

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 24, Number 5

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

January, 2000

...FROM THE EDITOR...

At the top of this page you'll notice the newsletter's statement of purpose, to promote "the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching." And in this month's issue, you'll also find a variety of voices exchanging ideas.

Shireen Carroll, Bruce Pegg, and Stephen Newmann summarize for us the voices of directors of small college writing centers as reflected in a survey they sent out. Then, Jim Charles, a classroom teacher, and Brenda Davenport, a writing center director, show us how to bring English education students into the center and let us hear the voices of those students as they learn about tutoring and tell us what they've learned that will carry into their own teaching. Vainis Aleksa shares with us her poetic voice, and then we hear the voices of two tutors, Teletha Hathaway and Mariah Johnson, as they share their encounters with students.

This diversity of voices reminds us of the diverse voices that make up our writing center conversation. But there's still a missing voice—the administrators whom we also interact with and who influence our writing centers in very major ways. Any ideas for how to include them in our conversation?

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Size Matters: Administering a Writing Center in a Small College Setting

• Shireen Carroll, Bruce Pegg, and Stephen Newmann 1

Conference Calendar 5

English Education Majors as Unpaid Tutors in the University Writing Center: A Service/Research Project

• Jim Charles and Brenda Davenport 8

the good session

• Vainis Aleksa 11

Tutors' Columns

"What Do you Want on Your Tombstone?"

• Teletha Hathaway 12

"Different Words, Different Worlds"

• Mariah Johnson 14

Size matters: Administering a writing center in a small college setting

This paper began out of a number of conversations with directors of small college writing centers and out of a panel at the Third NWCA Conference in Park City, Utah. Those conversations, and that panel, suggested that small college writing center directors felt under-represented in the larger public conversations about administrative concerns. Undoubtedly, we are under-represented in our professional literature. With the exception of Julie Neff's profile of the Writing Center at the University of Puget Sound in Kinkead and Harris' *Writing Centers in Context: Twelve Case Studies*, little has been written about how writing center theory and practice inform or contradict the mission of a small college writing center.

With this in mind, we set out to answer some basic questions about administering a writing center in a small college setting, including

- what a typical small college center was like
- how it compared to what we know of the national profile

- what concerns small college writing center directors had that were under-represented in writing center literature and conversations

During Spring 1999, we surveyed small site center directors across the country, then presented our results at the Fourth NWCA Conference in Bloomington, Indiana. In this paper, we describe the survey, review its results, and explore what the results imply for future research.

The survey

On February 1, 1999, 122 surveys were sent out to writing centers direc-

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Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

tors. Because the sizes of the institutions were not verified before the mailing, we received a few returns from institutions whose size was too large for our sample; in the absence of a quantitative definition of what constitutes a small college, we decided to create an arbitrary limit of 3,500 students. Of the 46 returns received by the survey deadline (March 19), 6 came from colleges with enrollments over that number; this gave us 40 returns for a response rate of 32.8%.

The survey itself consisted of three parts. The first solicited information to create a statistical profile of small college writing centers, their directors, and the institutions in which they are housed. The second part asked five simple Likert scale questions about director perceptions of their relationship to other faculty and administration and about their budgets, centers, and jobs. The final part solicited discursive responses to four open-ended questions.

The center profile

The initial questions focused on what a typical small college writing center looks like. The answers, when compared to our own experiences working in or running a small college writing center, and to the experience described by Neff (127), look very familiar. The average college in our survey was an institution of approximately 1600 students. The center saw about 419 students a year; these students attended a little over 900 tutorials and accumulated an average total of 698 hours of tutoring. The average center has also operated for roughly 13 years, with a range of responses indicating that our sample encompassed the brand new (0.5 years) to the comparatively old (30 years). Clearly, centers at small sites are beginning to build a significant amount of, as yet untapped, collective knowledge.

The profile of students using the service also looked familiar. Around 50% of these were first year students; this number dropped off to around 20% for sophomores and 13% for juniors, with

seniors showing a slight increase in usage (14.5%). The remaining percentage included a very low number of faculty and non-student tutorials, suggesting areas in which outreach programs could be conducted to increase visibility (particularly when a common lament voiced in Part Three was that faculty involvement in writing centers was problematic). The staff profile of small college writing centers is similarly unsurprising; about 90% of writing centers in this survey relied on some peer tutoring, employing on average 23.5 undergraduates, while roughly 65% of the sample indicated that they employed approximately 2.5 professional staff. Only a quarter of those responding indicated whether they had any kind of support staff.

Much of what was reported in Part One looks familiar, yet these responses also include some alarming results. All respondents could answer how many years their center had operated, and 90% provided an average number of students seen annually. Only 83%, however, could provide figures for the average number of annual tutorials, and fewer still (70%) could give the average number of tutoring hours conducted annually. The survey questions, which asked for average figures rather than exact figures from a particular year, may have been flawed. Even so, the inability of a significant number of directors to provide this fundamental information, crucial to writing center administration, suggests problems with small site record keeping procedures. Because these figures are necessary in any case we make to central administration for money, space, or staffing, we need to keep them as accurately as possible.

Answers to the question about the size of an annual budget were difficult to interpret and provide another area of concern. Both the range of annual budgets (\$250 - \$200,000) and the discrepancy between the mean (\$33,000) and the median (\$16,000) budgets makes projecting what a typical small center budget looks like difficult. Compound-

ing this problem, some respondents indicated they were including student wage lines and, in some cases, the director's salary in their overall budget while others did not.

More alarmingly, over 25% of respondents simply did not answer this question. How should we interpret their silence? Granted, some small sites do not have an independent budget and rely on a larger academic unit to pay the bills. Yet others clearly neither know what the figures are nor have a budget. That a quarter of our sample chose not to—or could not—answer this question suggests questionable administrative judgement on the part of the director or on the part of the administrator withholding this information from the director. Controlling an independent budget may not be politically expedient for some directors, but *all* directors need to know where the money comes from and who controls it. Without this information, we cannot prioritize spending, plan improvements, shift funds to meet changing needs, or generally, in Julie Neff's words, "allocate [a] budget to the good of the center" (128).

To complete our profile, we asked respondents where their writing centers were "located administratively" at their institutions. The distribution of these small college writing centers around various campus administrative units also complicates analyzing our professional status and program security. If program security is measured by departmental status, then less than 30% enjoy that kind of security. However, most are housed in an English Department, where issues of security are offset by issues related to the traditional Composition/English turf war. The presence of nearly 40% in some kind of academic support program (Learning Skills, WAC Program, Student Affairs) suggests not only that our position is more precarious than in a department but also that our mission is more of academic support than curricular in nature, again placing us in a more precarious position. The 18%

housed in an academic dean or division office perhaps have more security and arguably hard budget lines, but again, the mission of such a program is probably seen as being in the academic support field, marginalizing us by philosophy rather than position.

