Southern Discourse

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association

Spring 2000 Volume 3, Issue 2

Peer Tutoring Conference Spreads the Word about Collaboration

Bustling about the Alumni Fireside Lounge of the Nittany Lion Inn on an unusually warm October evening, Penn State peer writing tutors and writing center directors, past and present, eagerly awaited the convergence of 360 national and international presenters on the University Park campus. The registration table was set, the last conference T-shirt was folded, and the last pumpkins and gourds were placed to create a festive autumn atmosphere. Months of hard work were about to come to fruition in a weekend of sharing ideas and insights on tutoring programs and practices, writing center administration, and the composing process at the Sixteenth Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW), "Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process."

From its modest beginnings at Brown University in 1984, the 1999 NCPTW, held at Penn State from October 29-31, grew to an international event attracting renowned speakers and over fifty participating institutions. The 1999 conference featured more than sixty workshops, presentations, panel discussions, and talks on a variety of topics, including on-line and Internet tutoring, tutoring English as a second language, tutoring adult and learning disabled students, and a collaborative presentation by SWCA President Twila Papay entitled "Unmasking the Grim Realities and Hard Hopes of Post-Apartheid: A Dialogue with South African Peer Tutors."

Julie Story, conference director and assistant director of the Penn State Writing Center, explained the reason for the ongoing draw of such sessions: "Colleges and universities, high schools, and literacy centers with a desire to develop a program in peer tutoring in writing and to improve writing programs search for the diverse programs represented at the conference." Conference participants agreed. In an anonymous evaluation, participants responded that the best part of the conference was the "interaction between writing centers and the exchange of ideas" and the fact that "topics were very applicable to what I do in my profession of having tutors and directing the writing center."

At the center of this interaction is the tutor. With the guidance of Story and Dr. Jon Olson, director of the Center for Excellence in Writing at Penn State, the thirty-five Penn State writing tutors played a major role in developing and presenting the conference. The tutors' work began the spring of 1999 when they brainstormed the conference theme of "Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process" and formed hospitality, keynote, program, and social committees, each with a student chair. Writing tutors served in several other important leadership positions for the conference, including program intern, T-shirt designer, and speaker welcomer. Additionally, writing tutors presented workshops ranging from "How Can Being a Tutor Help You Find a Job?" to "Unmasking Writing: The People Behind the Tutor-Tutee Relationship."

Tutors' responses exemplify the conference's power to influence the development of the writing center and to promote outreach. Keynote Committee Chair Marleah Peabody said her participation in the "When the Mask Falls: Tutoring Creative Writing" workshop

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Join in the Renewal of the SWCA

Spring has come to the southeast, and the blanket of blossoms cast down my street reminds me that none of the clichés or lines of poetry penned about the months or the seasons were written by southerners: March was a lamb from beginning to end, if a sometimes chilly one here in Atlanta, and April in the south doesn't have a cruel bone in her body.

We are lucky in other ways in the southeast, too. The conference in Savannah, so ably managed by Christina Van Dyke and her crew, breathed new life into the SWCA through the exchange of ideas about teaching and tutoring writing and through the election of a slate of new board members, whose energy and enthusiasm promise a bountiful harvest. In this issue of *Southern Discourse*, you'll hear about some of the exciting initiatives and opportunities from new SWCA President Marcy Trianosky. I urge those who participate in the discussions and planning of these changes to use future issues of this newsletter as a forum for their thoughts and proposals.

A word of thanks to the outgoing board, particularly to Twila Yates Papay and Phillip Gardner, whose encouragement and writing have kept me and *Southern Discourse* afloat for two years. And while change and renewal are my themes, many, many thanks to Lee Hayes, the talented and conscientious assistant editor of *Southern Discourse*, who graduates from Agnes Scott this spring. Lee's eye for detail and careful work have given the last year's issues their polished look. Lee is not leaving, fortunately for me, but will hand her editorial duties over to Caroline Murnane and become my assistant director in the writing center for the coming year.

In this issue, Peter Carriere is back in *What's the Point?* with stories and witty insight about the history of punctuation marks. And at the other end of the historical spectrum, Donna Sewell and James Inman launch a new column called *The OWL's Nest* in which they will explore the technological side of writing center practice. The range and creativity of these now regular offerings typify, in my mind, the wealth of writing talent in our region.

When are you going to join them?

Are you or your writing center part of the renewal of the Southeastern Writing Center Association? Has your writing center or your perspective on some aspect of writing been represented in these pages? I challenge each of you to think about an article you'd like to write for the Summer issue (deadline May 1). Possible topics can include tales from the center, reports on new challenges or practices, historical pieces, written versions of conference presentations, and just about anything that relates to writing centers. Writing for *Southern Discourse* is a great way to initiate or nourish your publishing career. Why don't you email me *today* with an idea for May 1?

