

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E E T T E R

Volume 36, Number 5-6

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

Jan./Feb., 2012

— FROM THE EDITOR —

Writing centers often break new ground, remake themselves, evolve. And this sense of forward motion is highlighted in the January/February issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, in the articles and also in the themes of the writing center conferences announced here.

In the first article, Barbara Bird asks us to rethink what constitutes student learning in a tutorial as she discusses the characteristics of deep learning and offers tutoring strategies to achieve it. Next, Lucie Moussu reflects on an effective new program that includes her tutors in a project reaching out to the local community to help marginalized high school students. One goal was to improve the writing skills of the high schoolers; another goal was to introduce them to the university. A third goal was to encourage those students to apply to the university after graduation. Then, Bonnie Devet and Alison Barbiero, seeking a new way to prevent tutor burnout or tutoring on auto-pilot, suggested that tutors ask for advice about their tutoring by writing to “Dear Labby.” Finally, Katie Brown shares her thoughts about the challenges and rewards of tutoring a new group of writers: sixth-graders.

For conference chairs who would like CFPs and announcements in *WLN* and for search committee chairs who have announcements for writing center-related job openings, please e-mail information to me (harrism@purdue.edu) by the 15th of the month before the date of the issue. And to everyone a Happy New Year ahead, and may all your budgets increase.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

INSIDE

Rethinking Our View of Learning

◆ Barbara Bird ◆

Page 1

Bridging Gaps—An Unusual Writing Center: Bringing Unusual High School Students to University

◆ Lucie Moussu ◆

Page 7

Dear Labby: Stressing Interpersonal Relationships in a Writing Center

◆ Bonnie Devet ◆
and

◆ Alison Barbiero ◆

Page 11

Tutor's Column: “College Writing Tutors in Public School Classrooms”

◆ Katie Brown ◆

Page 14

Calendar for Writing Center Associations

Page 16

RETHINKING OUR VIEW OF LEARNING

◆ Barbara Bird
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Writing centers focus on writers, not writing, on learning, not editing. Because we value learning so highly, some writing center scholars have closely examined the long-held assumption that only non-directive tutoring strategies promote learning, concluding that this assumption is quite problematic (Henning and Hawthorn; Harbord; Truesdell; Shamon and Burns). Thus, writing centers are now placing a more direct focus on learning, using any strategy that facilitates learning in order to more effectively help writers learn skills or concepts. In other words, we have found that students learn more by having tutors focus directly on learning (rather than specific strategies). However, if we view “learning” strictly in the sense of gaining a product (a writing skill or concept), we limit the learning potential almost as much as we did when we focused on non-directive strategies. When tutors work with students, they frequently accomplish much more than merely teaching a specific concept or skill: they encourage higher-level thinking processes. By rethinking our view of learning to include not only concepts and skills but also thinking processes, we expand the learning potential in writing center work.

If we view the learning that takes place in the writing center as a product, something students walk away with (e.g., the knowledge of how to write a thesis statement), writers may be more likely to

continued on page 2

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Manuscripts: Before sending in submissions, please consult the guidelines on the *WLN* website. Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format (including Works Cited). Please submit files to the *WLN* website.

restrict their learning to a formula: follow these three steps to create a product, a thesis statement. But if we rethink our view of learning to include a set of deep thinking processes, we can emphasize the qualities and kinds of thinking deep learners use to produce those products we teach. John Tagg offers a useful definition of deep learning in his *The Learning Paradigm College*. According to Tagg, deep learning has seven thinking processes: focusing on making meaning, actively constructing knowledge, relating new knowledge to prior knowledge, integrating knowledge into "semantic memory," relating new knowledge to broader theoretical ideas, being mindful, and making learning enjoyable (81). Deep learning necessarily involves how we think. Thus, in our writing centers, as we engage students in these thinking processes, they experience the *kinds of thinking* necessary to create thesis statements, not just the superficial steps for making thesis statements.

STIMULATING DEEP LEARNING

In order to see more easily how deep thinking is applied in the writing center, I want to group these seven deep thinking processes into broader categories. Charles Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia, in their *Surpassing Ourselves: An Inquiry into the Nature and Implications of Expertise*, explain that deep learners use three thinking processes that novices do not use: sophisticated ("evidence-based"), impressionistic, and self-regulatory processes (47-48). I will explain each process, giving specific examples for how tutors engage students in these thinking processes.

As Bereiter and Scardamalia argue, deep learners use *more sophisticated and evidence-based thinking* processes than novice learners. Mike Rose discusses one example of the major difference between superficial thinking and deep thinking, noting that the "blockers" he studied used restrictive rule-governed thinking processes while the "non-blockers" used more sophisticated, flexible thinking processes. Deep learning processes are more complex and open. For example, when developing an argument paper, deep learners think more in terms of developing solid reasons that could persuade the reader, whereas novice learners tend either to predetermine the number of reasons or latch onto the first few reasons they develop, whether or not these are the best reasons. This latter issue illustrates that part of the difference between deep and novice thinking processes is that novice thinking stops too quickly. One common tutoring practice that prompts deeper thinking is pushing students to be open to alternative ways of seeing their topic, asking students if they have thought about their topic from a different perspective. Also, when tutors sense weak reasoning, they ask students to justify their reasons or help them identify unsupported assumptions those reasons rely on. All of these tutor responses push students into more flexible thinking processes.

A second difference between simplistic and sophisticated thinking processes is the depth of evidence used in writing, with writers using sophisticated thinking processes seeking out the best evidence. Tutors spur this thinking by encouraging students to use strong evidence and to interrogate their evidence. More sophisticated thinking processes also follow a more in-depth searching process, continuing to search until they find strong evidence instead of relying on the first article obtained or whatever comes up first in a Google search. Thus, when tutors see weak evidence for students' claims, they frequently ask students where they found that evidence. In addition, tutors sometimes ask students to think about what evidence they have already found that can strengthen their paper. These interactions push students into deep thinking processes.