The director profile

This area of the survey was closely tied to a 1993 national survey of writing center directors conducted by Dave Healy. Although comparisons between the two may not be totally accurate (Healy's response rate was 50.7%, N=273; ours 32.8%, N=40), they do yield some interesting observations. The breakdown of directors by degree and by field suggest that directors in small college writing centers closely resemble the national profile, with almost identical high numbers of MA's (44% in Healy's survey, 45% in ours) and English/Lit specialists (66% in Healy's survey, 68% in ours) in the field, and an almost identical low number of Comp/Rhet specialists (10% in Healy's survey, 8% in ours). Salaries are comparable as well; in our survey, the mean and median salaries reflect a \$2-3,000 dollar increase over the national average (\$33,323 (mean) and \$32,146 (median) according to Healy. Given that Healy's survey was conducted in the Fall 1993, salaries for small college writing centers seem to lag behind the national average. One way to interpret this figure is that it represents a 6% increase over the national average of five-and-a-half years ago and is thus a low figure indeed. Without the current national average salary, though, or a cross-sectional analysis of salaries by institutional size and type over that time, we cannot determine whether this reflects a national trend for writing center directors or just for small writing center directors as a peer group.

In the area of appointments, more striking differences between the national profile and the small college writing center emerge. The number of small college writing center directors who are faculty appointments is almost

half that of the national average (69% of national writing center directors in Healy's survey were faculty appointments, as opposed to 35% in our survey); this figure is also reflected by the number of tenure appointments which, among small college writing center directors, is again fully half that of the national average (46% nationally as opposed to 23% in our survey). And 38% of small college writing center director positions, according to our survey, are considered staff appointments. Consequently, despite similar qualifications and backgrounds, our lower salaries and status suggest that we are on shaky professional ground, perhaps more so than our national counterparts. Healy's contention that "writing center folklore tends to assume second class citizenship for directors" (30) seems more than illustrated by our survey.

However, the perceptions indicated in Part Two do not depict a group who feels marginalized, as Table One reveals (see page 4). Though the answers to Questions Three and Four suggest dissatisfaction with the way small writing center directors see their programs progressing, the higher standard deviations recorded in these responses suggests that this feeling is not universal. Further, the answers to Questions One, Two, and Five reflect the group's overall satisfaction with their professional lives. Clearly, if we are marginalized, we are not particularly worried by the fact.

When we presented this information in Bloomington, those attending the session suggested that this lack of concern may stem directly from non-faculty status: many of us have accepted the trade-off of decreased salaries and reduced job security for the freedom from the pressures of publication and promotion decisions. Identifying ourselves more as teacher/service providers than as scholars, some of us may, in fact, seek out small sites and what would conventionally be deemed marginalized positions. Other possible explanations reflect the nature of small institutions themselves. Our experience

suggests that staff positions may be relatively secure in comparison to pre-tenure faculty positions at other sites, and that the size of small colleges may also foster collegiality and render distinctions between faculty and staff less pressing. Julie Neff, perhaps voicing traditional wisdom, suggests that "having a director with faculty status and

such as a tutor—into the close pedagogic relationship, so making space for the tutor requires additional public relations. This suggests that the enthusiastic faculty support described by Neff (135) may not be typical of all small college writing centers, and may, in fact, pose a real problem in terms of the mission of such centers.

faculty from developing or teaching an overly "practical" course such as a tutor training one.

Time and money—which we never have enough of—each concerned 20% of respondents. That center directors at small sites feel as if they have inadequate time to perform their jobs is no surprise to any of us. Also unsurprising is the fact that one in five respondents worries about his/her center's budget. We remain uncertain how to relate this concern to other survey results, namely that over 25% of respondents did not or could not provide the size of their annual budget.

But if many of the concerns voiced by the respondents were predictable, what should we make of the unvoiced concerns in this survey? Many issues often hotly debated in writing center conversations—technology, job security, and center location—do not seem to concern small college center direc-

Table One: Survey Results to Part Two

Indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: (Disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 (Agree)

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.) I have a good relationship with the faculty at my institution.	4.19	0.79
2.) I have a good relationship with the administration at my institution.	4.48	0.75
3.) I am satisfied with the size of the writing center budget.	3.39	1.61
4.) I m satisfied with the way the writing center is as a whole.	3.36	1.28
5.) I am satisfied with my job.	3.88	1.40

with departmental affiliation" is "tremendously helpful to [a] center" because "having a faculty member in charge gives the program credibility" (128). The responses to our survey suggest that this picture may be more complicated than that.

Director concerns

Finally, we were interested in learning what concerned small site directors and to what extent these concerns were underrepresented in larger professional discussions. Respondents mentioned a typical range of problems that plague us all. (Because directors could mention more than one concern, responses add up to more than 100%.) As Table Two reveals, public relations concerned our respondents most. Although we all struggle with this aspect of directing a center, we were surprised by the extent of concern. In Bloomington, discussion centered on the fact that at small sites, it is easy to acquire and hard to shake a bad reputation. Moreover, small institutions may foster a conception of the faculty/student relationship that discourages faculty from being willing to "let" another party—

Table Two: Responses to Survey, Part Three, Question One:
(Describe your biggest concerns as the director of a small college writing center.)

Public Relations	60%
Tutors (staffing; developing)	38%
\$\$\$	20%
Time	20%
Technology	<1%
Job Security	<1%
Location	<1%

The second-most cited issue, tutor training, concerned 38% of our respondents. What might be unique about tutor training difficulties at a small site? As the Bloomington audience suggested, and we have experienced, small sites may not offer courses in rhetoric or composition or education that often provide at least partial training for would-be tutors. Furthermore, the anti-vocational emphasis sometimes present in a liberal arts college discourages

tors as much as they do colleagues elsewhere in the profession. We have already speculated why job security may not concern some directors in small college settings. As for the other two issues, we can only speculate that, as a group, we have found our institutions amenable to providing technology and space. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the mean age of a small college writing center in our survey is 13 years; many of these battles have

been fought and, if not won, resolved to our satisfaction. Certainly, this is borne out by Julie Neff's experience, as a desirable space and technological support were secured nearly ten years ago (137).

In addition to exploring director concerns and goals for their centers in Part Three, we asked respondents "how might NWCA provide support . . . for small college writing centers?" Responses were mixed and surprising, with the top three answers as follows: 35% felt the organization should/could facilitate mentoring; 33% had no response (with one other asking what the organization was and another assuming the survey authors were it); and 13% felt NWCA should assist in publicizing writing centers and supporting center research by continuing to create publication opportunities for directors and providing a clearing house for data on small sites.

