

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

March, 2006

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This is one of those “due to circumstances beyond our control” notes. Without consulting the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, the U. S. Postal Service has again raised its postage rates. In a similar covert move without asking for our advice, the Purdue Printing Services, which prints and mails our issues, has raised its costs considerably. And so, as I mentioned in an earlier issue, in order to continue to keep our budget from sinking deep into pools of red ink, we too must raise rates effective as of March 1. The increase is only U.S.\$5/yr. (see all rates listed in the box on page 2), but despite many of your limited center budgets that have to stretch farther than any mere mortal can manage, I hope you’ll all continue to keep subscribing and contributing to *WLN*.

In this issue, Carol-Ann Farkas examines our assumptions about our centers and how those assumptions do or do not match reality; William Macauley considers the role of narrative in the writing center; and Jessica Hulman looks at the tension between process and product in our tutoring. Aesha Adams contrasts her roles as teacher and tutor, and Liz Stephens offers insights into what she has learned about tutoring. In all, another collection of good reading.

• Muriel Harris, Editor

...INSIDE...

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Idle assumptions are the devil’s plaything: The writing center, the first-year faculty, and the reality check

Nothing is more comfortable than an unexamined assumption; like an overstuffed sofa, it’s easy to sink into one but very hard to get out of. For example, at my school, both faculty and Writing Center tutors take it for granted that the Center plays a central role in teaching writing in all the courses of the first-year curriculum. Both groups agree that the Center offers vital support to students negotiating the unfamiliar territory of college-level writing. But are we agreeing to something that exists only as an assumption? Many first-year students visit the Center—they account for about 25-30% of our “business”—but more do not. I would argue that the Center’s ability to attract and help students in their first year of college writing and college adjustment is hampered by a disconnect between what is taken for granted and reality: we have a clash of expectations coming from all sides. Students, faculty, and tutors all assume they want the same things from the Writing Center, and will get them;

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Manuscripts: Submission guidelines are available on the *WLN* Web site. Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. If possible, please send as attached files in an e-mail to wln@purdue.edu. Otherwise, send hard copy and a computer disk or CD-ROM, and please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 30 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. Sept. 1 for an October issue).

everyone means well and assumes they've been doing well; but from interviewing individuals from all three groups, I have found that there are huge differences between perceptions, expectations, and action.

In the tutors' perceptions, first-year students come in with a variety of expectations and assumptions, but generally are not really sure what will happen in the Center, why they're really there, or what the writing process really is. Tutors feel that some students have an exaggerated sense of their own abilities; that others are overwhelmed by the task of writing; that large numbers are actually very badly prepared for college-level work. One large problem the students have goes beyond understanding writing to how they become acculturated to college life: they don't really understand how and why student services like the Center work (especially the ratio of budget to operating hours); and they are tripped up by their own developing, but often still-limited time management skills. The result is that, from what the tutors hear and perceive, students expect the Center, like the Security office, to be open at all hours, and to have openings in the schedule to accommodate any student who comes last minute—and are frustrated when they can't get appointments when and how they want them.

Once at their appointment, students appear to the tutors to struggle to articulate what they want from their visit, and often ask for help with "grammar" or with "checking things over." The tutors, all sharing similar, comfortable ideas about the writing process, assume that the students are the ones making false assumptions, erroneously believing that writing is a mechanical, surface business, that, like math or science, is either right or wrong, and that their need is for someone to identify their mistakes and tell them simply and concretely how to fix them.

Students' other main request is for help in getting started and deciphering their instructors' instructions and comments. However, few students bring in assignment sheets—only partly because of their own work habits; apparently, many instructors give their assignments orally. So the students try to explain the assignment to the tutors, who in turn have to spend a lot of time questioning the student. The result of what the tutor understands is necessarily an interpretation. All of our tutors have taught in the classroom before and know how *they* would handle writing assignments but can't be completely sure their methods are the same as the instructors', especially those in other disciplines; thus, the tutors try to keep their comments fairly broad, so as not to lead students down a specific path which might really be a misdirection. Tutors subsequently notice that the students feel varying levels of frustration. Their perception is that the students want to be told what the instructors want, and what they must do to be correct: to the tutors, the students seem very impatient and baffled when they are instead met with more questions, instructions about ideas when they *know* they need help with grammar, or instructions to rewrite the whole paper. In this last case, the students are especially skeptical—it's not that they're lazy, the tutors feel, but that 1) they don't understand the writing process well enough to know why they should have to rewrite a whole paper, and 2) they don't want to do a lot of *radical* revision when they can't be sure the tutor's instructions are the same as the instructor's.

The tutors are sympathetic to the students, yet are not sure what they could be doing differently. As I said, they know how they would like the students to draft or revise; they assume the first-year faculty share, and thus teach, similar ideas about the writing process. But hard evidence is elusive, based only on how the students

present themselves during their visits; from the students' reports, it can be hard to tell what, of all possible writing issues, an instructor thinks is a priority for a given student, or if the instructor has any specific expectations about what the student will get from the visit.

One key problem, that no one had really noticed until we went looking for it, is that the tutors and faculty don't actually know each other. Everyone has assumed that Center-faculty communication has been sufficient, when in fact there has been none, except through the indirect medium of talking to the Center's director (that's me). The Writing Center is, of course, in the basement, two to three floors away from the Arts and Sciences offices, and so tutors and faculty rarely cross paths, and almost never communicate; few tutors and faculty members have met. Although faculty are invited to provide the Center with copies of assignments and syllabi, the levels of compliance with this request are fair to middling. From the tutors' point of view, they have been assuming that inquiries about faculty assignments and criteria would be unwelcome, that it might be seen as an infringement of territory, a questioning of the instructors' methods. They feel it is up to the faculty to make the first move—or the Center's director, who has made overtures to the faculty which have not been taken up (although everyone thinks it's a good idea). And of course, under our present policies, confidentiality rules prevent random discussion of individual student work anyway, unless the student requests a written report from the session. Instructors almost never make follow-up inquiries of tutors about these reports.

