



SOUTHERN  
DISCOURSE  
*in the* CENTER

*A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation*

- Exploring Performance and Perception via  
“Write It Like Disaster’: A Compilation of Music  
Made by Writing Center Staffers, Professionals,  
and Allies”  
*Scott Whiddon & Stacia Watkins & Brad Walker*
- Critical Perspectives on Group Consultations  
at Communication Centers: Communication  
Accommodation Theory, Immediacy, and  
Persuasion  
*William Bryant & Kimberly Cuny & Marlina  
Davidson*
- Shaping the Future: Writing Centers as Creative  
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- Back to the Center: The Writing Lab at the  
College of Charleston  
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- Consultant Insight: To Direct, or Not Too  
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- Book Review: “Talk About Writing: The Tutoring  
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*Allison Hutchinson*

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**SOUTHERN  
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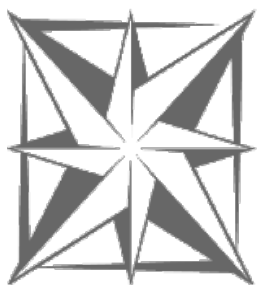
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*Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation* (SDC) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published by the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) biannually from the Georgia Institute of Technology. As a forum for practitioners in writing centers, speaking centers, digital centers, and multiliteracy centers, SDC publishes articles from administrators, consultants, and other scholars concerned with issues related to training, consulting, labor, administration, theory, and innovative practices.

Our editorial board welcomes scholarly essays on consulting, research, administration, training, technology, and theory relevant to writing centers, speaking centers, and digital/multiliteracy centers. Article submissions may be based in theoretical and critical approaches, applied practices, or empirical research (qualitative or quantitative). Submissions are evaluated by the editors, and promising articles are sent to our national editorial board for double-blind review. To honor *Southern Discourse's* historical context, future issues will include special sections that profile the work of regional associations, emerging undergraduate research, and centers across the country, providing a sustained look at regional and national concerns that centers face in the 21st century.



**SWCA**  
Southeastern Writing Center Association

## **Our Mission**

The Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) was founded in 1981 to advance literacy; to further the theoretical, practical, and political concerns of writing center professionals; and to serve as a forum for the writing concerns of students, faculty, staff, and writing professionals from both academic and nonacademic communities in the Southeastern region of the United States. A member of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), an NCTE Assembly, the SWCA includes in its designated region North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and the American Virgin Islands. Membership in the SWCA is open to directors and staff of writing, speaking, and digital centers and others interested in center work from public and private secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities, and to individuals and institutions from beyond the Southeastern region.

## **The Journal**

*Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation* is the journal of the Southeastern Writing Center Association. Published twice annually, this peer-reviewed journal promotes a community of writing center scholarship within the southeast and nationally while serving as a forum for innovative work across the field. Subscribe to *SDC* by becoming a member of SWCA at <http://www.iwca-swca.org>

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## **Guidelines for Writers**

*Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation* invites articles that engage in scholarship about writing centers, speaking centers, digital centers, and multiliteracy centers. The journal welcomes a wide variety of topics, including but not limited to theoretical perspectives in the center, administration, center training, consulting and initiatives. An essay prepared for publication in *SDC* will address a noteworthy issue related to work in the center and will join an important dialogue that focuses on improving or celebrating center work. Please submit manuscripts to [SDC@iwca-swca.org](mailto:SDC@iwca-swca.org).

## **Genre, Format, Length, Citation**

Most articles in *SDC* will be between 3,000 and 5,000 words. We ask that all articles be documented in accordance with the *MLA Style Manual, 3rd Edition*. Consistent with traditional writing center practice, *SDC* promotes a feedback model. Articles will be sent out to our national board for blind review and reviewed by our editorial team. *SDC* is excited to work with you. For longer articles, please send an email inquiry.

## **“Back to the Center” Guidelines for Writers**

Alongside scholarly articles, each issue of *SDC* will include an article of roughly 1,500 words that focuses on a specific writing center, speaking center, digital center or multiliteracy center. “Back to the Center” will share a center’s successes and hopes for improvement. By incorporating visual images, “Back to the Center” should give its readers an authentic sense of the ethos of the center and of the work done there. What is working in the center? What are the areas that need improving? What are the goals for the center?

“Back to the Center” will also include a section titled “Center Insight.” In this section, we’d like to know the numbers: How many sessions are held in the center per semester? How many consultants are working in the center? How many hours a week is the center open? How does consultant recruitment occur? How long is the training process for consultants before they work in the center?

## **“Consultant Insight” Guidelines for Writers**

Consistent with the consultant-writer model of the mutual exchange of ideas, we invite consultants to provide insight into center experiences. This article of roughly 2,000 words can be research driven or can take a more narrative and personal approach that illuminates consultant experiences. *SDC* is interested in both struggles and achievements. The article may focus specifically on one aspect of consulting or it may provide a broader sense of center work.

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## From the Editor

KAREN HEAD



Life in the editorial offices at SDC is settling into a groove. The staff have been working hard to improve on our processes. We have been streamlining our peer review system to get colleagues the quickest feedback possible on their articles. We have also restructured our reviewer solicitation system to allow our reviewers the time they need to provide thorough criticism. We also have completely reformatted our layout (thanks Hannah!). Essentially, we are endeavoring to polish our edges where we can.

As we announced last year, our fall issue will always reflect the theme of the upcoming SWCA conference: this year, multimodality. We think you will find these articles and reflections a great primer for the conference.

We had a number of strong submissions for this issue, and after peer-review I have selected two excellent articles. In the first, "Exploring Performance and Perception via 'Write It Like Disaster': A Compilation of Music Made by Writing Center Staffers, Professionals, and Allies," Walker, Watkins, and Whiddon not only offer us important insights about how our various personal and professional identities intertwine (what we might call the multimodality of self) to help strengthen our center work, but they also demonstrate the importance of cross-institutional research collaboration. In the second, "Critical Perspectives on Group Consultations at Communication Centers: Communication Accommodation Theory, Immediacy, and Persuasion," Bryant, Cuny, and Davidson elaborate the need for a framework to train tutors for more effective group consultations in speaking centers.

For a new section of the journal called "Disciplinary Perspectives," I



solicited an article from former SWCA President, Rusty Carpenter, to help frame some of the important contemporary disciplinary conversations we should consider in our communities of practice. Reworked from a keynote speech at the 2016 Northern California Writing Center Association Conference, Rusty argues for “refashioned approaches to the ways that media, composing, and thinking interact.”

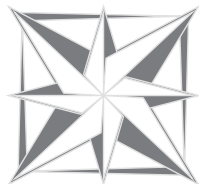
We are delighted to feature the award-winning Writing Lab at the College of Charleston for our “Back to the Center” column, in which Bonnie Devet explains the benefits of merging with their library.

Our “Consultant Insight” column from Brady Edwards is an excellent reminder that there is often a “Shakespearean” dilemma between being too directive or not directive enough in sessions. Brady’s reflections about agency and self-efficacy are always important, but the ways we balance our various roles as tutors and teachers require us to be vigilant about what is appropriate in a given scenario.

Allison Hutchinson’s review of Mackiewicz and Kramer Thompson’s *Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors* explains why this book is an essential resource for writing center professionals engaged in research.

Extra thanks to Andrew Eichel and Ruthie Yow for their editorial assistance.

Please remember to promote our journal to your colleagues. Encourage them to submit work to us. We are excited to hear about research involving centers of all types, multiliteracy, multi-modality, innovative pedagogical practices, technology and pedagogy, space design/development/redevelopment/implementation, etc.



# Exploring Performance and Perception via “Write It Like Disaster’: A Compilation of Music Made by Writing Center Staffers, Professionals, and Allies”

SCOTT WHIDDON  
STACIA WATKINS  
BRAD WALKER

**“Your Life is a Song, and That’s Where You Are:”**

**An Introduction (Peckham)**

In their 2009 book chapter “Creativity in the Writing Center,” Elizabeth Boquet and Michele Eodice ask writing center professionals “to think about creative acts not simply as a fun thing to do but as built into the fabric of an identity (whether be it an individual’s identity or a WC’s)” (5). In recent years—via staff training (for example, Zimmerelli; McGlaun), problem solving (such as Gladstein), spatial design (for example, Carpenter et al), or institutional situation and development—the notion of creativity has become part of the core values of many writing centers. Through their theorizing of writing center “play” and their reflections on jazz improvisation as voiced by F. J. Barrett, Boquet and Eodice argue that “The daily work in our writing centers not only reveals creativity, it requires it” (5).

But as the writers of this essay, we need to be honest before we go much further: as we began to assemble and promote a compilation recording of music made or performed by people who work in

writing centers (in preparation for the 2015 Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) conference), the three of us weren't really thinking about theoretical connections between creativity and writing center practice. Nor were we thinking of how Boquet carefully re-frames writing center practices via music-related metaphors such as "feedback" and "noise." We were simply struck by what we saw as a curiosity: the sheer number of WC staffers and professionals we had met over the years, at conferences, statewide events, or via listservs, who make and share musical work. Putting together a free collection of music made by writing center practitioners simply made good sense (and was a bit of fun as well for the three of us), given the rich music history of our conference site in "Music City USA," Nashville, TN. And, perhaps it appealed to some shared indie rock roots amongst ourselves as DIY music enthusiasts. As noted by the English punk band Desperate Bicycles when self-releasing their material back in 1977: "it was easy, it was cheap—go and do it!"