The fact that 33% of our respondents had no response, frankly, shocked us. This suggests large publicity problems for NWCA and, arguably, considerable gaps in terms of professional development for small site directors. Our audience in Bloomington indicated that

NWCA could assist small site directors most by facilitating some kind of special interest group session (along the lines of those held at CCCC) at our national conference to enable the mentoring and data sharing needs mentioned above.

Conclusion

The discussion generated by these findings during our session in Bloomington can best be summed up by a comment from one audience member. She pointed out that the significance of these findings lies neither in the way they show how small college writing centers differ from their larger counterparts, nor in the way they contradict accepted notions of writing center theory and practice, but in the way they inform writing center literature. The lessons of small college writing centers, insofar as this survey is concerned, should force us to examine existing notions of professional marginalization. They also encourage us to reflect on writing center/faculty relationships and the compatibility of tutor training with institutional mission. In the case of small college writing centers, size matters, not only because it constantly reminds us of Jeanne Simpson's admonition that our

writing centers' goals must be "fully consonant with institutional goals" (108), but also because it provides a different understanding of the ever changing dynamic between writing center theory, practice, and professional concerns.

- Shireen Carroll, Davidson College, Davidson NC
- Bruce Pegg, Colgate University, Hamilton NY
- Stephen Newmann, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches TX

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

February 3-5: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Savannah, GA

Contact: Christina Van Dyke, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy, Armstrong Atlantic State University, 11935 Abercorn St., Savannah, GA 31419-1997; phone: 912-921-2330; fax: 912-927-5399; vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu

February 26: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Berkeley, CA

Contact: Liz Keithley or Luisa Giulianetti at ncwca@uclink4.berkeley.edu. Phone (510) 643-7442; <http://slc.berkeley.edu>

March 24-25: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Fort Worth, TX

Contact: Jeanette Harris (j.harris@tcu.edu), Texas Christian University or Lady Falls Brown (L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu) Texas Tech University.

March 25: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Keene, NH

Contact: Anne Szeligowski, Gateway Community-Technical College, 60 Sargent Drive, New Haven, CT 06511. E-mail ASZELIGOWS@aol.com; fax: 203-789-6976. Conference web site: <http://www.mcp.edu/as/wc/wc.html>

March 30-April 1: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI

Contact: J. Pennington, Lansing Community College, Lansing, Michigan. E-mail: Jill_Pennington@lansing.cc.mi.us. Conference website: <http://www.lansing.cc.mi.us/~penningj/ecwca2000.htm>

April 1: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Rockville, MD

Contact: Jeannie Dadgostar, Writing and Reading Center, Montgomery College, 51 Mannakee Street, Rockville, Maryland 20850. E-mail: jdadgost@mc.cc.md.us

November 2-4, 2000. National Writing Centers Association in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Baltimore, MD. Conference website: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/mawca/nwcacon.html>

English education majors as unpaid tutors in the university writing center: A service/research project

Jim's introduction

Those of us who struggle to help prospective English teachers learn how to teach writing know that *telling* them about writing theory and *talking* to them about teaching writing do not make effective writing teachers. In the fall of 1995, it became clear to me that I needed to add some "real context" to the discussions my students and I had in class about the teaching of writing. While discussions on writing processes, journal writing, generating ideas to write about, and the place of formal grammar instruction in a writing program seemed useful to me and while students seemed interested in the issues that emerged from the discussions, the "transfer" of the concepts to actual lessons on how to write was illusory. What was needed was a deeper level of involvement in the act of teaching writing, a meaning-laden context within which the ideas discussed in class could be tried and tested.

My search for such a context ended in the University Writing Center. There, working as tutors, my students would encounter *real* writing with all its beauty and ugliness. Through service as tutors in the University Writing Center, my students tested writing theory, built their own approach to teaching writing, and felt the satisfaction of helping others.

Brenda's introduction

Writing centers are notoriously under-funded, under-staffed, under-appreciated. At times we're even under the building, hidden away on the basement level, unobtrusively complementing and supporting the writing instruction at all kinds of schools, colleges, and universities. The Writing Center at the University of South Carolina Spartanburg can't lay claim to all these distinctions; we're located in a highly visible area of a major building on

campus, and sometimes we're recognized for what we do. But our underfunding and understaffing hinder what we are able to accomplish every day.

As Jim and I outlined this project, I began to understand how our collaboration could address many of these problems. The relief to underfunding was obvious from the beginning. His students would tutor as a part of the requirements for their English teaching methods class. Their time, which has averaged thirty hours a week, wouldn't drag my meager budget into the Red Sea. That benefit alone was reason enough to give the project a chance.

But other benefits that weren't so obvious in the beginning of our collaboration are what I have come to see as the most valuable components of the project. Working with Jim's students has given me not just a source of free tutors, but a source of tutors who have real talent for the job and who have received more on-going training than any other group of my staff.

When I interview prospective tutors, I look for students who are more than just good writers. I've hired good writers who just told students how to rewrite their papers and at times even rewrote their papers for them. They were writers, not writing teachers or writing coaches. With Jim's students, who are all English Education majors, I have a group of people who have a better than average chance of being interested and involved in language, and possessing an interest in (and we hope an aptitude for) teaching.

And they are available. Until we began this project, I wasn't usually successful in recruiting education students as tutors. Their major is one of the

most time-intensive on campus; and, when they do work, they want and need jobs that pay more than I can offer. My collaboration with Jim gave me the group of students that had been turning me down for years.

Of course, having the potential to be a good tutor is no guarantee of success. Training is another essential component. I had always wanted to spend more time training tutors; I had always intended to spend more time training tutors. But our problem with understaffing includes my lack of time. In addition to my duties as director of the Writing Center, I teach two classes each semester, advise students, coordinate our integrated reading and writing program for students who need additional help in freshman composition, serve on committees on and off campus, and direct the Spartanburg Writing Project. Finding time to coordinate my tutors' busy schedules and mine and include regular formal training sessions seemed impossible. My on-going training program was usually an informal "how are things going" chat on easy days or a short but serious discussion when a crisis arose.

However, as we planned this project, Jim and I included a training component; and, since it is conducted during scheduled class time, everyone is available. Working with Jim and his students has added an element of formal instruction to my staff training that is an essential, but until now neglected, component of a successful writing center staff.

In this paper we describe the logistics of the project and analyze what the students have learned about teaching writing and serving others—two important aspects of preparing effective English teachers. By extension, we dis-

cuss potential benefits of such a project for our own as well as other university writing centers.