From the point of view of the faculty though, my interviews with them reveal further potentially misleading assumptions. These faculty members tend to assume that their students (should) understand their assignments—given orally or on paper—well

enough to explain the criteria succinctly to the tutors, when both tutors and students find this is not the case. The faculty also assume that the tutors will give the students the same kind of advice about writing, revision, use of sources, synthesis, etc—and the tutors do, but again, without being *sure* what the faculty want, the tutors respond to student writing somewhat conservatively and generally. Faculty have told me that they see the tutors providing the same service to students that they would themselves if they had the time—but both tutors and at least one faculty member believe that the students may be reluctant to take too much advice from someone who does not have the power of the *grade* to lend authority to their comments. The instructors like the idea of conferring with tutors, but aren't sure how or whether to contact them (and again, concerns about student confidentiality interfere here as well). Faculty opinions of the tutors vary, from seeing them as providing a service, to being colleagues: tutors themselves aren't sure how any of the faculty view them, but do report that some faculty seem to see them as a fix-it service, and not as equals. And again, these are only perceptions, since each party assumes that the other knows what each is up to, and that the other wouldn't welcome communication anyway.

For this particular project, I interviewed my own first-year composition students—a small, but outspoken sample of about forty-five. Their comments were revealing, confirming my suspicions of just how much we've all been off in our assumptions about what we're doing in our efforts to teach our students writing. From my conversations with other faculty, and my own classroom practice, I know we all put a lot of effort into explaining our writing assignments and the writing process itself, including the value of feedback from other readers like those in the Center. We all *mean* very well. And yet, as the tutors have reported, and I

discovered in talking to my students about this, there is something getting in the way of students *believing* us.

I found that relatively few of my students had actually visited the Writing Center, native speakers far less so than non-native speakers. Of those who had not gone, some weren't even sure where the Center was (though it was on the tour at orientation); some felt they didn't need the help, and many didn't want anyone, peer or professional, to see their work because they were so insecure about it. Most were reluctant to get help from people who were not me; they wanted to meet *my* expectations, not those of others. Which suggests that the students' understanding of the writing process is not the same as their instructors' or tutors: *we* all understand that feedback from varying sources can be helpful, while at the same time, what matters is for the student to find her own voice, her own ideas. But our students, so worried about GPA, and so steeped in an outcomes-oriented culture, may feel they can't afford to mess around with ideals: they want to do it "right" or not at all, and right is what the instructor—the one with the A's and the F's—says.

This attitude is no doubt reinforced by the problem that students, both those who have not been to the Center and those who have, have no idea who or what the tutors are; they're pretty sure they're not students—"they look too old"—but aren't sure what else they could be. They assume they must be professionals of some kind, and were reassured when I said they were—but some students seemed hurt when I tried to explain the part-time, temporary nature of the tutors' position: "You mean, helping students is not their career? You mean, they might not be coming back?" Most of the students assumed the tutors were part of the faculty in some way, although they weren't sure how; but they figured that surely, tutors and instructors must be in frequent communication—or should

be. However, without being certain of the tutors' status in the community, the students were again skeptical of taking a chance on what they might have to say.

For the much smaller number of students who had actually obeyed my exhortations to "just go!!"—almost all reported that the experience was not what they had expected. Some had gone assuming they would get help with grammar—despite the fact that I had tried to shape my own comments on their papers to emphasize ideas and structure rather than mechanics—assuming the latter is not as important as the former. When the tutors did exactly what so many of us have been trained to do, and focused on the content rather than the grammar, the students felt they were not getting the help they asked for. However, the students were not aware that they could in fact set up regular appointments to work on grammar separately, although I assumed they knew, having told them at least once (!). Other students reported that they had gone to the Center expecting to be told what to do to get an A—and again, were frustrated when the tutors seemed to sidestep this question. Many students assumed the tutors had been fully briefed on all assignments by the faculty. Their general sense was that whether or not they felt—assumed—that they understood the assignment fairly well, the tutors did not. As a result, the students felt they had to "waste" time explaining the assignment, answering tutors' questions about the criteria. Then, some felt the tutors were giving them generic advice, rather than advice specific to their papers (have you done an outline? Have you checked your thesis?)—again, not understanding how there could be a writing process, a theory of writing that supplies general principles that can be applied to specific writers' work. Other students were frustrated, as the tutors sensed, by the tutors' questions about the student's ideas:

they wanted answers, not more questions, and not more revision. Students were wary of doing too much revision based on the tutors' suggestions, because they were not convinced the tutors knew enough about what I wanted to offer feedback that would get them better grades (even when they had drafts with them that I had marked). And if students had been to the Center but had not gone back, it was for this reason—they would rather follow my comments alone rather than risk doing something I wouldn't want.

So, the only person who has had correct assumptions in this whole tangle of relationships is me, insofar as I had a fear, and made assumptions based on it, that everyone else had incorrect assumptions about what everyone else was supposed to be doing, and why and how. We could easily solve this problem by following EM Forster's famous dictum, "Only connect!" and yet it's precisely because we haven't been connecting—but have imagined we were—that we've ended up assuming more about our effectiveness in teaching writing than is really the case. On the one hand, the Writing Center tutors have a pretty good sense of how the students respond to their visits, and sympathize, but can't do more because of their sense of disconnection from faculty. They need to know more about the faculty's assignments, and criteria, and would find it very helpful to feel welcome to communicate with faculty, if not about specific students, then at least about general pedagogical expectations. On the other hand, faculty like the idea of the Writing Center but are not making optimal use of it. Faculty teach the writing process, explain it, give assignments designed to get students to engage in it; but for many students, what we assume should be enough instruction is not. We tell them what the Writing Center does, where it is, that they should go—for some faculty, that they must go—but many students still don't know what the Center

is for (let alone where it is!) and how they can make use of it.

I've also begun to suspect that perhaps our students are simply suffering from information overload, especially at the beginning of the year. The Writing Center's promotional efforts are focused on the orientation period and first weeks of class; our instruction in the concept of the "writing process" tends to be most intense at the start of the semester—then we all assume that since we've told the students, they've got it. Nope. I think our timing is as much an unlooked-for culprit as our other assumptions.

The point of this study has not been to discover new methods and tricks to get students to make more or better use of the Writing Center as part of their initiation to academic writing and life in the academy. In fact, I have all along been consulting my trusty *Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice*, my *IWCA Writing Center Resource Manual*, my collection of *Writing Lab Newsletters* and *Writing Center Journals*, and have earnestly followed the experts' tried and true advice, attempting to involve both tutoring and faculty colleagues as much as possible—and have subsequently been bemused when first-year visiting rates have stubbornly refused to budge upwards. Here was my big, unexamined assumption: that doing "right" things automatically compels others to provide desired outcomes. This epiphany is what led me to wonder to what extent other unexamined assumptions, especially my own, were getting in our way—and once I went looking for them, there they were. What I, the tutors, and the composition faculty have to do to improve our students' engagement in the writing community we had assumed we had established—is to do everything we've been doing, with one fundamental change. We can see places where we need to do some things differently, some

things more, some things on a different schedule; but most importantly, we have to make sure that the only assumption we operate on is that taking things for granted is no substitute for taking action.

