrimack-Lawrence collaboration described above. However, as these programs demonstrate, working outside institutional definitions of service-learning can allow them to respond usefully to their local community needs and provide meaningful learning experiences for their tutors.

Some writing centers, especially those in high schools and community colleges, have opened their doors to the communities surrounding their institutions through drop-in assistance and focused writing projects. According to Pamela Childers, “Many secondary school writing centers involve the community with programs for parents.” The Caldwell Writing Center, under her direction at the McCallie School in Tennessee, sponsored a writing project for parents, alums and students in response to September 11th and then published the writing on their Web site. Childers notes that “many [secondary school writing centers] offer workshops for parents on working with their children on college application essays, writing business letters, and creating a good resume. Many also offer creative writing workshops, writing groups, evening readings, etc.” For example, in Salt Lake City, the West

High School Family Literacy Center provides night-time ESL classes for parents and community members as well as family reading and writing projects.

At Casper College in Wyoming, director Ginger Cooper explains that the Writing Center works with “firemen, police officers, graduate students, and creative writers” on a variety of writing tasks. Their center works with approximately 45 non-students per year, most for multiple writing sessions. At Johnson County Community College in Kansas City, Writing Center Director Ellen Mohr states that opening the doors to the community is within their college’s mission as it “notes service to community.” The JCCC Writing Center sees a similar number of out-of-school writers as Casper College and also fields about ten to fifteen calls a day on its Grammar Hotline. Other centers, such as the Purdue On-line Writing Lab, maintain websites through which community members can e-mail questions about their writing to tutors.³

Certainly, it can be a challenge to open the writing center’s doors to the community, especially when funding is tight and supporting student writers is the main concern. However, Cooper argues that her decision to open the doors to the community is a “marketing strategy” for the center and a “recruitment effort” for the college. She explains that, “Wyoming puts forth an effort to combat poverty by promoting higher education,” and “when the community consistently sees a college entity participating or offering services, the community becomes more comfortable with the idea that the college can be an asset.” In other words, an argument can be made that surrounding communities of state-subsidized institutions may feel more inclined to support higher education funding if some of their services were available to them beyond enrolling in, and paying for, credit-bearing courses. If demand became too high, a writing center could limit non-student appointments to a small percentage of those available in order to meet student needs and improve the college’s image in the community.

Similar to working within service-learning programs as described above, several writing centers lead and/or partner in established community outreach/education programs, such as the National Writing Project. While the majority of NWP programs are housed within academic departments (Education, English Education, English), some writing centers—such as those at Colorado State University and Michigan State University—are the leading higher education partner in the successful K-12 writing education program. According to Janet Swenson, Director of the MSU Writing Center and the Red Cedar Writing Project, “Everyone [in the Writing Center is involved:] the director, associate director, outreach facilitator, grad writing consultants, undergrad writing consultants, office administrator.” Other programs can provide a partnering opportunity for writing centers as well. At Presbyterian College in Laurens County, South Carolina, Jill Frey coordinates their Writing Center’s involvement in CHAMPS: Communities Helping, Assisting, and Motivating Promising Students. Through this program, the Writing Center tutors, coordinator, and English Department faculty volunteers participate in an annual writing workshop provided for at-risk students in grades six through twelve. Finally, disciplinary internships can be an opportunity for writing center outreach. At OSU-Lima, two tutors who are English majors, are interning at a local high school for college credit and are working with the school to set up a writing center there.

Other writing centers reach out to their communities through more targeted, though no less community-based, projects. At Oregon State University, the Writing Center sponsors the Craft of Writing lecture series which “give[s] students, faculty, and members of the Corvallis community an insider’s look at the process of professional writing and the issues professional writers face.” This series, supported by funding from the Oregon

State Student Association, are open to both the campus and the community. Director Lisa Ede notes that the requirement for this funding is that students organize the lecture series; therefore, this project is the tutors’ responsibility, and they gain valuable skills and knowledge along the way. At OSU—Lima, the Writing Center sponsors a writing contest each year for local high school students. Funded through the contributions of two Optimist organizations, tutors are paid to organize the contest and to assist in the selection process. Finally, at The Evergreen State College in Washington, the institutional priority on community activism spurred director Sandra Yannone to work with her tutors on a community service project each year. The Writing Center partners with a local organization and holds benefits—mostly readings of student work—to raise money and resources for that organization. Last year, they worked with Books to Prisoners (a prison literacy program), and this year are working with a literacy project that works with incarcerated youth. They also post information on the organization in the Writing Center to raise awareness about it in their student population.

Conclusion

Writing centers are clearly engaged in the movement towards educational/community partnerships that is reflected in the Campus Compact’s “Presidents’ Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education”: “[We challenge] higher education to re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic idea . . . to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities” (Erlich and Hollander). K-12 institutions are also taking up the call in droves to merge community service with their students’ education. However, writing centers, often near or at the bottom of institutional funding priorities, can find that their efforts to develop community partnerships are either not supported—or even

noticed—by those in administration or their home departments.

To meet these challenges, some writing centers align themselves with emerging or established service-learning programs, while others ground their efforts into their institutional mission statements or highlight the positive PR that their work brings to the college or school as whole. Still others build the time that they and their tutors spend on community partnerships into professional development tracks, or seek external funding as philanthropic and corporate foundations prefer to support partnerships—such as those between education and community organizations—over single-entity programs. Without a doubt, the directors and tutors described in this article have continued the tradition of creatively moving their centers forward, and are innovative models of how a writing center can support the learning goals of students and, now, of the communities that surround them.