Logistics of the assignment

Early in the semester, students in the secondary English education methods class are informed of the three-fold purpose of the University Writing Center Research/Service Project:

1. to place them in an "action research" situation—a real teaching situation where research on how to teach writing can be tested, verified or rejected
2. to allow them to discover some personal "truths" about the teaching of writing that they will take with them to their own classrooms some day very soon
3. to provide them with an opportunity to serve the needs of others

The research/service project consists of five parts: 1. an orientation to the project; 2. an in-service session, conducted by Brenda, Jim, and a former project participant on the experience of serving as a tutor in the University Writing Center; 3. ten sessions as a tutor in the University Writing Center (a "session" is defined as 45 minutes of one-to-one writing instruction delivered to a writing center client); 4. a reflective journal entry for *each* tutorial session; and 5. a research paper which clearly details the following: a. verification of or rejection of current thought on teaching composition as described in a minimum of four research sources; b. personal revelations about teaching composition that the tutor will one day use in his/her own English class; and c. the service aspect of the project.

Orientation

During the second class session of the semester, students enrolled in the English teaching methods class participate in an orientation to the research/service project. During the orientation the purpose of the project as well as its requirements are carefully explained. Since Jim requires that students com-

plete the project, it is necessary to "sell" it to students. Combining the practicality of action research with the altruism of serving others seems to be a palatable combination for most students. Let's put it this way: no student has yet raised his/her hand and said, "Please let me do a term paper instead of this lame project!" It is only after the project is completed, however, that students seem to fully appreciate its merits. Susan put it this way:

Nothing has helped me in college to prepare more for teaching than the time I have spent in the Writing Center. I learned more about writing this past semester than through twelve years of high school. Perhaps the most helpful thing I have gained through peer tutoring is exposure to so many varying levels of writing and diversity of people. . . . After careful consideration, I must conclude that if any one of my tutees walks away with just one grain of knowledge about writing that I have helped them to discover, then everything I have done is well worth it.

Log/Journal

Each entry in the reflective log/journal consists of two parts: a summary section which describes what occurred during the tutoring session, and an analysis of the tutoring session which answers these questions:

- What did I learn about teaching writing during the session?
- What are the links (even tentative ones) between what I learned and composition theory?
- What are the possible/probable links between what I learned and my future teaching of composition in English class

The in-service session

Although the actual formal training is only three hours long, it has proven to give the students what they need to begin tutoring. During the session, Brenda introduces students to the philosophies of the Writing Center, including its approach to helping stu-

dents. First they get an overview by previewing an article by Toby Fulwiler that Brenda assigns as homework and by reviewing some handouts. Then these philosophies are applied as the class reads and responds to actual student papers.

Students begin tutoring by asking their client this question: "How can I help you with this paper?" Although most of their clients respond with something like "I don't really know" or "I need help with my commas" or with some other response that will not really direct the session, asking the question establishes just what effective tutoring is about. It communicates to the client that the paper—what it contains and what it becomes—is ultimately the responsibility of the writer. It lets the student know that the tutor is there to help him or her write a better paper and become a better writer, not to simply proofread the paper or ghostwrite it. These distinctions are important for both the tutor and the client to understand, and they need to be established early in their work together.

We discuss other approaches and philosophies. Tutors need to prioritize work with a client because they can address only a few areas of a paper, not every problem, in any given session. They should address problems with content first, then organization, and finally conventions and mechanics. They laugh when told "Correct drivell is still drivell," but that's because they have never worked with the kind of students they will often see in the Writing Center.

Frankly, their lack of awareness is a bit surprising. Students should have had some experience in peer response groups in their composition classes. And maybe they have. But somehow they seem innocent when we begin this process. They imagine they will remind students to put an apostrophe here and a colon there. We move quickly into practicing with papers written by students who have come to the Writing Center for tutoring, and at this point their journey into the real world of teaching writing begins.

On an overhead projector, Brenda shows them typical freshman comp papers—first drafts that discuss trips to Disney World, working at Quincy's, or the dress code at their high school. After reading aloud each draft, I ask: "What would you say first?" In the beginning, Jim's students are quiet or they yell out, "Go back to Disney World!" or some other flippant remark to diffuse their apprehension and the tension of not knowing. We understand. What do you say to a person sitting across from you who has gone in six directions in one paragraph or written in such general terms that someone who has never been to a theme park or a steak house could have written the paper? How do you respond when you recognize what's wrong, but you don't know how to say it to the person who wrote the paper? Sometimes the words are there, but the tact or the courage is not. And this is what we talk about. We look at paper after paper and we talk and learn.

Of course, these students will see good papers as they tutor, but they don't need much help in learning how to praise someone's work. They do need to learn how to structure a tutoring session and how to put into practice the philosophies that guide what we do in the Writing Center. Or that's what they think they need. We know that what they really need to learn is to make quick, accurate judgments about a piece of writing and about the experience and comfort level of the person who wrote it. And they need to trust themselves. But at this point in the process, they build a foundation for those more sophisticated skills, and responding to a set of papers together gave us that experience, at least in simulation.

What really gives the students insight into what the total experience is like is talking with someone who has actually participated in the project. Last year, we invited a student who had completed the course and the tutoring experience the previous fall to come talk with the group. Tasha de-

scribed her initial fears about being able to work with other students and about how she would manage her time to include the tutoring. As she talked, the students realized that they weren't the only ones who worried about having nothing to say to a client or having their advice rejected. She was honest about the experience, and she was their peer, so her comments carried a lot of weight. It was peer tutoring at its best.

Revelations from the logs and journals

As Jim's students work with clients in the Writing Center, they keep a journal in a format Jim has prescribed. Reading these journals has convinced me that this project is as valuable to the students in Jim's class as it is to the students they work with in the Center. They write honestly, often eloquently, about insights they have gained through tutoring.

Jim expects them to make conscious links to teaching and they do. They write about what they observe working in the teaching of writing and what does not. The type of assignments students are given is usually an early concern in the journals. The students quickly realize that they have to become adept at moving from one type of paper to another because students write about everything from swimmer's itch to King Lear. They begin to understand that for many inexperienced writers the assignment itself is a real stumbling block.

Early in the semester, Heather wrote in her journal: "For the second or third time, I learned that teachers need to clarify writing assignments for their students. They have to be very specific about what they want because the student can be easily confused." Ellen extended that discussion in her journal and concluded that "not enough is taught to students about how to take a general assignment and make it into a workable topic." Kate also speculated on how the writing assignments themselves could be more effective. She wrote, "Sometimes it may be useful to

have students write about something the teacher has not read. The [legitimate] questions the reader would then have might help show the writer how to be clear and concise in what they are trying to convey."

Their journal entries revealed that their one-to-one work with students gave the tutors a micro-experience of what they would like to do in the teaching of writing in their own classrooms. What worked and what didn't work in the classroom and the tutoring session was a point of discussion in many journals. Ellen especially felt that teachers weren't using the most effective strategies for the students she was tutoring. She believed that "many teachers emphasize what a student should not do and don't spend enough time showing them and explaining to them what they should do. In her tutoring she decided to use a different strategy which she found more effective. She concluded that "students can 'discover' writing with very little lecturing and a lot of modeling." Through looking at papers professors returned to her clients, Treva understood that one of the reasons they needed the help of a tutor was because "some students don't understand the professor's comments, so they can't correct their papers."