This article begins by briefly describing the process of developing "Write It Like Disaster": A Compilation of Music Made by Writing Center Staffers, Professionals, and Allies" (WiLD).<sup>1</sup> WiLD represents the blended voices of these active musicians to argue that creative work outside of the writing center can mimic, influence, and even inspire the creative work that goes on within a center. The core of this essay interprets and codifies two themes, performance and perception, that emerged from our guided interviews with select participants that took place in spring 2015 (with support from our

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<sup>1</sup>We chose this title, "Write it Like Disaster" for many reasons—our shared love of Elizabeth Bishop, the somewhat punk sense of prosody in the title itself, and—perhaps most importantly—our belief in the importance of informed creative projects as scholarly inquiry.

respective IRBs and with assistance from Dr. Kyle Steadman of Rockford College). We examine how our participants voiced their own connections to music composition in terms of writing center work as performance and how writing center work is perceived by ourselves and others.

But, all in all: we hope this project helps us sing our collective song.

### **“...funky tools to play with”: Where WiLD Began**

In November 2014, we circulated a “call for musicians” via listservs such as WPA (Writing Program Administrators), SLAC-WPA (Small Liberal Arts Colleges), Wcenter, and regional avenues such as SWCA. Although we were explicit about a few key elements—that this was a free compilation of either originally composed music or music from the public domain, distributed via download cards and Bandcamp, and that all rights were retained by the performer/artist via a one-time, non-exclusive copyright license—we wanted to keep the range of potential submissions as broad as possible. We encouraged everything from pieces recorded in professional studios to tracks recorded on laptops in garages and dorm rooms. We imposed no limits on genres or recording fidelity/quality, and we saw ourselves as compilers rather than curators; in the spirit of openness, all submissions offered by our deadline would be included on the compilation recording. As Christopher LeCluyse, Associate Professor of English and writing center director at Westminster College, noted in his interview, this move toward open source ethos was true to the “collaborative, non-hierarchical way of doing things” in writing center practice.

WiLD showcased music by 16 students who serve as consultants, 14 writing center directors or professional staffers, and four current

or recently retired university faculty members who had sustained relationships with writing center work. These participants offered a range of genres and arrangements—the sparse acoustic folk stylings of Hiraeth, an Appalachian fiddle tune, noise-punk recorded on cassette, to a public domain piece from the Early Modern era. Some contributors had just recently begun writing and or performing their work; others had developed their musical craft for decades. Likewise, this project represents a wide range of writing center experience: consultants, new directors, and seasoned writing center veterans.

Along with their mp3 submissions<sup>2</sup>, we encouraged each participant to include a self-written biography statement that detailed not only their musical life, but also their relationship with writing, writing centers, and writing studies. We sent regular updates of our progress to the list of interested musicians as the months progressed between our initial call for participants and the release of the compilation online at <http://writeitlikedisaster.bandcamp.com/releases> and via download cards printed for the SWCA conference.

Of course, the success of WiLD hinged not just on the participation of writing center musicians, but on people actually hearing the album. To create a marketing buzz, we knew it was important that WiLD have a strong visual design—a distinctive brand that established an ethos for the project. Because the compilation was tied directly to SWCA, the conference served as the visual context for the design:

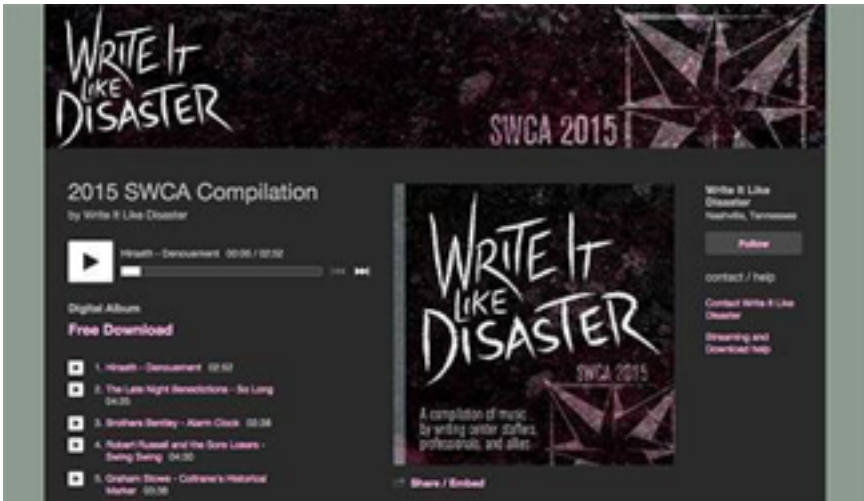
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<sup>2</sup>*It is important to note, given recent wider conversations about the ethics and rhetorical practices of free music downloading—whether artist sanctioned or not—that contributors were responsible for their own recording costs. We recognize the vast range of opinions on whether or not distributing music for free is good for artists, or art writ large. We took steps to make sure that each contributor understood the roles/responsibilities in this form of distribution.*

colors are derived from the official SWCA palette, and the SWCA compass logo features as a watermark. The main “Write it Like Disaster” wordmark is a chalky allusion to the educational sphere in which we operate, and the grungy background an homage to the home studio sites, practice spaces, and dive bars with which many of the artists are likely familiar. In the end, the WiLD branding achieves our rhetorical purpose of establishing a brand that, while familiar, is distinct to this album and, we hope, memorable.

By current count, tracks from WiLD have been streamed and or downloaded over 3,725 times. We received dozens of emails and calls from writing center practitioners across the country noting their support and excitement for this unique representation of writing centers. Just after our release in February 2015, WiLD was featured on the *Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders* blog and on numerous individual writing center web pages. Writing center directors have used download cards as promotional items at their respective local and regional writing center events. They’ve been given to friends and family members as well as division chairs and deans. Like all good punk rock, our project has been disseminated via both official channels of our profession (such as conferences and listservs) and unofficial, grassroots, informal exchanges.

If that was the end of the project, we’d be quite thrilled to simply offer this celebration of music made and performed by people who spend significant time immersed in writing center discourse—especially given the importance that students (and professors, too!) often place on what Cindy Selfe, in “‘The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning’: Aurality and Multimodal Composing,” describes as “sonic environments.” She describes, “...the songs, music, and podcasts they produce and listen to...the headphones and Nanos that



accompany them wherever they go; the thumper cars they use to turn the streets into concert stages; the audio blogs, video soundtracks, and mixes they compose and exchange with each other and share with anyone else who will listen” (617). Selfe asks us to take seriously the ways that writers “compose and communicate meaning” via “the exciting hybrid, multimodal texts they create” (642) that might not fit traditional academic assignments.

In reading the biography statements offered by participants as we developed the physical and digital aspects of this project (which can be found online at <http://www.iwca-swca.org/SWCA-WiLD-Project.html>), we realized that many of these musicians offered eloquent reflections of how their lives as writing center staffers might be in tune, to varying degrees, with their lives as music makers. These writers are “already engaging in the self-sponsored literacy practices of creating digital video and audio texts” that seem quite different from the print-centric discourse that Selfe examines.

After discussing our contributor biographies at length, we asked twelve participants to take part in guided/recorded phone or online

interviews to help us “better understand the importance” (Selfe 642) of music in their lives. Although conversations ebbed and flowed, as conversations about writing centers often do, we offered the following IRB-approved questions:

1. Talk about the music you make. How long have you been making music? Do you actively make this music available to others (live booking, releasing recordings, etc)? Is this something that you do for yourself entirely? Somewhere in between?
2. Think about your music in terms of **composition**. What connections can you make between your life as a musician and your life as a writing center staffer (working with other students, staffers, and professionals in a variety of ways—from working one on one with other writers, to developing and promoting workshops, to team-oriented tasks)?
3. Think about your music in terms of **recording** and/or **performance**. What connections can you make between your life as a musician and your life as a writing center practitioner?
4. Before you saw the call for our compilation album, had you made connections between your music and your academic work?
5. Has your research or practice within the field influenced your music? Has your music influenced your research in the field?
6. How do you think that this album contributes to the field?
7. In your opinion, how might writing centers learn from spaces such as recording studios, band practices, etc?

Of course, some of these questions are more pertinent to directors or long-term tutors than, for example, undergraduate students who are



new to writing center work. However, we wanted our questions to encourage improvisation; we wanted musicians to tell their own stories about how their roles in writing and music intersect.

Our belief in the importance of gathering and using stories from our field informed our choice of methods for this project. As Briggs and Wolbright note in their introduction to their edited collection *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*, stories offered by writing center participants “not only tell us the subjective tales of their writing center lives, but reflect on how their subjectivities were formed, they try to figure out what forces shaped their perceptions, and, whenever possible, they connect the stories to theories they have thought through” (xi). To cut a larger swath, anthologies such as Hanson and Lu’s *Comp Tales: An Introduction to College Composition Through Its Stories* “show[s] how storytelling indeed works in collaboration to define and redefine relations and issues central to the field” (x)—in this case, the multi-faced discourses of working with writers.