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Endnotes

¹ Please see “Into the City We Go: Establishing the SLCC Community Writing Center,” in *Writing Lab Newsletter* 28. 6 (Feb, 2003):11-13.

² This program is described in depth in DeCiccio, “‘I Feel a Power Coming All Over Me with Words’: Writing Centers and Service Learning,” in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* 23.7 (March, 1999):1-6.

³ Additionally, according to Mike Palmquist, in an e-mail to the author (December 3, 2004), the newly-launched on-line Writing Studio at the Colorado State University Writing Center, plans “to develop resources specifically for community literacy initiatives and similar projects.” The CSU Writing Studio can be found at <<http://writing.colostate.edu/studio/>>.

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Tutor training as reflective practice

(continued from page 15)

where. And the thirty minutes seemed more like seconds."

It's a pleasure to watch interns grow and change from students to tutors over the course of the semester. Seeing this growth in Schön's terms can be helpful; his work provides answers to some of the ongoing challenges interns—and those of us who train them—can face. Most interns learn to interpret the messy reality of a tutorial and to separate the essential elements—those that must be dealt with—from those that can be safely ignored. They learn to set problems in which they are involved and to solve them in collaboration with student writers. The scenario card game and

their ongoing reflection help them to see that some of the experienced tutor's "secret knowledge" is not, after all, a compilation of facts, rules, and a "how to" list but rather an analytical and interpretive skill. What we generally have accepted as best practice in training tutors (observing tutorials, role-playing, tutoring in a mentored situation, writing about learning, conferring) is actually well-grounded in Schön's theory. And his theory about learning enables us to teach and to understand our interns' learning processes more effectively.

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Book Review

Breuch, Lee-Ann Kastman. *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. (Hardcover, \$39.00)

Reviewed by Anne Raines (University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR)

Overview

As indicated by its title, *Virtual Peer Review* by Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch provides an in-depth examination and exploration of virtual peer review. The author begins the discussion with an extended definition of virtual peer review by examining the differences between virtual peer review and face-to-face tutorials, emphasizing the importance of written response in place of oral response. Focused primarily on virtual peer review in the classroom environment, the book covers computer-based instruction, current attitudes toward integrating technology into composition courses, and possibilities for virtual peer review beyond the classroom.

How might this book prove useful?

The author devotes a great deal of space and energy to defining and characterizing virtual peer review. For readers searching for information dealing with all aspects of virtual peer review, the book will be a good resource. The author defines and characterizes virtual peer review by comparing it to the familiar, face-to-face peer review. Yet in this comparison, many secondary issues inherent in virtual peer review surface, including integrating of the concept of technological literacy into composition pedagogy, enlarging the meaning of *discourse* to include written communication, and broadening the context of peer review to incorporate differences in time, space, and interaction. The author argues convincingly that virtual review does not alter the sound pedagogical principles associated with peer review; it merely changes the practice of those principles to a written form expressed in a virtual environment.

In examining these differences between the two types of peer review, the author defines terms clearly and con-

tributes to the body of vocabulary available to composition scholars for use in discussing virtual peer review and, in a broader sense, computers and composition. Breuch asserts that as computers become an integral part of composition pedagogy, language used to discuss the practices in place must evolve to incorporate the “abnormal discourse” involved with virtual peer review so that in the long run, virtual peer review and the discourse associated with its theory and practice are familiar terms to writing pedagogy.

Included in the extended definition of virtual peer review is a discussion of attitudes toward computer-based writing instruction. Breuch views virtual peer review as a lens for examining these attitudes. While she recognizes the difficulties in transitioning to a pedagogy that incorporates computers into teaching composition, she points out that reviewing our own reliance on computers—as we word-process, publish, and access the internet for information and e-mail—brings the relationship between working with words and computers into clear focus. Succinctly, we write with computers. Breuch hypothesizes that many writing instructors resist virtual peer review because they define peer review as a “speech-based instructional activity” (55) and draw distinctions between “literacy and orality” preferring “strong-text literacies” (75). Enlarging the discourse regarding peer review to include written feedback as well as oral feedback will help to alleviate the perception of peer review as an activity that must take place only in the classroom—hence, the book’s value as a contribution to the discourse surrounding virtual peer review. Breuch also examines negative attitudes toward technology resulting in challenges to

virtual peer review. She concludes that “selecting appropriate technology, discovering the frustration factor, and identifying attitudes about technology” contribute to the overall experience of virtual peer review (103). Careful planning and conscientious implementation of virtual peer review are integral to its success.

For writing instructors interested in incorporating virtual peer review into their instruction, the text discusses the importance of clearly defined writing goals and their subsequent governing of choices and uses of technology. To illuminate these theoretical concepts, the text offers several scenarios illustrating how virtual peer review can be implemented as an instructional activity. In addition, Appendix A in the text, “Peer Review and Technology Instructions,” as well as “Suggestions for Implementing Virtual Peer Review” (Figure 27), may prove useful to an instructor incorporating virtual peer review in composition courses. The author emphasizes that successful virtual peer review requires thorough planning, clear identification of goals, informed technological choices, and careful responses by the reviewers.

