

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

October, 2005

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Words of caution, explanation, advice, and celebration are offered in this month's *WLN*. Joe Essid warns us to think now about preparing our writing centers for the future state of academia in which corporate mentalities prevail. Also looking forward, Erica Marsh asks us to consider the role of cyberspeech in tutoring and the use of cyber-shorthand symbols and phrases in synchronous tutoring. For those of us not familiar with emoticons such as []> or ^5 or phrases such as TTFN or YBS, Marsh's appendices offer translations.

Dorothy Treichler and Emilie Steffan advise tutors to draw on their academic knowledge in their fields of study to tutor students with papers from other fields, and Jennifer Beattie writes about the importance of helping ESL students become immersed in English rather than giving them rules of grammar. And Katie Theriault reviews a new collection of essays on in-class tutoring.

Finally, Clint Gardner calls on all of us to contribute ideas for the inaugural year's celebration of International Writing Centers Week, February 12-18, and explains how and where to post suggestions. So, find a quiet corner in your center to congregate and begin planning for your festivities!

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Working for the clampdown? Being crafty at managed universities

Last fall I found myself not only our school's Writing Center Director but also its Writing Program Administrator. At the same time, a reminder of my wastrel youth appeared: the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of the Clash's *London Calling*.

The two events are connected. On the one hand, it is delightful to hear people again discuss the anthems of the punk-rock era. More than at any time since the 1970s, we need a little more defiance against authority, including the transformation of everything into a saleable commodity. On the other hand, the very way in which *London Calling* appeared, slickly packaged at a premium price, reinforces my creeping suspicion that everything, from punk rock to writing centers, is being assimilated by corporate values.

Writing centers have always placed writers' needs ahead of those of our universities. Like punks, we provide alternatives to an often alienating system of power. Now that I have bowdlerized North's famous dictum, why

stop there? What do we do, as colleges and universities increasingly become mere extensions of the corporate world, instead of alternatives to it? A number of scholars are charting the ways in which the structures and governance of higher education, even the

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software we use to teach, ever more closely resemble those in business. That metamorphosis may help cash-strapped institutions generate revenue, but the opportunity costs can include the independence and long-standing mission of writing centers. We have, however, a window of opportunity to protect our mission in what the authors of a recent anthology call "the managed university." I recently tested this when, as a new WPA, I leveraged the influence and prestige of our writing center and WAC program to challenge aspects of a curricular reform effort antithetical to students' needs and fundamental principles of writing pedagogy. This local success has implications for all of us as the institutional power of English declines. Three decades ago, punk rock gained energy from a sense that England was on the skids; I suggest that as English goes down that dark road, we can all use "punk pedagogy" to maintain and expand the status of writing centers and remain crafty outsiders.

A grim scenario unfolds as we struggle with tight budgets and a fetish for assessment. Bruce Horner, in a review of the anthology *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers*, summarizes how corporate thinking now shapes writing instruction:

- (1) the "professionalization" of rhetoric and composition as an academic discipline. . . has had no improving effect on the working conditions of the vast majority of composition teachers;
- (2) the exploitative working conditions of college composition teachers have deleterious effects on the teaching of composition;
- (3) this exploitation is but one manifestation of the privatization of education, which is itself a manifestation of the increasing commodification of all realms of life;
- (4) a "managerial" discourse that

accepts the basic premises of such privatization . . . dominates the field of rhetoric and composition. (Horner 351-52)

Managerial discourse now employed in higher education, one of optimizing resources and minimizing costs, influences our work at every turn. It can lead to less flexibility in our budgets, staffing, and use of campus facilities. It can even provoke mergers with other units that do not share our pedagogy or mission. Managerial discourse reaches online to shape our courseware, like barbed wire strung across the supposedly "wild frontier" online. Course management systems, for instance, employ assessment and monitoring reminiscent of Taylorist ideals of worker efficiency, and they privilege materials antithetical to writing pedagogy carefully developed over decades (Payne 496-99).

Those invested in literary studies will be of little help in the coming struggle to redefine academic work and curricula. It is time we stopped kidding ourselves: one does not have to hear horror stories at the MLA convention's cash bar or watch allocation of institutions' resources to realize that the academic study of literature is in decline. As writing-center professionals, we must find, even highjack, our own lifeboats, as many of our colleagues in composition have done. Here I want to concur with Blitz and Hulbert's radical challenge:

[O]ne different teacher, one different course may not change a curriculum, a department. . . but two, three, four, joining together?, . . . Why not make the university a place for "centers" of all kinds? Seriously, let's chuck departments and divisions and set up large open spaces full of tables and chairs where people talk and listen and learn about things. (91)

Not so fast; that good idea sounds either like a perfect learning space or Dilbert's hellish workplace, an office

environment supposedly set up by The Man to encourage collaboration and non-hierarchical workflow. So we must be very careful as old walls come down and new institutional structures replace them.

Writing center professionals who engage in curricular change must channel it, when possible, toward solid pedagogy and away from centralized control and decisions based on profit motives or turf warfare. I had this sort of opportunity earlier in the year, when a Task Force on Undergraduate General Education issued a long-awaited proposal. This reform to our curriculum would replace the first-year writing requirement with a series of new classes taught by full-time term faculty from many departments. The models were laudable, seminar programs at schools such as Harvard and Princeton. I became WPA amid this, to oversee a demoralized, and likely doomed, program staffed almost completely by adjunct faculty.

Enter writing center director as funeral director. Or, just maybe, as punk agitating for a new order? The proposal caused hardly a stir among my literary studies colleagues, who never teach the comp courses that are technically a part of English. I had expected that, but their lack of involvement in the larger debate about general education made me wonder if many of our colleagues are *genetically* incapable of seeing larger, long-term issues driven by a private-sector ethos to downsize units not matching the mission statement, attracting grants, or recruiting the brightest prospective students. Kathleen Blake Yancey describes the dangers of English being “anachronistic” as currently practiced (302). Buggy-whip makers would provide too insulting a metaphor for these workers unable to adapt to change. Think instead of hub-and-spoke, “legacy” airlines blinded by past success and stumbling before competitors with better business models.