Treva also began to understand the value of writers taking the responsibility of carefully proofreading papers before they submit them. In her journal she revealed that seeing the papers of her clients helped her recognize a weakness in her own writing. She was dismayed at the large number of "careless" errors that were a part of the papers students were ready to hand in, but she admitted that her own work had often been criticized for the same problem. Until she tutored students and saw the paper with "teacher eyes," she had never recognized the negative impression these mistakes made. In her journal, she planned how to use this insight to improve her teaching and her writing: "I will stress proofreading [in my classroom]—something I need to work on myself."

Revelations from the research papers

Culled from the pages of their research reports, and as clearly demonstrated in their reflective journals, is proof that project participants learned a great deal about the teaching of writing as a result of serving as tutors in the University Writing Center. Discoveries they made can be categorized as follows:

1. writing *teachers* themselves should engage in reflective introspection about writing and the teaching of writing
2. writing teachers should sort through their priorities for writing instruction, wrestle with these priorities and adjust them
3. process approaches to writing are efficacious
4. the "writing conference" and peer tutoring are valid means of providing writers with formative feedback
5. positive growth results from serving others

Descriptive statements from the students' reflective journals/logs document these findings.

Project participants almost to a person have asserted that writing *teachers* should engage in reflection about writing and the teaching of writing. By thinking intensely about what they are teaching and how they are teaching it, the students adjusted their views of writing as well as their pedagogical approaches. According to Taleisha, "The sessions also helped me because they tested my ability to recognize poor development not only in my clients' paper, but in *mine* also. The project opened my eyes to the mistakes *I* make as a writer [emphasis added]." Aaron's writing improved as well. He said, "I feel that, in the process of uncovering and eliminating the most common writing problems, both my clients and I became better writers."

The pre-service English teachers' reflection served a "sorting function" as they wrestled with and adjusted their priorities for writing instruction. Their

work with students who speak English as a second or third language caused a great deal of rethinking. Susan, in working with ESL students, came to an important realization about setting priorities in writing instruction. For her, the necessity of focused critique with accompanying encouragement became apparent:

I have discovered that ESL students are at a disadvantage when it comes to writing. I believe that for these students, constant encouragement and continual student-teacher [and/or] peer sessions are needed. I have come to realize the damage that continual criticism of essays can have on students and I vow to only write clear, understandable and focused or limited comments on [students'] papers . . . I am considering using pencil as a grading instrument to write comments so students can erase them if they see the need to.

Tasha uncovered one of the major reasons why students seem so enamored by formal grammar instruction. She found that "students worry most about grammar and surface features of their writing. Consequently, the content of their papers suffers. [My clients] struggled with paragraph organization. However, they each came to me asking for instruction in grammar and punctuation. This habit of students, paying more attention to spelling and grammar, may well be a direct result of the teaching methods employed by their elementary and secondary teachers." Narrowing the focus of a paper proved to be a very significant aspect of writing. Aaron noted:

My clients often had problems with narrowing the focus of their essays, preferring instead to offer up sweeping generalizations and broad statements about a given topic . . . I found Fulwiler's advice concerning the limiting of time, place, and action to be very helpful with my clients. Both C. C. and H. C. seemed to improve this essential skill after a few sessions hearing about it and practicing it.

In addition to these two aspects of focus—focused feedback and focused writing topics—students discovered the need for specificity, through developed details and description, in their peers' writing. Aaron found that having his students "turn inward" to tap their personal experiences was very helpful in generating good ideas for writing topics as well as specific detail for their papers.

The writing center tutors corroborated research findings on the efficacy of process approaches to writing. Specifically, they described as essential the need to generate ideas prior to composing, the need for relevance in writing topics, the need for focused feedback, and the merit of delaying "polishing" until final stages of composing. All these features are well known aspects of process approaches to writing. However, coming to these realizations within the "real" context of tutoring in the University Writing Center seems to have convinced students that treating writing as a process is, indeed, the way for teachers to approach it. Gorgi Anna discovered that, despite years of practice and research with writing process approaches, "students do not know the writing process. They tend to think that writing a paper is writing what they are thinking without further [refinement]. Revision, a foreign concept to most of them, is important and overlooked in most classes."

Students' realizations about the writing process prompted a reorientation toward formal grammar instruction. According to Tasha,

[The process approach to] teaching writing emphasizes content and organization first. It also shows students that there are definite stages within the writing process, and if any one stage is neglected, the final piece may suffer. Grammar is important to the paper as a whole but what the student has to say is much more important. If we teach student writers that their ideas and thoughts are worth our time and attention, then per-

haps the students themselves will work harder to improve the manner in which they put those thoughts and ideas onto paper.

On the other hand, some tutors, after struggling to help their clients understand stages of the writing process, came to different conclusions regarding grammar instruction. Aaron became convinced of the need for attention to grammatical correctness (something he saw as neglected by typical writing process approaches). What is interesting is that among the writing center tutors, writing instruction is not viewed as an either-or situation—either “process” or “grammar.” Even the staunchest advocate of formal grammatical instruction concluded that it and “process” concerns deserved equal billing:

The most common and at times glaring, errors were grammatical . . . mostly the usual suspects—spelling and punctuation errors, subject-verb disagreements, run-on sentences . . . R. M.’s problems with grammar . . . illustrate why a good working knowledge of

standard written English is at least as important as “process.”

In addition to affirming the writing process and the concept of focus, project participants demonstrated the efficacy of the “writing conference” and peer tutoring as valid means of providing writers with formative feedback. “The most important thing I gained from this project,” said Greg, “was the experience of sitting down with a person, one-to-one, and critiquing his/her paper. This taught me what to tell that person so they could figure out their own mistakes and learn from them.”

Perhaps the most heartwarming aspect of this project is its service provision. Comments from the students explode the myth of the student as self-absorbed member of Generation X. As a result of serving others, project participants reported positive growth and a greater respect for the profession they are about to enter. “[The service project] made me appreciate more what a teacher does,” said Taleisha. According to Treva, “The project is a

good learning experience for future teachers. [It] gave me more confidence in analyzing and editing students’ work. This will be extremely helpful in my teaching career. During the tutoring sessions I had an opportunity to think on my feet and give helpful advice to students . . . At times I felt intimidated, but I kept in the back of my mind that [the students] came in for help and that was what I was in [the Writing Center] to do. The service I provided in the Writing Center definitely allowed me to realize what a tough job I am going to face.” No lecture, not even the most dramatic one, fully interactive and laced with detailed anecdotes of actual classroom experiences, could make clearer the awesome responsibility of the writing teacher.