In addition to examining virtual peer review in the context of the classroom, the text explores implications of virtual peer review outside the classroom. Of particular interest for *WLN* readers is the discussion of virtual peer review as it relates to online writing centers. Breuch asserts that providing virtual peer review in online writing centers expands the use of technology from a resource-only focus, where information about writing is available in the form of Web links or handouts, to an activity focus where technology supports tutoring. Continuing, Breuch

points out that by offering virtual peer review, online writing centers provide another type of writing assistance—online tutoring. She lists increasing convenience for access to tutoring, additional options for assistance, and reaching students who otherwise might not utilize the writing center tutoring services as logical results when writing centers allow “pedagogy to drive technology” (109). Similarly, writing-across-the-curriculum is another option for implementing virtual peer review—especially in writing intensive courses. Again, Breuch cautions that careful planning is a key element to success.

A few drawbacks

Unless the reader is interested in incorporating virtual peer review into the classroom environment or scholarship associated with computers and composition, the book may tend to drag because the author has included much how-to information and current scholarship on the subject which make for slow reading. That is not to say the information is unnecessary, given the author’s stated purpose of adding to the body of scholarship available regarding virtual peer review and the vo-

cabulary for discussing it. As director of our writing center’s online tutoring service which operates using virtual review, I was especially interested in the topic; however, I was disappointed that so much of the book is devoted to classroom application and not writing centers. The three pages devoted to writing center application of virtual peer review are more an affirmation of what our center currently practices than a resource for improvement. While I found it comforting that our online service is in-line with the author’s perceptions, I wished for more information regarding tutor training for virtual review and refining current practices. For a writing center considering development of an OWL that offers virtual review, the section addressing online writing centers would be useful when exploring technological options and rationalizing the need for online review.

Favorite aspects

The book is proof that the body of scholarship related to computers in composition, and specifically virtual review, is a growing area. Breuch articulates a salient point: as teachers of

writing our perspectives must be broader to accommodate new technologies available to our students. More specifically, we must broaden our understanding of peer review to include the “abnormal discourse” inherent in computer-mediated communication. Just as riding a horse and driving a car are both forms of transportation, each requiring vastly different skills to get the rider from point a to point b, virtual peer review and peer review require separate skills and actions to be effective. Breuch correctly argues that to expect a seamless transfer from face-to-face review to computer-mediated review is a mistake. At a time when many resist the leap from face-to-face tutoring to virtual tutoring touting the drawbacks when computer-mediated communication does not measure up to face-to-face standards, Breuch pulls together a variety of research examining the dynamic nature of communication in virtual environments. Her book and its extensive works cited section are good reference points for becoming familiar with current theory regarding a traditional face-to-face activity being performed in the virtual environment.

Reviewed by Judy Arzt (Saint Joseph College, West Hartford, Connecticut)

When Muriel Harris’s solicitation appeared on WCenter, the writing center listserv, for reviews of Lee-Anne Kastman Breuch’s *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments*, I could not resist. The prospect bridged two long-standing interests: writing center practice and computer technology. An examination copy arrived early summer, and its simple black-and-white cover suggested a straightforward text. A glance at the table of contents, however, proved me wrong—sitting in my lap was a book filled with a review of theory in the field of peer review.

Skimming the text, I was struck by the excessive number of references to others’ work. Within this slim volume

were tributes to virtually everyone who has published in the field of peer review as well as collaborative learning theory. The 13-page bibliography represented nearly a tenth of the text.

I was impressed by Breuch’s penchant for prefacing her own theory-making with the works of others. A quick appreciation set in for Breuch’s genuine scholarship, as I realized what I had in my hands was not summer, pool-side reading. For those searching for myriad theory related to the role of peer review in the classroom, this book answers that call. On the other hand, if one’s focus is on online tutoring, not classroom peer review, this book holds less value. Yet, because many in the field of writing center work teach, or will teach, and because peer review is

well-entrenched in the composition pedagogy, Breuch’s work is worth a look.

Breuch explains her title by way of defining virtual peer review “as the activity of using computer technology to exchange and respond to one another’s writing, for the purpose of improving writing” (10). The text is steeped in socio-linguistics coupled with collaborative-learning theory. Breuch contends that peer review has a long tradition in oral dialogue and questions the migration to an online environment where collaborators do not meet face-to-face.

Kenneth Bruffee’s work in collaborative learning peppers the text, and, at times, dominates as the voice defining

Breuch's treatise. On the first page of Chapter 1, Breuch acknowledges Bruffee seven times. Borrowing from Bruffee, she asserts that what distinguishes conventional peer review from its virtual counterpart is "talk." Initially, Breuch sees the missing "talk" in virtual space as a shortcoming. Later, she finds its replacement with written text a plus and concedes that traditional peer review entails a modicum of written text. The classic peer review, Breuch says, involves a triad of talk, interaction, and writing. In citing Bruffee, she lauds the written component as a time in academia when students write for a real audience and purpose. Yet, Breuch spends considerable energy on distinguishing face-to-face review from its virtual iteration by claiming the former relies on oral tradition.

Breuch, overall, finds the loss of "talk" in virtual space unsettling. Yet, for non-auditory learners, oral peer reviews can be frustrating. More on learning theory, in fact, would be a boon to any text examining the shift of peer review to the online environment. Further, assuming that peer review as conducted in the conventional classroom is talk-focused establishes a false dichotomy. In-class peer review sessions can rely on written transcripts, particularly when led by instructors trained in the approach. In fact, rich feedback is quite possible when talk is withheld or curtailed in favor of some written record of the session. Because Breuch slights research supporting written peer review in-class, when she as-

serts that live and virtual peer review are antithetical, her argument falters. When in-class review contains a significant written component, the distinguishing features between the two reduce to: (1) physical versus online space and (2) handwritten versus typed response. These matters are ceremonial rather than substantial.