Second, deep learners tend to use much more *impressionistic thinking* processes, which Bereiter and Scardamalia explain as an emotional commitment to what is being learned (56). Without emotion, most "knowledge tends to be rapidly forgotten. According to some modern theories of memory, we do not so much recall information as *relive* events. Strong impressions make memorable the experiences out of which we reconstruct knowledge as we need it" (emphasis in orig. 56). Expert

learners really “get into” their work far more than novice learners, who frequently see writing only as a task to be completed. Thus, deep thinking processes include greater emotional commitment, which does not have to be life-changing; students can engage emotional processes by simply choosing a paper topic that interests them or choosing a stance or even an example they truly care about. When tutors help students find these connections to their topic or ideas, they nudge students toward this deep thinking process.

The scholarship of Alice Brand, Susan McLeod, Laura Miccichi, and Sondra Perl further supports the significance of emotions in thinking, arguing that connecting emotions directly to learning improves the product these thinking processes generate. Miccichi even frames emotional processes as “part of what makes ideas adhere, generating investments and attachments that get recognized as positions and/or perspectives” (6). The specific kinds of emotions these scholars promote help improve learning (e.g., excitement about the topic or sensing a raw idea). However, as Gayla Mills notes in her *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, “Preparing for Emotional Sessions,” some emotions can be detrimental. Specifically, Mills mentions anger, stress, and anxiety as preventing students from productively engaging with their learning process. Impressionistic learning processes draw on the positive emotional states to enable deep thinking.

Tutors encourage the use of emotional responses by helping students value what their words and ideas mean to them. Many times students, especially freshmen, write what they think their professor wants to hear or what they imagine academic writing should be. This externalization of ideas can result in a paper divorced from who they are as writers or from what they truly believe, preventing deep thinking. When tutors help students find personally meaningful examples to illustrate a point, argue a position they feel passionate about, or find some genuine interest in their topic, they move students toward deep thinking.

A third kind of deep thinking process, as Bereiter and Scardamalia note, is a *self-regulatory process*. This is “knowledge that controls the application of other knowledge,” to guide the work in which writers are engaged (60). A self-regulatory process allows writers to more effectively control their work by drawing on a wide range of writing concepts such as considering audience and defining the writing task (Flower and Hayes), engaging in dialectical thinking (Berthoff), and drawing on “felt sense” to generate ideas (Perl). Here is an example: Tutors can help students draw on their felt sense by encouraging students to verbalize the “raw” ideas in their head. Many of our tutors are exceptional at helping students try out different words or ideas until these students can verbalize the felt sense they are experiencing, asking questions and paraphrasing what the students say until the students reach an “a-ha” moment of clarified idea. Students being guided through this process can gain not only a concrete improvement in their current paper, but also an experience of using the self-regulatory process of drawing on their felt sense.

“ [I]f we focus solely on the learning of specific skills, we risk inadvertently encouraging a superficial learning, relying on simplistic thinking. ”

Another kind of expert self-regulatory thinking process is that of understanding and using “resources in everyday [authorship] practice” (Lave and Wenger 100). Whenever tutors directly engage students in common authorship practices, they teach self-regulatory thinking processes. Here are some authorship processes that tutors frequently teach: how to rewrite a confusing sentence in various ways to find the best option, how to use a “backward outline” to check the structure of the paper, or even how to use a thesaurus to improve word choice. These processes engage students as participants in

everyday authorship practices. What is important to recognize is that teaching and promoting these activities can do more than help students learn a particular skill (how to write a thesis statement or look up a word in a thesaurus). Teaching these activities models a deep learning process, *a way of thinking*.

By becoming more aware of how our tutoring interactions not only help students learn specific concepts or skills (products) but more importantly thinking processes, we open the door for deeper learning, broadening the potential impact of our work. Tutors cannot directly control what thinking processes students repeat on their own; however, students who use these deep thinking processes in the writing center should be, on their own, more apt to return to these thinking processes than if they had just been taught how to create a product (a thesis statement or outline). Intentionally pulling students into deep thinking processes, at the very least, will expose students to expert learning and will likely provide students with an improved understanding of how products are created by expert writers.

WORKING TOWARD AN ASSESSMENT OF DEEP LEARNING AND THINKING PROCESSES

I attempt to assess the level at which my tutors teach or encourage students to engage in these deep thinking processes. This assessment is clearly an indirect measure of student learning; however, at this point I am more concerned that my tutors intentionally try to draw students into deep thinking processes. I observe and record 15-20 tutoring sessions every semester and then code nearly every verbal exchange tutors make, including how and when tutors teach these three thinking processes. I also use a meta-analysis of all my tutors' coded sessions to assess my writing center as a whole—strengths, weaknesses, and overall trends. Below are some specific qualities that support deep thinking that I look for when I code my tutors' transcripts:

Get student to talk about ideas in the paper. We all have tutors who begin their sessions by asking students to talk about their work. For example, last semester one of my tutors asked, in the first few moments of the session, "What is your general direction [in your paper]?" He then took notes on what the student said about his ideas. We also have tutors who turn students' papers over so they can't see their work and then ask what their paper is about. These actions force students to talk about their ideas in terms such as, "I try to develop my thesis this way. . ." or "I want to show that. . ." This language pushes students to own their ideas, and this ownership tends to develop *impressionistic thinking processes*.

Ask prompting questions. Consultants prompt students into deeper thinking by asking students to elaborate on a point they made or clarify a term they used. For example, in one session when a student was using football to analyze muscle movement in a paper for a kinesiology class, my tutor asked the student, "So maybe, since you just talked about a touchdown pass, I was thinking, so, throwing touchdown passes is great, and how you are supposed to do it, [but] how do you prove, like what muscles you need? See what I mean?" This question prompted the student to think more deeply about his purpose, the assignment, and what he was trying to prove in his paper. This uses *more sophisticated thinking processes*.