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Work Cited

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Writing Center/Writing Program Director American University in Bulgaria

Applications are invited for the position of Writing Center director, to include administering WAC and first year composition. PhD preferred, ABD or MFA considered. The director’s load is two courses/semester and administrative responsibilities. Experience in writing center or writing program administration preferred. The position starts Fall 2000, with university orientation in mid-August. Contract will be fixed term and renewable, with a one-year probationary period. Salary is competitive, based on experience and qualifications.

The American University in Bulgaria is a highly selective liberal arts institution serving 650 undergraduates drawn largely from Balkan and former Soviet states. It is located in Blagoevgrad, a regional center of 90,000 people, an hour and a half drive from both Sofia and the Greek border. Please submit a letter of interest, vita, and three current letters of recommendation to: Writing Center Search, American University in Bulgaria, 1725 K Street NW, Suite 411, Washington DC 20006-1401. Submission deadline is Feb 1. AUBG is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Call for nominations— NWCA Board

The National Writing Center board will need two at-large and one community college representative to take office at the NWCA Board meeting at NCTE 2000. If you want to nominate someone, please be sure that the person is willing to run, and then ask the nominee to send the NWCA secretary, Leigh Ryan, an address, phone number, fax and e-mail along with a brief (150 word or less) biographical statement that will appear on the ballot. Please send this information to Leigh Ryan, Leigh_RYAN@umail.umd.edu, The Writing Center, 0125 Taliaferro Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, by January 25, 2000.

the good session

isn't smooth.
 you remember that you've
 seen her on the el.
 she was laughing.
 now she's quiet, stiff, thinking
 you'll make it an "A."
 and you surprise yourself
 with the questions you ask her.
 but she expects you to be good.
 the voices at the other table
 sound happier.
 you talk to other tutors.
 they say she'll appreciate
 it later.
 that's not it, you say.
 just like her,
 you've got a thesis now
 that's not quite there

the good session
 isn't in the theory.
 you notice the edge
 of his sleeve
 and his breath.

he needs a comma there
 and a subordinator there.
 no, he needs someone,
 not a tutor,
 a long time ago.
 "all women," he writes.
 how does he know?
 "this is hard to prove," you say,
 and his eyes narrow. "do I need
 a comma here?" he says,
 digging in. "yes," you say,
 "and another here."
 and a lot more.
 you wait. behind him
 through the window
 the flow of people
 off to class thickens.
 the hour's almost over.
 "if I don't say *all*," he says,
 "won't my point seem weak?"

there are two seats
 at the tutoring table,
 which one is for you?

you're younger, older,
 more willing, more
 nervous, less cautious
 than your tutee.
 her writing wanders
 from point to point,
 something about child
 abuse. you know all
 about child abuse from
 psych class and talk
 about how claims
 are supported. it gets
 quiet. you watch the tea
 stain the water in wisps.
 she finally talks as
 if she's counting
 her words. she knows
 about it after all,
 but not from a book.
 you'd know what
 to do if you had this
 session again, but
 you never do

the good session
 is not perfect,
 leaves things undone,
 brings out the best
 in you, races ahead
 of you, goes well
 despite you.
 there's this space
 between you
 and the other
 that changes, a growth
 that is far from uniform,
 an accrument of encounters
 with other students
 who did and didn't want
 to be here, who were
 doubtful, thankful, tired,
 late, stuck, and registered
 an image of you
 listening

Vainis Aleksa
 University of Illinois at Chicago

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association/ National Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
 Nov. 2-4, 2000
 Baltimore, Maryland

The Call for Proposals, for the next national NWCA conference, co-sponsored with the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, is available on the NWCA 2000 website: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/mawca/nwcacon.html.xcccc> For more information about the conference, contact Barbara Lutz (lutz@udel.edu) or Terry Riley (riley@planetx.bloomu.edu); for information about the program and to send proposals, contact Carl Glover (glover@msmary.edu); for information about registration and to send registration, contact Jon Olson (jco3@psu.edu). Proposal deadline: Feb. 15, 2000.

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association

Announcement and Call for Papers
 Saturday, April 1, 2000
 Rockville, Maryland
*"Diversity and the Teaching and Tutoring of
 Writing"*

Presentation formats: 20-minute interactive presentations, roundtables, workshops, or panels, 10 minutes per presenter. Proposals no longer than one page for presentations, no longer than two pages for roundtables and panels in triplicate by January 20, 2000, to Jeannie Dadgostar, Writing and Reading Center, Montgomery College, 51 Mannakee Street, Rockville, Maryland 20850. E-mail: jdadgost@mc.cc.md.us

TUTORS' COLUMN

"What do you want on your tombstone?"

Often we get so caught up in the "here and now" that we forget about the "there and later." We engage ourselves in interactions with others, giving no thought to anything beyond the exchange. No sooner do we accomplish one task than we turn around and begin another. First impressions create an immediate response in an individual. What about legacy? What is my legacy? What am I doing today that will remain imprinted in someone's memory tomorrow? As a Rhetoric Associate—a tutor in a writing-across-the-curriculum program—I am not only concerned with what happens in a conference, but what will be remembered after. I firmly believe that teaching and learning experiences have the potential to make a powerful impact. I'm not only concerned with how I will be viewed as a peer evaluator, but with how I will be regarded as a person. First impressions are important, but our legacies have the potential to last forever. There are five qualities I would like to see engraved upon my tutor tombstone. Only time will tell if I have succeeded in my efforts.

Emerson said, "Every man I meet is my superior in some way. In that, I learn of him." The unvarnished truth is that most people feel themselves superior in some way. A sure way to people's hearts is to let them realize in some subtle way that you recognize their importance. In order to learn something and to have someone learn from me, I cannot, and will not, criticize. If a student is to be given the opportunity to learn, criticism better not exist. Criticism is futile, and gets you nowhere. It puts people on the defensive, and they will try even harder to justify themselves. It is difficult to

have an environment that is conducive to learning if criticism is present. Negativity is dangerous. It wounds pride, hurts their sense of importance, and arouses resentment. In being a tutor, I need to remember that I am not dealing with completely logical, rational beings. I am dealing with individuals of emotions and feelings.

The first thing I'd want engraved on my tombstone is "Lack of Criticism." What would give me the right to engage in stinging criticism? I am responsible for helping, educating, and encouraging the students. During fall term, 14 students from an Outdoor Recreation Behavior class were assigned to meet with me. I met with them twice during the quarter. I was excited when a student came back for the second appointment and told me I had made a difference. The writer expressed how my comments had helped, I had made her think harder about what she was writing. If I had even had a small hand in helping the student, then my job as a tutor has been successful. I could stir up resentment and lack of cooperation permanently if I engaged in just a little bit of criticism, no matter how certain I was that it was justified.