For the writing center community, Breuch devotes a few pages in one chapter, late in the book, and a few lines, earlier on, to that audience. When she turns to the role of online technology for tutoring, her comments focus, not surprisingly, on the oral tradition of the writing center. Moreover, the absence of coffee pots, candy dishes, and plants—those elements that make writing centers warm and fuzzy places—concerns Breuch. Yet, she recognizes the value of online environments for the dissemination of information, citing Purdue's venerable OWL.

The transcripts that Breuch includes of online peer reviews—done by students in classes—suggest do's and don't's for online environments. Breuch's concludes, based on an examination of these documents, that students need training to conduct effective virtual peer reviews. Just like conventional peer review, students need to be pushed beyond merely saying a classmate's work looks fine. Furthermore, students need training on using the tools inherent to the technology. Readers who have used online peer review with students will be able to extri-

cate strengths and weaknesses in the facsimiles that Breuch supplies.

In essence, Breuch offers her readership an array of research and theory to inform practice. Much of the theory on collaborative learning and social constructivism is a helpful refresher. It is intriguing to witness Breuch spin a web of references in support of her views. In that regard, her text resembles a doctoral dissertation, citing as many experts, theorists and researchers as possible. Old names in the field of computers and writing, like Eric Hobson and Cynthia Selfe, surface, as do established social interaction theorists, like Anne Ruggles Gere. Early pioneers in the design of Web-based programs like Commonsense are not slighted. And, of course, trusted names in the field of writing center work like Muriel Harris are paid homage. There is good coverage all around, and one of the most remarkable things about this text is the number of names dropped, reflected by this lean monograph's exhaustive bibliography. For those immersed in a dissertation in the field, the compendium of resources is a jewel.

On her website at Iowa State University, Breuch observes "computer-assisted instruction is most meaningful when it encompasses instructional activities central to a course. In the case of composition, peer review is such an activity." With the field of online writing technology expanding, *Virtual Peer Review* offers the writing center scholar a window into emerging pedagogy.

Reviewed by Susan Mueller (St. Louis College of Pharmacy, St. Louis, MO)

All of us involved in teaching writing have at some time pondered the massive changes that the Internet has brought for students. Research has come to be synonymous with Google searches for many, and documentation—never a picnic—has become a nightmare as students have ventured into an ever-wider, ever-stranger online world where anything goes. I

think all of us have longed for a book that would guide us in teaching students to use online technology and at the same time teach fidelity to traditional academic standards of excellence, honesty, and clarity. Alas, Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch's book, *Virtual Peer Review: Teaching about Writing in Online Environments*, isn't that book.

Breuch well might argue that such was not her intention. She is focusing exclusively on peer review, the activity of having students read and comment on each other's work. She is envisioning this as a completely virtual exchange with no face-to-face involvement at all. She asks many of the right questions—does pedagogy drive technology or vice versa, for example. Her

focus, however, is largely theoretical and steeped in references to scholarly work. It is abstract, and the problem we face is very concrete.

The audience for this book is not writing centers. It is teachers of composition, as she tells us. Within that, however, it is that stripe of teachers concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of online work in the scholarship of composition and rhetoric.

Breuch discusses her own class's experiences with virtual peer review in the middle chapters, the most interesting part of this book. She doesn't whitewash this for us; she candidly tells us about the challenges—expected and unexpected—that she encountered. Breuch observes that online writing is ubiquitous among students, and virtual peer review happens anyway without being formally integrated into the curriculum. However, her students' virtual exchanges are more primitive than she (or we) expected. In her class "reviews that were completed using e-mail were typically shorter and less rich than handwritten peer reviews. For example, handwritten peer reviews reflected a variety of comments ranging from editing to questions to suggestions. In contrast, the most common type of comment found in e-mail peer reviews was that of praise—"complimenting the author on something that was well done." Later on that same page, she goes on, "For example, handwritten peer reviews included comments written in margins, between lines of texts, and at the end of a student paper. In contrast, all e-mail peer reviews except one reflected only an end comment—a separate e-mail message written to the student writer" (107). Further, her description of the pitfalls of the software is mind-boggling. The students found the technology to be unusable, and Breuch discusses at length the issues of usability and the absolute necessity for training, both in the software and in the virtual peer review

process. Her case is strong, and it is hard to disagree with her reasoning, but this raises other issues. For one thing, the teacher must understand the software well enough to anticipate the dilemmas students will encounter. This assumes great familiarity with that software and with computer/usability issues in general, which is often not the case. (Teachers of writing are teachers of writing. They may not also be teachers of computer-based learning or technology.) It also raises issues about the time and expertise required for both software training and virtual peer review training.

Breuch states, "Although virtual peer review shares the same pedagogical assumptions as traditional peer review, the fact that it occurs in virtual environments means additional factors of time, space, and interaction suddenly become important. . . . Certainly, the differences of time, space, and interaction suggest the potential of virtual peer review to be an extremely efficient, convenient, and inexpensive way to conduct the business of writing" (38). She goes on to talk about the benefits of both synchronous and asynchronous communication. In short, writers don't have to be in the same place or writing at the same time to exchange insights or suggestions. While this seems efficient, it is also harder for a teacher to monitor, mostly for the same reason: it isn't taking place at the same time or in the same place. A teacher can require printouts of transactions, but these are after the fact, in other words, after any damage is already done. Training again emerges as an issue: training to use the technology, but also training to more fully and carefully express the reader's thoughts and reactions. Although "real time" interactions approximate conversation, they do not recreate it.