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**Director of the Writing Center and Associate
Director of the Undergraduate Writing Program
Columbia University**

Columbia's Undergraduate Writing Program is a four-year-old program responsible for offering the university's required first-year writing course and for operating the university's writing center. We seek to hire an associate director interested in working with a small team of writing program administrators (the director and one other associate director) to expand and administer this program. This associate director's primary responsibility will be to direct and develop our nascent writing center. Additional duties will include teaching the university's required first-year writing course, participating in the selection and training of graduate student instructors, and contributing to the general administration of the UWP. Experience with curriculum development, non-native speakers/writers of English, writing-in-the-disciplines, or writing and technology is also desirable.

This is a full-time, non-tenure-track position at the faculty rank of Lecturer in Discipline. The initial appointment will be for one year, with the possibility of renewal for subsequent multi-year terms pending successful re-

view. A.B.D. considered; Ph.D. by October 1, 2006, preferred. Salary competitive and commensurate with credentials and experience. Please send letter, C.V., and three letters of recommendation to Professor Joseph Bizup, Director, Undergraduate Writing Program, 310 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University in the City of New York, 1150 Amsterdam Ave. MC 4995, New York, NY 10027. Applications received by March 2, 2006, will receive first consideration. Our search will continue until the position is filled. We will conduct initial interviews in late March and early April, on campus and possibly at the CCCC Convention in Chicago. <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/uwp/>>.

If you are interested in applying for this position after the March 2 deadline and would like information about the status of the search, please email Joseph Bizup at <jb2223@columbia.edu>.

Columbia University is an Affirmative Action / Equal Opportunity Employer. Minorities and women are encouraged to apply.

**Visiting Faculty and Writing Center Associate Director
Xavier University**

Xavier University invites applications for a Visiting Faculty and Associate Director of the Writing Center. The Associate Director is responsible primarily for supervising the student staff, maintaining records, promoting services, and ensuring efficient operations of the Center, and as a full-time instructor, teaches three writing courses per semester, primarily advanced composition for Honors students. This is a one-year, non-tenure appointment, beginning in August 2006, renewable up to three years. Candidates should have experience with writing centers, have significant experience in teaching writing, know current composition

theory, and be familiar with word processing and database software. Candidates must have excellent interpersonal skills and be committed to working closely with students and peer tutors. Candidates must have, at a minimum, an M.A. in English.

Applicants should submit a cover letter, curriculum vitae, three letters of reference, and a writing sample. All applications must be postmarked no later than March 3, 2006. Send materials to Ms. Linda Loomis, Xavier University, Department of English, 3800 Victory Parkway, Cincinnati OH 45207-4446 or email loomis@xavier.edu.

Narrated presence: Story, class, and writing center work

I'm thinking about the discussions in the Honors section of first-year composition. The students were struggling with my adaptation of McAndrew and Reigstad's "This is how I write" assignment. They wanted to—but couldn't—fit that writing into a five-paragraph essay; they couldn't outsource, relying on collected reference materials to present them with a thesis. They had to live through their writing processes and simultaneously describe them. They had to allow their own stories to unfold before them. This is a lot to ask of students whose assignments had never before called for writing in this way, especially students who had succeeded so consistently in writing for school. What I do most in these situations is listen and ask questions about what writers are trying to accomplish, what story they are telling.

Allow me to speculate. First, thinking about my students enables me to ground my work in the classroom, where I feel most at home. Second, looking at other writers enables me to move comparatively as a writer. Third, as I consider how I helped my students, I can think about how to help myself. Finally, I can narrate a story and find out what my role is there, through considering what my role is here.

Somehow, this doesn't seem earthshaking. It doesn't seem like new ground, yet this process, watching it unfold and constantly reconsidering my roles both here and there, enables me to keep moving forward, to keep uncovering new considerations, to keep engaging myself in a dialogue about what I am doing and why. I think I may be tutoring myself; I seem to be guiding myself through an unfolding process that I hope leads to clarity and a more tangible sense of the role I'm seeking. The more I tell a story of my-

self in this role, in this task, the more I am able to make my way through this work and consult the narrative I am generating.

My telling this story is the process by which I am getting this work moving. Narration is propelling me forward. Discussing the importance of narration in writing center work is what I want to do. Talking with a group of my peers and colleagues about how I value narrative in writing center work, especially when working with students who are new to college and postsecondary culture, is exactly what I want to do. Ultimately, I want to argue that writing centers are a most advantageous place for these narrations because so much of our work relies on story—stories of getting assignments, of writing processes, of struggle and of what comes next.

The important question is not whether our writing center practices engage narrative but what is at the center that works so well and what role narrative plays in that center. Rather than try to impose narrative on writing center work, it makes better sense to consider narration as it is found already operating in the center and how narrative might matter to student writers.

Joseph Campbell, the hero's journey, and the monomyth, Carl Jung, archetypes, and the collective unconscious would certainly be considered in a longer discussion of the collaborative power of narrative. Pointing to selected highlights of writing center practice will work better here. What are, say, three of the most ubiquitous features of current writing center practice? The three that come to mind first, for me, are process writing, collaboration, and non-directivity. There are certainly others, and these selections are not in-

tended to capture the full complexity of writing center work or culture. However, in the writing center circles where I travel, these three are prevalent if not the primary pedagogical features of current and successful writing centers.

Process writing

When I think about process, especially process writing, I think about a series of events unfolding over time. Although it has long been known that writing is neither linear nor neat, thanks to the work of researchers like Janet Emig, writers can still learn a great deal about what they do and create opportunities for their own intervention by studying processes for writing, both their own processes and those they gather from others. Narrative is the only means by which this process is really representable.

When I teach process, I narrate a certain sequence of events and then ask students to narrate theirs. Although it may demonstrate my own limitations, I just can't seem to find another viable way to work this with students. As a teacher and tutor, a good deal of my time with student writers has been spent on figuring out where they are with their writing and where they want to go, and narrative is not what I have requested or demanded but the seemingly natural vehicle by which this kind of interaction has taken place.