One final note. Editing a newsletter is as much a work in progress as any piece of writing. To be realistic about when you actually receive the three annual issues of Southern Discourse, we are changing their issue names to Spring (instead of Winter) and Summer (instead of Spring); Fall will remain the same, as will the three deadlines. The Spring issue will bring with it the newly revised regional writing center directory, and the Summer issue will include a formal conference announcement and call for papers.

Shouldn't the next issue include an article written by you?

Christine Cozzens
Agnes Scott College

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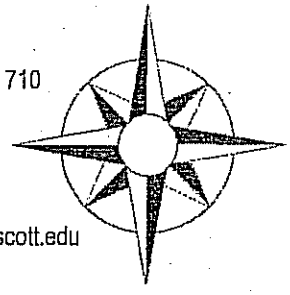

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Southern Discourse is published three times a year in the fall, spring, and summer.

What's the Point?

Definitions and Other Oddities

In 1905 Routledge published a book by T. L. and M. F. A. Husband called *Punctuation: Principles and Practice*. The first three chapters of the book were devoted to a history of punctuation marks, or "points," as they were called until about a hundred years ago. Some of the odd definitions in these chapters suggest that it has always been challenging to coordinate symbols with speech, and that maybe for some the challenge should have gone unmet.

Take this definition by no less a literary figure than Ben Jonson: "A comma is a mean breathing. . ." (quoted in Husband 39). Just what did Jonson mean by "mean"? The first definition in the OED is "that which is in the middle" and adds under *a*: "That which is intermediate; a condition, quality, disposition, or course of action, that is equally removed from two opposite (usually, blamable) extremes; a medium." The second definition is "an intermediary agent or instrument." Thus the comma would be an intermediary agent whose effect would reside somewhere between the effect of a period, or full vocal stop, and no mark at all.

But what about the word "breathing"? If the comma is a mean or average kind of breathing between two extremes, then the two extremes would have to be either no breathing or speedy breathing, hardly a definition to inspire confidence in apprenticed pointers. Take the sentence "Bill, come here." We may make a full vocal stop between "Bill" and "come." But if we say, "She was pretty, perky, and vivacious!" we are likely to slur through the commas without ever stopping the voice. It may make some logical sense to declare that a comma indicates a pause somewhere between a full stop and no stop at all, but the phrase "mean breathing" seems inadequate as a definition of comma placement.

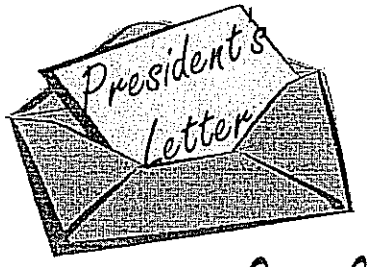
But Jonson's definition is mild next to this one from *Of the Orthographie and Congruitie of the Britan Tongue* that appeared in 1617: "the comma . . . is pronounced with a short sob" (40). If we apply this definition to the sentence above, we get a rather ludicrous result: "She was pretty (sob!) perky (sob!) and vivacious!" But perhaps the word "sob" had a definition in the seventeenth century since rendered obsolete. If so, we might salvage this denotative incongruity of the Britan Tongue. What does the OED say?

The first definition of "sob" in the OED is "an act of sobbing; a convulsive catching of the breath under the influence of grief." Unfortunately, all subsequent definitions in the OED refer to the first one: "to make a sound resembling sobbing," "to break or burst with sobbing," or "to utter with sobs." Well, not all of them. The last definition is "to frighten, scare," still a far cry from the comparatively benign though incomplete definition by Ben Jonson, although it might scare our apprenticed pointer out of his tunic.

More useable is this definition from *A New Grammar, with Exercises of Bad English* from 1753: "The points are marks of pauses whose length is determined so: for the comma count 1; for the semicolon 2; for the colon 3; and for the full stop, the mark of interrogation, and the mark of admiration, 4" (42). So our sentence now becomes, "She was pretty (one) perky (one) and vivacious!" But our last mark, obviously one of admiration, must be given a count of four.

In the seventeenth century pointing was a way to indicate vocal pauses. From influential personalities like Ben Jonson to obscure grammarians, punctuation had not yet completed its divorce from speech. A century later a drastic change had occurred: according to Husband and Husband there were forty rules governing the placement of commas in English in the eighteenth century (43). While the change may have been precipitated by the desire for greater precision (sob) the confusion that has resulted (sob) felt by every child who has ever challenged the Point Police (sob) may have been a less-than-admirable change (one, two, three, four).

Peter Carriere
Georgia College and State University



Dear SWCA Members,

It is with a great deal of pleasure and excitement that I write to you as the new president of the Southeastern Writing Center Association. Thank you for your confidence in me. The professionalism and enthusiasm of those of you that I've met at conferences and corresponded with on email is truly inspiring. As writing center professionals, we are engaged in the business of teaching, talking, and collaborating with our tutors, our professional colleagues, and the students, faculty and staff at our institutions. Our association with each other through SWCA offers opportunities for sharing our knowledge and expanding the boundaries of writing center scholarship and practice.