Encourage the student as a writer. This encouragement needs to be specific, usually praising a specific attribute of the student's paper. In one session, my tutor was reviewing some sentences the student had worked on since her last session, and she asked my tutor what she thought of an altered sentence. My tutor responded, "I liked it because it gave me a good idea of your situation. I experienced it, too." This very specific praise encouraged the student as a writer because it was her own work as a writer that the tutor praised. In addition to praising students' work, tutors can

praise students' writing skills. For example, in one session a tutor noticed that her student no longer was making one particular grammar error and paused to point out that improvement to the student. Praising specific aspects of students' writing usually improves *self-regulatory thinking processes* because it helps students connect their process, how they created whatever it is the consultant praised, to their work as a writer, and it can improve *impressionistic thinking* since the student usually becomes emotionally pleased with his or her work.

Ask the student what he or she already knows about the topic. This question could be raised at any point in a session. At the beginning of one session, my tutor asked his student what interested him in his topic (Hugo Chavez), and the student said that he is Cuban and feels like Americans do not have an accurate view of Chavez. So later in the session, my tutor asked, "Would there be some positives, some things that he did that helped the people that maybe aren't as recognized in American culture?" This question prompted the student to connect his more sophisticated, prior knowledge to this particular paper. These questions helped the student move toward *sophisticated thinking processes*.

Express interest in the student's ideas through direct statements. Interest is sometimes communicated through the act of combining praise with a restatement of a specific idea in the student's paper, as one of my tutors did: "I thought this was really good, bringing in the idea of a sub-culture versus even the broad culture of spirituality, and helped get into the meat and details of the study!" This enthusiasm for what the student produced potentially reinforced the thinking processes used to create those ideas. Additionally, when tutors collaborate with their students, prompting them as necessary to develop their ideas, they model sophisticated thinking processes. In one session, one of my tutors asked a series of targeted questions to help her student rephrase a section of her paper. Later, my tutor said, "Yea! That's great! Let's get that down!" Expressing delight and approval for how a student phrases an idea usually improves students' *self-regulatory thinking process*, and it can also improve *impressionistic knowledge* if and when students gain an emotional connection to their ideas. Though deep learning processes are difficult to assess directly, I believe we can develop effective methods of assessing specific indicators of deep learning where tutors teach, model, or facilitate these thinking processes.

CONCLUSION

As a writing center community, we have always understood the importance of helping students learn as writers rather than focusing on their text. But if we focus solely on the learning of specific skills, we risk inadvertently encouraging a superficial learning, relying on simplistic thinking. By rethinking how we view learning, we make the teaching and modeling of deep thinking more explicitly a part of writing center practice. Rethinking learning, recognizing that we facilitate not only writing products but also thinking processes, our mantra, "we help writers not writing," becomes even more appropriate than we might have imagined. ♦

Note

¹ "Felt sense," originally coined by Eugene Gendlin (as cited in Perl 365), refers to that bodily sensation we have when we consider how we want to respond to a topic. It includes, in an encapsulated shell, all that we sense, know, have inspiration over, and feel about a topic. Perl argues that only when we slow down and pay attention to our felt sense will we produce writing that represents us and that "teaches us something" (368). Acknowledgement: I am deeply appreciative of the feedback I received from *Writing Lab Newsletter* reviewers and editors! ♦

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Director, Hume Writing Center Stanford University

The Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) at Stanford, a program within Stanford Introductory Studies (SIS) in the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE), seeks a senior staff member to manage and direct the Hume Writing Center (HWC) and serve as Associate Director of Stanford Introductory Studies.

Qualifications include: Ph.D., experience teaching and tutoring writing, experience in writing program and/or university administration, and experience with campus-wide writing support.

To view the complete job description and to assure your application information is captured in our official files, you must apply to <<http://jobs.stanford.edu/>> and in the keyword search box, indicate 45473.

Additionally, we ask that you send your letter of application, curriculum vitae, at least three letters of recommendation, an example of writing related to scholarship or writing program administration, and a statement of philosophy regarding writing center pedagogy to:

Nicholas Jenkins
Faculty Director, Program
in Writing and Rhetoric
Sweet Hall, Room 314
590 Escondido Mall
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-3069.

Deadline for applications: January 30, 2012.

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IWCA WRITING CENTER SUMMER INSTITUTE

Interested in writing centers? The IWCA Writing Center Summer Institute is ideal for current or would-be writing center directors and assistants, writing program administrators, tutors, writing teachers (high school or college), curriculum developers, graduate students, new PhDs, and academic leaders—both in the U.S. and abroad. Institute leaders offer presentations and roundtable discussions on a variety of topics and issues that connect theory and practice. Leaders are available to meet one-on-one with participants throughout the week. Leaders for the 2012 Writing Center Summer Institute are—

Tammy Conard-Salvo, Purdue University
Brian Fallon, Fashion Institute of Technology
Nancy Grimm, Michigan Technological University
Jennifer Wells, Florida State University
Ben Rafoth, SI co-chair, Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, SI co-chair, West Virginia University

The 2012 Summer Institute will be held July 29-August 3, 2012, at Seven Springs Mountain Resort, located about one hour's drive southeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the beautiful Laurel Mountain region. Air travel is to Pittsburgh International Airport (PIT). For more information, including registration, please visit <<http://iwcasummerinstitute.com/>> or contact the institute co-chairs: Ben Rafoth (brafoth@iup.edu) and Nathalie Singh-Corcoran (Nathalie.Singh-Corcoran@mail.wvu.edu). ◆

BRIDGING GAPS—AN UNUSUAL WRITING CENTER: BRINGING UNUSUAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO UNIVERSITY