A number of times, I have encountered teachers or professors who aren't accessible. When I first came to campus, the advisor assigned to me was not accessible. Every attempt that I made to set up an appointment failed as he always had too many other priorities. I could understand the fact that he was busy with teaching and students, but he never made a real effort to help me out. Needless to say, this advisor left a "bad taste in my mouth." Sometimes professors make me feel

that my visits are burdensome. One tired professor remarked to me that "I would never have any successful writing ventures." Ouch! These types of experiences stick with me, as they would with anyone.

On the flip side, I have had wonderful experiences with professors. Under their guidance, it was as if I was being molded and carved into a polished student and writer. For instance, a couple of years ago, I decided to write a Christmas story—not as an assignment, just something that I wanted to do. I was anxious about making the effort, but I have always been careful about whom I let read my work. After a couple of months, the story was completed, I took it to my English professor to read. He gave me advice and suggested I could use the input from my classmates. Although I was uncomfortable, I agreed, stood in front of the class, read my story, and waited. I was surprised and pleased that nobody spoke a harsh word of criticism. I feared what my peers and professor would say. I had no reason to be fearful, for they gave me wonderful insights. For example, I try to use imagery, especially when writing a poem or story. One of the students commented on how they could "see the pictures on the mantle, and the fire burning in the fireplace" just as I had described it. How did I come up with that visual, I was asked. It felt good to know people could experience my story, visually, in their minds. I took their input, and I went to work. The result was a Christmas story that I enjoy sharing with people. If I had received even a little bit of negative criticism, from either my peers or professor, I would never have finished my work. That made an

impact on me. Whenever asked to critique or make suggestions, I remember how I felt that day in front of my English class. William James said, "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Honest appreciation will always get results where criticism and ridicule fail.

Beneath "Lack of Criticism," engraved would be "Interest in People." Alfred Adler, a famous psychologist states, "It is the individual who is not interested in his fellow men who has the greatest difficulties in life and provides the greatest injury to others. It is from among such individuals that all human failures spring." I am interested in people. I have a lot to learn from others. Every encounter brings new insights into the continuing spectrum called life. I will never walk away from an interaction without learning something, either positive or negative. When writers come to me for a tutoring conference, I want them to feel like they just made a new friend. Becoming genuinely interested in a person is one of the best ways for me to open the lines of communication. By talking and getting to know the students I work with, I can feel more comfortable performing my duties, and they can feel more comfortable asking me questions. Having a personal interest in knowing someone is a way of saying they are important. Always strive to make the other person feel important.

I wish for "I Remembered" to be etched upon my tombstone. I remember the names of the students that I work with. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie states,

We should be aware of the magic contained in a name and realize that this single item is wholly and completely owned by the person with whom we are dealing . . . and nobody else. The name sets the individual apart; it makes him or her unique among all others. The information we are imparting or the request we are making takes on special importance when we approach

the situation with the name of the individual.

By remembering a person's name you pay an effective compliment to the individual. Everyone wants to be remembered. When I was involved in a community committee for two years, I met a variety of people. I always strived to remember names so that when I saw them again, I could greet them. The reaction that came from people I called by name was incredible; consequently, I made many new friends, and my network expanded. Being under public scrutiny for two years taught me how important it is to acknowledge and remember those around you. Picking a particular characteristic of a person and associating it with the name enabled me to remember. The main reason people forget each other's name is they just don't take the time. They make excuses. They are just too busy. By remembering a student's name, again, the message I am sending is "you are important." This also creates a more informal atmosphere, which allows learning and interaction to take place.

Since this is my own tombstone, it can be as large as I want it to be. "Equality" will be etched and polished into the stone. I wish to be remembered for believing that everyone is equal, including writers and tutors. I don't want to come across as omniscient. In fact, I will probably learn more from the interaction than the students will. Some of the students I work with are older than I, have spent more time in school than I, or just know more about a certain subject than I. But you know what? That's okay. That is how we learn from each other. We will only learn from each other if we perceive we are on the same level. If a student feels that I have placed myself above, no learning or interaction will take place.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, "Helped People Succeed" will be emblazoned upon my tombstone.

Many individuals are apprehensive when they first interact with a peer evaluator of any kind. One of the best ways that I, as a tutor, can help students succeed is to help them come up with their own ideas and solutions. The best way for me to do that is by listening. Most people trying to win others to their way of thinking do too much talking themselves. Let the students talk. They know more about their strengths or ideas than anyone. My role is to ask questions and let them tell me their story. At the beginning of each conference, I ask "how do you feel about this paper? What do you think is strong about the paper? Where do you think it needs a little work?" I may not agree, but I won't interrupt. This interaction helps to facilitate a productive conference. They won't pay attention to me if they have ideas they are trying to express and I intercede. I must listen patiently with an open mind. Don't we have much more faith in ideas that we come up with ourselves than the ones that are handed to us? Isn't it bad judgement to try to ram opinions down the throats of others? Look for the reasons people think and act the way they do. Ferret out those reasons, the key to their thoughts and actions.

What is it that motivates people to teach? I would dare say it is the work. If the work is exciting and interesting, people will look forward to doing the job and doing it well. Everyone loves the game, the chance for self expression. Being a tutor gives me the chance to share my opinions and express myself. At the same time, it allows other influences to take root in my opinions, mind, and being. Everyone needs the chance to prove worth, to excel, to win. The desire for a feeling of importance is inherent in all of us. That is my job as a tutor—to help students feel important by helping them to succeed. Throw down a challenge. William James offers this advice: "Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. We are making use of only a small part of our physical and mental resources. Stating the thing broadly,

the human individual thus lives far within his limits. He possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use." That is my job. My job is to help bring out abilities and qualities in other people. It is not only a job, it is a responsibility I have as a human being. I can think of no better or more

noble ambition than to help another person to succeed.

As an tutor, I have the potential to accomplish many things. How will I be remembered? I have the opportunity to make a difference. Interactions with students may make an impact forever—on me and on them. The lessons

I am learning will continue to influence me for the rest of my life. I would propose that I am in an even greater position for learning than the students are. William Arthur Ward states, "The only right time to look down on others is when you are helping them up."

Teletha Hathaway
Utah State University
Logan, UT

Different words, different worlds

The following events and characters are real. In some cases they have been exaggerated or taken out of context for emphasis' sake. All speakers have been re-named to protect the innocent and guilty.

I sat at the table waiting for my first conference as a Rhetoric Associate. I looked at the sign-up sheet for the thirteenth time. Tyler Robbins. It was now nine minutes after two o'clock, and I wondered if he would show up. Someone suddenly came around the corner and looked my way. I figured it was him.

"Are you Tyler?" I said as he came closer and pulled out the chair to sit down.

"Yes, I'm sorry I'm late. Look, I know my paper isn't good. It's definitely a half hour job. You have to understand that my major is engineering, and this class is my last priority." He rushed through this explanation like a criminal waiting for a punishment.