Writing center directors have the advantage of a long history of privation and entrepreneurial spirit leading to hard-earned recognition and better fortunes. That history leaves us well equipped to compete in a managed university. We should not be too sanguine, however; our independence as academic units may not be safe simply because fulfilling our mission retains students and satisfies employers. Mere survival does not mean influence. As Foucault—there’s the reference one would need at MLA—showed me, power, and the Nietzschean will to it, cannot be denied. How we use power may corrupt our values, but we either have power and influence in some measure, or we do not. Edward White’s most salient advice for WPAs, certainly worthwhile for writing center directors as well, is to stop pretending that power in administrative settings does not matter. A canny director will size up a program’s enemies, identify allies and recruit more, and make effective arguments to the right decision-makers (108-9).

So how do acquire and retain some of this power? We can begin by getting out of our battered chairs in our legendary leaky basements and stifling attics. Or, as increasingly seems likely, we can get up from our ergonomically perfect chairs and desks in well appointed learning center spaces full of matching office furniture. We then could stride, metaphorically, into the daylight, as I did by mixing it up in the faculty e-list whenever curriculum discussions touch upon the role of writing. I found, and quickly, that instead of being treated like a second-class citizen, I was asked for advice by those overseeing curricular reform and looking for allies of their own. Two committees closely associated with WAC and Writing Center, whose members include adjunct faculty, met jointly. We unanimously agreed to support the new curriculum at a floor vote if it were revised to include intensive, mandatory tutorials for our least-prepared incoming students and a seminar to

train faculty across the curriculum in writing pedagogy. Those two ideas entered a revised curriculum proposal.

It is wise, when engaged in this sort of administrative process, to keep a close eye on how other units thrive by appropriating strategies and rhetoric of the corporate world. Across the quad, and without a ripple of concern in English, our “Speech Department” first became “Rhetoric and Communications Studies” and then, less formally, “Communications Studies.” One wonders if, fifteen years from now, this department, gaining majors quickly while English struggles for them, will be where students learn about Ahab or Lear, not as foils for a theory *du jour*, but how both characters use language well while making fatally bad decisions.

I admire such savvy, adaptable colleagues, partly because the gamesmanship of re-invention in a managed university is never lost on them. They, not English, hired our campus’ first tenureable techno-rhetorician. Like writing center professionals in the 70s, they have seen the future.

We might again need that sort ofchutzpah, that brashness to re-invent that is so lost on many English departments. Yancey advises us that the time available is brief; she contends that ongoing changes in literacy are “seismic” and we only have a “moment” to adapt our practices to them. This new demographic, coming to us at the same time as creeping corporatism, spells trouble not only for literary studies but also for everyone invested in traditional notions of academic literacy: so-called “Millennial” students both more conservative in their epistemology and with less allegiance than any in recent memory to the printed word (*Reading at Risk*). This public writes constantly as opportunities for informal expression proliferate online:

[M]embers of the writing public have learned—in this case, to write, to think together, to orga-

nize, and to act within these forums—largely without instruction and, more to the point here, largely without *our* instruction. They need neither self-assessment nor our assessment. (Yancey 301)

Cold comfort for writing centers in this; whether a paper discusses Buffy, Baudrillard, or both, how will we “tutor” multimedia projects that are going to replace the essay? For the reasons Horner and Yancey outline, writing centers face ever greater pressures from writers who *think* they already have the skills they need and from administrators and colleagues who wonder why our students cannot write for academic audiences, even though they have technological literacy and “write” all the time.

Horner’s and Yancey’s observations now influence my work as “manager” for adjunct faculty and tutors. And therein lies a danger, one shouted in the Clash’s song “Working for the Clampdown”: one day you are a rebel, the next a suit. With a foot currently in both camps, I wonder if both roles can co-exist. When I presented some of these ideas at a regional conference, another writing center director pointed out that it would be too easy to become a distant administrator behind a closed door, instead of an affable coach to peer tutors.

Despite that hazard, we must also consider the danger of not acting in the face of a seismic change in literacy. The writing center need not remain the central location for alternatives to the classroom, especially as writing morphs into something textual, visual, auditory, and for all I know, olfactory. Even in the money-drunk 90s, Walvoord predicted a “Darwinian” future during the coming decade for WAC programs and other initiatives, with “some programs disappearing as they no long draw funds or faculty” (69). I fear that as English and other

inflexible units lose influence, writing centers may be absorbed by larger programs that employ pedagogical models we do not like. Case in point: with some assistance from a dean I successfully deflected not-so-subtle attempts to bring all of the tutoring programs under one umbrella; I then argued successfully that an academic-skills program with which the Writing Center has a good working relationship should move with us to a new building. Arguing that we possess a unique knowledge of writing may not be enough to prevent a “hostile takeover,” but there is strength in numbers. Without proximity and shared resources, the other director and I both feared division, then conquest, by another administrative unit.

Fortunately, one outcome of our long-running WAC program has been to give the director some administrative clout. We established a pedagogical model that partners carefully trained undergraduate Writing Fellows with faculty; this compliments and promotes the peer tutorials at our center (Essid and Hickey). In fact, most students work as both tutors and Writing Fellows before graduating. Faculty remark that the work of both Fellows and tutors has altered their own responses to written work. That put our camel’s nose under the curricular tent-flap.

I have been relentless in leveraging the success of WAC and our center into more courses, more articles, more technology, more training for tutors and Writing Fellows. We send a well produced newsletter not just to faculty and students but also, by hand and with a smile, to all of our senior administrators. Thus we accrue one bit of currency that “counts” as academic success (White 112). That’s important on a campus small enough to bump into the President and Provost at lunch and have a real chat. The growth of our Center and WAC program, using a relatively small budget, had not gone

unnoticed. Our camel is now officially in the tent.