Narrative, in this context, enables a critical distance. Narrative inquiry allows students to step out of "one-shot" thinking about both their writing processes and products, arguably because it allows them to recognize their active and ongoing decision-making roles as writers. When they can see themselves as decision makers and builders of texts, they can also begin to consider how to intervene in those processes in order to better achieve their goals.

Telling writing stories enables critical distance, which in turn generates better access to writing processes and written products. In working through narrative, with a writing tutor or other, student writers have something useful and important to contribute.

Collaboration

Collaboration can often be narrative, too. And the best evidence of this is what students say to one another when they are working together. This is especially the case when students seem to be “off-task.” When students are working in groups, they often spend time trading stories about their week-ends, about parties, about movies. Off-task talk, according to John Parbst, can be very useful in writing tutorials because “this type of conversation can relax a one-on-one tutorial” and it is “one of the best ways to unintentionally brainstorm new ideas” (1). Although these exchanges may not be focused on the task at hand, they are meaningful in that they generate a context for that work. “These discussions, although seemingly time consuming, can ultimately help bring about a better and more productive relationship” (Parbst 2). I must admit here that I am less concerned about this in my classes than I probably should be, because I agree with Becky Bolander and Marcia Harrington who write that “These treasures are easy to miss if we work too linearly or listen too ‘lightly’; if we allow ourselves to think that only certain kinds of talk or processes are legitimate or productive in tutorials; or if we judge certain digressions or issues students bring to tutorials as only marginally important (2).

According to one language acquisition text, we are hard-wired with what is called “story grammar” (Carroll 176-180). It is somehow an essential part of how we understand the world; we seek context first and then episodes within that context. Certainly, off-task work can be understood as this kind of

contextualizing. Ruth Mirtz focuses very specifically on this phenomenon within small writing groups; “instead of seeing small groups as off-task or a failure, I saw small groups as a locus for writerly behavior. . . . Each group ‘invents’ itself, each group finds its own way to meet diverse and conflicting goals, and each individual modifies her personal goals to some extent to make the group work” (93-94). This, by any of my measures, is what collaboration should look like. The vehicle by which that interaction, adjustment, and negotiation occur is primarily narrative.

It is sometimes true that students are simply not doing their work when the discussion wanders, and it may also be true that students are sometimes derailing the work because they are not prepared. However, what if these off-task narrations fulfill some other purpose? What if they provide the group with touchstones for their collaboration? What if these are the context markers for the episodes of each student’s paper or that particular assignment? It is not entirely farfetched to think that students may use narrative to contextualize their responses as they collaborate. This kind of narrative interaction not only facilitates students’ active roles but also disables individual peers’ needs to “take charge” by distributing responsibility, authority, and group work.

Nondirectiveness

If, in our tutor training, we discourage direction-giving and unilateral problem-solving, by what means do we hear tutors working with student writers? What I hear, from both sides of the tutorial, is narrative.

“What are you working on?”

“I listened in class about what I’m supposed to write but, when I got back to my room, I didn’t have a clue.”

“What have you done so far?”

“I read over the assignment sheet and made some notes about things I think Professor Schmoe wants to see in the paper. I started a draft, but I got nowhere with it.”

“What are you thinking about the paper right now?”

“Right now, I am thinking about how much I don’t care about this topic.” All of these statements could be parts of the narratives students and tutors can bring to the table. Because they have these resources at their disposal, tutors can then continue to ask questions about where student writers have been and where they would like to go. Because both contribute to the narrative of the tutorial, each has access to another story of her own work, another way to think through her own process of generating writing.

In order to avoid simply fixing papers for students and/or becoming the grammar police, tutors need to have a range of tools available other than direction. If we wish to empower student writers, they must have a role to play in the tutorial, too. Peers demonstrate, in the ways that they work together, that narration is an important contextualizing agent as well as mode of operation. In tutorials, narrative can go one step further and become the agent of change. Students don’t need to be told what to do when tutors can help them make informed decisions for themselves. When tutorials can get student writers to ask for what they need, because the student writers can see the story of their writing unfolding before them, there is much less need for directiveness on the part of the tutor because the student is narratively shaping the tutorial as well as the writing process and the developing narrative of that process.

Please be clear that I am not saying instruction or directive tutoring are never appropriate in writing tutorials. However, I am saying that the mutual construction of a writing tutorial narrative, one in which both participants contribute and learn from that narrative, diminishes significantly the necessity and utility of direction or instruction.

There certainly is no claim intended here that *only* narrative can accomplish these ends in the writing center either. The hope, from the start, has been to demonstrate that narrative is a viable means by which to enable the writing process. Further, some of our most consistent goals in writing center work can and often are accomplished through narrative, or at least they can be. I realize that I may have generated a very peculiar argument here and one that requires greater articulation than this context might afford but, if you'll bear with me just a little longer, I will demonstrate that there is good reason to at least consider this line of thinking.

Resistance

We academics have been very much willing to consider resistance as an overt student response to academic discourse. Cecilia Rodriguez Milanés wrote convincingly of both the appropriateness and utility of resistance. Victor Villanueva advocates a pedagogy that enables and informs resistance; “students are asked to consider in their writing the degrees to which they can or do resist, oppose, or accommodate” (634). But James Berlin argues that resistance may not have the desired effect. Rather than enabling a student to participate in academic culture, “expressionistic rhetoric is inherently and debilitatingly divisive of political protest, suggesting that effective resistance can only be offered by individuals, each acting alone” (691).

What options, other than resistance, exist for the student and tutor who are not already a full-fledged participant in

academic discourse? How can writing facilitate that acclimation (not assimilation—academe is not the Borg, to be sure)? What role can the writing center play in that acclimation to academic discourse?

I would argue that these students need ways to see themselves in the role of writer. Their alienation from that role is disabled when they can see themselves as viable participants and check their vision against that of codified members of the academic discourse community. Certainly, among students, there are few more recognizable, accessible, and codified members of the academic culture than peer writing tutors. They are not only successful participants but so successful that the institution put them in positions of responsibility for helping their peers “get on board.”

Isocrates' students, unlike those of other Sophists who saw writing only as preparatory to speaking, were taught that writing was a medium through which they [the students] learned about themselves (heuristic) and through which they could develop their ideas fully before presenting them in social or political circumstances. . . . Isocrates is credited as the first to recognize the full potential of writing instruction—that is, as a method for facilitating thought and expression in higher education. (Murphy, et al 53)

We have not lost track of that ideal, even if the resulting methods are sometimes a little hard to see; certainly for students whose experience with academic discourse is limited, writing can facilitate their becoming more aware of themselves as thinkers and writers; meanwhile, developing writing skills also enables these same students' acclimation to academic culture, which relies so heavily on writing.