◆ *Lucie Moussu*
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB

A few weeks after I became Director of our Writing Centre at Ryerson University (in Toronto, Canada), the chair of the English department presented me with the opportunity to create and teach a new course that would train my writing center tutors through a university Service Learning project. Without much thought, I accepted and subsequently embarked on a complicated and exciting adventure, working in conjunction with a local high school (HS), the university's Service Learning office, and our Arts and Contemporary Studies (ACS) program. A primary goal of this project was to raise the educational aspirations of high school students from marginalized communities by offering them university courses to strengthen their writing skills and to help them gain a sense of belonging to a community of learners. Other goals included providing extensive practical education and training to future writing center tutors; helping university students put theory into practice while developing interpersonal skills and the confidence to move from being a learner to a teacher; and linking the university to the outside community. Bridging gaps between high school and the university for university students, writing center tutors, and high school students was, in short, our overarching goal.

BACKGROUND

The overall purposes of this project were many: first, Ryerson University wanted to provide its students with strong practical experience through Service Learning projects, and my ACS class seemed like a perfect fit for such an undertaking. Also, as new Director of our Writing Centre, I was excited to follow Richard Kent's call to "adopt one (or more) secondary schools" to provide students at that school with writing support and to bridge the gap between high school writing practices and university/college practices and requirements. This project also seemed a great opportunity to share resources and expose students and teachers at both institutions to new teaching and learning experiences, as advocated by Pamela Childers. Interestingly, this type of collaboration had previously been employed at Stanford University (Tinker), but had not yet been tried at a Canadian writing center. Finally, the participating HS wanted to provide its students with a unique experiential learning experience while improving their writing skills (Itin). As this article will demonstrate, the project was ambitious and turned out to be more challenging than expected, but its positive effects made it worthwhile and extended well beyond an improvement in the HS students' writing skills and my ACS students' tutoring skills. It is my hope that other high schools and university writing centers find inspiration in this project.

BUILDING THE BRIDGE

The participating high school is an inner-city school, located in the heart of Toronto. The school is host to a large English-as-a-Second-Language population and a transient student body. Challenges abound in trying to retain students and guide them through a program that focuses on success for post-secondary school. In 1999, two teachers at the participating HS explored the possibilities of students receiving first-hand university experience while still attending HS. Their objective was to propose a program that would give selected students support at the high school while gaining experience in all aspects of a university program. Together, they created a curriculum that allowed selected HS students to attend courses of their choice at participating Toronto colleges and universities. At the same time, these two HS teachers assisted students in their preparation of university assignments, time management skills, and exam preparation. In addition to paying the students' tuition, the HS also paid for student textbooks/supplies and the cost of transportation.

The students themselves were very impressed with their own success at the university level. It gave them a sense of confidence in their own abilities as their work was equally judged alongside that of first-year students. Back in the high school classroom, these students viewed and approached their senior courses more positively as a result of their university experience: grades increased, attitudes improved, and motivation spurred a strong desire to apply to university. All students who completed their course were accepted to the post-secondary schools to which they applied. However, the complexity of the university and college courses chosen by the HS students raised concerns about these students' literacy levels, and university-level skills had to become more appropriately integrated into the HS students' experience. This integration was accomplished through the introduction of The Writer's Craft, a mandatory course, which taught students to read and write at post-secondary levels and acted as a support system for the college/university course studied by the students. As part of the students' commitment to their post-secondary studies, HS students were mandated to attend the writing center in the institution they had decided to attend. When students received writing assignments from their university/college or their Writer's Craft course, they were to take their drafts to the Writing Centre. Student access to the Writing Centre was provided via a weekly campus day, a day when students attended their post-secondary institution in order to participate in an activity of their choice (i.e., library, gym, Writing Centre).

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

In February 2007, my Arts and Contemporary Studies class became involved. As new director of Ryerson University's Writing Centre, I was given the opportunity to create and teach an undergraduate Arts and Contemporary Studies (ACS) class in tutoring and writing pedagogy. Some of my students were going to become Writing Centre tutors, but others would go on to Teachers College or other graduate programs, so I wanted to introduce these students to a variety of teaching and tutoring techniques and contexts. This class aimed to provide experience for all of these future contexts through a training schema that included a practical element, as well as theories of pedagogy and writing. This type of training is highly recommended by many scholars (Capossela; Litman; Tinker). Discussions between the HS and the Service Learning office concluded that a partnership between my ACS students and the HS students would benefit both parties.

Having never tried such a collaborative project, I decided to teach a regular class three hours a week and to require my ACS students to tutor the HS students for at least ten hours total, outside of class time, throughout the semester. In addition to the practical aspect of the course, our curriculum consisted of readings and assignments that would prepare my students for their tutoring and teaching experience. Homework assignments included readings, observing actual tutors in the Writing Centre, responding to a variety of student papers, and writing a final research paper. Students were also required to go to the Writing Centre and have one of their own papers evaluated to understand a writing conference from the perspective of Writing Centre clients. After each tutoring/teaching experience and observation, students were required to write a reflective evaluation.

Class time consisted of guided tutoring practices and role-play to practice teaching and tutoring techniques, discussions of the readings (including their theoretical and pedagogical implications), debriefings of tutoring experiences, development of lesson plans to meet the HS students' needs, grammar/style/punctuation mini-lessons prepared and presented in turn by each student, and guest presentations by a variety of people involved in the project: the HS principal discussed the challenges and successes faced by his staff and students; a representative from University Admissions addressed learning options for atypical high school students who want to attend university; a psychologist from the Student Development and Counseling at Ryerson presented information on creating safe teaching and tutoring environments; and the director of the English Language Support office at Ryerson shared his knowledge of the difficulties second-language writers can encounter.