After transcribing and reading/re-reading these interviews, we noted the ways that these stories, both collectively and individually, spoke to the work we do. We recognized that our own subjective experiences as writers, writing center professionals, musicians, and music enthusiasts shape how we collectively understand and choose to represent these interviews here. By that same notion, we recognized that the textures in these conversations—the shared laughter, the quick but silent moments of paused reflection, or the comfort in similar experience—cannot be completely represented in these few pages, if at all.

Our conversations with participants touched on many of our

field's touchstones: listening, collaboration, development of skill sets, and—most especially—joy. We were delighted by the depth and range of responses offered by participants. After reading, coding, and discussing our transcribed interviews at length, we realized that, along with Selfe's work, Boquet's concepts from *Noise from the Writing Center* help to thread our own findings with long-standing writing center understandings of both perception and performance. Boquet explores performance through institutional perceptions of peer-to-peer writing consultation, specifically, how we might allow for and promote "a greater tolerance for distortion" (75) as a way of avoiding rote repetition in our day-to-day work, and even as a way of challenging how writing centers are sometimes located as sites of clinical remediation. Like Bouquet, our participants spoke eloquently about performance and perception and the work of writing centers at large.

### **"Learning to Jam": Threads from Our Interviews (Kail)**

"Skilled Improvisations:" Performing the Writing Center (Tracy Santa)

*Part of it is just the actual performance of consultation...Cultivating the ability to be present in the moment, which good performing requires. You're not just rushing through it, you're aware of it, and with that come the awareness of an audience. And, in singing, there's a real audience. there's actual people. ... Real human beings in front of you, and you have to make choices in how you're going to communicate something to them. —*

LeCluyse

Fans and musicians alike often use the word performance in a variety of ways: a specific show or concert; the ways in which performers might deviate, even in small ways, from already established texts; the

ways a performer (or even an audience) might choose, implicitly or explicitly, to frame their work to an audience—in one single moment, or over a longer career. At times, the term can even verge towards the critical: a “mere” performance, rather than something authentic or organic given our expectations as audience members.

Throughout the interviews, our participants often explored the messy, non-linear nature of performance—how the protean nature of writing centers (as sites, as practices) requires a range of individual and collective roles. Although much of our time is spent documenting and demarcating our daily work (the number of sessions, the data from surveys, the time spent on preparing training sessions or campus events), the subjectivity of writing consultations does not always translate so well to end-of-term reports and assessment guidelines. Boquet, thinking of peer feedback and drawing on both Jacques Attali and Jimi Hendrix, urges us to give into this ambiguity as a fuel for creative, reflexive practice when she writes, “...And to imagine that we can grow to tolerate it, that we might even learn to like it and seek it out. Play (with) it. Riff on it a bit. That we might think of feedback not as a relay from point to point to point but as sympathy, as harmony, as vibrating independently and in tandem, like the strings on that sacrificial Fender guitar.” (75) Boquet eloquently reminds us of how the act of peer-to-peer consultation (as well as other writing center work) takes place in real time; it is a thing in motion.

This motion requires, as noted by Coastal Carolina Writing Center Director Scott Pleasant, “skilled improvisations” that are a daily part of our work. As in music, we rely on techniques, but are able, in best cases, to deviate from expectations and forms in a mindful

manner. Boquet notes both the difficulty and sheer excitement of improvisation as a performative act:

*The first thing a musician learns about improvisation is that it is not anything goes. Improvisation is instead a skillful demonstration performed by someone who knows the tones of her instrument, the rhythms of her musical traditions, so well that she can both transgress and exceed them, give herself over to them, play within and against the groove. The most interesting improvisations work because they are always on the verge of dissonance. They are always just about to fail. They are risky. But when they work well, they are also really, really fun. They leave you wide-eyed.*

(76)

The dialectic between repetition and improvisation in performance emerged throughout our interviews. For example, “In the actual process of the writing consultation,” LeCluyse stated, “I become aware of the writer, and I try to be attentive to the writer, and this is an awareness I try to cultivate in my own consultants, not falling back on rote formulas, being present to that individual...”

LeCluyse’s comments here and above in the aside that introduces this section connect to how staffers talk with patrons (and how patrons talk with staffers) via the act of exploring a prompt or draft together. “Perhaps this is why I resist to such a degree the idea of scripted performance in the writing center,” Boquet argues; “I much prefer thinking of the work of the writing center as random chaos, or maybe controlled chaos, instead. It is a frame that enables me, in my work with writers, to acknowledge the importance of preparation while at the same time immersing myself in the pleasure of the here and now” (83). Pleasant offered a similar concept, with his conceptions of audience and feedback:

*So anytime you sit down with somebody else, what often occurs: somebody else has written a song, and you've written a song, and...then they'll tweak it a little bit, or they'll offer something. Your first instinct is, just like when somebody tells you something about your writing (no matter how long you've been at this), when somebody tells you there's something wrong with your writing, the first instinct you have is 'how could you possibly say such an idiotic thing?' The only response that you want when you show somebody your writing or play them your song is 'that's genius, don't change a thing.' You'll never get that, though...[but] you start to hear it the other way, the way the other person is hearing it, and you say 'well, I get what that would be.'*

The necessary improvisation, by the consultant in a writing center session or through the response of the patron, offers a non-threatening way to succumb to the bridled chaos which is essential in the writing process.

Writing center stories can help translate—or, transpose?—this seeming chaos that comes with peer-to-peer writing consultation. But the pleasure of writing center performance—which has the slippage and power of free jazz—is complicated and, perhaps, is rooted in long-standing ways in which writing is framed for patrons and staffers alike via sanctioned learning spaces such as classrooms. Our long-standing practices of guided peer feedback or talking out a prompt might seem foreign—out of key and time?—to newer students whose previous experiences with classroom-based writing allow for little exploration and revision. Professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara Chuck Bazerman, in his reflections on his development as a singer of classical opera, noted the messy perceptions in play:

*One thing that I was thinking about...was the balance between practice and performance, which people forget about with writing, quite often. ... They think writing is just skill in practice and that consequential performance is something quite apart...People are not afraid to keep in necessity both of repetitive practice and technical education: building of technique [when it comes to learning how to sing or play an instrument] ... But, in writing, we have this kind of opposed form of thinking. Either you're working with expression or you're working technically.*

These oppositional perceptions of “writing” as opposed to other skills—especially with beginning writers/performers, as Bazerman explored in his interview—make good sense, given how writing center users are often institutionally-positioned, even before they walk into our spaces for the first time: “Some of the things that people call ‘writer’s block’ are very akin to stage fright.”

Good writing center work helps ease the divide between preparation and performance by providing a “rehearsal room”—a place to safely make mistakes without the threat of being booed offstage. University of Missouri WC director Aaron Harms noted that writing centers provide “mentors and comfortable spaces to recognize one’s publicness and get comfortable with that publicness.” As noted by LeCluyse, “... the two overlap in such significant ways, especially in vocal music. ... The skills we gain in performance can then translate back into ... writing consultation because it’s mostly improv, mostly making things happen in the moment, making choices.” In other words, good writing center work can help alleviate student fears of making choices and playing with an already drafted (if even hastily drafted) text. “I think music teaches us a lot about space,” stated Tim Dougherty, Assistant Professor of English at West Chester University, “that has come back for me as I talk to students about their own

writing. Don't go everywhere. Go one place very well."

By rethinking our performance as playing the role of participants in and stewards of a studio space—a site in which texts are both invented and documented via conversation—and by making that performance more explicit, we take on the role of supportive listener, the receptive respondent, and, in a sense, a bandmate. The writing center becomes the rehearsal room for patron and staffers alike: a place to invent and remix, to try and try again, as articulated here by long standing University of Maine WC director Harvey Kail:

*And here's another thing about music, and I think this is true for tutors as well. You have to have a lot of repetitions ... You may be a genius, but you're not going to get it on the very first try. You have got to do it over and over and over and over again until you really get a grasp on it. And I think that's one of the reasons that peer tutors and the research that Paula Gillispie and Brad Hughes and I did into "What Peer Tutors Take With Them ..." was the sense that they got to do something over and over and over again ... Peer tutors get to come into writing centers and they have to be flexible, but they go through the same process: somebody comes in, they sit down, they look at their writing together, they have to come up with a mutual way to proceed, and they have to be open to criticism and they have to be supportive, and all the tough stuff that goes on, but they do it four or five times a week. Ten times a week? Eight times a week? That's practice.*

Here, Kale argues for the significance of repetition as essential in becoming a strong peer writing tutor which must be reflected in tutor training. Throughout this interview as well as others, we saw this dialectic between preparation, via repetition, and the ability to forget the scales and chords, to improvise on a theme.

Such a dialectic is core to the ways we not only perform as tutors and writing center professionals, but also as to how we perform the writing center in and of itself. Here, we're reminded of stories of producers such as Brian Wilson or Lee "Scratch" Perry, in the ways they "played the studio" as an instrument in and of itself—by setting a tone and a space for other music makers to create a certain type of performance that can capture spontaneity, as reflected in our conversation with University of Minnesota writing center staffer Damian Johansson:

*Much of my music is jazz-inspired, or even just trying to capture emotion is so spontaneous, and I'm not afraid to try anything. But I think the writing center work is a parallel to that because my favorite thing to do in sessions is mirroring, where you react to what the person you're helping presents to you. And the better that you can do that, the better result, that I've had anyway, with mirroring...in that spontaneous capture and response.*

We know that writing center performance is messy. It can be loud, angular, circular, and quite unlike the roles seen in other learning spaces such as classrooms. The themes that emerged from our interviews, like Boquet theorizes, reflect a need to affirm this messy working and reworking as a reflection of how all of us—staffers and patron alike—develop as writers. We need to find ways to inscribe it into our self-representation, our staffer training, and even the ways we present our work to others.