These issues—time, space, and the necessity for new, specialized training—segue back to the writing center. While virtual peer review may (or may

not) be more efficient for classroom teachers, it is less efficient for writing centers. We do it out of necessity because our students are geographically dispersed, or because they come to class at night and work in the daytime, or in some other way are prevented from using our normal services. It takes longer to read and comment on a paper online than it does in person, substantially longer. Practices such as color-coding error patterns or using strikethroughs as editing marks can be visually effective, but they take much longer for the reader/commenter to do than a face-to-face discussion. When those readers are hired writing center staff, it means more time on the clock per paper. We also assume, when we hire tutors, that they know something about good writing versus bad. This doesn't necessarily mean that they understand how to mark and comment clearly in writing on students' problems. We may still be looking at global issues, but we are looking at them in a more restricted context. This becomes another training demand for us, one that competes with others (theory, procedures) for the finite amount of training time we have.

Virtual Peer Review: Teaching and Learning about Writing in Online Environments is an interesting book, largely because its author is out on the frontier beckoning us to join her. Is it an enticing offer? While virtual peer review may well be securely grounded in the theory of composition pedagogy, its practice seems to be fraught with difficulties. Faculty may read it and make their own evaluations. Writing centers, compelled to join the online world of paper review, are faced with a set of problems that Breuch only hints at in this book. We need to find our own norms and solutions.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Focus on focus: How to facilitate discussion in a peer group

Currently I am a writing fellow at Penn State Berks. My role is similar to that of a writing tutor, but I work with a peer group of three students in a basic writing class, rather than one-to-one with a student in the writing center. When I first began working with the students in my writing group, we would start each session with the author reading his or her paper out loud. Each member of the writing group would follow along on his or her own copy with a pen in hand to mark up the paper and be prepared to discuss it when the author finished reading. After the author read the paper, the students were supposed to start off the discussion of the paper by saying something positive about the paper and then pointing out something confusing or missing. However, group sessions did not proceed well with such a broad beginning for a discussion. I noticed that the students did not mark up the paper, nor did they know what to say about the paper after it was read. They would start a discussion by mentioning the positive aspects of the paper in monosyllables. If I could get one student to say something good about the paper, the other students would say that was the aspect of the paper they liked also. When I asked each student to say something different, they would offer general remarks, such as "I liked the last sentence of the paper. It was short and to the point."

I realized that starting off each session by mentioning a positive aspect of the paper did not help the students begin conversing about the papers. Because it seemed too difficult for the students to launch a discussion by mentioning positive aspects of the paper or unclear paragraphs when they

weren't even sure about their topic, I decided to give them an easy starting point. After a little thought I adapted a strategy from *Tutoring Writing* by Donald A. McAndrew and Thomas J. Reigstad. In their book, McAndrew and Reigstad say that the "thesis/focus should be the first thing on the tutor's agenda" (43). They advise tutors to start each tutoring session by asking the writer to summarize his or her paper in one sentence. Since I am a writing fellow, not a writing tutor, I needed to adapt their strategy to fit a writing group. I decided to have each group member, ending with the author, point out or explain the focus of the paper.

At our next group meeting, after Jon finished reading his paper on the college transition, I asked Mike to tell us the focus of Jon's paper in his own words. Mike said that he wasn't sure, but he thought the main point of Jon's paper was about succeeding in college. Then Jessica said that she thought the focus of Jon's paper was that the transition to college does not have to be hard. I asked Jon to tell us his opinion, since he was the author. He said, "I don't think my focus is clear. I want my paper to be about important steps that make the transition to college easier so a student has a better chance of succeeding in college. Does anyone have any suggestions for a thesis sentence for me?" After a couple of suggestions from his peers, Jon came up with a really good thesis sentence for his paper. He decided that it would be, "Proper planning, organization, and preparation make the college transition easier for a first-year student." And before I could even tell him to write the sentence on his paper so he would not forget it, he started writing it down.

I applied this strategy of identifying and explaining the main point to each paragraph of the paper. This helped to continue the discussion among the students. For example, Jon said that the focus of his second paragraph was that planning is a big step in a student's transition from high school to college. I then asked the students how the focus of the second paragraph supported or could be used to support the focus of the paper. Jessica said that she liked Jon's idea in the second paragraph that students should visit various colleges to find the perfect campus. She said, though, that Jon could improve the paragraph by telling why finding a perfect campus makes the transition to college easier. Mike suggested that Jon could develop the paragraph more by adding an example about a student who did not attempt to visit colleges until late in the school year. Finally, the student just applied to a campus without visiting it and then did not do well in college because he hated the college he was attending.

Before I initiated this strategy, I would have to force my students to write their peers' suggestions down. They would always tell me that they didn't know what to write, even if I told them to write exactly what they just said. I would also have to ask a lot of questions to get the students in my writing group to talk about anything. However, after I asked my group to talk about the focus, all of them came up with really good suggestions. They were discussing the paper so much that I hardly had to say anything. I was amazed at how eagerly the students conversed about the paper, giving each other very good advice for revisions. I also noticed that the students didn't

just criticize each other's papers. Once I got the students to explore the focus of the paper, they would contrast the bad parts of the paper with the good parts.