> *"As writing center professionals, we are engaged in the business of teaching, talking, and collaborating with our tutors, our professional colleagues, and the students, faculty and staff at our institutions."*

One way in which we hope to expand the activities of SWCA and further its mission is through the formation of specific planning groups. Various current and former members of the Executive Board have created these groups to address the needs of SWCA. The success of these programs depends on your participation. Please consider joining one of these initiatives:

New Millenium Planning Committee
Purpose: Outreach and global contacts. Current projects include a review of the bylaws of other writing center associations with an eye towards updating our own.
Contacts: Glenda Conway, University of Montevallo (conwayg@montevallo.edu) and Phillip Gardner, Frances Marion University (pgardner@fmarion.edu), co-chairs.

Membership Committee
Purpose: Recruiting. Current projects include finding willing members to help coordinate membership drives in their home states.
Contact: Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan College (peggy_ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu), chair.

Web-Weavers
Purpose: Designing an SWCA web site. We hope to link our web site to the National Writing Center Association web site as well as to individual web sites of writing centers in our region.
Contact: Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina, Aiken (karlf@aiken.usc.edu), chair.

Consultant Coalition
Purpose: Creating peer tutor linkages. This committee will concentrate on connecting peer tutors at different institutions so that they may share their knowledge.
Contact: Twila Yates Papay, Rollins College (tpapay@rollins.edu) and Beth Rapp Young, University of Central Florida (byoung@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu), co-chairs.

SWCA Publications
Purpose: Reviewing options for supplementing *Southern Discourse* with a new SWCA journal, online publication, selected papers, etc. and planning such a venture.
Contact: Christine Cozzens, Agnes Scott College (ccozzens@agnesscott.edu), chair.

Please consider becoming active in one of these planning groups or starting a new group on a topic of your choice. We need your enthusiasm and your ideas!

I look forward to working with you to build on the many strengths of our organization.

Marcy Trianosky
Hollins University

SWCA Annual Achievement Award

The SWCA thrives because of the hard work of writing center professionals — in their work for the association and for their institutions. This year, the SWCA has reinstated its annual Achievement Award to honor an individual for "his or her outstanding contribution to the writing center community."

Many SWCA members have been involved in renewing this award. Thanks to the generous contribution of Tom Waldrep of the Medical University of South Carolina, the first recipient of the Achievement Award in 1986, this year's winner will also receive $250. The committee reviewing nominations consists of Glenda Conway, University of Montevallo; Sonja Bagby, State University of West Georgia; and Tom Waldrep, Medical University of South Carolina.

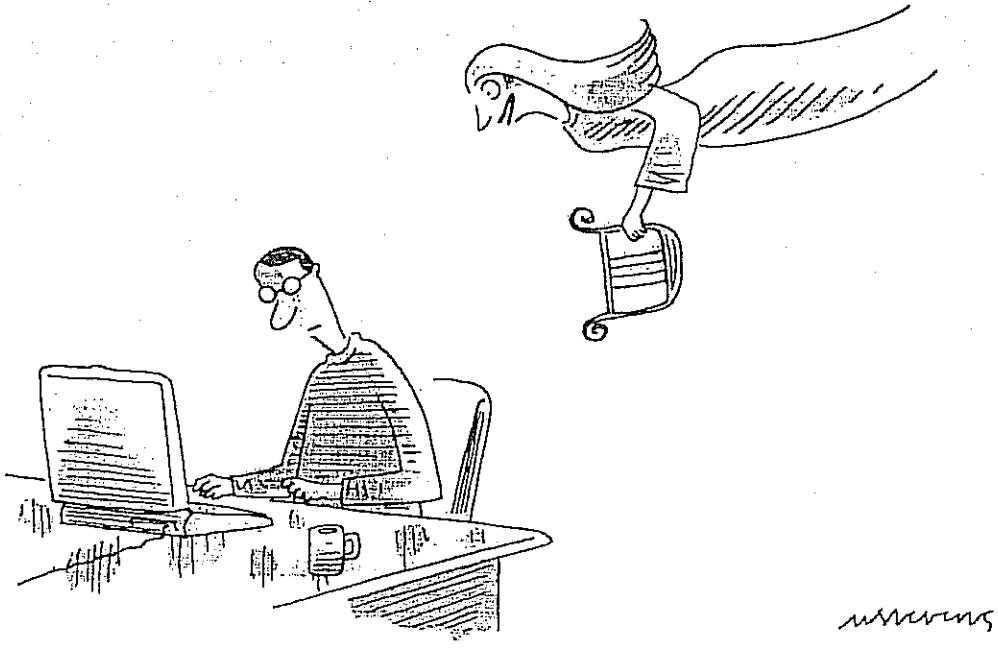
The summer issue of *Southern Discourse* will provide information and deadlines for submitting nominations.

Lee Hayes
Agnes Scott College

The 2000 SWCA Writing Center Directory is enclosed! Thanks to everyone for providing updated information.

This could be your last issue of *Southern Discourse*!