Although much writing center scholarship since Boquet's arguments from *Noise from the Writing Center* about performance has turned—for excellent reasons—toward more replicable and data-driven projects (as a separate and equally compelling way to perform our stories and selves), the themes of performance noted by our Write it Like



Disaster interview participants help reaffirm the existence of those hard-to-catch moments of insight and grace that leave us “wide eyed.” These moments help remind us of how such preparation and improvisational performance, as messy and noisy as it can be, is core to writing center work—no matter how linear and neat we might wish our song to be.

### **“Playing Second Fiddle:” Writing Center Perceptions and the Ways that Writing Centers are Perceived (LeCluyse)**

Two threads of writing center perceptions emerged from the interviews. The first, that writing center staffers often see ourselves as marginalized, has been explored in such texts as Macauley and Mauriello (2007), Pemberton (2011), and McKinney (2013), but the creative-project-as-solution idea was new to us, and was an unintended consequence of the album for some of the musicians. LeCluyse offered the idea:

*[The album] offers an antidote to a lot of the ways that we talk about ourselves in the writing center world. We're always hearing about marginalization. Writing center people used to talk about themselves as second fiddle. ... The more you say you're marginalized, guess what? They're going to marginalize you. [This project] is more like, “look at this place of vital creative contribution,” not, “look at this place of misunderstood people that are off in a corner somewhere.”*

The use of the word “vital,” in this instance, is not meant to imply that all writing center staffers should be musicians or should have a traditional creative outlet; instead, what we came to realize through this project is that the creativity of our staffers can give our centers life and can elevate our perceived value.

And a knowledge of music or a creative background may also elevate the actual, practical session experience for patrons through the ability to relate to them through their interests and across disciplines. Elizabeth Hoyer, in the article “Discovering Disciplinary Rhetorical Practices: Tutors as Guides, Not Masters,” explains the student-patron benefit with a musical metaphor describing the impression patrons may have about writing:

*...the student who may have been proficient in Bach minuets is suddenly expected to excel in ragtime, jazz, minimalism, classical accompaniment, and the music of John Tesh—all with minimal instruction. Like the master musicians, writing center tutors can offer some insights into the differences among the different situations for writing. Unlike the master musicians, writing center tutors can provide tools for students to equip themselves for the delicate and complex maneuvering required of writers across the disciplines.*

Patrons may, too, perceive that staffers are working with the goal of standardization in style and voice—that all disciplines require the same writing technique, that all effective writing is the same. However, through the creativity displayed and put to use in our centers, we could dispel that misconception.

The second thread revealed the suggestion that writing center staffers and scholars believe that they are viewed as prescriptive not only in writing center work, but also in their own academic persona. Pleasant described how the album could redefine writing center staffers to the academic community: “I hope that I’m not what the student on the first visit to a writing center thinks I’m going to be, which is a nitpicker. ... I hope that there’s something more human or dynamic to the whole process, and music has to do that. ... Writing is an art,

and writing music and playing music is an art. I hope it's not just a checklist of thing that I need to look for." The creativity required to be a practicing musician is similar to what we hope patrons experience in a writing center session—play, experimentation, invention, curation, revision—not a prescriptive, homogenized experience.

The creativity of individual staffers can offer uniqueness to our centers, and therefore, potential appeal in our reputations to our patrons; however Boquet explains that these challenges in writing center perceptions, such as Pleasant described, may be perpetrated within our own community:

*The last several decades of scholarship on writing centers has provided us with rich descriptions of the skills and strategies of writing center practitioners. We have not so self-consciously considered, however, the ways in which the writing center is no longer (was it ever?) a machine that makes writers (much less writing). How, without sounding a note, the writing center is already a bundle of meaning and possibilities hinted at, if not entirely contained, in the product. (Noise 149)*

Our “product” does exist with an inherent meaning, and we can continuously revise and evolve this meaning—and therefore, the reputation sustained by this meaning—on our campuses through our own individual personalities and strengths. These strengths may not necessarily be academically-acquired “skills and strategies.” Perhaps the awareness and promotion of our own creativity, creative processes, and creative development can be determining factors—the antidote to the writing “machine” perception—in how we see ourselves and how writing center administrators represent their centers to their incoming staffers, administrators, and patrons.

The image of center as “studio,” or a space where an artist creates, is

not one that has been lost on our community (Carpenter et al), and many writing centers have taken that title, and with it, the hope that their identity will be perceived as a space of creative experimentation. However, promoting our staffers as creative individuals, as artists, across the writing center community could change patron perceptions in a different more individualistic way. Associate Director of the University of South Carolina Writing Center Graham Stowe explained, “So it’s possible that [people] might [think], ‘Oh, look at these people who do this kind of work that isn’t their own.’ They’re always doing this work on other people’s work, but they’re creative, too, in their own ways, and they do their own kinds of things that are inventive and creative.” A writing center is comprised of individuals, and each year our centers will transform with a new staff that, likely, could distinguish it from the last in unique, interesting ways. Perhaps, our training, promotion, and marketing could better reflect our individuals in order to dissuade false perceptions about the clinical nature of our centers and serve as a reminder to the center staffers about the many combined talents it offers.

### **“An Album’s Worth of Good Ideas:” Conclusions and Possible Futures (Dougherty)**

It might be best to point out that many of our participants did not claim to see substantive connections between their work as musicians and their work as writing tutors/writing teachers before we began our conversations and interviews—a key insight into how we often perform radically different identities that exist alongside our lives as writing center professionals. Some saw music as an escape from workplace duties; others worked hard to keep separate their two active, creative lives (along with their varying roles as students, parents, grandparents, friends, etc), simply for personal

sanity. A few even saw music as a step away from traditional sites of literacy acquisition, such as school; as noted by Colorado College WC director Tracy Santa, “Music was something that I did outside of academia, really, and I did it as a way to remove myself from academia on some level. ... It’s really healthy.”

And yet, other participants noted that they had seen connections for some time now. For example, Drexel First-Year Writing Director Irvin Peckham states, “It’s all a part of my life. ... There’s no distinction...I don’t want to call it dialectic, but they play back and forth on each other, and I know I’m doing the same thing, but I’m just doing it in a different mode. I just could not imagine being a writer without being a singer.” Either viewpoint can privilege the separation or blending of the musician/writer’s interests depending on individual perspectives. As Pleasant explained, such an exploration uncovers “that what we really are, are creative human beings who are interested in the whole creative process.”

Both the compilation itself and the interviews that transpired from it helps us not only further understand the complicated act of writing but also of working with other writers—as whole creative human beings. As Selfe argues, “We need to learn from their motivated efforts to communicate with each other, for themselves and for others, often in resistance to the world we have created for them” (642). Projects like WiLD serve as a small emblem of a larger moment in the field of writing center studies. WiLD showcases not only music made by those in our ranks, but also exemplifies how writing centers are more and more often expanding beyond their physical and historical spaces. Even though great records often get made in cramped attics and hard-to-find basements, writing centers are—more often than not—moving beyond such spaces into the larger conversation of the

academy. Cross-institutional projects like WiLD not only complicate our core practices but also allow others to see us as creative text-makers.

In the chapter noted at the beginning of our essay, Boquet and Eodice “challenged us...to think of play not as mindless enjoyment but as play in the wheel—that is, freedom of movement” (17). At the outset of our project, we had no idea that making a compilation of music recorded by writing center staffers, professionals, and allies might evolve into an “occasion for extended discussion, debate, consideration as the task gets worked into collective purposes, themes, and goals” (17). By offering selected thoughtful and reflective moments from our pool of interviews, though, we hope that our project fills in, as Kail eloquently offered when recalling learning how to play the blues, “the notes that are not there”: in this case, the stories that writing center / musicians told us, from their own point-of-view, woven into our field’s scholarly history.

A song composed of those notes is well worth singing together.

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# **Critical Perspectives on Group Consultations at Communication Centers: Communication Accommodation Theory, Immediacy, and Persuasion**

WILLIAM BRYANT

KIMBERLY M. CUNY

MARLINA M. DAVIDSON

Communication centers provide assistance in the effort to enhance students' speaking skills and they have been shown to be very effective as a resource and support across numerous campuses. The central purpose for any communication center continues to include "tutoring for students preparing oral presentations or for participation in group activities, interviews, discussions, or debates" (Hobgood, Sandin, Von Till, Preston, Burk, Neher, Wanca-Thibault, 2001, p. 3). Research has shown that centers successfully help students gain competence as well as reduce public speaking anxiety (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Hunt & Simonds, 2002). In order for communication centers to be successful, peer educators need to be able to effectively communicate with students regarding strength as well as areas that need improvement. Students' perceptions of their peer educator can have a profound influence on student learning as well as how the students communicate with the peer educator.