Not becoming part of a clampdown has allowed me to retain the same humanity as WPA so essential to being a good writing center professional. I got a shock when a long-time adjunct thanked me for providing written feedback about her teaching. It was the first time in years that a supervisor had provided an evaluation at either university where she teaches. Could we imagine being that distant from our tutors?

The empowerment of adjunct faculty through regular meetings and feedback was just the beginning of punk-style acting up about our curriculum. With my encouragement, adjuncts used their academic freedom to attend the curricular task force’s meetings, where they voiced their concerns. Their voices will lead, in our new gen-ed curriculum, to a consistent approach to writing well informed by writing center praxis.

One battle done, another coming: I suspect that despite academia’s distaste for military metaphors in these new-imperial times, life in the managed university is simply going to feel that way. Sometimes that battle will be over what our centers will even *look* like. When I was invited to sit down with architects and librarians planning new construction to include our offices, I soon was campaigning to keep private tutorial spaces in the floor plan as well as larger common spaces. One senior administrator, on fire with an hot new idea acquired from a corporate trade show, only wanted modular spaces shared between several administrative units. Can you say “merger and acquisition”? I wore a neck tie, covered my tattoo, but kept in my earrings as I fought to prevent this idea from getting sketched in.

After all of my justification, you may agree with the Clash that “Every cheap

hood strikes a bargain with the world.” Alternately, I’d claim that a will to power and influence need not become tools of oppression and self-aggrandizement: the most talented punk rockers were consummate tricksters, not merely anarchist louts or sell-out artists. Godfathers of Punk like Brian Eno, Iggy Pop, and particularly David Bowie, are masters of re-invention, yet they never lost their edge and talent as musicians. Faced with the changes ahead of us, both in campus polity and student literacy, we would do well to listen to a few old tunes again.

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The Writing Center Journal

The Writing Center Journal is an official publication of the International Writing Centers Association, which is an Affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English. *WCJ* is published twice a year, in the fall/winter and spring/summer.

The Writing Center Journal's primary purpose is to publish articles, reviews, and announcements of interest to writing center personnel. We therefore invite manuscripts that explore issues or theories related to writing center dynamics or administration. We are especially interested in theoretical articles and in reports of research related to or conducted in writing centers. In addition to administrators and practitioners from college and university writing centers, we encourage directors of high school and middle school writing centers to submit manuscripts.

The Writing Center Journal also has a few new online developments you might want to check out:

- 1) **A Web site.** Go to <www.writing.ku.edu/wcj> for information on guidelines for submissions, subscriptions, and more.
- 2) **A blog.** Go to <writingcenterjournal.blogspot.com> to

see authors from our current issue blogging like mad. Let them, and us, know what you're thinking too!

- 3) **A database of back issues.** Thanks to Kate Brown and the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP) at the University of Louisville, we're delighted to announce the rollout of an annotated, searchable and complete database to articles that have appeared in *Writing Center Journal* from vol. 1, no. 1 (1980) to the current vol. 25, no. 1 (2005).

Go to <<http://coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/a-s/wcrp/>> and click on the left-hand column link labeled Searchable Annotated Bibliography of *WCJ* Articles; you'll also see that many of these articles are FULL TEXT and available for free download from the WCRP site, and many more will be coming online over the next few months. So search for your favorite authors, topics, or titles and pass along a word of thanks to Kate Brown and the WCRP.

From language to lingo: A look at cyberspeech in synchronous electronic tutoring

Next semester is just around the corner, and many writing centers will be implementing chat session tutorials for the first time. In addition to software, html, and interactive scheduling programs, how many directors, tutors, and students are familiar with chat slang, web lingo, cyberspeech, or what ever else we're calling internet acronyms now days? With the proliferation of chat lingo, and chat room language itself, I ask, "Which discourse should online writing center tutors utilize when assisting students?" I will attempt to answer this question by first analyzing the chat room language and the importance of the question, giving a brief history of synchronous chat sessions and writing centers, and by looking at what theorists have said about the language and conversation choices tutors make within the writing center.

With the admission of ten Instant Messaging abbreviations into the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* in 2003, the question of whether or not to use cyberspeech in the online writing center becomes even more important (13). Chat room discussions, in much the same way as the spoken language, is littered with sentence fragments and incomplete thoughts. In addition, chat sessions tend to omit punctuation and capitalization, unless used to "emote." Emoting has been popular since the inception of the Internet and is used widely across chat rooms and instant messaging providers. These symbols or pictures created with letters and punctuations are known as emoticons. [Please see Appendix A, page 8, for an example of emoticons and their meanings/translations.]

Chat room or instant messaging frequenters may be more apt to utilize the

online writing center because it provides an environment they are familiar communicating in. Chatters could fall into the habit of using slang, acronyms, and sentence fragments to expedite their communications, but should writing center tutors use the same language? To answer the question, it is important to look at the mission of the writing center. The mission statement of Middle Tennessee State University's Writing Center, similar to many other writing centers' statements, lists various wants and goals of the center, its director, and its tutors, but two stand out as being directly applicable to the discourse decision a tutor must make within the online chat session. First, as a center for writing, "We want to provide a relaxed, yet professional atmosphere in which writers across the curriculum can become more comfortable with the writing process" and "We want to share our love of language and learning with those around us" (Smith 1). If one of our goals is to "provide a relaxed" atmosphere, then the use of chat lingo or cyberspeech would seem natural when a tutor is communicating with a student familiar in that discourse. On the other hand, by adding the "yet professional" clause onto the statement, the seeming disregard for grammar and syntax cyberspeech displays is contrary to the very mission of the writing center if "professional" includes Standard Academic English. The second goal appeals to the heart of writing instruction itself in that every session tutors conduct should impart a message of the "love of language and learning" the writing center embodies. Within the context of cyberspeech, this message can be a double-edged sword—leading tutors to either emphatically use Standard Academic English, or to embrace cyberspeech as

simply another medium of language meant to be utilized and shared as a celebration of hybridity.