Throughout the course, my students were evaluated on class participation, completion of homework assignments, and performance as tutors. Evaluation of students' reflective writings and class discussions helped me ensure the project was going smoothly, allowed me to respond quickly to unexpected difficulties, and informed my practices for teaching similar classes in the future.

The HS students were to meet with the Ryerson tutors once a week for two hours, on Ryerson's campus, but not all sixteen students came every week or for both hours. This created a difficult situation, as we could never predict how many students would attend any given meeting. Some weeks, only four or five HS students would come each hour, which allowed my students to give them individual attention; other weeks, all sixteen students attended both hours, which required my students to divide them into smaller groups and to adopt more of a teacher role than that of a tutor. After a couple of awkward weeks, my students became used to this (lack of) organization and knew that they always had to prepare a Plan B. And although my students enjoyed tutoring the HS students one-to-one, Stephanie noted that, "working with students in a small group setting was also rewarding for the students since they were able to bounce ideas off of each other."

Initially, my ACS students expected the HS students to be "slackers" and to attend the meetings with a negative attitude; however, all of the HS students seemed enthusiastic about the project. As Karla wrote in her first tutoring reflection, "I had imagined that each student was from a lower socio-economic background, with personal baggage to contend with, and an attitude about learning that would be difficult to overcome. I was totally wrong, and I have never been happier to be so wrong in my entire life."

Another unexpected aspect of the project taught my students flexibility: there was no consistency in the assignments that the HS students brought to the class. Some of the pieces were related to their university courses, but they also brought previous assignments from their high school classes, college and scholarship applications, and creative pieces. Sometimes, they would not bring anything and would simply ask questions such as "what is the difference between the APA and MLA styles?" This experience forced my students to think on their feet in order to give advice to the HS students in areas above and beyond the assignments at hand. For example, the HS students were very curious about my students' positive and negative experiences with university life and asked numerous questions like "what was your most difficult class and why?" Although such questions did not directly relate to writing, I encouraged my students to answer them because this type of interaction was one of the primary goals of the project. As Julie said, "the students benefit from talking to us about just anything because they can ask us questions they are afraid to ask someone else like their teachers or professors." In their article, H. M. Ashley and Lisa Shafer discuss how outreach programs that link inner-city college and high-school students can lead to a significant increase in college admission for low-income youth and youth of color. The interest of the HS students in student life at Ryerson suggests this is indeed so.

Given the unpredictability of the tutorial sessions, a variety of activities were created and carried out by my ACS students in response to the HS students' needs. For example, on the first day together, the HS students were divided into small groups and taken for a tour of the Ryerson Library and Writing Centre. During another session, a small group of students worked on brainstorming techniques and creating outlines. Interestingly, one of my students, Jordana, noted that she was speaking too often and "not letting the students do the talking. As we have discussed in class, it is very difficult to keep your opinions to yourself in order to facilitate the students' learning by not instilling your own ideas into their heads." My students also practiced their tutoring skills by responding to pieces written by the HS students. Stephanie, for example, said, "I feel that my student and I have fully engaged in the writing process, not only making her paper better but helping her as a writer to improve at the craft."

Overall, my students' reflections and feedback demonstrated that they tremendously enjoyed this hands-on experience, although the beginnings were a little arduous. As Karla wrote after her first

TAKE NOTE

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Friday, March 30 – Sat.,
March 31, 2012

Indiana U./Purdue U. at
Indianapolis (IUPUI)
Indianapolis, Indiana

*"It's the End of the World as We
Know It: Negotiating Change
in a Writing Center Context"*

Keynote speaker: Muriel Harris

The Mayan calendar predicts the world will end in 2012. Writing center work is full of endings and new beginnings. Sessions end, semesters end, only to be replaced by something new.

Sessions may consider ways you cope with CHANGE in your writing center: possibly how you train and integrate new tutors, what your experience as a new tutor or administrator is; how you set up new spaces/rearrange old spaces; how you implement new policies or adjust existing ones to shifting circumstances; and how you adjust to new administrative demands, try new techniques, tweak old techniques, reinterpret and apply theory, integrate technology, outreach, or assessment. The possibilities are endless.

For further information, contact Jackie Grutsch McKinney (jrmckinney@gmail.com; 765-285-8370) and Lynn A. Jettpace (ljettpac@iupui.edu; 317-278-9214). Conference website: <<http://www.iupui.edu/~uwc/ecwca.html>>.

tutoring session, “I found it difficult to help all these students at the same time and to work on assignments I knew nothing about. At times, I felt over my head.” Julie added, “The second tutorial session went better than the first. We went in with a clearer vision of what to expect and so did the students.” In the end, there were many comments such as this one from Jane: “Working with the HS students was a pleasure and an invaluable experience! I have learned that preconceived notions do not belong in a tutorial session and that every tutorial provides an opportunity for mutual learning.”

CONCLUSION

Bringing the university to marginalized high school students while simultaneously providing practical experience to university students turned out to be a complex yet exciting endeavor and a monumental success for the high school program. The HS students’ feedback, although not collected systematically, was very positive. One student, who wrote an application for a scholarship with the help of my ACS students, successfully received the scholarship, and all the students who applied to Ryerson were accepted for the following year.

The challenges we all encountered that semester allowed us to improve both my ACS course and the bridging HS program. Stakeholders at the HS, Ryerson’s English Department and Faculty of Arts, as well as the HS and ACS students, all recognized the value of this project and the fact that its many accomplishments went beyond everyone’s expectation: sharing resources and providing intellectual development for participants at every level; engaging high school and university students in new ways of thinking about their education and their future; raising educational aspirations and confidence among high school students; improving high school and university students’ writing skills; creating a sense of belonging to a community of learners; providing practical education to potential writing center tutors; allowing university students to put teaching theory into practice and develop the confidence to move from being a learner to a teacher; and establishing a strong link between the university and the outside community. The cooperation and efforts on behalf of Ryerson and the participating high school were extensive and intensive, but well worthwhile for the final outcomes leading to high school and university student preparation and success for the future. This kind of “bridging” project can give student tutors a glimpse of authentic social and educational issues in action—something that students sitting in regular classrooms won’t often experience. All you need to create similarly successful projects is a bit of creativity, a lot of enthusiasm, and a few dedicated people who are not afraid to let things develop in unexpected directions. ♦

Note

The author directed Ryerson University’s Writing Centre for three years. She is now the Director of the University of Alberta’s Centre for Writers. Readers are welcome to e-mail the author (moussu@ualberta.ca) to discuss this project further and ask any questions.