Complete and return the SWCA membership form (enclosed) to stay on our mailing list. Beginning with the next issue, only SWCA members will receive copies.



"Go ahead. Don't think of it as plagiarism, think of it as an homage."

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Position Statement: The Nouveau Poor

(Presented at the SWCA Conference 2000)

Although writing center professionals can point to a wardrobe of respectable attire—national conferences, a good journal and newsletter, directors with doctorates—we still don't belong to the Academic Country Club. And we are frustrated. We have demonstrated that we can walk the walk and talk the talk. Listen as you read current writing center publications and you'll hear the voice of critical theory, composition theory, feminist theory, and socio-psychological theory. Yet, as if wearing rented shoes, we stand uneasily, waiting desperately for appropriate recognition from the very folk that we appear to disdain and fear. We are a highly conflicted bunch.

> *"We want to retain our outsider, rebel status while receiving the benefits and status of blueblood insiders."*

Current theory-based literature on writing centers is almost exclusively oppositional, fiercely attacking the hegemonic, hierarchic, oppressive, authoritarian structures that we want so desperately to belong to as full members. We want to retain our outsider, rebel status while receiving the benefits and status of blueblood insiders. Like the post-hippies of the yuppie eighties, we want to wear our rattail haircuts on the street and tuck them under our starched collar before we take our seat at the board meeting. The bad news is that in a futile attempt to find a language that accurately describes who we are and the work we do, we have settled for a stance and a language that attacks American culture, the evils of academic structures, and our colleagues in the classroom. Those attacks in many respects are justified, and the articulation of those evils by writing center folk may serve a good end. But assaults upon culture or entrenched structures, if heard at all outside the walls of writing centers, don't describe all that we do, or why we do it, or all the benefits we bring to our students, colleagues, and institutions we dwell within. And worst of all, they don't acknowledge the common ground of shared purpose that holds these parts together.

Until that common ground is defined and explored, until its common purpose is illuminated positively by writing center professionals, and until we find a descriptive language that is understood and valued by the collective whole, we will remain the nouveau poor.

The descriptive language we propose for describing our work is *critical thinking*. It is the common thread of intellectual work that weaves across disciplines as different as the humanities, sciences, and math. Moreover, it is woven deeply into writing center practice. Here, we believe, is important common ground on which we can state what it is we actually do, how our work is central to the curriculum, and why our mission is not marginal to the academy.

We urge that writing center professionals theorize about and analyze their practice not in terms of resistance to the academy (and to our colleagues in the classrooms), but in light of shared intellectual purpose. The current rhetoric of resistance and struggle is self-defeating, its oppositions needlessly self-marginalizing. Because critical thinking is a core value of the curriculum cutting across the whole educational enterprise, it should define writing centers as sites of intellectual work rather than peripheral support sites.

We believe the academy invests great energy in developing students' higher order cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (as opposed to the old emphasis on simple reception and recall of facts). It increasingly emphasizes collaborative activities, discussion, problem solving, task-based learning, and face to face activities that evoke discovery. It also emphasizes the behaviors encouraged by such practices: recursive and reflective thinking; processing of alternative points of view; belief revision; increased ability with problem solving; increased affective disposition toward truth-seeking and open-mindedness; decreased deferral to expert authorities; and diminished dualism, i.e., an absolutist perception that facts are either "right" or "wrong."

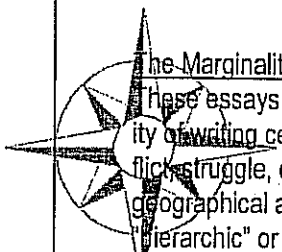
Is this not the nature of writing centers' dialogic, interactive work? If there is common ground

here, then we can regard ourselves as insiders not rebel outsiders, and we can articulate our mission in descriptive language that the academy values.

Please share your thoughts on this subject with us: pgardner@fmarion.edu and wramsey@fmarion.edu.

Phillip J. Gardner and William M. Ramsey
Francis Marion University

Bibliographies



The Marginality of Writing Centers

These essays make assumptions about the marginality of writing centers. Most employ a rhetoric of conflict, struggle, or liberation, locating writing centers in geographical and political *opposition* to the "hierarchic" or "hegemonic" interests of institutions. All, as a consequence, have trouble finding common ground with the curriculum, classroom faculty, and mission of the institution.

Bawarshi, Anis, and Stephanie Pelkowski. "Postcolonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 19.2 (1999): 41-58.

Advocates a WC (writing center) strategy applying Edward Said's postcolonialist political resistance to hegemonic acculturation through "critical consciousness." Critical consciousness is "being critical of discursive formations" (which reproduce power relationships) and being critical of one's own subject positions. . .within these formations." The authors resist the idea that in academic settings writing is "ideologically innocent or even empowering," because the aim is "to transform the student and his or her texts into the acceptable standard of the university" (i. e., a "colonialist" aim).

Boquet, Elizabeth H. "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions." *CCC* 50.3 (1999): 463-82.