What role can the writing center play in these processes? The writing center can be the place where students tell and develop the narratives of them-

selves as students, thinkers, writers, researchers, and vested participants in an academic discourse community, whatever that participation looks like. Because the writing center provides recognized peer writers with whom students can work and learn, it facilitates interaction that enables student writers' becoming more fully informed of academic communications. By working through process, collaboration, and non-directive tutoring, the student is empowered to play an active role in his or her becoming a member of the campus community. Because that work so often takes the form of narrative, it not only facilitates students writing themselves into the stories of their academic lives but encourages students to think very deliberately about the stories they can tell of themselves now and those they hope to be able to tell in the future. The more they articulate those stories, the more they can access those same narratives and actively work to shape them.

The narrative character of writing center work can enable students to not only think about themselves as part of stories of higher education but also provide them with opportunities to continue to develop those stories. Not unlike the writing I have used here, students can use narratives to find their stories and get at the centers of them.

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

March 3-4, 2006: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Provo, UT
Contact: Penny Bird, e-mail: penny_bird@byu.edu; phone: 801-422-5471. Conference Web site: <<http://english.byu.edu/writingcenter/peertutoring.htm>>.

March 4, 2006: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Sacramento, CA
Contact: Susan McCall, e-mail: mccalls@arc.losrios.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://ncwca.stanford.edu>>.

March 9-11, 2006: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Alliance, OH
Contact: Bill Macauley, e-mail: WMacauley@wooster.edu; phone: 330-263-2372; Rodney Dick, e-mail: dickrf@muc.edu; phone: 330- 823-4792. Conference Web site: <www.ecwca.org>.

April 7-8, 2006: NorthEast Writing Centers Association, in Nashua and Amherst, NH
Contact: Leslie Van Wagner, e-mail: lvanwagner@rivier.edu.

April 8, 2006: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Annapolis, MD
Contact: Chip Crane, e-mail: cecrane@usna.edu; Leigh Ryan, e-mail: lr@umd.edu; and Lisa Zimmerelli, e-mail: lzimmerelli@umuc.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca/conf_2006.htm>.

April 29, 2006: Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association, in Corvallis, OR
Contact: Conference Web site: <<http://www.acadweb.wvu.edu/writepro/PNWCA.htm>>.

June 24-26, 2006: European Writing Centers Association, in Istanbul, Turkey
Contact: Dilek Tokay, e-mail: dilekt@sabanciuniv.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/ewca2006>>.

October 25-29, 2006: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Louis, MO
Contact: Susan Mueller at smueller@stlcop.edu or Dawn Fels at dfels@earthlink.net. Conference Web site: <<http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>>.

New Date for U. of Illinois Conference

For the National Conference on Writing Centers as Public Space, to be held at the University of Illinois at Chicago Writing Center, please note that the dates for the conference and the submissions deadline are different from those given on the original announcement.

New Date: September 29 - October 1, 2006 New submission deadline: March 6, 2006. Please send submissions or inquiries to Vainis Aleksa at: uicwritingcenter@hotmail.com. For more information about the UIC Writing Center, visit our Web site: <<http://www.uic.edu/depts/engl/writing/>>.

TUTORS' COLUMN

“Where’s our teacher?” Reflecting on peer tutoring and teaching

I arrived dressed in khakis, a white blouse and a scarf. I remember deliberating a long time about what to wear because I knew that it was the first day and I worried about making an impression as “the teacher.” Now, you would have thought that the scarf would have given me away since most first year students don’t wear them. I came in deliberately late (about 5 minutes or so) and took a seat in the only empty chair available—right in the front. I didn’t have to pretend to be flustered or nervous—I really was because doing this “activity” was definitely a risk for me, given my usual introverted self. Although I have since forgotten his name, I’ll never forget the smile on the face of the young man sitting to my left. It seemed to say: yeah, it’s been a rough day for me as well. It’s all right that you’re late. It’s going to be okay.” I sat for a few minutes and I noticed that the class began to rustle and bustle with nervous energy. One burly, athletic-looking student in the back of the room (who I would have trouble with later in the semester when he made a paper airplane and threw it across the room the day my assigned mentor came to observe my teaching skills) said out loud—“Where’s our teacher”? Wouldn’t it be funny if *he* didn’t show up?!

At that moment, I stood up, walked to the front of the room, picked up a piece of chalk and wrote: “Welcome to English 15. Ms. Aesha Adams.” You could have heard a pin drop—I certainly thought I heard every jaw drop as I stared at a classroom full of blank faces. I could only assume they were shocked because first of all, I looked so young (how else could I have pulled

it off?); secondly, I was female; thirdly, I was African American and fourthly, I was a young, African American woman!

After introducing them to Penn State’s Introductory Rhetoric and Composition Course, I proceeded to tell these eager yet baffled students why I engaged them in that activity. I said, “I want to blur the lines of distinction between me, the teacher and you, the students. I want you to realize that I don’t hold all of the knowledge about writing and rhetoric. You all have something to bring, something to teach me as well.”

Thus began my first day of teaching first-year composition, a milestone event for my tenure as a graduate instructor at Penn State University. As I reflect on this first day and the ways in which my teaching practices have since evolved, I have come to realize that I have been indelibly marked by my experiences as an undergraduate peer tutor at Marquette University. As evidenced by my speech to the class, I strove to create an environment that valued diversity and fostered collaborative learning, dialogue, and interaction between and among all participants. I thought of myself as a “coach” or a “mentor” to my students, encouraging them through a variety of assignments, readings and activities, to become self-reflexive of their writing, a skill I acquired as a peer tutor. Although it was my first time teaching college students, I gained confidence and expertise knowing that I at least knew how to begin to respond to student writing because of the ways in which I was trained to respond as an

interested, engaged reader during tutoring sessions. In fact, in the early days of my teaching I found that my comments almost always took the form of questions on student drafts. Furthermore, I thought of my one-to-one conferences with students during office hours as mini-tutorials because I always wanted the student to maintain ownership of her writing while helping her take a step back from her writing and become aware of her rhetorical choices.