I think the strategy of focusing on the focus facilitates discussion because, for the first time, these students are examining the whole text to find the meaning. Since these students are only in a basic writing class, maybe they have always read the way they write—sequentially,

without constantly reflecting on how each succeeding paragraph adds to the meaning of the text as a whole. As the students in my writing group continually think back to the focus of the paper, they are reading their peers' papers to understand the meaning of the paper, rather than just to get information. By centering the group discussion around the focus of the paper, I eventually helped my group discuss not only the main idea of the paper, but also the

organization, development, clarity, and successes of each paper.

Bithyah Shaparenko
Penn State University—Berks Campus
Reading, PA

Work Cited

McAndrew, Donald A. and Thomas J. Reigstad. *Tutoring Writing*.
Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2001.

Director, Center for Academic Excellence Santa Fe Community College

Salary maximum: \$45,891

Hiring department: Academic Support & Student Retention

Person hiring: Mildred Lovato

SFCC required training: All new hires are required to complete a 20-hour new employee orientation program their first week of employment.

Education and experience: Master's degree and a minimum of two (2) years of higher education teaching experience as a full or part-time instructor and two (2) years of supervisory experience required. Must also have at least two (2) years experience with diverse populations, faculty, and staff members. At least one year of experience working with computer technology is required. Experience in providing tutoring and tutor training in an institution of higher education is preferred. Bilingual (English/Spanish) desired.

Skills and knowledge: Understands current teaching methodologies and diverse learning styles in mathematics, science, and writing as well as with current research about tutoring, writing labs, and supplemental instruction. Ability to effectively communicate with information technology professionals. Sensitivity to and understanding of diverse academic, socio-economic, cultural, special needs, and ethnic backgrounds of community college students.

Summary: Under general supervision, provides leadership in developing and maintaining tutoring and supplemental instruction programs aimed at increasing student success. Also responsible for working closely with the Office of Information Technology and the CIO to ensure that SFCC's open computer labs are staffed with lab assistants who have the skills and training to support student learning, and that policies and procedures implemented in SFCC's open computer labs meet the needs of the students. Works with faculty, staff, and administrators across disciplines, departments, and divisions to provide academic support programs that enhance students' learning experiences.

Tutoring Center Coordinator West Virginia University

West Virginia University's Department of English invites applications for a newly created, full-time, non-tenure track position to develop and manage the activities of a Tutoring Center that will support students enrolled in University writing courses. The person we hire will supervise writing tutors (graduate assistants and undergraduate peer tutors) and will also teach composition. The initial appointment is for 3 years.

Requirements: Master's or doctoral degree in English or closely related field; experience teaching composition; and knowledge of tutoring and tutoring centers. We welcome administrative or faculty development experience; additional expertise in English as a second language a plus.

Application: Cover letter and c.v.; brief statement of teaching philosophy; three letters of reference; and a brief (10-15 page) portfolio of teaching and/or administrative materials. Address: Professor Laura Brady, Tutoring Coordinator Search Committee, Department of English, PO Box 6296, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506-6296. E-mail applications are also welcome: Laura.Brady@mail.wvu.edu.

Deadline: Review of applications begins March 25, 2005, and will continue until the position is filled. For more information, please visit our Web site: <<http://www.as.wvu.edu/english/>>.

Tutor training as reflective practice: Problem setting and solving

For those of us who train tutors, one of the most significant challenges we face is helping the “tutors-in-training” (called “interns” at my center, and a term which I will use throughout to avoid confusion with experienced tutors) to begin to think like tutors rather than like students. Interns need to see us as “reflective practitioners” whose engagement in the actual work of tutoring serves both as a model and a guide for understanding and improving their own practice rather than simply as “teachers.” What is it, exactly, that makes it so difficult for interns to stop seeing themselves as “students” and to think and write their ways into the tutor’s role, one of authority and agency? And what exactly occurs as interns progress along the path of experimentation and learning to gain confidence and competence? We can find answers in Donald Schön’s work on reflective practice and his theories of problem setting and problem solving.

At Winthrop University, we are fortunate in that we have an academic, credit-bearing class that prospective tutors must take in order to work in our center. The “lab” portion of the class entails five weeks of observation in the center, five weeks of tutoring with a mentor present for each tutorial, and for those who qualify, five weeks of taking their own appointments. In the lecture and discussion part of the class, two strategies have proven to be very useful in furthering the growth from student to tutor. The first of these strategies is the “scenario card game,” which we use throughout the semester as a means to react to and synthesize the course readings with real-life situations that have occurred in our center. The other is a reflective writing assignment—modeled on Schön’s work—that reveals how students gradually set more complex problems for them-

selves as they “grow” from student to tutor over the course of the semester. In this essay, I plan to review Schön’s discussion of problem setting and how what he calls the “reflective practitioner” both thinks about and solves the problems he or she establishes. Then, I will relate Schön’s idea of problem setting to tutor training. Finally, I will discuss how the two strategies mentioned above can be used to help interns progress from “student” to “tutor,” a shift in both identity and worldview.

Donald Schön’s *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, published twenty years ago, was an integral part of a new way of looking at the classroom—how both teachers and students reflected on their thinking, learning, and teaching or being taught as well as the classroom itself. The importance of this approach is demonstrated by the three conferences hosted by NCTE in the 1990’s as well as by many books and articles that apply Schön’s work to the classroom and to writing instruction. However, what I am particularly interested in here is his work on the professional’s (what he calls the “experienced practitioner’s”) ability to analyze and interpret reality in order to understand the problems relevant to his or her field. In this work, Schön describes the results of “Technical Rationality” on education, arguing that “professional practice [has become] a process of problem *solving*” (39). He then states that this view is too simplistic:

But with this emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem *setting*, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen. In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens.