A Foucauldian analysis of the peripheral status of writing centers which are caught between their hegemonic and counter-hegemonic missions. Partly the oppressor, they impose institutional authority through service, remediation, grammar fixing, and ready answers. Partly the liberator, they empower students through collaborative, discovery, discussion, and other counter-authority practices. WCs have a conflicted identity, half adhering to and half resisting institutional expectations.

Cooper, Marilyn M. "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal* 14.2 (1994): 97-111.

Using a libratory model, Cooper argues that WCs are a "site of critique of the institutionalized structure of writing instruction" and must "empower students," helping them find "agency in writing" against "constraints on writing imposed by the dominant order."

Diamond, Suzanne. "What's in a Title? Reflections on a Survey of Writing Center Directors." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 24.1 (1999): 1-7.

Expresses scepticism that WCs can articulate their mission in a way to overcome marginality. They confront the "power of an existing hierarchy...to sustain its foundational inequities," and their missions are "imposed by external...forces."

Ede, Lisa. "Writing Centers and the Politics of Location: A Response to Terrance Riley and Stephen M. North." *The Writing Center Journal* 16.2 (1996): 111-30.

Ede questions the locational assumptions of marginality. She critiques the "binary" tendency to view WCs as marginal and oppositional in tension with the regulatory and enabling ideology of the academy. Binary schemas fail to "situate" WCs in specific local contexts. Because WCs are mixtures of various political realities, there is nothing inherently liberatory in their practices.

Grimm, Nancy. "The Regulatory Role of the Writing Center: Coming to Terms with a Loss of Innocence." *The Writing Center Journal* 17.1 (1996): 5-29.

A Foucauldian critique of WCs' regulatory role constraining students to write in culturally accepted forms (so as "to reproduce the social order" and "reinforce the status quo"). WCs "extend the power of the teacher's authority." Grimm says we cannot "pretend that this regulatory power is liberating or culture-neutral." From their "liminal position," WCs must become social "change agents" that mediate culture.

Kail, Harvey. "Collaborative Learning in Context: The

Problem with Peer Tutoring." *College English* 45.6 (1983): 594-99.

Argues that WCs work counter to the "lineal" authority of teachers (who employ the transmission model), thus "disrupting" the teacher-student relationship.

Kail, Harvey, and John Trimbur. "The Politics of Peer Tutoring." *The Writing Center Journal* 11.1-2 (1987): 5-12.

Employs a power plant metaphor to warn against having WC tutors extend in surrogate fashion the transmission-model authority of teachers. Teachers, atop the hierarchic order, are the power plant that would generate and transmit their power (knowledge) to students. In WCs, the power lines should be cut to empower students to learn more collaboratively and independently.

Lunsford, Andrea. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal* 12.1 (1991): 3-10.

Lunsford rejects metaphors of the "storehouse" (of information) and "garret" (of the solitary learner), viewing the WC as a "parlor" of collaborative work in which learning is socially constructed not teacher-transmitted. Though a parlor does not suggest marginality (it is in the center of a home,) Lunsford places WC work against "the rigid hierarchy of teacher-centered classrooms."

North, Stephen M. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46.5 (1984): 433-46.

A noted essay stating that WCs are marginalized into separate "provinces" divorced from the curriculum. North argues that WCs should define themselves not in terms of some "external curriculum" but in terms of the process or activity elicited in writers. He worries that his outlook for WCs' status is "dismal" because "composition itself is suspect" as a discipline. As an afterthought, he suggests the real heritage of WCs is Socrates' practice of "continuous dialectic."

-----. "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center.'" *The Writing Center Journal* 15.1 (1994): 7-19.

Ten years later, he seems to have acquiesced to hierarchic realities": WCs are "enmeshed in. . .systems. . .educational, political, economic, social" and are "lower in institutional pecking orders."

How to Submit Articles to *Southern Discourse:*

Articles should be sent to Christine Cozzens via email (in the body of the message), disk (MS Word preferred), or fax. Please note the following deadlines:

Summer 2000: May 1st
Fall 2000: October 1st
Spring 2001: March 1st

Still distanced from the curriculum, WCs face the perils of "martyrdom" and becoming a "scapegoat." It still remains "to renegotiate the place of writing in post-secondary education."

Riley, Terrance. "The Unpromising Future of Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal* 15.1 (1994): 20-33.

Riley fears WCs will find secure niche status, selling out their more subversive, counter-hierarchic principles to become another "pure" or "monolithic discipline." WCs will be less "able to assert that our philosophy is libratory and contrarian." They will lose the sense of "struggle."

Sunstein, Bonnie S. "Moveable Feasts, Liminal Spaces: Writing Centers and the State of In-Betweenness." *The Writing Center Journal* 18.2 (1998): 7-26.

Explains marginality with the locational metaphor of "liminality," by which WCs are perceived not as "stable spatial constants" but as "a temporary space—not exactly home, not exactly school—that offers a momentary respite away from the competing cultures to which our students and colleagues belong. Liminality has the "in-betweenness" of "a de-militarized zone" or of a "borderland."