Group consultations at communication centers, where peer

educators (also known as peer tutors, peer consultants, and peer coaches) are outnumbered by the speakers they support, combine an assortment of personas, talents, and motivations. Many students seek out this type of consultation support as a result of faculty members communicating value for doing so (King & Atkins-Sayre, 2012). This value is communicated by way of extra credit or a required part of a bigger assignment. Communication centers are sites for critical intervention (Pensoneau-Conway & Romerhausen, 2012) and peer educators need to be able to communicate effectively during consultations (Turner & Sheckels, 2015), adapting to a variety of different student personalities and needs. It makes sense that research has found communication central to the peer tutoring process (Atkins-Sayre & Yook, 2015). Effective communicators adjust their style and communication content to suit their goals in a given context (Pitts & Harwood, 2015) and thus, we argue peer educators in communication centers need a better understanding of the theoretical framework addressing the phenomenon of communication adjustment and the motivations behind people's communicative acts in order to accomplish one's goals of helping others become better speakers. Peer educators must not only understand but also be able to apply the critical perspectives of communication accommodation theory, immediacy, and persuasion if they are to facilitate a more effective and efficient group consultation.

First, a peer educator must recognize that people communicate from a position they deem advantageous for their situation. As a result, a peer educator should be familiar with a standard communicative framework that best prepares them to work with speakers. The following suggests that Speech Accommodation

Theory (SAT), later renamed Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), is one such normative framework that will allow a peer educator to better manage all communicative scenarios during a group consultation. Within this framework, the peer educator must understand three specific concepts: convergence, divergence, and maintenance.

Second, a peer educator must understand how the theoretical framework (i.e. CAT) manifests in immediate behaviors. We define immediate behaviors as both the verbal and nonverbal communicative actions that motivate people to participate, and encourage connection and a sense of belonging. Immediacy for the peer educator is directly connected to the establishment of trust, friendliness, approachability, and credibility. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include smiling, nodding, eye contact, walking closer to the audience, leaning forward, vocal expressiveness, and open posture. Verbal immediacy behaviors include addressing a person by name, previewing and reviewing, framing statements from the perspective of the person talking (for example, as a listener I found myself wondering if the thesis is supported properly in your main points). The peer educator's need to work within the speakers' preferred framework demands employment of certain verbal and nonverbal immediate behaviors.

Third, the peer educator must apply these immediate behaviors as persuasive elements to establish a relationship with their speakers. At the start of a session, if the peer educator wanted to use a person's name they might say, "so, Jamie, what are you working on?" T. L. Williams (personal communication, November 4, 2016), a graduate consultant with over 7 years of experience

finds use of proximity persuasively powerful at the start of a consultation. As each speaker is different, Williams respects their individual personal space while seeking to sit as close to them as their comfort will allow. Immediacy behaviors as persuasive elements lets the peer educator more easily enter into meaningful dialogue with the speakers, and increases the chances that feedback provided will later be applied. The peer educator must therefore grasp the interdependence of immediate behaviors and persuasion.

To facilitate a successful group consultation, peer educators must take these three critical perspectives into account (i.e., communication accommodation theory, immediacy, persuasion) and we contend that much can be gained by bringing these areas of research and theory to the communication center context. We begin with a review of each, and follow by looking at how they can be used in each stage of a group consultation. CAT describes variant categories and strategies employed by people during a communicative interaction, enabling the peer educator to see when and where immediate and persuasive behaviors are used. Thus, a basic understanding of CAT is crucial for the communication center peer educator facing group consultations.

### **Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)**

Important communicative respect and/or communicative avoidance occur when peer educators interact with students in group consultations, and this can be understood from a communication accommodation theory perspective (CAT; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). CAT investigates the ways in which individuals vary their communication to accommodate others

given where they believe others to be, their motivations for so doing, and the social consequences arising.

CAT was developed from Giles' 1973 Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT). Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson (1987) introduced CAT to widen its application beyond speech to nonverbal communication and to highlight the value of the cognitive and emotional processes behind speech behaviors. CAT considers the ways in which awareness that communicators are members of different social groups can influence interpersonal communication (Giles et al., 1991). In particular, it predicts that when a person views another person who they are communicating with as a member of an outgroup he or she will adopt communication strategies that are attuned to the perceived needs of styles of individuals from the outgroup. Often, these strategies or accommodations are based on stereotypes about the outgroup. The theory has been used extensively by communication scholars seeking to understand and explain interactions of interpersonal dyads and small group communication across many areas, including instructional communication (Dragojevic, Gasiorek, & Giles, 2015). Thus, communication accommodation theory is an appropriate theory to help understand the impact peer educators have on students' perception and learning outcomes.

Studies using communication accommodation theory help to explain how the theory is used within particular contexts. For instance, Watson and Gallois (1998) used the communication accommodation theory to help examine the interactions between health care professionals and patients because "each person's behavior influences the perceptions and responses of the others" (p. 345). In another study, Gasiorek (2013) sought to understand

how young adults are motivated to respond and the ways in which they respond to someone who has under-accommodated them. Results indicated that participants responded in one of three ways: directly, indirectly, or through avoidance of the issue. This research helps to confirm communication accommodation theory's suggestions that people accommodate depending on to whom they are speaking.

Street and Giles (1982) explain that CAT is derived from similarity-attraction, social exchange, causal attribution, and social identity principles. "A basic postulate is that communicators are motivated to adjust their verbal and nonverbal speech styles with respect to one another as a means of expressing values, attitudes, and intentions. In addition, it is the individual's perception of another's speech that will determine his or her behavioral and evaluative response" (p. 205). CAT seeks to explain an individual's motivations for, and constraints upon, speech behavior during social interactions, as well as the social consequences of altering speech behavior. CAT accomplishes this through an analysis of the cognitive and emotional processes that lead to convergent, divergent, and maintenance speech (Giles, et al.; Giles, Williams & Coupland, 1990). CAT also bears in mind the social cognitive impact between addressee and addressed, and the influence of the environment on their interaction. As a result, CAT is concerned with both objective and subjective states of being, examining how a communicative behavior is intended (based on the communicator's perception of the situation and of their interlocutor) and how it is perceived. To use CAT effectively within a group consultation, peer educators must understand three aspects of the theory: convergence, divergence, and maintenance.

### *Convergence*

Convergence is the term for a communicator's attempt to align their communicative style and behavior to that of the interlocutor. "Speech convergence has been described as a linguistic strategy used by interlocutors attempting to adapt to the linguistic pattern used by one's partner" (Nussbaum, Pitts, Huber, Krieger, & Ohs, 2005, p. 290). However, a speaker bases convergent behavior on what they perceive the interlocutor's level to be. This is necessarily so, for convergent behavior happens in the midst of a communicative encounter, and the speaker must use what they can perceive about the interlocutor as a guide. Furthermore, "convergence is also not always to the perceiver's level, but to the level that the speaker believes the perceiver expects him to achieve" (Giles, et al., 1987, p. 21). Convergent behavior is often motivated by a desire for social approval. The effects of convergence are strongly tied to the intention believed to be behind the convergent behavior (p. 26). Thus, the interlocutor's perception of the speaker is of utmost importance.

### *Divergence*

In contrast to convergence, divergence is "the way in which speakers accentuate vocal differences between themselves and others" (Giles, et al., 1987, p. 14). Studies of the perceptions of accent change in different situations show that in one situation, accent change is perceived favorably, and in another not, largely based on what social norms are in play in the particular situation (p. 24). Giles, et al. examine divergence in terms of intergroup interaction, citing studies that demonstrate that divergence can arise from a desire to maintain group identity and/or

membership over or against another group (p. 28). This divergence can even take the form of speakers adopting linguistic behaviors stereotypical of the group in which they wish to demonstrate their membership (p. 29). As a result, the authors point out that divergence is sometimes expected, and viewed positively (p. 33). In such situations, divergence can organize the interaction – making clear each participant’s role and point of view (p. 32). However, this application is better seen as an act of maintenance.

### *Maintenance*

Maintenance is not as extreme as divergence, for it does not involve a change in communicative behavior. It occurs when “a person persists in his or her original style, regardless of the communication behavior of the interlocutor” (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005, p. 123). A person who neither converges nor diverges communicatively is attempting to maintain the current positions of the self and other during the interaction. Giles, et al. (1987) claim that maintenance can be motivated by a desire to be noncooperative, either out of disagreeability or out of a desire to maintain a distinct social or group identity (p. 28). Like convergence and divergence, the effects of maintenance depend on the attributed motives behind the maintenance behavior. Having discussed the central concepts and themes of CAT we move to defining and examining how (non)immediate behaviors encourage convergent, divergent, and maintenance speech.

### *Immediacy*

Immediacy describes the amount of closeness and approachability that is present between people (Mehrabian, 1971). Immediate behaviors are both verbal and nonverbal communicative actions



(Gorham, 1988) that motivate people to participate, and encourage both connection and a sense of belonging. Immediate behaviors convey feelings of closeness. Immediate behaviors essentially create an environment of willing reciprocity, comfort, and attentiveness between interlocutors. As Richmond (2002) states, “immediacy is the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between people” (qtd. in Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002, p. 68). This closeness facilitates open communication and increases each participant’s satisfaction with the communicative encounter. Nonverbal immediacy includes such behaviors as eye contact, smiling, direct body orientation, close proxemics, gesturing, vocal inflections, and physical contact while communicating (Mehrabian, 1971). In contrast, nonimmediate behaviors include those that communicate “avoidance, dislike, coldness, and interpersonal distance” (Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988, p. 55), and can cause individuals to “avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer” (Mehrabian, 1971, p. 1).