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DEAR LABBY: STRESSING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A WRITING CENTER

◆Bonnie Devet and Alison Barbiero
College of Charleston
Charleston, SC

At one time or another, most consultants have worked with clients who cry, cling, degrade themselves, refuse to listen, want to use their tutors' ideas as their own, or answer questions with "I don't know" or "I'm not really sure" because their paper is, after all, written for a Sociology, not an English class. Thus, consultants must be trained in various interpersonal issues so we can face these problems head-on and improve our consulting skills.

In our writing center, we recently used a novel training program to demonstrate a wide variety of interpersonal relations and different ways to handle clients. The technique, called Dear Labby¹, is based on the popular newspaper Dear Abby/Ann Landers letters, where writers spill out their problems onto a page, hoping for a reply. Borrowing the technique from these popular letters, the director asked each consultant to write an anonymous Dear Labby letter, describing any interpersonal problems we had faced with clients. Then, she put these Dear Labby letters in a box and brought them to a training session where they were drawn from the collection and read to the consultants. Next, we became "Labby" and wrote down ways to handle the situation. Finally, consultants read aloud their suggestions so that all could hear how other consultants—both new and experienced—would deal with the client.

The letters contained a wide variety of problems, such as this one:

Dear Labby,
Yesterday, I had a client that continually spoke about how 'lousy & terrible' his work was. He seemed to need a lot of encouragement. I attempted to reassure him of his capabilities, but he still continued to put himself down. What should I do?
Signed,
Overwhelmed by a Needy Client

The replies to "Overwhelmed by a Needy Student" showed there was no one way to work with this client; one consultant, for instance, advised "Overwhelmed" to use tough love:

Dear Overwhelmed,
I would suggest you tell the student that he can no longer put himself down, as it is becoming counter-productive to his writing process. He now just needs to focus on enhancing and sharpening his writing; otherwise, he won't get anything done and will gain nothing from his Lab experience.

Taking a different approach, another consultant suggested "Overwhelmed" establish a bridge between tutor and client:

Dear Overwhelmed,
Share a few elements of your personal flaws as a writer or examples of certain instances where you have had problems. For example: 'Yes, that can be tricky—I myself sometimes have to write my thesis eight times before I nail it.' This makes them feel as if they are equal to you in ability and, therefore, not being judged by you.

TAKE NOTE

INTERNATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
Oct. 25-27, 2012
San Diego, CA
"Lines in the Sand: How Writing Centers Draw and Redraw Boundaries"

Like lines drawn in the sand, writing center work is continuously recast by ever-changing policies in higher education, innovations in technology, outsourced alternatives to student services, increased diversity of student populations, and progressions in writing center praxis. With the tides, we must be willing to shift within our philosophies and our policies in order to best support the communities with whom we work.

For our 2012 IWCA conference, we invite you to consider the centers where you work and write: What lines do you draw? How do those lines shift? How do shifting lines provide a chance for new definitions of yourselves and your work? How do the disappearing lines of work that you thought finished reappear as issues you must revisit and re-vision? How can the writing center community adapt to the tide so that it is second nature for us to live with the shifting sands? And how do we encourage others within our institutions to shore up student writing for/in the 21st century?

The deadline for proposal submission is April 23, 2012. For more information, visit <<http://www.socalwritingcenters.org/iwca2012/index.html>>.

TAKE NOTE

SOUTH CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

February 23-25, 2012
Little Rock, AR
"From Rubble to Diamonds: Writing Centers as Sites of Exploration and Discovery"
Guest speaker: Leigh Ryan

Conference co-chairs are Martha Dale Cooley, Henderson State U. (870-230-5283; cooley@hsu.edu) and Allison Holland, U. of Arkansas at Little Rock (501-569-8311; adholland@ualr.edu).

Deadline for early registration discount: January 15, 2012. Registration deadline is February 15, 2012. Registration and hotel information available at <ualr.edu/scwca/>.

Still another option stressed that consultants should offer support, both emotional and intellectual:

Dear Overwhelmed,

Find specific examples of where he did well and point them out. Explain why they are good. Tell him to focus on how to improve his writing rather than putting it down. And, of course continue to reassure him of his capabilities.

And one piece of advice was merely to end the session:

Dear Overwhelmed,

While it is perfectly normal for a client to doubt his or her writing ability, in this case, self-deprecating is interfering with your ability to assist the client. I would recommend asking the student to come back another time.

After listening to the responses from my fellow consultants, I (Alison) was caught off guard. The responses were all so varied and not at all what I would have done. Normally, I would deal with this scenario by catering to the client's ego; I am comfortable making people feel confident about themselves. However, these responses made me rethink how I would have handled the client. Dear Labby showed me other ways that I could deal with a situation; these responses helped me grow.