The first article on synchronous electronic writing consultations was published in 1995 by Barry Maid and Jennifer Jordan-Henley. However, the topic of the time was not the language the session was conducted in, but the environments and technologies used to initiate the communications and the problems that arose within and around them. In 2000, J.A. Jackson's "Interfacing the faceless: Maximizing the Advantages of Online Tutoring" appeared in *The Writing Lab Newsletter* concentrating on the directive or non-directive e-mail session. Jackson offered the following advice as a solution: "Ask questions, give information-based direction, but avoid taking over the role of the writer" (6-7). This gives tutors an idea of how not to "take over" the session, but does not supply a language for the conversation. Furthermore, Monroe's "The Look and Feel of the OWL Conference" suggests the problem chat sessions produce by stating, "While an OWL conference is a written artifact, it is an electronic artifact, unstable and ephemeral, shot through with typos, jumbled formatting, and white noise" (23). My question to Monroe is "Where does the 'line' of typos and jumbled formats end before one crosses into the category of being a 'bad example?'"

Many writing center leaders debate the idea of providing models for students, but tutors are models for the simple reason that they work in the writing center—they are the example students seek for help. With this in mind, tutors must be very careful in how they structure their written com-

munication within chat sessions. Similarly, in 1998, Susan Blau, John Hall, and Tracy Strauss evaluated the discourse in "Exploring the Tutor/Client Conversation: A Linguistic Analysis." The most applicable examination in regards to online tutorials is that of echoing. They note that "often in the informal tutorial conversations tutors or clients [pick] up on the other's speech patterns and [integrate] them into their own" (27). Blau relates how everyday conversations are "rife with hesitations, fillers, [and] conversational tags such as 'okay' or 'you know,'" (27). Taking the analysis into the virtual environment, one can see that the "tags" and "fillers" are shortened and abbreviated within the chat communication, making the language less recognizable. If students model this speech pattern in their writing, even if done subconsciously, tutors may be illustrating a false example, and harming, more than helping, the student.

Writing center theorists have been concerned about the language tutors use and the impact it has on students for quite some time. In 1985, Jay Jacoby asked "Shall We Talk to Them in English?" His article examines the sociolinguistic implications of tutor talk and reminds readers that tutors are not teachers, "they are normal, 'real people,' *peers*" (1). Unfortunately, after the bout of training tutors are run through, they gain a new "language" with which they can, at times, discuss students' writing. Jacoby does not see this shift as an unpredictable one, he even states that "[n]ext to the language of Madison Avenue, teacher talk is the jargon our students know best" (2). With the proliferation of Internet communications, students are now becoming intensely aware of another form of discourse: chat lingo. Jacoby's warning that "[m]ost writing center clientele are keenly sensitive to language, [and] particularly to how language can operate, wittingly or otherwise, to discriminate against them" is applied best when the topic is broadened to tutor conversations in general. Online tutors, as

Jacoby advises face-to-face tutors, should be "equally sensitive" to the language they utilize in their tutorials.

Sensitivity becomes the deciding factor when tutoring in the web environment. Tutors must be acutely aware of the student's words, tones, spellings, abbreviations, speeds, and lengths of messages sent through the chat applet. Observing all of these signals can give the tutor an idea of the type of "chat-ter" he/she is communicating with. Again, it becomes important to recall the mission statement and remind tutors that "we want to provide a relaxed, yet professional atmosphere" (Smith). Like face-to-face tutorials, there is no cookie-cutter method of approach for tutors to use. In order to "provide a relaxed atmosphere", tutors may find it necessary to make use of particular portions of chat lingo like "brb," "k," or any other number of phrases, but they are just that, short phrases. Tutors should recognize that chat lingo can be used to substitute Blau's illustrations of "conversational tags." They should also be able to recognize when a student does not know how to use chat lingo. If a student uses the chat session option because it is a more convenient time, rather than a more comfortable environment, that student may be very unfamiliar with any form of chat lingo. With a student already uncomfortable with his/her Web environment, using Web slang would only aggravate, instead of alleviate, the student's frustrations, possibly leading to that student's dismissal of chat session tutoring. Likewise, a student familiar with the expediency and fluidity of chat lingo could become frustrated by the wordiness of using Standard Academic English within the chat applet. Online tutoring is difficult enough to "sell" to students without "discriminating" against them for their lack or knowledge of chat lingo. The solution seems to be some sort of mediation between the two discourses, but the degree a tutor leans one way or the other depends entirely on the level of fluency a student expresses in any discourse. To ac-

curately predict which types of students and which discourses both students and tutors choose, one would need to conduct studies of tutorials over several semesters and across several campuses. At this time, such a study is beyond my reach, but perhaps we can begin looking further into this type of research.

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Appendix A: Emoticons¹

s , *S* , <s> = smile	*g* , *G* , <g> = grin	xoxo = hugs & kisses	Hugggggsssss = hugs
w , <s> = wink	*g* = giggles	*k* , *K* = kiss	;-)~~~~~~ = giving someone a raspberry
(((person))) = virtual hug	\~/ = glass with a drink (usually booze)	?^ = what's up?	^5 = high five
[]> = a cup	c["] = cup of coffee	8-) = wears glasses	@-/- = rose
@@@ = cookies	:-p = sticking tongue out	:-x = I'm keeping my mouth shut	:-O = shouting or shocked
:-) = Happy	:-(= Sad		

Side Notes:

- 0 or O = The letter "o" and the number zero and often used interchangeably.
- 1 = won or one, (1dr = wonder)
- 2 = too, to, or two
- 3 = the letter E (s33 u = see you)
- 4 = for, four, or fore (b4 = before, 4warned = forewarned)
- 8 = ate or as a substitute for the sound "ate" (gr8 = great) also used in emoticons
- B = be
- C = see (IC = I see)
- G = gee
- K = okay
- M = am
- N = in
- O = oh
- R = are
- U = you

¹ For further information, see Charles H Davis' "Web Slang, Lingo, and Acronyms Used in Chat Rooms, Instant Messages, and Text Messaging" at <<http://www.web-friend.com/help/lingo/chatslang.html>>.