They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense. (40)

Schön does not specifically discuss writing and writing instruction, let alone tutoring, but we can apply what he argues here to the often troubling or puzzling tutorial in order to understand how the skillful tutor operates. Schön goes on to describe the nature of the practitioner’s problem setting:

When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the “things” of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we *name* the things to which we will attend and *frame* the context in which we will attend to them. (40)

Schön also argues that the practitioner does not always know in advance exactly how the problem, once set, will be solved because each problem is unique; when we are experienced in solving certain kinds of problems, we may in fact mentally rehearse a plan for action, but we also display a different kind of knowledge that does not rely on planning (51). This “knowing and acting” is called “reflecting-in-action” by Schön, and of course this reflecting-in-action causes considerable concern for interns in the initial phases of training: they often hope that we can give them a script, a specific set of instructions, a sort of “how to” manual of tutoring. The idea that we tutor by

somehow gauging each situation and responding to it almost intuitively can be frightening. Schön also explains that skillful action reveals a “knowing more than we can say” (51). Thus, the act of setting and then solving problems is constantly creative and educative; one develops expertise from the act of manipulating and reshaping old knowledge to create something new. But interns who are just beginning to tutor have not yet acquired the knowledge and need experience before they can realize this expertise within their own actions.

Schön believes that teachers have an important guiding role as their students deal with what he calls the “messy reality” of their fields, set their own problems, and then confer with their teachers about the problem framing they have accomplished; yet he argues that there are serious limitations to our ability to teach our students what we know. As successful practitioners, we have learned to manipulate reality effectively, but our skillful practice is interwoven with our knowledge and cannot be described or shown directly to students (Schön 271). Our learning is partly tacit and inexpressible, and it relies not just on the rules we have learned but must also come out of the actual experience of solving unique problems successfully—or pondering why we were unable to solve them at all. When we discuss the intern’s work in the center with him or her, the dialogue helps the intern because he or she can *see* the teacher’s more complex setting and solving of the problem, what Schön calls the “spontaneous behavior of skillful practice” (51). Asking the intern, for example, about aspects of a tutorial that he or she seems to have ignored and then discussing the potential importance of these aspects collaboratively can help the intern to set a more complex problem within the “messy reality” of the next tutorial session. The intern, however, needs the actual experience of setting and solving many problems on his or her own before reaching the experienced practitioner’s expertise.

A significant difficulty we must overcome in tutor training is that students are generally much more accustomed, and therefore comfortable, with teacher-assigned problems. Typically, it has been the teacher who has named the things to which the students must attend and framed the context. In some cases, students have not engaged in problem setting at all; they simply solve the teacher’s problems as best they can. Thus, they do not fully gain the kind of expertise needed to set and then solve their own real world problems. There are three major reasons for this: their inexperience, their desire to be efficient (after all, it’s much easier and faster to solve a simple problem), and finally, their lack of awareness of the potential rewards, in part at least the satisfaction of solving a complex problem. It is not surprising, then, that interns want to rely on what has worked in the past and hope to be told what to do and how to tutor in any given situation. It is difficult for them to assess the relative importance of the unique qualities present in a particular tutorial situation: the student writer’s attitude and interest in writing, the particular assignment to which he or she is responding, the due date, and the quality of the prepared text. Then, out of this information, the tutor sets a problem that can be solved through collaboration with the student writer. In essence, when an intern seems to ignore or dismiss what the experienced tutor sees as significant information in a tutorial situation, the intern has been unable to set a problem that is complex enough to adequately reflect the “messy reality” before him or her.

Our challenge in the writing center, then, is to help interns to make their problems more complex over time. When we are training tutors reflectively, we want to accomplish three things: to enable the interns to set their own problems within each unique tutorial situation; to urge them to reflect on their learning through carefully designed assignments, both private and

collaborative; and to reveal to them how *we* (both the teacher and experienced tutors) reflect in action, so they can have the benefit of our expertise either orally or in writing. The two strategies I will discuss help to achieve these goals.

The more playful of these strategies, the “scenario card game,” developed from the scenarios used for discussion in several books aimed at tutor training (see Meyer and Smith’s *The Practical Tutor*, pp. 15 and 25, for example, or Gillespie and Lerner’s *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, pp. 56-8). Unfortunately, my interns, when reading these useful books, acted like *students* and did not pause to think about the scenarios—they simply waited for me to lead class discussion about the assigned readings. The game prevents this. On 3x5 cards, I write short descriptions of actual tutorial situations that have happened in our center, one card for each class member. These are held out to each student, face down in a fan, from which the student selects a single card and places it, still face down, on the desk. Interns volunteer one by one to read their cards aloud and then explain how they would handle the situation. For example, one I use early in the semester is the following:

A freshman enrolled in a first-year composition class shows you a paper that is completely covered with comments in red; she is very upset and doesn’t know where to begin revising. As you look at her paper, you see that higher order concerns are interspersed with comments about mechanics, spelling, etc. What do you do?