Welch, Nancy. "From Silence to Noise: The Writing Center as Critical Exile." *The Writing Center Journal* 14.1 (1993): 3-14.

Taking Kristeva's description of the writer's "becoming a stranger to one's own country," Welch sees WCs as places of "exile" where one "not only questions received knowledge and social norms but transforms them." At WCs one is a "dissident" who resists "the codes that create and control conversations" in order to "write and act in the world rather than be written and acted upon."

Critical Thinking

Recent research on critical thinking may suggest common ground whereby writing centers can be linked to the core mission of the curriculum. Below are convenient starting points for review of the critical thinking movement (and its critique of the transmission model of learning). Additionally, campus specialists in education and educational psychology can be useful resource persons.

Jarvis, Peter, Colin Griffin, and John Holford. *The Theory and Practice of Learning*. London: Kogan Page, 1998.

An excellent historical overview of educational theory in the twentieth century, delineating the paradigm shift from the transmission model to the learning model.

King, Patricia M., and Karen S. Kitchener. *Developing Reflective Judgment: Understanding and Promoting Intellectual Growth and Critical Thinking in Adolescents and Adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.

Seven stages of epistemological development, according to age, predicting the degree and kind of higher order thinking that students can perform (prereflective, quasireflective, and reflective thinking). A summation of their brilliant work.

Kurfiss, Joanne G. *Critical Thinking: Theory, Research, Practice, and Possibilities*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 2. Washington: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1988. 129 pages.

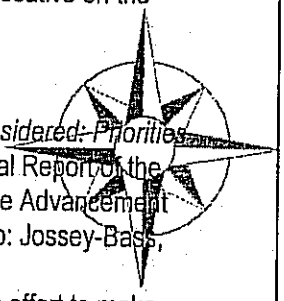
Compact overview of what educational psychology has empirically examined about critical thinking, including argument knowledge, cognitive processes, and developmental stages. A twenty page bibliography.

Leming, James S. "Some Critical Thoughts about the Teaching of Critical Thinking."*The Social Studies*. 89.2 (Mar-Apr 1998): 61+.

Reviews barriers to the development of higher-order thinking, including the transmission model and students' epistemological stages of development according to the King-Kitchener model. A balanced view, accepting the need for "a rich and accurate store of information" as a precondition to critical thinking.

Paul, Richard W. *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive In a Rapidly Changing World*. Rev. 2nd ed. Rohnert Park, CA: The Center for Critical Thinking & Moral Critique at Sonoma State University, 1992. 673 pages.

Paul is the director of the Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, and chair of the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction. This massive compendium of Paul's works argues sharply on many theoretical and practical classroom topics. Chapter 4 is especially provocative on the didactic model.



Redefining Intellectual Work

Boyer, Ernest L. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Special Report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

The Carnegie Report, in an effort to make the professoriate more responsive to institutional and broader communities they serve, redefines scholarship to mean more than pure and specialized research. It endorses 4 types of scholarship: 1. Scholarship of Discovery (traditional investigative, specialized research); 2. Scholarship of Integration (synthesizing and integrating areas of knowledge); 3. Scholarship of Application (applying knowledge for consequential problems); 4. Scholarship of Teaching (developing knowledge for teaching and professional work). The relevance of this report to writing centers is its argument that intellectual work takes many forms, not just pure research. An important assumption employed is that when intellectual work grows from scholarly knowledge and professional skill, *it is a form of scholarship*. By this reasoning, writing centers can be viewed as more than service sites. Deeply involved in items 2-4, they are sites of intellectual work just as are academic departments with their "pure" disciplinary contents. Making critical thinking central to their practice, writing centers are not, then, marginal to the scholarly work of the academy.

Peer Tutoring Conference
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helped her "formulate a plan of action for helping creative writers in our Writing Center. Spurred on by the discussion we had in that workshop, the University Park Writing Center will be sponsoring a creative writing workshop starting next semester [spring 2000]." Tutors also benefited from participation in the conference through the opportunity to develop professional and scholarly contacts and to learn what other institutions have to offer in the way of writing, tutoring, and academic programs.

The NCPTW's goal of faculty supporting students was illustrated by the collaborative keynote presentation entitled "A Tutoring Narrative in Four Part (Dis) Harmony" by Dr. Beverly Moss, Melissa Dunbar, Wendy Ake, and Nikole Marzano of the Ohio State University. This group—composed of a professor, a graduate student, and two student peer tutors—engaged in an interactive presentation in which each member shared equally in the performance. These keynote speakers used their varied experiences to address how they negotiated the practical and theoretical demands of a collaborative peer consulting program. Story explained, "The hallmark of this conference is its encouragement of spotlighting undergraduate and graduate peer tutors and putting faculty and staff directors in a supporting role. . . . Hierarchy is based more on the quality of one's ideas than on institutional rank."