However, as the aforementioned paper airplane incident demonstrates, I ran into problems later in the semester with maintaining my “authority” as the teacher and handling student resistance when I attempted to “redraw” the lines of distinction between teacher and student. Perhaps I was overly optimistic (and naïve) in thinking that the writing center and the writing classroom were identical spaces—there are different expectations, different institutional constraints, and different power dynamics in operation in a writing classroom. Muriel Harris makes a similar observation in “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors.” She claims “tutorial instruction is very different from traditional classroom learning because it introduces into the educational setting a middle person, the tutor, who inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher” (28). Students therefore respond differently to tutors than to teachers, according to Harris, because tutors can occupy a third space, a space outside of the evaluative pressures of the classroom (28). Therefore, despite all the blurring of boundaries and distinctions, my students would in some way still

perceive me as “the teacher”—I held the grade book; I assigned grades to the papers; I marked students tardy; I, in some ways, was viewed as a representative of the institution, who with the slightest stroke of my hand could make or break a student’s GPA. Furthermore, I believe that there were times when my students wanted a “teacher” and not a “tutor”; while my office hour conferences were fun, interesting, and satisfying (at least to me), to resist being directive and tell students what I expected seemed unethical. In other words, acknowledging students’ rights to their rhetorical choices was fine until I had to assign a “C” or some other grade to those choices.

Finally, I struggled with how much of a “peer” I could or should be to my students without losing their respect. Peter Elbow surmises that “even though we are not wholly peer with our students, we can still be peer in [the] crucial sense of also being engaged in learning, seeking, and being incomplete” (332). For Elbow, it seems, “peeriness” is a rhetorical stance or pose that teachers can adopt to demonstrate that they are also lifelong members of the learning community even while they simultaneously insist on upholding classroom standards. Elbow calls this “embracing contraries” and claims that it embodies the struggle of “good teaching . . . because it calls on skills or mentalities that are actually contrary to each other and thus tend to interfere with each other” (327). As I grappled with how to blend the expertise and confidence I found in my sense of self as a tutor with my newfound role as a composition instructor, I also struggled with how to remain student-centered and maintain my authority within my classroom. I wanted to eschew the image of the teacher as “the” ultimate authority figure, but I also needed to know how to deal with students throwing paper airplanes across the room.

I realized, however, that I had a limited view of what authority is and where it should come from. Although writing centers and writing classrooms are not identical spaces, like the writing center, the writing classroom is a space where multiple subject positions converge and multiple roles are negotiated. Brian Street and James Gee refer to these multiple positions and roles as “multiple literacies.” Street argues that rather than think of Literacy (capital “L,” small “y”) as a neutral, technical skill, we should think of literacy as the ideological, social and cultural practices that individuals draw upon to make meaning of a variety of verbal and extraverbal texts. James Gee demonstrates that literacy not only involves multiple ways of knowing but also multiple ways of being—ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that are particular to a discourse community. For me this includes my sense of self as a “teacher”-“preacher”-“singer”-“sistah”-“scholar”-“student”-“writer”-“tutor.” The list goes on and on. I could draw upon each of these different ways of being, knowing and showing, to assert my authority to teach.

Indeed, as my teaching has evolved, I have worked to make these literacy practices more explicit in the classroom. For example, I often begin my composition courses by soliciting students to sing a call-and-response gospel song in order to illustrate the ways in which their participation is integral to the success of the semester.

My first semester experience as a composition instructor demonstrates the multiple subject positions, multiple voices, and multiple roles we as lovers of, users of, and practitioners in writing centers occupy and employ as we enter new spaces. I often wonder if my students were asking the same question at the end of the semester: “Where’s our teacher?” If so, I’d like to think that it was less because they thought I did a poor job of teaching them about

writing and more because they began to think differently about what it meant to be a student in a composition classroom taught by a peer tutor. Despite my encouragement, many of my students did not visit the writing center that first semester. But, they didn’t have to because the writing center visited them. In the words of Wendy Bishop: “You can take the girl out of the writing center, but you can’t take the writing center out of the girl.”

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Learning to teach

While I'm not sure how much help I've been to the students I've tutored, all the students I've worked with have certainly been a lesson to me.

Each day as I entered the Writing Center, I had no idea what awaited me. My challenge might be anything from helping an ESL student understand her pronoun reference, to tweaking sentence structures for clarity on an advanced writer's paper. What all my sessions had in common, however, was an effort to lull everyone into comfort. "I am not here to judge you," my whole manner tried to say. "I'm here to help you." Or, in the language I often used, "I'm just putting another pair of eyes on this," or "Here's an idea," or "It seems to me. . . ."

In Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner's chapter "Examining Expectations," they remind their readers that as tutors, "your attitudes towards the distribution of power will have a great influence on what occurs in your sessions" (35). I found this to be true. My attitude about my authority, and that of the students I worked with, had everything to do with how helpful, or not, our sessions were together. In addition, there were some surprises.

As one of my co-workers, a fellow graduate instructor, discovered, if you bow out of your position as expert with someone who may be defensive about being present at the Center altogether, you run the real danger of letting them walk right over you. In this instance, she was confronted with not one resistant client but two. These two young men were writing a project together, and only ended up at the Writing Center because it was required. They ran rough-shod over her suggestions, once they got a sense of her tutoring style, which was extremely gentle and suggestive, rather than directive. Clearly, some finessing of her style was in order, and she adjusted accordingly.

With a firm voice, she reminded them in no uncertain terms that they had come to the Writing Center for a reason—and that she was a tutor there for a reason. Without spelling it out, she had reminded them: she was by definition the expert in this situation. Only her help, not her expertise, was predicated on listening to their ideas. Gentle as she is, she felt horrible later about having been so firm, but other experts than her confirm that sometimes it works.

Literacy theorist James Gee believes "face-to-face interactions such as tutoring can be controlled by the participants' ideologies or largely unconscious values and viewpoints within social activities that have implications for the distribution of power" (qtd. in Gillespie and Lerner 41). While I believe this can be used powerfully to the tutor's benefit, in my co-worker's case this seems to explain the break-down of communication in her session. She at least certainly felt the reaction of the clients was predicated on their feelings for a woman in her position, triggered by her arguably feminine style of subverting her expertise.

I have had a few students contradict my suggestions, but happily they were usually right in the instances they did so. These were occasions in which we agreed there was an issue, but disagreed with the solution. With close listening, and a few rereadings, we came to constructive solutions via a true learning experience for the student, and for myself. Able to see the problems in their own paper—often, anything I point out is something they already suspect—they are able to craft a better solution under my supervision, so to speak.