Besides showing us options for handling clients, the Dear Labby cards combated another problem: stagnation of practice. Consultants, after a semester or two, can often begin to handle students in the same way so that one methodology, like a snowfall, smothers, conceals, suffocates, and blankets tutorials. Many reasons account for this stagnation, which is common in centers. Human nature itself could be a factor: we tend to do what's easiest and feels most comfortable to us. While using the same techniques for every consultation is not good, it can make the consultations more predictable—as consultants, we like "predictable." In addition, time pressure and consultants' self-assurance can foster stagnation. When the Writing Lab is flooded at midterms and finals, consultants may be distracted by the line of clients waiting, tapping their pencils on the table and begging for just five minutes of our time. During these stressful times, we want to help our clients as much as possible, but we also want to assist as many as we can, so we may fall back on techniques we know best, since we're most confident with our personal method and style of handling clients; for instance, I (Alison) may deal with insecure clients by leveling with them and sharing my own insecurities because I know this technique has been successful in the past.

Hearing the consultants' suggestions for handling the Dear Labby cards, however, encouraged all of us to reexamine our tutorial techniques. In fact, the Dear Labby responses taught us methods we had not previously considered or had been afraid to try. Knowing that fellow consultants had seen success with a technique gave us the confidence to try it in our own sessions. Until Dear Labby broke our habits, we did not even realize we were being cookie cutters in our approaches. As Anne Ellen Geller, et al. argue, writing centers need to step back from their everyday existence and acquire a "mindset of exploration" about their procedures so consultants become more open to adopting new techniques (13). Staff training should foster

this “rupture of the assumed” where all premises about one’s work are reevaluated (Geller, et al. 16). The Dear Labby exercise helped to make sure our philosophies and practices did not become stagnant.

As experienced consultants, most of us could sort through, process, and reformulate the numerous suggestions to fit with our own tutorial practices. But there was a concern about whether new consultants would be overwhelmed by hearing so many ways to handle a client. While new consultants might have felt swamped, they were able to pick up some of the ideas for handling students and see that not all consultations are cut and dried. Also, because the cards described real life examples faced in the Lab over the last few weeks and months, new consultants could see what actually lies ahead. Dear Labby helped to show what was under our umbrella of responsibility.

The multiple responses to each card’s interpersonal problems also taught us how to help each other. When discussing a situation where one consultant was uncomfortable, we could empathize because it had happened to all of us at some point. In effect, by sharing our ideas, new and returning tutors saw we were not alone in our work. We could learn from each other, gaining a fresh perspective on how to handle clients in order to form “a community of practice that allows for change, mutability, learning” (Geller, et al. 12). ♦

Note

¹ The phrase “Dear Labby” was originally used by a former Writing Lab consultant Richard Perkins.

Work Cited

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COLLEGE WRITING TUTORS

(continued from p. 15)

can help one become a better writing tutor on the college level. Remember that even college students need encouragement and that enthusiasm and active listening from the writing tutor can prompt college students to become more interested in their own writing.

Tutoring writing in public schools can be a win-win experience. Students may act as though they do not care about writing, but, like Mark and Christy, they do care when someone takes the time to listen and get excited about their ideas. If more of us could voluntarily tutor writing in public school classrooms, perhaps more children would learn to write and be excited about writing. And we would learn something too: how to be better writing tutors.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Director, University Writing Centers Eastern Carolina University

Tenure track Assistant Professor beginning Aug. 13, 2012. The Department of English at East Carolina U. seeks to hire a colleague with experience and an active research agenda in writing centers to integrate, coordinate, assess, and enhance the current writing centers on campus. This person will join a vibrant, active faculty and staff, and serve as a leader in the University Writing Program (UWP). Responsibilities may include training and supervising undergraduate as well as graduate student tutors, promoting the work of writing centers across campuses, and collaborating with the Director and Staff of the UWP and the Director of Composition to develop additional support for student writers across all levels and areas of the curriculum. This is a 9-month faculty position with significant reassignment for administrative responsibilities. In addition to those responsibilities, the person holding this position will teach graduate (MA and PhD) and undergraduate courses and maintain an active research agenda. Earned PhD required by August 2012, preferably in composition and rhetoric.

Screening began December 1, 2011, and will continue until position is filled. Salary commensurate with qualifications. Candidates for this position must complete a candidate profile and submit an application letter, curriculum vitae, one-page statements of teaching philosophy and research agenda, and writing sample online at <http://www.jobs.ecu.edu>. In addition, arrange for three current reference letters to be sent to: Jeffrey Johnson, Chair, Department of English, Mail Stop 555, Bate Building 2201, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858-4353.

TUTOR'S COLUMN

COLLEGE WRITING TUTORS IN PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

◆ *Katie Brown*
College of the Ozarks
Point Lookout, MO

Across the desk from me sat two sixth-grade students, both staring blankly at the papers in front of them. Christy had been holding her pencil since I arrived as if writing were a dreaded disease, and if she even dared to scratch the lead across the paper, she might be infected. Although Mark had been writing only moments before and could regale me with ideas for his story, his creative flow seemed impeded by the process of writing. Both of them were struggling students, and I was there to help. And I was scared. How could I assist students with their writing when they didn't seem to care? At that moment, I could not see how one semester of tutoring could teach me practical ways to engage children with their writing and strengthen my skills as a college writing tutor.

Although Branson Intermediate School's (BIS) writing center began in 2006, it has recently struggled to maintain enough staff to keep the center running for students. After I began working at the writing center at College of the Ozarks, the director, Elise Bishop, encouraged me to tutor at BIS. With a schedule full of classes and work, I did not have the spare time. . . until we were able to arrange that tutoring time as a special problems class that would count towards my rhetoric minor. As a result, in September 2009, I began tutoring writing to one or two students at a time (such as Mark and Christy) within two sixth-grade classrooms at BIS.