The 1999 conference also featured a distinguished speaker from the business community, Nancy Sharkey, assistant to the managing editor of the *New York Times*, who spoke on the importance of humanizing the editor-writer relationship. Through examples and personal anecdotes, Sharkey outlined the four stages necessary for an editor to establish a collaborative relationship with a new writer. She emphasized how the conference's message has begun to influence the editing field:

> Today, in our newsroom of 1,100 people, we have a set of guidelines that I'm particularly proud of. I was on an early committee that helped draft these new rules. They begin with these words: "Editing is a collaborative process. Your job is to help others—particularly reporters—realize the full potential of their work, not to do their work for them. Sound familiar? It should. This reflects your movement. But you know how hard it is to follow this standard. Not to do their work for them. The temptation is to rework the words, not work with the writer. . . . But more and more, we are finding something that you folks have been saying for years: It's the writer, not the story. (1999)

Peabody's response to the speech echoed that of numerous participants: "I would have to say that Nancy Sharkey's speech was my favorite part of the conference. It was entertaining and informative. It gave me the feeling that what we do is even permeating the work world; it was just all-around a joy to listen to."

The conference also included the presentation of the Ron Maxwell Leadership Award to Molly Wingate from Colorado College. Named for Dr. Ron Maxwell, Penn State professor emeritus and director of the Penn State Writing Center from 1986 to 1997, the award is a tribute to his pivotal role in the conference's growth and success.

The award was created to recognize a NCPTW professional's exceptional work to promote collaborative learning among peer tutors in writing. As one nominator wrote, Wingate "has been the spirit of service—a model in working collaboratively with her own students, a model in collaborating with the rest of us, and a joy to work with in her unending kindness, courtesy, and enthusiasm." The presence of such faculty members, though advisory, was no less essential to the conference's success. Numerous conference participants, including Maxwell himself, cited the sixteenth annual NCPTW as "the best conference ever."

Fifteen years ago a small group of college and university writing tutors and writing center directors started a movement that continues to gain strength—a commitment to promote collaborative learning and to share their experiences and insights in a national forum. This commitment led to the creation of the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, which, as Penn State's recent conference hosting illustrated, perseveres in its mission. Through the work of Story, Olson, Maxwell, Papay, Wingate, and others like them at colleges and universities around the country dedicated to the promotion of collaborative learning, the future of peer tutoring in writing is on the "write" track.

Jim Purdy
Penn State University

The OWL's Nest

Getting Acquainted with Technology

Given technology's prominence at the Southeastern Writing Center Association conference in Savannah, we want to begin an association-wide discussion about technology in *Southern Discourse*. First, we'll introduce ourselves: James A. Inman directs the Center for Collaborative Learning and Communication at Furman University in South Carolina, and Donna N. Sewell directs the Writing Center at Valdosta State University in Georgia.

Writing centers, as you know, incorporate an impressive range of technologies in support of their missions, and we plan to look at some of the many options being employed, including asynchronous interactive technologies, such as electronic mail and bulletin boards, and synchronous interactive technologies, such as MUDs and chat rooms, as well as other media like the World Wide Web. One of the most exciting and challenging aspects of electronic writing center.work is its diversity, so we hope to explore technologies in many different contexts, as well as offer general guidelines and observations designed to be useful. Many writing center practitioners know the impressive efforts of early OWLs like those at Purdue University and Roane State Community College, but how many know about the latest innovations, like Washington State University's custom-designed interface or Texas Tech University's cybertutoring specialists? We understand the need for this column to be practical, offering sound and useful advice to those both experienced with and new to computer technologies, but we hope also to explore issues with larger theoretical capital, helping readers of *Southern Discourse* to enter into field dialogues about technologies in disciplines such as composition studies, technical communication, information science, and educational technology.

In this inaugural column, we want to recommend some resources that are currently available or published online:

The National Writing Centers Association Website
http://departments.colgate.edu/diw/NWCA.html
Maintained by Bruce Pegg, Colgate University

The Virtual Writing Center Tour
http://faculty.winthrop.edu/tarversj/tour.htm
Maintained by Jo Koster Tarvers, Winthrop University

Online Writing Center Consortium Website
http://owcc.colostate.edu
Maintained by Mike Palmquist, Nick Carbone, and Luann Barnes, Colorado State University

Issue 1.1 of Kairos: A Journal for Teachers of Writing in Webbed Environments
http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/1.1/index.html
Issue edited by Mick Doherty, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

WCENTER: The Home Page
http://english.ttu.edu/wcenter
Maintained by Jon David Poteet and Lady Falls Brown, Texas Tech University

While these resources are not comprehensive, they do offer a sampling of the many technology-rich activities that writing center professionals are currently pursuing across the country, as well as specifically in the southeast. We hope, of course, to see many more from *Southern Discourse* readers and are excited about the chance this column brings to describe and discuss such projects.

Although we plan on reviewing online resources, software, and books on technology, we also want you to help us plan this column. James can be reached at James.Inman@furman.edu, and Donna's e-mail is dsewell@valdosta.edu. Our goal is to prompt a conversation that we hope will spill over onto the SWCA electronic discussion list http://onelist.com/group/swcatalk. To find out more about this discussion list, simply go to the web page listed above and follow the directions for subscribing. We look forward to hearing from you.