Appendix B: Phrases¹

<i>EASY</i>	
LOL	Laugh Out Loud
L8R	Later
IM	Instant Message
TTFN	Ta Ta For Now
f2f	Face to Face
BRB	Be Right Back
IMHO	In My Humble Opinion
TY	Thank You
BTW	By the Way
BBLR	Be Back LateR
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
g/f or b/f	Girlfriend or Boyfriend
YW	You're Welcome

<i>HARD</i>	
TNT	'Til Next Time
SOS	Same Old S---
PITA	Pain in the Ass
HAND	Have A Nice Day
CUL8R	See you later
RUOK	Are you okay?
14U	I Love You
AAK	Alive And Kicking
BSEG	Big S--- Eating Grin
YBS	You'll Be Sorry
YMMV	Your Mileage May Vary
H8	Hate
GR8	Great
ROTFLEMAO	Rolling On The Floor Laughing My Ass Off

¹ For further information, see Charles H Davis' "Web Slang, Lingo, and Acronyms Used in Chat Rooms, Instant Messages, and Text Messaging" at <<http://www.web-friend.com/help/lingo/chatslang.html>>.

Register now for the Southeastern Writing Centers Association Conference

If you are planning to attend the Southeastern Writing Centers Association conference on February 16-18, 2006, in Chapel Hill, NC, please note that fees increase after November 15. See the list of rates before and after November 15 on the registration pages of the Conference Web site: <<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/swca/registration/attendee.html>>.

<<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/swca/>>. Or contact the Conference Chairs: Kim Abels (e-mail: kabel@email.unc.edu) and Vicki Russell (vgr@duke.edu).

Other information about the conference, such as accommodations and area information, is also available on the Conference Web site: <<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/swca/>>. Or contact the Conference Chairs: Kim Abels (e-mail: kabel@email.unc.edu) and Vicki Russell (vgr@duke.edu).

TUTORS' COLUMN

Academic diversity and the generalist tutor: How to survive and thrive tutoring outside your discipline

Our Writing Center at Colorado College is staffed with generalist tutors. We work on any paper from any discipline, regardless, for the most part, of our own specialty. Being effective as a generalist tutor has a lot to do with being able to transfer skills from one discipline to another and to recognize the common ground between them. Here's how Dorothy discovered one method for doing that.

"I'm an English major and toward the end of my junior year I had to write an anthropology paper. I went to talk to my professor, looking for some guidance on how to go about it. She told me, in so many words, that in anthropology the important things to look for are what is there and what that means for the culture you are studying. It was later, sitting in class, that her words collided in my mind with what I do all the time in literature classes. I realized that in many, if not all, disciplines: "It's all about close reading!" That is to say, when doing critical thinking, no matter the subject, one pattern of analysis we can use is to look closely at what is before us and then ask ourselves why it is important and what it means for the larger picture. It was even later that it became clear to me that this epiphany had applications in writing centers.

No matter what sort of text you want to think critically about, the steps in close reading remain essentially the same. The first is observation. Ask yourself, "What do I notice?" During this step, try not to make judgments or

generalizations about the text or worry too much about what meaning you might find. Pay attention to the text and generate a list of details you find interesting, significant, revealing or strange. Alternatively, look for repetitions, resemblances, dichotomies or contradictions. Keep in mind these don't have to be of words only, especially when looking at non-written texts, they can be images, ideas, objects, numbers, and so on.

The bridge between this step and the next is to choose several details that you would like to work with, the ones that seem most interesting, significant, revealing or strange. Once you've done this, it's time for interpretation. The basic question here is, "So what?" What do these details, resemblances, contrasts, etc., add up to? Secondary questions could be, "Why is it like this?" and "What does this mean for the text as a whole?" Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, you can ask "So what?" about your answers to your first questions. The more layers of "So what's" you go through, the deeper the meaning you will uncover. Remember there will often be more than one answer to these questions; your job is to argue for your answer (Rossenwasser and Stephen).

Although this is not often discussed explicitly, students use this pattern of thought across the disciplines. We as tutors and students examine many different types of media and many different types of writing. These are all different formats of a text, which we will

define as anything that can be interpreted, whether it is a graph, an experiment, or a culture. Even so, those comfortable with reading and analyzing a poem may find it difficult to interpret a painting or a diagram, formats which seem more abstract. However, just like written words, portions of these texts can share common patterns, display relationships, provide a context for the information presented, and suggest something about the larger picture.

Tutors who are working outside of their discipline can implement familiar strategies to assist writers. For example, if a writer comes in with a lab report and accompanying data, tutors can use the close reading strategies to help the writer "read" the alternative text. What is the author's goal? Where are the patterns? Inconsistencies? What might they signify?

In analyzing different texts it is important to decide what components of the text tell you the most about it. What do you look for in a lab report versus a novel? Lab reports focus on data, so you should focus on the trends in results and the way variables affect the results, whereas the key component in a novel may be the dialogue, and the key component of a painting may be the colors.

Critical thinking skills extend to all academic disciplines. The key for tutors is to recognize how to redesign these strategies for specific types of texts and help the writer implement

this method. In a tutoring session, discussing how to analyze the text makes the writer more confident to approach an unfamiliar discipline and provides the tools for critical thinking. It's all about close reading. With this in mind, generalist tutors can provide more than

advice on commas to students with work outside of tutors' majors.