In particular, I am thinking of a session with an ESL student, a girl from Korea writing a research paper on the United States' education system. I was

absolutely fascinated by her viewpoint, and her paper as a whole was strong. However, her thesis was beyond problematic. Wrong place, wrong angle, just wrong. She would not take my suggestions regarding a change to this. Briefly, I felt my authority questioned, and was, essentially, resistant to her resistance. I was not listening closely enough. Ultimately, it became clear that she agreed with the idea of changing it—she now could see the problem. However, my initial suggestion did not work for her.

She was right. I remembered an early tutoring session of mine, which was observed by the Writing Center director. "You're excited about her work and her interests," the director had told me politely. "However, your exuberance at times runs over her comments." We'd had a good laugh at the time.

Now I could hear it happening. With a deep breath, I shut up. I listened to her idea, and her reasoning. I listened to the history of the Korean education system, and her experience within it. I heard her abrupt surprise on being set into the American education system; I heard the difference between the two systems. And I finally heard what she meant to say—the emotional center of her whole paper, not my structurally sound thesis sentence. With a couple of pointers from me—small ones, grammatical ones, non-invasive ones—she crafted a really relevant thesis, making her true point. Which was her own.

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The product-sensitive writing center

I decided to write about addressing a dilemma I encounter daily in the writing center where I work: the tension between process and product. Which deserves more attention? I figured it would be easy to outline my take on the debate, as articles arguing the issue (particularly promoting the former) inundate the writing center and composition studies fields. Yet my attempt to write this was quickly complicated by the extent to which I was forced to personally address the conflict. In drafting, how much leeway should I allow my thoughts creatively, before reigning them in to something readable? At what point have I learned enough as writer, and at what point is the article perfect?

The process versus product debate links to the fact that as consultants in the center, we witness the range of roles afforded to writing: the communication of one's ideas to others, the crystallization of one's ideas for oneself, the instilling in the writer of new methods of critical thinking, the functioning of rhetoric as a social process by which one voices one's ideology. Consulting frequently entails adapting to the individual writer, drawing on one's experience and theoretical knowledge in order to best serve the needs of the session. The epistemological leanings of contemporary writing centers vary due to the sheer number in operation; few centers, however, can claim themselves not persuaded at least in part by the process-focused expressivist movement. The groundwork laid by expressivists such as Stephen North, Sondra Perl, and Donald Murray has proven invaluable in broadening our conception of what writing is, as well as moving our attention from outdated rules to the very habits of the writer in the act of creation. Despite individual variation in strategies, it is not uncommon to find

within quite a few centers a tendency to approach the persuasive essays, the compare/contrast papers, the exploratory essays brought to the center with a fairly unified battle cry: Let's examine the *way that one goes about* writing such a paper!

On a daily basis in the center in which I work, one as influenced as any by the expressivist movement, I cannot help but witness ways in which the predominance of process neglects equally vital components of writing and consulting. I am not the first; Eric Hobson, in his essay "Maintaining Our Balance," critiques not only the strictly expressivist approach, but the need to find the theoretical "true home of the writing center" (105). He traces the inability "to mold the writing center and the work it does to fit that epistemology's specific contours" to "the fact that each approach is not able to take into account all of the forces that impact writing center instruction" (105). Like Hobson, I see the center as a nexus for the many unique components of writing. Particularly in the realm of product, it is necessary that we rethink some of the strategies that we acquired through the process-based approach to tutoring. While no single stance can encompass a center, we can identify and amend practices as we gain in awareness of their limitations. We can take steps toward dismantling the limits induced by our various epistemological influences by overcoming the very fear of *product* that has led a great many centers thus far.

In consulting we engage in collaborative discussion, we encourage active writing in the session, and in doing so do our best to respond to the writer's needs. Frequently, these practices begin with the writer's presentation of a product, in some form of completion. As North states in "The Idea of the

Writing Center," "That particular text, its success or failure, is what brings them to talk to us in the first place." In continuing, North describes the expressivist approach, "In the center, though, we look beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and see it is an occasion for addressing *our* primary concern, the process by which it is produced" (North 38). In amending his influential essay years later, North revisits several key points, including the reality that writers are often not as engaged with the material of their texts as the tutor might hope, yet he fails to retract his emphasis on process as the definitive concern. In reflecting on North's description of the goal of the consultant/writer interaction, I cannot help but recall the image of the witch luring Hansel and Gretel into her house with candy, with the real motivation to push them in the oven. The authenticity of the collaborative relationship, with both participants communicating openly their concerns and levels of expertise, is a key ingredient in the establishment of trust necessary to the successful tutorial. How can we deign to speak of authenticity, or of the "student-centered" establishment of North's essay, while applying an approach that revolves around manipulation or trickery? The same forging of a common goal that so many minimalist strategies entail, in which tutor and writer find common ground defining the designation of tasks and power is necessary to the bigger picture of the student/writer relationship. At times, we may have to compromise in part when it comes to our process-focused ideal, (for example, in the case of the writer composing a personal statement upon whose success her future depends); at other times process-based strategies best fulfill the goals of both the writer and the center.

The writer is aware of the importance of product in her choice to visit the center, as a grade often depends upon it, and the consultant witnesses other ways product is indispensable. Anyone who works in a center will agree that some of the most fulfilling moments occur when the writer truly invests herself in her writing. This is a phenomena directly linked to product, one which even those primarily concerned with providing cognitive support for the process-based approach allude to. In citing ways that the writing process is a unique mode of communication, Janet Emig suggests that “Perhaps because there is a product involved, writing tends to be a more committed and responsible act than talking”(9). The pride that impels the writer’s investment in her writing is a direct result of the fact that the written product will last beyond the end of the writing of it. To belittle product is to discount this unique aspect of writing as a mode of recorded communication. Similarly, cognitive analysis of the heuristics of the writing process cannot be fully appreciated without an awareness of the role of product. The widely accepted idea that writing is a recursive process that relies largely on a writer’s “felt-sense” is one most writing centers would support. As tutors, we seek facilitate access to this writerly intuition. Yet the backward movement inscribed in the felt-sense, described by theorists such as Perl, “to the feelings or nonverbal perceptions that surround the words, or to what the words evoke in the writer” (103-4), cannot be separated from some belief on the part of the writer that the essence of this vision can in some form be captured in the product. We should ask ourselves as consultants if we would embark on our own written endeavors minus this hope that the product, be it essay, review, poem, etc., will resemble the one in our vision. Would I really be writing this article if process were all that counted?