Donna Sewell
Valdosta State University

James Inman
Furman Univeristy

Writing Centers & Technology

Tutors' Stories

Questioning the Tutor's Role

Having tutored students for five years or so in several different writing labs, I've found that quite a few things come up now and then which can take you off guard.

If you do manage to get used to the idea that students frequently ask for assistance two days before the due date (with no clear idea of exactly what the assignment is), then something else will come up to remind you that your job as a tutor will never be predictable. This change keeps the job interesting to most of us, and we probably would run in terror from any kind of a job where we were expected to do the same thing or perform the same task day after day.

Even though this change, this unpredictable nature of tutoring, has always been something which has kept me in this type of work, I've found comfort in one thing: we have a clear purpose as to what we are supposed to do. As employees of a tutoring lab or writing center, we see ourselves, essentially, as mechanisms by which students can improve their writing and get better grades. This is not always the thing first and foremost in our thoughts, but at the very least we're all aware that this is why the student is there. But what happens, though, when we begin to question this basic assumption? What are we to do, as tutors, when we consider that our role as writing coaches entails something entirely different, something not quite so easy to define?

A few weeks ago in our weekly practicum here at Auburn's English Center, I was part of a group of tutors trying to decide how to best help our students. We discussed things such as trying to improve the students' critical reading skills, proofreading strategies, coherence, organization, and so on. After a while, we decided that the most logical place for us to start would be the assignment sheet itself, helping the student to understand how to find out what the teacher will be evaluating in the assignment and how to address the rhetorical situation accordingly.

This is where things began to get more complicated. Once we began to look more and more closely at the assignment sheets for the Freshman Composition and Great Books assignments, we began to notice certain patterns developing, patterns which could very well help the student to understand the assignment in such a way as to earn a better grade in the class. Teacher A seemed to place a strong emphasis on the thesis statement, while Teacher B seemed more interested in the student's ability to demonstrate rhetorical competence and a command of the written language—semicolons, and so forth. Teacher C seemed interested in a unique personal voice, while Teacher D tended to evaluate the amount of universal insight in the paper. Things seemed to be going well for my little group; we were discovering how to help the student get a better grade on the assignment—doing our job, right? That's where I began to have my doubts.

One question kept nagging me: is it really our job to help the student interpret the various codes of evaluation the teachers put forth in the assignment? Should we concern ourselves primarily with the grade the student will receive on the piece of writing? It certainly would seem so; the student is there for that reason. We preach, though, that the student should be improving as a writer and a student. But is this really going to help toward the realization of that far more important goal of creating a better student rather than a better essay (or at least the essay which receives the better grade)? How can we accomplish this goal and feel more certain that we are doing what is best for the student? The answer to this—believe it or not—is much more simple than we sometimes acknowledge.

SWCA Conference 2001

Auburn University will host the 21st annual Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference in the spring of 2001.

See the summer issue of *Southern Discourse* for more information!

Sitting in a group of fellow tutors—those of us who have proven that we are able to consistently receive better grades than the average student—I noticed that there was one trait common to all of us: our ability to question why we are doing a particular assignment and to adjust our work accordingly. We ask ourselves questions; we don't just attempt to memorize rules. We go further, attempting to get at the reason these rules were put in place to begin with. If we can just get our students to do this, we have accomplished something above and beyond what is expected of us as tutors—maybe even beyond what we ourselves expect from our roles as tutors. The way to get here is not by helping the student to interpret a particular assignment, but to ask the student to put himself or herself in the place of the teacher for a moment. "What then, might be the reason for the teacher to stress this grammar rule in this essay?" Or "What do you think the teacher wants you to learn by doing this exercise?" We often fail in asking these simple questions because we find ourselves caught up in the students' zeal and determination to get the best grade possible. We are often guilty of this in our own research and writing as well.

As tutors, we must accept that it is our responsibility to look beyond the assignment at hand and see that improvement in the student's ability to understand the reasoning behind the assignment will pay off better in the short run as well as the long. To be sure, we must explain this to students—they will not come back if they feel you are not helping them improve their grades. Once students understand that there is a less agonizing way of approaching the Freshman Composition assignment, they will be thankful for the new way of looking at the problem. Once they understand the teacher's reasoning for asking them to evaluate, say, parent-child relationships in *Hamlet* for a Great Books course, they will be better equipped to deal with those problems which they face once the tutoring session is over. Once we learn to rethink the way we approach our relationship with the student, once we become the ones who ask questions instead of the ones who give answers, we will have more effectively done our jobs in assisting the student.

Then, perhaps, we can find that at least one aspect of our job has a little stability after all.

Jason Russell Nix
Auburn University

The tutors of Agnes Scott College and director Christine Cozzens on River Street in Savannah after the 2000 SWCA Conference.

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SWCATALK.

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