According to Witt and Wheelless (2001), “the communication behaviors employed by teachers play a strategic role in student learning outcomes” (p. 327). Immediacy is positively related to affective and cognitive learning outcomes (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007), teacher credibility (Teven, 2007), liking (Teven, 2007), and increases in student-teacher interaction (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Clearly, researchers have established the important role immediacy has as a teacher communication behavior. And in the communication center context peer educators are taking on many of the same roles that teachers do in the classroom.

Cuny, Wilde, and Stevens (2012), identify immediacy behaviors

as important for creating a connection between peer educator and speaker in the communication center. More recently, specific information about the role that nonverbal immediacy plays in peer educator interactions has been published in the book *Communicating Advice* (Atkins-Sayre & Yook, 2015). Immediate behaviors can be seen as strategies that produce a space for persuasion to occur; therefore, immediacy and persuasion form an interdependent relationship.

### *Persuasion*

At its core, the goal of persuasion is to change or reinforce another's views. It involves the relocation of power, as the persuader attempts to control the views of the object of persuasion. As such, it is often viewed with suspicion. However, not all attempts to persuade are devious. In fact, persuasion permeates the large majority of our daily lives through our conversations with others. Therefore, persuasion is a necessity that allows society to operate. One of the primary ways persuasion accomplishes such tasks is through the use of rhetorical proof (or appeals) as delineated by Aristotle in *Rhetoric*.

When a situation requires persuasion, the speaker can employ pathos, ethos, and logos to ensure the speaker achieves the intended end. Pathos is the way in which the speaker influences the listener's emotions. Ethical use of pathos, as a means of persuasion, effectively taps into the emotions of the audience. Ethos, on the other hand, is the degree that the audience is inclined to trust the speaker. Without trust, the audience will not listen to the message, for mistrust of the speaker undermines the legitimacy of the message itself. Logos, accomplishes

its persuasion through the use of logic, including evidence, demonstration, and the implementation of inductive and deductive reasoning. Individually, pathos, ethos, and logos can be quite convincing; however, in combination, they produce powerfully persuasive rhetoric.

### **Application to the Group Consultation**

How does knowledge of communication accommodation, immediacy, and persuasion assist peer educators in facilitating a more effective and efficient consultation? For clarity, the following is divided into sections corresponding to the stages of the group consultation itself: the perspectives will be studied as they reveal themselves within the beginning (introduction), the majority of the meeting (body), and the end (conclusion) of the group consultation.

#### *The Introduction: CAT, Immediacy, and Persuasion*

Peer educators have three goals in the introductory phase of a consultation: to uncover group problems and goals, to establish credibility and rapport, and to gain the group members' trust. During this phase, speakers and peer educators engage in small talk (Ward & Schwartzman, 2009) rife with convergent, divergent, and maintenance behaviors. Peer educators' awareness of these tenets of CAT help them to understand each group member's stance within the group. Convergent behaviors indicate a group member's satisfaction with the group, while divergent behaviors indicate dissatisfaction. Maintenance behaviors are ambiguous, for they may indicate real satisfaction, or they may indicate dissatisfaction the group member is putting aside for the good of the group. On the part of peer educators, convergent behaviors

may make the relationship with speakers too personal or informal, whereas divergent behaviors may alienate a speaker and reduce the peer educator's efficacy. Thus, peer educators should manifest maintenance behaviors as much as possible, to establish and maintain a working relationship and avoid interfering with the internal dynamics of the group.

Peer educators can use CAT to diagnose problems within a group and maintain para-professional credibility. The next two critical perspectives, working together and helping peer educators establish rapport, fall under the persuasive technique of ethos; however, it is accomplished using pathos and immediacy behaviors combined. Peer educators can appeal to the emotions of the speakers, using small talk and friendly nonverbal cues to highlight the similarities between them all. These immediacy behaviors encourage speakers to feel that the peer educator is invested in their successes. Peer educators must establish trust so that the speakers will be inclined to engage in dialogue and apply the peer educator's feedback and suggestions. Likewise, it is important at this stage to establish the supportive atmosphere of the center. This is partially accomplished by a peer educator's use of logos. In the initial stages of the consultation, peer educators must inductively determine the speaker's purpose in seeking help, usually through a series of formal questions. This logos aspect of the initial interaction supports the credibility of the speakers and the center, because it makes the speakers feel that the peer educator is equipped to handle the situation. Likewise, the credibility of the center itself works with the ethos of the peer educator to support the credibility of the feedback and instruction given during the consultation.

*The Body: CAT, Immediacy, and Persuasion*

At this stage in the consultation, the group's problems and goals should be clear. Now, peer educators gather and provide information to assist the speakers in addressing these problems and goals. A peer educator's goal in the group consultation is not simply to dictate what the speakers do; rather, it is to listen, offer suggestions, and support each speaker's self-improvement. The speakers should remain empowered, and the peer educator should maintain a guiding, rather than dictator, role. Thus, peer educators must facilitate conversation between group members, allowing them to interact with one another, working to accomplish the group goals while processing their verbal and nonverbal messages in real time. Peer educators must manage the convergent/divergent/maintenance behaviors of group members – reinforcing and encouraging convergent behaviors with positive immediacy behaviors (nodding head, open posture, smile, supportive comments, etc.), and responding to divergent behaviors with guiding questions to allow speakers to be self-critical and reflect on their own stances. For maintenance behaviors, which are inherently ambiguous, peer educators should allow the situation, as it evolves, to determine what immediate behaviors and what degree of persuasion are required for the situation.

In some instances, peer educators must take a stronger, more assertive role in guiding a group toward a resolution of problems and the achievement of its goals. If the consultation appears to be lagging or headed in the wrong direction, or if speakers appear disgruntled, it is time for the peer educator to take proactive measures in order to keep the consultation (and the group itself) from calamity. If the peer educator established sound rapport and

credibility in the introductory stage of the consultation, then they can resort to persuasion for help in managing these circumstances. This ethos provides a sound foundation for a peer educator to exert persuasive influence on the speakers. Peer educators may choose to add strength to their feedback and recommendations by framing each with a statement like, "I recently had another speaker with this problem, and she ..., which worked well." This appeals to ethos and logos, for it relies both on a peer educator's credibility in telling the anecdote, and also on the rational principle that similar problems call for similar solutions. If peer educators need to strengthen ethos, the response might include telling a similar, personal anecdote. This makes the speakers feel that the peer educator is on their level, and sympathizes with their situation. Thus, this technique uses pathos in addition to ethos. In any case, peer educators strengthen the persuasiveness of the input into the consultation only to guide the speakers toward their goals. Persuasion is used to increase the likelihood that the speakers will accept and apply the peer educator's comments, and thus supports the effectiveness of the consultation in general.

#### *The Conclusion: CAT, Immediacy, and Persuasion*

The conclusion of the consultation has four goals: to reinforce the content of the consultation, to review the action plan for moving forward, to ensure speaker satisfaction and improvement, and to ensure the speaker sees value in the support. Ideally, by the end of a consultation, the group and peer educator will all be exhibiting convergent and maintenance behaviors, and divergence will be minimal. This indicates that the peer educator has been successful in facilitating the unified progress of the group, and has increased the likelihood that they will act on the feedback and instruction

provided. In this ideal situation, the peer educator can manifest immediacy behaviors to reinforce personal ethos, and then capitalize on this by appealing to pathos and logos to recapitulate the content of the consultation. If the speakers are convinced of the peer educator's ability and desire to help, then the peer educator can use these feelings of admiration and mutuality, and a rational appeal, to restate and sum up the session in a persuasive way. If the body of the consultation has been successful, then the speakers will already feel that the peer educator has helped them, and so will more readily take any further suggestions offered.

Sometimes the consultation has been less than ideal. In these cases, peer educators can attempt to redeem the consultation in the conclusion by eliciting and gathering feedback, and attempting to resolve any remaining issues. This can be done by asking the speakers if there are any areas that need more attention, or any questions left unanswered. This can be characterized as an immediacy behavior, which can strengthen the speaker/peer educator relationship and build ethos, thereby allowing the peer educator to help the speaker more effectively. Questioning in this manner is an excellent way to respond to divergent behaviors in the conclusion, and can help resolve the underlying problems that give rise to such behaviors. Furthermore, this allows the peer educator to evaluate speakers' satisfaction and improvement and resolve issues in these areas. One of the best ways to increase the likelihood that a speaker will value the experience, and even encourage their peers to use the center, might be to accomplish the prior goals — reinforcing consultation content and checking speaker satisfaction and improvement. Just finishing the consultation in a strong and professional manner leaves the

speakers with a good impression, making them feel more satisfied with the consultation and the center.

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

In explaining the basic concepts of CAT – convergence, divergence, and maintenance – we provide a framework for beginning to understand communicative behavior during group consultations. We have also explained how immediacy and persuasion act within these communicative behaviors. Unifying these three critical perspectives, we have shown how each plays an important role in the process of a group consultation. When applied these perspectives can help to achieve specific goals in the communication center and make the consultation more effective overall. In doing this, we have demonstrated how immediate behaviors align and work within the theoretical commitments of CAT, and how immediate behaviors are connected with acts of persuasion.