Finally, product is indispensable if as centers we are committed to the “writ-

ing to communicate” aspect of the WAC program, which invokes the conception of a given discipline as “a Burkean parlor,” into which the aspiring scholar must gain admission and learn to converse. “Writing to communicate” seeks to mold student writing in ways that will facilitate this entry and integration. With the teacher and writer enacting “the relationship of the seasoned professional to the apprentice” (McLeod 154), the classroom becomes the forum in which the dialogue of a given discipline is enacted. Just as in the greater forum of the discipline, in the classroom the product is the medium through which the dialogue occurs. Students labor most intensively over papers for the classes of their chosen discipline, seeking to emulate the scholars whose texts they study. With hard work and dedication, student writing transforms into disciplinary dialogue, as the former apprentice assumes the role of professional. The point at which this transformation occurs remains arbitrary, blurring the distinction between academics and the various disciplines as well. Are not most disciplines, at least in the humanities, firmly rooted in a university setting? Furthermore, such thinking works against the vital role afforded to the center, as described by Muriel Harris, of decentering authority by providing an alternative to the typical teacher-student relationship (139). Yet despite these facts, advocates of process take the line between the classroom and the discipline to be as cut-and-dried as that between product and process. Disregarding its motivating potential, product is considered inconsequential because the student does not yet wear the badge of master. When combined with a strictly expressivist viewpoint that claims student-writing can be of no import, this aspect of the WAC program thus works against the very writers it seeks to aid.

As tutors in the writing center we are in the privileged position of experiencing the diversity of written communication and are thus familiar with the

numerous forms in which it can occur. It is part of our job to respond to the different types of writing assignments students bring to us with different strategies. We would not apply the same techniques and activities to help a writer structure a psychology lit review as we would a poetry manuscript, for structure functions in very different ways in the two. The importance of product is an aspect of writing which can vary just as much between assignments (consider again the personal application statement): why then is it assumed a fact that the role of product is not likewise arbitrary and dependent upon the form of writing? Teachers assign different types of writing in order to instill different skills in writers. For example, in a single semester, students might write an exploratory essay, a research paper, and a persuasive essay. While the products of the first two might be secondary to the processes of crystallizing one’s ideas and acquiring research skills, inherent in the idea of the persuasive essay is an emphasis on the ability of the finished product to persuade. The best way to learn how to write a good persuasive essay is thus through a careful consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular example, i.e., how the reader reacts. Some types of writing are more translucent to process, meaning a teacher can see a successful process despite a less than successful product. A research paper need not be perfect in order to provide evidence of progress in researching methodology and structuring an argument. Other forms, such as the persuasive essay, are not so translucent: the process is “in” the product.

The complexity of the role of product can be traced to other, more intrinsic factors of the writing process. The process of learning is not static; rather, cognitive development has been shown to exhibit various stages and features: connection, re-organization, reinforcement, feedback (Emig 10). As a unique type of learning, writing exhibits these features, in large part *because* it results in a product. Emig states, “The importance for learning of a product in a familiar and available medium for immediate, literal (that

is, visual) re-scanning and review cannot perhaps be overstated" (11). The process of learning how to write, looked at over an extended period of time, is similarly related to product. Throughout her development, a writer frequently alternates between exploratory, experimental periods and periods in which newfound skills and techniques are incorporated into their pre-existing rhetorical style. In writing, "the complex evolutionary development of thought [becomes] steadily and graphically physical throughout as a record of the journey" (Emig 14). As Piaget and others have shown, the "thought" of learning is never uniform; cognitive development moves through various stages. The implication of this is that when a writer is reaching for new uses of language, product is of less import, but when a writer is testing her ability to successfully use the skills acquired through experimentation, perhaps in a final paper culminating the writing skills learned throughout a semester long class, her only avenue for evaluation is through careful examination of her product. The question remains as to what this means for the center. To deny product a place in writing is clearly not an option. Instead, new strategies are called for, in order to help a consultant and writer together decide to what extent the finished product is important in a particular endeavor. In my own consulting, I've found that it is often as simple as asking writers whether they feel a skill has been covered thoroughly enough as to have become part of their writing repertoire. If the response is affirmative, the session can continue by moving away from the product with regards to that particular aspect (comma splices, for example), toward that which still merits attention. Acting as such, the session can transition smoothly from product to process (and vice versa) in a way that remains authentic goals of both the writer and center, even when working with the most "product-weighted" endeavors.

As writing centers continue to evolve and expand, gaining attention as they assume a larger role in the universities they serve, definitions of writing expand as

well. Our strategies and encounters illuminate the many facets of a unique process. For this reason, in many universities the center is indeed "the center of consciousness about writing on campus" that North alludes to (85).

Yet the work of neither the writing center nor the composition theorist is done until reconciliation between product and process is reached. Are we supporting the writers we work with or the unattainable ideals of a faceless epistemology? The sides of the argument become increasingly tangled, at times seeming to contradict themselves. Murray, advocating process, writes, "Mechanics come last. It is important to the writer, once he has discovered what he has to say, that nothing get between him and his reader. He must break only those traditions of written communication which would obscure his meaning" (6). Despite an emphasis on process throughout his article, this statement implies that process is important in that it ultimately produces a product that, in Murray's view, should comply with convention. Is this what process is about? Denying the writer's concerns, failing to acknowledge that it itself encompasses a belief in product, and in the end merely serving the rules of positivism?

"The stance(s) we take toward how best to teach writing are determined by our view of where truth is located and how it can be accessed by novice writers" (Hobson 101). While consulting is not teaching, Hobson's statement lends itself to way we approach our work in the center, particularly regarding process versus product. Product is not the big bad wolf we've made it out to be; conversely, it has shown itself in many ways to be inseparable from any truth about writing. This article stands as evidence: I only feel fortunate to have a theoretical background in composition and writing center studies with which to tackle this issue as it has arisen for me. When we work in centers committed to serving our respective academic communities, our job is

to bring our experience and knowledge to the writers with whom we consult. Not only is it time, as Hobson makes clear in his article, to reconcile the process, product, and social-epistemic arguments, we must also re-strategize in order to expand this truth. With awareness and authenticity the center can thus continue to evolve.

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