*Dorothy Treichler and Emilie Steffan
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Work Cited

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ESL in the writing center: Providing Krashen's "comprehensible input"

How do we approach ESL tutorials in the writing center? Do we treat ESL students differently than our other students? Should we use more directive techniques to help them learn the rules of the English language? These questions continue to plague new tutors; in fact, ESL tutorials are perhaps among the most dreaded of all tutorials for "newbies." This is particularly true of tutors uncomfortable with grammatical rules and forms. They anxiously wonder how they will be able to "teach" these students to "write in English." Some mistakenly believe they need a foundation in these students' first languages in order to be successful. Others worry that they need special ESL training to best help these students. Their fears and questions are not unreasonable; the task does seem daunting at first. However, we must remember that, even with ESL students, our job is not to teach; it is to provide a collaborative environment conducive to learning and development. A quick look at Stephen Krashen's language acquisition theory reveals that the same collaborative techniques we use with native English speakers can be equally helpful to ESL students.

In short, Krashen argues that second language learners acquire language naturally and unconsciously. Thus, ESL students develop their ability to use English through the same process

we did when we were children. We did not learn how to effectively or correctly use the language by memorizing and then following a set of formulaic rules taught to us by our elders; rather, we acquired the language because we were constantly surrounded by other people using it. According to Krashen, the ESL students we encounter will not further develop their language skills because we pump them full of rules. At best, such an arsenal of rules can only serve as a "monitor" for language learners. For example, when I was still a very young girl, my mother would correct me every time I said something like "Me and Valerie played hopscotch at recess." "Valerie and I played hopscotch!" she'd bellow in response. "It's I and it comes last!" I didn't really understand why she kept doing that because I always heard people saying "Me and so-and-so." Thus, no matter how many times she corrected me and recited that rule, I kept saying it wrong until eventually, I'd start saying, "Me and Val—uh, I mean Valerie and I." The constant repetition of the rule resulted in memorization for me; but I adapted the rule only as a "monitor" to check the usage of the incorrect construction, which I had acquired through my linguistic environment. In the same way, simply reciting rules and correcting mistakes (even for pattern errors) for ESL students does little to help them in Krashen's view.

What, then, does work? If we can't rely on correction and rule recitation, what are we supposed to do with our ESL students? Krashen says that learners of a second language "acquire [it] by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond [their] current level of competence" (21). The only way to truly acquire a language is through immersion in a linguistic environment that provides "comprehensible input." Sounds complicated, right? It really isn't, though. The writing center, in its very nature, is a linguistic environment; writers meet with other writers to discuss writing. We're chock-full of language! Thus, all we need to do with ESL students is provide that mysterious sounding "comprehensible input."

The first step to providing comprehensible input is to garner an understanding of what the student already comprehends. This assessment need not be difficult or scientific, nor do we need to be first-rate detectives to accomplish it. Tutors just need to be aware and listen carefully during the introductory part of the tutorial. The student's responses to questions as simple as "How are you doing today?" and "What are you working on?" are clues to his level of linguistic comprehension. Simply noting the sen-

tence structures and vocabulary he employs can give us an idea of where he stands linguistically. Obviously, a student with one word answers like “Fine” or simple sentences like “This is paper for my writing class” feels less comfortable with the language than a student who replies with “Ok, but I’m tired a little” or “I’m writing a paper that is an argument that cloning is wrong.” Their level of comfort usually reflects, at least to some extent, their level of comprehension. Reading the paper also reveals comprehension level. How complex are the student’s sentence structures and vocabulary here? Whether we’re aware of it or not, we already conduct this very kind of assessment in all of our tutorials. It’s the information we acquire in those first few minutes that we use to determine the direction and format of the tutorial. How else do you explain the variation between what and how we choose to verbally approach tutorials?

This leads to the next step towards applying Krashen’s theory: to control the content and structures of the tutorial. As I’ve said, this is something we already (probably unconsciously) do. Think about it: we constantly make decisions about the content and structure of our feedback and discussion. Though we may not realize it, what we say and how we say it is part of the ESL learner’s unconscious acquisition of English. This is exactly what Krashen urges language teachers to do; this is providing comprehensible input! The only other element to making comprehensible input actually comprehensible is to provide contextual and other extra-linguistic clues. Again, this is something we probably already do in all of our tutorials. Sitting face to face and talking with a student makes it easier to see when they’ve “gotten” something you’ve said and when they haven’t. Plus, asking questions, such as “Do you see what I mean?” can clue us into comprehension. Quizzical looks or

unconvincing “uh-huhs” mean we have to try again. Often, our second attempts include drawings or hand gestures in addition to rewording. Rewording, itself, often includes using contextual examples. Sometimes, of course, this may be harder to ascertain of ESL students because of cultural differences. They may try to fool you, for lack of a better word, into believing they “get” everything you’ve said. Thus, to be even more effective with ESL students, we can simply incorporate our second attempt solutions into our first. For example, suppose I am trying to help my ESL student develop a stronger thesis. We would begin by talking about it: “What exactly is the main point that you are trying to make about this?” I might ask. After listening to his response (which is probably still not clear), I might say, “So—what I think you’re saying is that because of such-and-such, blankety-blank has occurred, or happened.” At the same time, I might be punctuating my statement by drawing out the elements of the statement in a diagram, with “such-and-such” in a block above a block containing “blankety-blank,” where a downward pointing arrow makes the connection between the two. Thus, I would be providing both linguistic clues and non-linguistic clues. The student might very well then acquire the use of a “because construction” to show cause and effect, and he might even acquire a new vocabulary word: “happened.”