"Well, I'm Rachel, and I have read over your paper and made a few comments. Now I would like to go over it with you." He had that look about him, without even looking me in the eye, which said he knew everything about his paper and didn't need my help, but I continued anyway. "I was a little confused in your first paragraph," I began, "These two sentences are contradictory and cause the reader to wonder what you are going to proo . . ."

"I did it that way," he retorted, interrupting my explanation, "because I

want to contrast the different techniques used in the film." Immediately I could tell Tyler was uncomfortable. It was because I had the information and knowledge to help with his paper, and he didn't. According to Deborah Tannen, in *You Just Don't Understand*, when men regard someone else as higher up on the ladder by virtue of being more competent, they view this as a message of incompetence (62). It wasn't that he was trying to tell me I was wrong; it was only his way of interpreting and reacting to my message.

Trying to narrow the gap between all-knowledgeable tutor and incompetent student, I continued, "That makes more sense now that you say it that way; make sure and add that idea to your paper. I want you to read the first paragraph out loud, and you tell me if it sounds contradictory." Trying to let him see the problem and find the answer independently, I gave him the liberty of expertise.

"I see the problem," he said after reading the first three sentences. "I contradict myself, so I need to add a sentence which explains the contrast." He explained to me as if I were his student. It had worked; if you give males a feeling of independence and freedom, they will feel in charge and be more likely to cooperate (31). Several minutes and suggestions later, Tyler backed up from the table and thanked me graciously for all the help. Based on his earlier reaction, I figured he hadn't seen me as useful; I was wrong.

Boy, I thought, watching Tyler walk away, I've really changed. If I had

been a tutor eighteen months ago, Tyler and I would have both left the conference confused and annoyed. My, how much time has taught me. My thought took me back to my freshman year in college.

"I can't believe what a jerk he was," I said to my roommate as she flipped over her grilled tuna sandwich. "All I needed was a little help with my Spanish, and the jerk acted like he was my Savior."

"C'mon now Rach, don't you think you're being a little extreme?" The butter sizzled, as did my insides. Nikki didn't understand what the tutor had done, nor was she trying to.

"I suppose," I said half-heartedly, "but he still made me feel like a first-class idiot. He acted like he knew everything. All I needed to know was if I did my assignment right, and he rambled off in Spanish for twenty minutes about a bunch of grammar stuff that I don't even need to know. I'm convinced he would've treated me differently if I wasn't a girl."

"You're on to something, I bet he liked you and was trying to show off." Nikki said it with a smirk and proceeded to plunge into her sandwich. She was completely missing the point, and I thought she of all people would understand. I gave up hope when Nikki picked up *Cosmopolitan* and continued chomping her freshly grilled sandwich.

For tutors, understanding and modifying our style and vocabulary to each student is very important. As Muriel

Harris explains, "As we talk or listen, question or demonstrate, elicit responses or offer guidance, we depend on the flow of conversation to carry our meaning. But other messages are being communicated in the words we choose, in our actions, in our gestures—even in what we do not do" (72). When we realize we could be communicating a world of wrong messages, we see the importance in understanding each other better. The most basic way to start the understanding process is to examine differences in gender conversational styles. Once this is understood, we can move toward improving communication, relationships, and education.

A petite girl timidly approached the table. "Excuse me, are you the Rhetoric Associate?"

"Yes, my name is Rachel. Take a seat. You must be Laura."

"Yes," she almost whispered but looked me right in the eye.

"All right, it's nice to meet you. First of all, are there any questions or concerns you had about your paper?"

"No, but I did have a hard time writing it."

"Okay, let's go over it and you can ask questions as we go along. I'd like you to read the first three sentences of this paragraph."

She read out loud, then looked at me wanting to know what to do next. "Did any of that sound confusing to you?" I asked hoping she had realized the inconsistency in verb agreement.

"Yea, I guess so." By the look on her face, I could tell she didn't know what was confusing, so I prodded further.

"How many people are you talking about right here?" I pointed to a sentence which claimed one person were going to a film.

"One," Laura said.

"So, if you have a singular subject, the verb needs to agree. In this case, *was* is the proper form to agree with one person."

"That makes sense." She still didn't look like she understood, but she agreed with me anyway. Eventually, as the conference ended, she finally caught on and walked away claiming she would do everything I said. I was shocked at the differences between Laura's and Tyler's conferences. I knew women were more likely to do what is asked, and men resisted the slightest hint that anyone, especially a woman, would tell them what to do (Tannen 31). My conferences revealed this like an example from a textbook. I started to think about why the conferences had turned out so differently. The contrast I saw reminded me of a class I had taken on gender in folklore, where we discussed the differences in male and female behavior.

"Gender differences in conversation exist, there is no getting around that. Boys and girls, even if raised in the same family, grow up in different worlds of words. Our goal in this class is to understand these differences more fully so that we can communicate with less frustration and more understanding." Doctor Couch, with zeal and enthusiasm, explained the purpose and logistics of the course. "Deborah Tannen's book You Just Don't Understand will be the main source of discussion in this class. In my estimation, she does a very good job of establishing the differences in gender conversational styles, without bashing one or the other, and this is why I like to have my classes read it."

That night, I picked up Tannen's book eager to explore possible answers to all my questions. Why do males and females react so differently in certain situations? Why do guys always act like they know everything? Why do I, and other girls, agree with people when we really don't understand the issue, just for harmony's sake?

Reading Tannen's book helped me

realize that men and women really do act differently. The differences weren't bad either, just aspects of our personalities that we can learn from. It was no longer a matter of male arrogance. In general, men weren't arrogant. In most cases, it was a stereotype women designed because they couldn't understand men's way of conversing. Women weren't the gossip queens either; men based this judgment on the fact that women like to talk about others as a way of connecting.

Many educators recognize the need to understand students from other cultures; however, many overlook the need to understand the differences in gender. Harris states, "students brought up in other cultures acquire habits, behavior patterns, perspectives, ways of delivering information, and other cultural filters that can affect writing in ways we do not sufficiently attend to—and indeed are in danger of ignoring" (74). This is true and important; however, many habits and patterns are acquired specific to gender and need as much attention as differences in culture. Just as we have dialects, or variants of a language according to geography, we also have variants dependent on gender. Tannen refers to these gender differences in conversation as "genderlects."

Tannen points out, according to her research, that females play down their expertise and males tend to contribute more in class. Males view life as a contest in which they are constantly tested and must perform in order to avoid the risk of failure (178-9). In a class of 16—four of whom were males—the majority of the comments came from the male students. Many of the women did not contribute one comment during the whole quarter. These are the type of differences in gender that are often overlooked and ignored. The female students may not be gaining the most from their education in this environment. Understanding gender characteristics and genderlects will help us achieve a more balanced education, where both student and tutor can learn.