THE RESEARCH

Although I was already tutoring at the college level, I wanted to understand more about tutoring children at the middle-school level. With this in mind, I began searching for professional literature regarding writing center work in public schools. Though I did not uncover any literature that pertained directly to writing centers at the middle school level, I did discover several books about how children learn to write and teaching children to write, such as *One to One: The Art of Conferencing with Young Writers* by Lucy Calkins, Amanda Hartman, and Zoe Ryder White; *Lessons from a Child* by Lucy Calkins; and *In the Middle* by Nancie Atwell. While *One to One* reviewed basic conferencing skills and gave example scripts of writing conferences with young children, *Lessons from a Child* detailed the progression of third graders learning to write, noting their need to learn how to focus on a topic, how to become independent writers, how to become peer reviewers of each others' work, and, ultimately, how to become their own audience. *In the Middle* provided practical ideas for teaching middle-school writing, such as how to use mini-lessons to target specific writing areas and how to listen and respond sensitively to students' writing.

Though none of the literature focused on writing centers or tutoring middle-school students, each perspective was thought-provoking. This research helped me think about the importance of being aware of developmental writing levels of children, such as their need for concreteness (rather than abstractness), as I chose how to approach each student's writing.

WRITING TUTOR'S LESSONS

Some days while tutoring at BIS, I struggled to be a good tutor and help children learn to become better writers. Towards the end of my semester of tutoring, I realized these struggles taught me lessons about tutoring children. Looking back at my journal, I noticed two major themes repeating throughout my reflections.

- *Be Enthusiastic*

When I began tutoring at BIS, I knew enthusiasm was an important part of writing conferences. I read it in books; I heard it at the Center for Writing and Thinking, College of the Ozarks' writing center. But it was while tutoring sixth-graders at the intermediate school that I really began to understand how enthusiasm affects children's responses towards writing. If I was ever tired and less than enthusiastic when working with

these students, their resistance toward writing only increased. In contrast, the more enthusiastic I became (showing genuine interest in the topic, pointing out something I thought the student had written well, etc.), the more effort the students put into their papers.

- *End with Praise and a Review*

In the college writing center, we always end writing conferences by reviewing what the student and writing assistant worked on during the conference. While working with sixth-graders, I began to realize how important this reviewing process is for children. Without review and praise, as I was leaving, the student often remained disorganized and uninterested rather than committed to continuing to write and revise. On days that I reminded the student of specific, concrete areas he or she had been working on and provided praise for his or her work, that student seemed more focused and interested in completing the assignment. Reminders of progress seemed to validate each student's work.

STUDENTS' LESSONS

"Oh, I get it!" Mark exclaimed one day as he stared at the spidery words dancing upon the lines of his notebook. "I never thought about it that way before." Hurriedly, he scratched out part of a sentence and spilled his new sentence across the blotted page.

Mark was one of those students with whom writing tutors love to work, full of dialogue and quick to assimilate anything I said. Mark's writing was more focused than that of many other students I worked with. Though a little disorganized, he was full of ideas and excited to share them. Talking through his thoughts helped. Some days he wanted to be finished whenever he scrawled his last word across the page. But when I pointed out an area of his story that did not make sense, it would be as if the proverbial light bulb clicked on in Mark's head. He would exclaim, "I never thought of that before!" and proceed to add explanations to that area of writing.

One day after reading one of Mark's new sentences, I turned to Christy, still slouching over her paper, twisting her pencil in her fingers. I asked her what she was thinking about. For a moment, there was silence. Then, slowly, words began to stutter from her mouth: "I... think I didn't say this right." She glanced up at me. "Well, it didn't happen exactly like that."

"Well, how did it happen?" I asked.

She paused. The pen rolled between her fingers. Then she began to write.

Christy was a quiet student who gave me the impression that she "knew" she wasn't a good writer. Some days she was apathetic towards her writing; other days, she was concerned with writing exactly what she wanted to express. On her first paper (a personal narrative), she wanted to detail every moment of a recent trip – showering, leaving the hotel, etc. – and disliked the idea of cutting anything. "I want to write about the whole thing," she insisted. A couple of weeks later, she was more receptive to improving her writing. She collaborated, asked questions, suggested changes. By the next paper, however, Christy was once again reluctant to change one word. Though her progress seemed inconsistent (often seemingly influenced by tiredness), Christy was slowly learning to revise for accuracy. "Well, that's not exactly true" or "I didn't actually say that," she would say.

IMPROVEMENTS IN WRITING AND TUTORING

In December 2009, as I finished a semester of tutoring at BIS, I asked for feedback from teachers who saw the children's writing on a daily basis. These teachers confirmed that the students had been learning, reporting progress in "editing/revising skills, which led to the students having a more developed and improved final draft."

Writing tutors, as well, can learn from this experience. Though I questioned it when I began tutoring, it is possible to give students individual attention within the classroom. However, in order for middle school students to become better writers, it is essential that tutors provide attentiveness, respect and enthusiasm for students' ideas, and encouragement to keep writing. Additionally, practicing these skills with middle school students

(continued on p. 13)



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CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

February 16-18, 2012: Southeastern Writing Centers Association, in Richmond, KY

Contact: Russell Carpenter: russell.carpenter@eku.edu. Conference website: <<http://www.iwca-swca.org/Conferences.html>>.

February 23-25, 2012: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Little Rock, AR

Contact: Martha Dale Cooley: cooley@hsu.edu and Allison Holland: adholland@ualr.edu. Conference website: <<http://ualr.edu/scwca/>>.

March 30-31, 2012: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Shippensburg, PA

Contact: Karen Johnson: kgjohnson@ship.edu. Conference website: <<http://mawca2012.intuitwebsites.com/index.html>>.

March 30-31, 2012: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Indianapolis, IN

Contact: Jackie Grutsch McKinney: jrmckinney@gmail.com, and Lynn A. Jettpace: ljettpac@iupui.edu. Conference website: <<http://www.iupui.edu/~uwc/ecwca.html>>.

April 13-15, 2012: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in New York, NY

Contact: Conference website: <<http://www.northeastwca.org>>.

October 25-27, 2012: International Writing Centers Conference, in San Diego, CA

Contact: Conference website: <<http://www.socalwritingcenters.org/iwca2012/index.html>>.