Of course, the results may not always be that immediate; in fact, even if the student picks it up in speech, it may take a while for it to progress to his writing. However, learning is not immediate; it is progressive. And in the writing center, we’re not in the business of creating immediate results. Our goal is to promote development of long-term abilities. It may seem difficult to avoid error-correction and direct instruction of rules and form with our

ESL students, but if we really want to be helpful in the long run, we must. For filling them to the brim with rules and regulations isn’t going to help them any more than my mother helped me, uh, I mean I, no, me all those years ago.

*Jennifer Beattie
Winthrop University
Rock Hill, SC*

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Kathy Gillis
(kathleen.gillis@ttu.edu)

Book Review

On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring. Eds. Candace Spigelman and Laurie Grobman. Utah State UP, 2005. (ISBN 0874215994; 274 pages; \$24.95; orders: 800-621-2736)

Reviewed by Katie Theriault

Traditionally, the academy and the writing center have existed separately, and sometimes even oppositionally. They are typically not in sync; divergent goals and methodologies take these institutions in different directions, and seldom do their agendas and ideologies match up. From time to time, however, the academy and the writing center work alongside each other, collaborating in new ways to yield meaningful teaching and learning experiences for faculty, students, tutors, and administrators alike. Candace Spigelman and Laurie Grobman's collection, *On Location*, examines one of the ways in which the writing center and the academy have come together to make such opportunities possible—through classroom-based tutoring situations. Spigelman and Grobman contend that classroom-based, or “on location,” tutoring must be understood as a “hybrid genre,” borrowing elements from writing center tutoring, writing across the curriculum, supplemental instruction, and peer writing group theories (5-6). The essays in *On Location* explicate and theorize this unique, emerging field in writing center pedagogy and philosophy, and share some initial attempts at implementing such programs.

On location tutoring brings together a wide variety of participants, uniting tutors, faculty members, writing center administrators, and staff members to build one-time or ongoing tutoring situations. Beyond the immediate experience of on location tutoring, the practice can build relationships be-

tween the writing center and faculty, between administrators and staff, and between tutors and faculty. Most often this tutoring happens in the physical space of the classroom, as part of a course's organized activities. But, as suggested, it also unfolds in other spaces that are not typically directly associated with tutoring: professor's offices, faculty meetings, writing center staff gatherings, one-to-one conferences with writing center directors.

On Location targets a wide range of readers, from writing across the curriculum directors and writing center administrators to graduate and undergraduate students and tutors. The contributing authors are as varied as the intended audience. As such, the book aims to do a lot in 232 pages and is not able to delve too deeply into any given subject. Though the central messages of the book can sometimes get lost in the flurry of viewpoints, there is value in the mélange of voices; they merge diverse perspectives and experiences, as well as varied levels of theory and practice. The end result is an amalgam of advice on the logistics of setting up classroom-based tutoring practices, as well as potential roadblocks to this endeavor.

Characteristic of writing center scholarship, *On Location* is a compilation of authors telling their stories about their attempts at on location tutoring, explaining what worked and what didn't, speculating and theorizing why, and offering up some transferable tips for readers to bear in mind in their

own experiences. The book offers a practice-based orientation punctuated by a “moral” at the end of each story and, importantly, a way to implement the lesson in one's own writing center. The editors have organized the book into three sections. Part 1, *Creating New Alliances and Connections through Classroom-based Writing Tutoring*, explains the rationale for on location tutoring. The authors point to all the personal, interdepartmental, and interdisciplinary connections that are possible, and argue that all parties—tutors, students, and faculty alike—can benefit from involvement in on location tutoring practices.

In Part 2, *Reconciling Pedagogical Complications in Classroom-based Writing Tutoring*, the book finds a more conceptual footing, pointing to tensions that underlie on location tutoring. The “day-to-day operational decisions” that are made in on location tutoring programs “are often at odds with deeply entrenched alliances and beliefs about the ‘right’ kinds of tutoring practices,” and the tensions that emerge from these choices are at the heart of the authors' considerations (85). In their analysis, the authors suggest that an awareness of these possible (and probable) tensions is the key to making them productive. In other words, we don't have to solve any of the problems of on-location tutoring—in fact, the book offers up no concrete solutions—but as we forge ahead in this developing practice, we need to anticipate hurdles in order to better guard against them.

Part 3 focuses specifically on “issues of authority and role definition in classroom-based writing tutoring.” This section deals with conflicts of authority for peer tutors as well as for writing center administrators and teaching faculty. In some ways, it puts a new twist on some age-old questions that writing center folk grapple with: how can we maintain a level playing field with our co-collaborators in the academy, which is founded on hierarchies and power inequities? How can tutors disrupt the power structures of their institutions and centers, seemingly having so little power themselves? By taking up such issues in the context of on location tutoring, this portion of the book complicates things that we might have thought we had down by now.

Significantly, *On Location* gives life to the very principles it celebrates: a challenge to conventional top-down tutoring and pedagogy, an inclusive model of reform, and a call for transparency and explicitness in every step of the reform process. Rather than telling us exactly what to do in every instance or scenario, the contributing authors offer up their stories and allow the reader to cull useful bits from their experiences. This style also invites the reader into a dialogue with the work, treating the audience as peers who might participate equitably in the conversation. Similarly, Grobman and Speigelman advocate for tutor participation at every level of planning and implementation of on-location tutoring programs. And by the inclusion of tutor-authored chapters, the book itself models how, in on-location tutoring programs, writing center staff members should be valued as collaborators, rather than as secondary participants.

Grobman and Speigelman have structured the book in such a way that

it addresses practical concerns first, and then complicates them in the latter third of the book with introduction of theory as a means of reflecting on the practices. In this way, the editors enable us to consider not only *what* happened in various moments of on-location development, but also *why* it happened, in the context of writing center and composition theory. This is the same critical perspective they advocate throughout the book for writing center folks who are beginning on location tutoring. That is, equally as important as the logistics of the programming are the implications of administrative and tutor methodologies. It might also have been interesting to see the practice and the theory wedded in each chapter, so as to demonstrate the inextricable nature of the two and to synthesize them more explicitly. Nonetheless, such as it is, the book’s structure whets the reader’s appetite for the analysis that comes toward the end.