After the intern explains what he or she would do, the solution is discussed by the class members, who offer other alternatives. Usually, the discussion results in a more complex understanding of the problem as the class members examine more features of the messy reality of the tutorial scene. When an intern dealt with the above

problem, for example, she ignored the student writer's being upset and explained that she would deal with higher order concerns first. In the discussion, other class members commented that it would probably help were the tutor to acknowledge the student writer's understandable frustration rather than to ignore it. In Schön's terms, the intern simplified reality too much here; often, however, interns reveal their ability to "reflect in action" by changing their minds and thus their approaches in mid-discussion. The game cards appear at least once every two-to-three weeks: not often enough to become boring but often enough to maintain the real-world quality of our discussions. They are designed to enable interns to synthesize theory (the readings for class) with practice—and also, as with role-playing, to allow the interns to practice tutoring safely.

The second strategy, three reflective papers based on the interns' observations in the center, is certainly one that most of us who train tutors already use to good effect. A form of self-assessment, these papers, as well as conferences with me about their work, help interns to see that some of the experienced tutors' "secret knowledge" about tutoring is not, after all, a compilation and then memorizing of facts and rules, but rather an analytical and interpretive skill. What Schön's work helps us to understand, however, is *why* our interns have trouble with observation and reporting what they see: they often simplify what takes place and describe, in their observation notes, a series of steps that they hope will be easy for them to follow later. Alternatively, they attempt to attend to everything and overwhelm themselves.

The reflective paper encourages interns to imagine their *own* problems and work to understand and posit their own solutions for them. Sam Watson, in his essay "Letters on Writing—A Medium of Exchange with Students of Writing," argues for the benefits of such reflection:

Reflecting on what we do while we do it, we come to do it differently. And we come to do it better, sooner, than we would without the reflecting. Our writing improves our learning; it obliges us to reflect on what we are learning, and it invites us to reflect on how we are learning it. (133)

Watson asserts throughout his essay that students must establish their own problems and their own areas of attention as writers to achieve authority, and this is equally true for interns. The writing assignments, then, are open-ended: the interns write up observation notes for their two-hour center "lab time" each week, and this forms the basis of their papers. After the first five weeks of observing, for example, they write a short, two-to-three page paper in response to this prompt:

Subject: The general subject of this paper is your purposive reflection on your observation in the Writing Center. However, you must determine your own specific focus. Here are some possible approaches: What has interested you most about tutoring? What do you imagine your successes or difficulties as a tutor might be? Select one specific tutorial that taught you something about tutoring, describe it in detail, and then analyze it. Why was this memorable for you? Note: these are three possible approaches. Don't try to do them all!

I also include a section about my purpose for giving the assignment, explaining that I believe that keeping observation notes and then reflecting on these over a period of several weeks encourages more active learning. The second and third prompts are modified slightly to reflect the interns' growth and gradual change in role. The third paper, for example, suggests these possible approaches: "What have you learned about yourself as a tutor? What do you do well? What about tutoring is most difficult for you?"

The interns gain in several ways from writing these papers, notably in that they begin to think and write themselves into their new role as "tutor" rather than "student." The papers formalize the steps: first observer, outside the process; then apprentices or journeymen who tutor under the eye of a skilled practitioner; then actual tutors who have been entrusted to help other students. In their first papers, I can see the "student" orientation, their frustration and hopes that they will discover the "one right way." Having to write about what they observe in the center forces them to contrast their past real-world experience (often "fixing" a friend's paper in the dorm) to the challenge of a tutorial. Their sense of problem setting in the beginning, then, could be described as "how will I get the student writer's paper closer to what I, as an accomplished writer, would do?"

The second papers reveal different problems that suggest their growth: they are very aware of having to stop and think through the process—essentially, they become aware of reflecting-in-action. Sometimes they are frustrated when they realize they have asked very general questions in order to maintain the student writer's autonomy: "Well, tell me, what do you think of your paper?" They are equally frustrated by their inability to maintain a flow of questions about the student writer's writing process or the paper itself. Often these reflective papers use the "Then, ___ but now ___" structure as interns ponder their growth and learning. But in their third papers, the interns begin to have a sense of skillful practice, and they sometimes write exuberantly about their internalization of a tutor's questions. At least on occasion, they begin to tutor almost instinctually, moving away from consciously rehearsed questions to a natural conversation with the student writer. As one of my interns put it, "Suddenly I was immersed in the flow, and the questions came out of no-

(continued on page 6)

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

April 1-2, 2005: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Adrian, MI

Contact: April Mason-Irelan, Siena Heights University, 1247 East Siena Heights Drive, Adrian, Michigan 49221. Phone: 517-264-7638; e-mail: amason@sienahts.edu. Web site: <http://www.sienahts.edu/~eng/ECWCA/ecwca.htm>.

April 9, 2005: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Frederick, MD

Contact: Felicia Monticelli, e-mail: FMonticelli@frederick.edu, Frederick Community College, 7932 Opossumtown Pike, Frederick, MD 21702. Phone: 301-846-2619; e-mail: FMonticelli@frederick.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/staff/mawca/index.html>.

April 16, 2005: Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association, in Bothell, WA

Contact: Becky Reed Rosenberg, beckyr@u.washington.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~writepro/PNWCA.htm>.

April 16-17, 2005: New England Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY

Contact: Patricia Stephens, English Department, Humanities Building, Fourth Floor, Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, One University Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Phone: 718-488-1096; e-mail: patricia.stephens@liu.edu.

June 10-12, 2005: European Writing Centers Association, in Halkidiki, Greece.

Contact: Conference Web site: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/ewca2005/>.

October 19-23, 2005: International Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN.

Contact: Frankie Condon e-mail: fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu. Conference Web site: <http://writingcenters.org/2005/index.html>.

THE WRITING LAB
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