While some have argued that conversations are too complex to be reduced to CAT and more recently research has shifted to an individual's perception to understand inferred motive in processing nonaccommodation (Gasiorek & Giles, 2015), we find merit in teaching CAT to peer educators when coupled with the recognition that conversations are infinitely complex speech acts. In the context of peer education in communication centers, where no two peer educators act or react in exactly the same way given the same set of variables, this argument should meet little resistance. Essentially, we establish a need for the inclusion of these critical perspectives in the training of peer educators working with groups in communication centers.



As in any attempt, much work remains to be done. Troillett and McIntyre (2012) note that the training of peer educators working in communication centers is vital to the success of all involved. While different aspects of peer educator training at one particular communication center have been documented (Cuny, Thompson, & Naidu, 2014; Cuny & Yarragunta, 2009; Davis, 2011; Davis, 2012; Davis, 2016; & Ellis, 2015) and Atkins-Sayre and Yook (2015) have published a book dedicated to the topic, there remains a need for a systematic examination of training practices. This leads us to suggest that communication center graduate students, directors, and researchers work together in designing such training, launching it across multiple centers, and conducting multi-method assessment of the training across multiple communication centers.

In addition to the need for more documented training methodologies, the conclusions from this essay need to be confirmed with data. This issue deserves our attention and future studies should investigate the intersection of communication accommodation theory, immediacy, and persuasion in order to gain a better understanding of the support peer educators can give in group consultations at communication centers. These endeavors could expand beyond a basic understanding of CAT into inferences, intentionality, and motive by including additional interpersonal adaptation or adjustment theories of mimicry, style matching, synchrony, and reciprocity. Toma (2014) argues that while the field of interpersonal adaptation is rich, the research “does not provide a cohesive and unified view of interpersonal adaptation but rather a multifaceted, complex and sometimes disjointed one” (p. 156). We challenge communication center researchers to use the conceptual clarity provided by Toma as well as the conclusions from this essay as a starting point for continual

examination.

Ultimately, it does not matter what area of study is being supported, peer educators who enter into meaningful dialogue (with their student peers) need a clear understanding of the motivations behind people's communicative acts. An intentional training program would allow peer educators to understand how to use communication to accomplish the goals of helping others become better communicators. Communication centers are well positioned to take the lead in such training. Finally, persuasion can be a positive force in many settings, but especially in the realm of radical education like that of communication centers.

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## *Disciplinary Perspectives*

# Shaping the Future: Writing Centers as Creative Multimodal Spaces

RUSSELL CARPENTER

The 2016 Northern California Writing Center Association (NCW-CA) annual conference, held at Santa Clara University, provided the ideal and timely opportunity to think deeply about “New Media, New Spaces, and All the Ways Writing Centers Work.” Most importantly, this theme encouraged scholars, tutors, and professionals working in writing centers to examine new ways that we might shape the future of our work.

To this end, I follow several related threads for writing centers throughout this essay. I bring these threads together to examine ways in which writing centers work through old media, or what we might consider low-tech tools (to include pencil, paper, or dry-erase boards); new media (to include the work we do through pixels, laptops, and tablet devices, for example); and new concepts of space design that incorporate refashioned approaches to the ways that media, composing, and thinking interact. The three threads are:



- Thread 1: Writing centers as spaces for creative invention
- Thread 2: Writing centers as spaces for multimodal thinking
- Thread 3: Writing centers as spaces for reworking understandings of media

Silicon Valley, the site of the NCWCA conference, is home to thousands of high-tech companies, including Apple, Adobe, and Google. These three companies alone are considered among the most innovative in the world. Apple, specifically, is one of the world's largest IT companies and manufacturer of the popular iPhone, iPad, and MacBook, and serves as a model for innovation.

Adobe, however, creates some of the nation's leading multimedia and software products. It's known for Photoshop and the popular Adobe Creative Suite and now the Creative Cloud. Their systems and applications allow us to design graphical information, edit videos, and develop web applications. The Creative Cloud advertises this line: "Your favorite assets—images, shapes, colors, text styles, settings and more—all available within your apps" (Adobe Creative Cloud), and upon closer look, you see that the Cloud even offers you libraries to learn how to "access, organize, and share creative assets with other users." Adobe's innovations continue to change the ways we think about creativity and meaning-making through visual elements, make visual and creative artifacts accessible, and create a channel that allows for sharing and collaboration.

Our culture of sharing—and the tools that allow us to share and consume—has changed the ways we think about producing text, the definition of a text, and collaboration and the ways we view and access material. Google, which has changed our views and

approaches to productivity, composing space, and collaboration processes, seemed to anticipate our future composing and thinking needs before we knew we would benefit from these features or understood how useful they could become for the ways we work. In addition, Google offers a search engine feature (now Google Chrome) that integrates with its productivity software (Google Docs), its email (known as Gmail), and its cloud storage (Google Drive). Google Cardboard even provides inexpensive and accessible virtual reality, and Google Draw, which I used here to draft an early version of a new experimental space, allows for a composition that involves alphabetic text, colors, lines, and shapes. Behind these products and developments, however, you'll find physical and intellectual spaces and media that encourage new ways of thinking and invite us to share our work in ways previously directed through paper-based modalities and in-person communication.



Figure 1. Early Prototype of Innovative Space

These companies employ some of the most creative and innovative talent in the world to keep them on top. They innovate constantly. They're the first to change, and the others follow, react, or simply keep up. They look for new and better ways of doing their work, and it's part of their culture. They exist because they've changed, and they understand future demand.

What might these companies have to do with all of the ways writing centers work? They look at their work differently than others, and they prompt us to do the same. They're able to see their work, their clientele, and their possible clientele differently than the others. They view their work anew regularly, not just when prompted. How might writing centers channel some of this thinking as we consider new media, new spaces, and *all* the ways writing centers work? For that matter, what *are* the ways writing centers work?

- Will writing centers maintain a primary focus of offering objective peer-to-peer support for writers of papers?
- What ways will writing centers work in the future in light of new media opportunities, new spatial opportunities, and all of the ways that we could or should work?

I think writing centers are sites of innovation. We *have to* innovate to maintain the level of intellectual exchange and curiosity that we do on any given day. We often shape this thinking in rhetorical or compositional terms. These moves and shifts in thinking occur often in the one-on-one work our staff members do with peers; however, I encourage us to elevate that thinking to the programmatic level for a moment.

We might start by channeling our colleagues at the Design School (also known as the d.school) at Stanford University. The d.school's approaches to creativity encourage hands-on thinking, often with low-tech tools and objects (we call them "manipulatives" in our program). The 2011 book *Make Space* by Doorley and Witthoft encourages all of us to rethink our spaces and roles in them. Their approach serves as a model for academic space design. While the pages offer many concepts and renderings for creative space design, the broader argument is that "space transmits culture" (22). The authors give us the instructions to make our own space, and thus our own cultural shifts, and to create space, which is empowering. Its pages are full of ideas and concepts for making any space creative using easy-to-find or buildable low-tech items. The book also includes how-to spreads that provide instructions for designing learning materials that resonate with spatial configurations. These concepts might prompt several questions for writing center scholars:

1. What might such a book for writing centers look like?
2. What spaces might we design, and what instructions should we include?
3. Are we empowered to implement these creative concepts in our writing center spaces?

Moving forward, scholars might also consider the intersection(s) of media, space, and writing center work.

My own program emphasizes creativity, and it's hard work. I taught our Creativity and Innovation course in spring 2015, which is part of our Minor in Applied Creative Thinking in the Noel

Studio. My small group of students and I read *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, which offers ten personas that allow us to “beat the devil’s advocate,” that positioning which raises questions and concerns that effectively kill new ideas while also admitting no personal responsibility (“About the Book” n.p.). I suspect that many writing centers have faced this exact challenge. As we discuss the personas, you might consider how they are present in your writing center or how your writing center might innovate by assuming one or more personas.

My students and I spent the semester designing new ways of thinking, learning, and composing in our writing center space. We began with the Learning Personas, which are “driven by the idea that no matter how successful a company currently is, no one can afford to be complacent” (8). The **Learning Personas** include:

- The anthropologist: ventures into the field to observe how people interact with products, services, and experiences in order to come up with new innovations
- The experimenter: celebrates the process, not the tool, testing and retesting potential scenarios to make ideas tangible; the experimenter invites others to collaborate, while making sure that the entire process is saving time and money
- The cross-pollinator: draws associations and connections between seemingly unrelated ideas or concepts to break new ground (8-9)

The **Organizing Personas** “played by individuals who are savvy about the often counter-intuitive process of how organizations move ideas forward”:

- The hurdler: a tireless problem-solver who gets a charge out of tackling something that's never been done before
- The collaborator: the rare person who truly values the team over the individual. In the interest of getting things done, the collaborator coaxes people out of their work silos to form multidisciplinary teams
- The director: a leader with an acute understanding of the bigger picture, with a firm grasp on the pulse of their organization (9-10)

The **Building Personas** gain insights from the learning roles and channel the empowerment from the organizing roles to make innovation happen:

- The experience architect: relentlessly focuses on creating remarkable individual experiences
- The set designer: looks at every day as a chance to liven up their workspace
- The storyteller: captures our imagination with compelling narratives of initiative, hard work, and innovation
- The caregiver: guides the client through the process to provide them with a comfortable, human-centered experience (10-11)

What persona would you want your writing center to adopt for the future? Ideally, how would the media and spaces at work in your writing center adapt or change based on this persona?