As a tutor trainer, I appreciated the inclusion of general training tips to prepare tutors for on-location work. My interest was piqued by the suggestion that the tutors who engage in on-location work can also teach techniques for students to add to their own writing strategies. This pedagogical and learning opportunity stems from the potential for tutors to model peer response during on location tutoring, so as to supply the tools for students to begin responding to each other independently (much as a tutoring session models strategies for writers to think critically about their own writing once they leave the writing center). As someone considering on location tutoring for the first time, I craved more specific suggestions for how to train tutors to model such practices. Now, after I’ve read a healthy discussion of the theoretical complications that come

along with tutors’ sustained presence in classrooms, the next move, it seems, is to design a practical training forum in which current and rising tutors can play out tensions and learn how to negotiate them in more tangible ways.

In *On Location*, Speigelman and Grobman lay the groundwork for a practice with enormous potential and offer useful interpretations of some possible complications. The book is an important step in theorizing this new “hybrid genre” with its own set of complications that seem to define its very nature. By naming it and engaging it on a conceptual level, *On Location* also legitimizes the work that’s already happening in writing centers across the United States, while providing the blueprints for future programs. Writing center veterans and newcomers alike will find value in the way the book identifies seemingly isolated efforts and groups them together in one space. As the field continues to experiment with and develop on location tutoring, I sense that we will soon be looking to Speigelman and Grobman’s collection as being foundational to our understanding of on location theory and practice.

Ed. note: Katie Theriault is the former assistant director of the Farnham Writers’ Center at Colby College, in Waterville, ME, as well as a former peer tutor there. She now lives in Farmington, Maine and is working at the Franklin Community Health Network.

International Writing Centers Week 2006

(On WCenter, the writing center listserv, on 8/26/05, Clint Gardner (Clint.Gardner@slcc.edu), offers the following details about International Writing Centers Week):

The International Writing Centers Association in response to a call from its membership has instigated "International Writing Centers Week" (IWCW 2006). The week is scheduled February 12 through February 18, 2006. We hope that this week will be celebrated in many writing centers around the world.

The IWCW 2006 committee (Pam Childers; Michele Eodice; Clint Gardner, Chair; Gayla Keese; Mary Arnold Schwartz; and Katherine Theriault) needs your help! We would like you to share your plans/ideas for celebrating IWCW 2006 in a specially created forum on the IWCA Discussion boards: <<http://www.writingcenters.org/board/index.php>> (the IWCW 2006 forum is second on the list). Our purpose is to collaborate in the development of the week so that we can continue celebrating it in the future. Since many writing centers are based on collaborative learning models, what better way to develop a writing center week than by sharing in the development of ideas and plans for implementing it?

We encourage you to share your ideas in the discussion forum. Why the forum? Unlike WCenter where messages are delivered to your mail box, whatever you post on the forum will be available to anyone who access the Web page. Likewise in the forum you can share images (please limit them to less than 1024kb) easily or other such pre-formatted documents by using the file attachment function (something that WCenter generally prevents).

In order to share you will need to have an account in the discussion forums. Click on the "register" button (it has a rocket icon) in the upper right hand side to re-

quest an account. Please take a few moments to share your plans and ideas. We hope that everyone is looking forward to developing the celebration of IWCW 2006!

The people have spoken—well 22 people have spoken—and have chosen an "official" logo for IWCW 2006. I have uploaded various sizes of the logo in both color and black and white to the discussion forums <<http://www.writingcenters.org/board>>. Look in the IWCW ideas topic.

Please note that the logo is official only informally. If you really despise it or know you can come up with something better, please do and then share your logo with others on the discussion board. While it is nice to have a common look and feel for the week, I don't think we need to be overly obsessed that everyone has the same logo to represent it.

Now comes the real fun—planning and sharing what we are all going to do for IWCW. You can do that also on the forums. Folks have already started sharing ideas. I won't clog up WCenter by reviewing what people are planning to do, so go take a gander, see what's up, and share your ideas.

The success of IWCW 2006 is up to us all—no one committee or no one group can plan what the entire community should be involved in creating and celebrating.

*Editorially yours,
Clint Gardner*

Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake City, UT

(On Sept. 13, Gayla S. Keese added this note on WCenter):

Just wanted to let people know that I placed my brainstorm of ideas on the forum. Let's see what comes out. I'd love to see others' ideas. Also, check out the site for National Tutoring Week for more ideas. BTW—I designed the Paine College segment: <<http://www.ntatutor.com/NTAweek2004/>>.

*Gayla S. Keese (keeseeg@mail.paine.edu)
Paine College, Augusta, GA*

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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>>.

February 16-18, 2006: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Chapel Hill, NC

Contact: Kim Abels, e-mail:

kabels@email.unc.edu and Vicki Russell vgr@duke.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/swca/>>.

February 23-25, 2006: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Little Rock, AR

Contact: Allison Denman Holland, e-mail: adholland@ualr.edu; phone: 501-569-8311. Conference Web site: <<http://www.scwca.net/>>.

South Central Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals

Feb 23-25, 2006

Little Rock, AR

*“Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Writing Centers
as the Center of WAC”*

Keynote speaker: Joan Mullin

Share your experiences with and dreams for writing centers and WAC. Suggestions for proposal topics are located on the SCWCA Web site: <<http://www.scwca.net/>>, along with Proposal and Registration forms and other conference information. The deadline for proposal submissions is November 15. Acceptance notifications will be sent out by December 30.

Questions? Contact: Allison Denman Holland, Conference Chair, University Writing Center—SUB 116, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 South University, Little Rock, AR 72202; Office: (501) 569-8311; Fax: (501) 569-8279; e-mail: adholland@ualr.edu.

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