In my own program, our consultation sessions often look visual and have a sense of motion. Our consultants help students examine all possible opportunities for designing a text, which might involve incorporating forms of media or sketching an idea in

low-tech or high-tech ways. The non-discursive nature of these interactions and the physical process of moving and sketching with students re-inscribes ideas that are often lost (or forgotten) in conversation. This process is highly visual and interactive. Engaging a multimodal approach to consultations, students are encouraged to move / stand up or to incorporate dry-erase boards (if low-tech) or monitors (if high-tech). You might see students standing clustered together or simply drawing. At times, it looks like play or doodling, but it's serious, intentional, and rigorous academic work.

In our programming, we're constantly examining how the different modes of communication work. Table 1 allows us to consider ways in which communication modes contribute to writing center activity. As shown, possible outputs cluster in four general areas or lead to other modalities, to include visual. Visual or aural modalities allow us to think about ideas through different artifacts, which encourage a different output (see Table 1).

Table 1. Modality and Writing Center Activity

Modality	Artifacts	Possible Output	WC Activity
Written	alphabetic text, printed paper, hand-written notes	essay, research paper, paragraphs	drafting, consulting alphabetic text
Visual	photos, images, sketches, shapes, icons, drawings	diagrams, charts, concept maps	visual exploration, relational thinking, brainstorming
Oral	speech, audio file, video	podcasts, audio file, brainstorm, presentation	discussion, presenting, oral expression, recordings
Aural	ambient sound, musical patterns, audio clips	soundtrack, archive, background music	explore role of sound in multimodal artifacts, compose with sound

To this list, we might add kinesthetic learning—the physical act of thinking and experiencing communication through interactions with tools or resources. Rather than pursuing linear paths for research and development, we might explore intersecting paths that inform all the ways we work. One of the possibilities will be kinesthetic, considering the ways we interact and learn with interactive forms of low- and high-tech media.

### An Overview of Multimodal Pedagogy

While multimodal composition has become fairly common in the composition classroom, I suggest that we examine multimodal pedagogy as a way of employing written, visual, oral, aural, and kinesthetic modes of thinking, learning, and composing. As an entry point, I'll refer to Cynthia L. Selfe's *Multimodal Composition*. Selfe encourages us to think, learn, and compose beyond words. Building on Selfe's work here, I suggest that we craft a new definition that focuses on multimodal pedagogy for writing and multiliteracy centers, and that considers complexities in spaces and new media:

*A multimodal pedagogy is designed to facilitate expansion of the modalities through which students and faculty create meaning, to teach and learn beyond alphabetic text and to challenge linear, one-directional thinking by exploring the affordances of image, sound, and movement.*

Table 2. Kinesthetic Activity

Modality	Artifacts	Possible Output	WC Activity
Kinesthetic	butcher paper, Post-Its, magnetic tiles	models, prototypes	design communication processes, experiences, and relationships



I would like to expand on this thought here. I think the multi-modal shift is important because:

- It encourages a complex process of thinking
- It promotes creative thinking
- It promotes deep learning
- It models to students that there are multiple paths in a composing process
- It reveals to students an important learning process that also promotes metacognition; that is, if you can also understand why you are performing a task in a certain way, you can begin to understand, reflect on, and hone that task to enhance your writing

Let's take a closer pass at the three threads I mentioned earlier:

### **Thread 1: Writing centers are spaces for creative invention**

Much like the offices at Apple, Adobe, and Google, writing centers are also spaces for creative invention. Like the Google search page, no two visits to the writing center are quite the same. Tutors shape feedback for students based on their questions and main concerns. The job itself requires constant reinvention of the role.

Writing centers are centralizing teaching, learning, and composing spaces on our campuses. We've not always highlighted the creative process in our spaces, but much of what we do involves helping students learn and think about their writing and then work toward an understanding of all of the available opportuni-

ties for communicating in compelling ways.

Why should writing centers consider the value of design thinking? We might see it as an extra, an add-on, or coming from the “outside” into the writing center, but it is exactly where we should look as we innovate our future practice. Design thinking offers values that we can benefit from in writing centers.

The appeal of design thinking, as Lee and Carpenter have written, is being considered by scholars in composition and rhetoric studies. To recap this research: Marback’s 2009 “Embracing Wicked Problems: The Turn to Design in Composition Studies,” Newcomb’s 2012 “Sustainability as a Design Principle for Composition: Situational Creativity as a Habit of Mind,” and Purdy’s 2014 “What can Design Thinking Offer Writing Studies?” have prompted us to consider how these concepts can enhance writing center work. As indicated by AAC&U News, however, academic interest in design thinking also suggests value in creativity theories and even pedagogies that have the potential to enhance teaching and learning in writing center spaces.

Building on the work of Marback, Newcomb, and Purdy, I encourage us to look more specifically at the processes of design thinking as articulated by the d.school and these composition scholars to develop new ways of working with space and high- and low-tech media in the writing center. Table 3 adapts the design thinking model, in use at the d.school, for use in the writing center.

Design thinking offers an important entry point into current understandings of creativity and, in some ways, innovation.

In composition studies, instructors may think of creativity and

Table 3. Design Thinking Concepts for Writing Centers

Design Thinking Concept	Writing Center Value
Empathize	Focus on the student; understand the student's concerns, constraints, and needs. <i>Who is my student? What matters to this person?</i>
Design	Construct a point of view that is based on student needs and insights. <i>What are the student's needs?</i>
Ideate	Brainstorm and develop as many creative solutions as possible (reserve judgement). <i>How can I encourage wild ideas and possibility thinking in the student?</i>
Prototype	Build a representation of one or more of your ideas to show to others. <i>How can I show my thinking? How can students show their thinking? What materials are available or needed to display thinking and thinking processes?</i>
Test	Return to your original user group and test your ideas for feedback. Share your prototype. <i>What is working in this prototype? What is not working? What are the available options for moving forward?</i>

creative thinking as a process such as brainstorming by which students generate new ideas or topics. However, the writing process is generally understood to involve four stages (for example, brainstorming, planning, composing, and revising). For composition instructors who adhere to process-writing approaches, the creative moment is often formally integrated as an early stage of the writing process. As Lee and Carpenter argued: "A composition process with an emphasis on creative thinking . . . presumes that creative thinking is present and taught in each stage [of the composing process]." Building upon this observation, writing centers are the ideal spaces to rethink (or to innovate) composing and feedback processes. Therefore, writing centers should consider the following:

1. What should innovation look like in your writing center?
2. What should innovation look like in your academic work?  
Your consultations with students?

3. What should innovation look like in your academic work with faculty?

I'd like to suggest that we focus on the ways that we think and learn in our spaces as a strategy for advancing innovation in writing centers.

### **Thread 2: Writing centers are spaces for multimodal thinking**

Creativity involves seeking new ways of thinking about problems, ideas, and forms of composing. Composition studies has embraced this, spending many pages examining multimodal composition—that is, creating projects that involve written or alphabetic text, visual text, audio, or combinations of these modalities. While many writing centers continue to focus on writing consultations using print-based forms, the ways we do this work continue to change. I'd like to take a different look at applications of multimodality in the writing center independent of the textual product.

Writing centers are sites and spaces for thinking and learning through composing. The ways we work, though, might involve speaking ideas as well as visualizing them.

We often think about the role of new media (and old media) in our output: a production based approach. I encourage us to consider the meaning-making and process-oriented potential for new and old media to shape the ways we consult, learn, and compose in *different ways*, with *different goals*, in our writing center spaces. In rethinking the ways in which we work with or in spaces

through new media (and new approaches to using old media), we might move toward a visual, kinesthetic, and modal or multimodal-focused thinking process. Such a process stands to engage students through multimodal forms and reveal the many ways that thinking and composing happen before moving toward production. To this end, writing centers might allow students to create in their spaces during the messy invention stages of the process.

As a way of illustrating what this process might look like, I'll draw from the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy discussed in detail by David R. Krathwohl in his 2002 *Theory Into Practice* article and earlier in Anderson and Krathwohl's 2001 *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing*. Models like the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy can help us think in new ways about how we consult, learn, and compose in and around writing center spaces. In envisioning the future of our spaces and mediated opportunities, including all the ways we work, I'd like to think through how we create new understandings of our work through such a model. When consulting with students to develop an understanding of terminology during the writing process, we might draw from remembering; to classify these concepts or reorganize them into new, meaningful relationships, we might draw from understanding; when asking students to sketch, we're drawing from application. The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy places creating at the top. It's the level of knowledge that students produce new or original work by designing, assembling and constructing in new ways.

Here, I would like to examine the ways in which the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy allows us to articulate multimodal processes

in terms of knowledge goals. Rather than focusing on a text or correctness, this iteration of Bloom's focuses on the learning that happens in each of these areas as the way writing centers work.

### **Thread 3: Writing centers are spaces for reworking understandings of media**

As the final thread, I argue that writing centers are spaces for reworking understandings of media. Positioning writing centers as spaces that understand and articulate how old and new media composing and learning processes operate can become a major point of advocacy moving forward. This point is not simply driven by an advocacy for technology (or the high-tech). Reworking our understanding of media entails taking the lead and articulating for our centers, programs, and partners the ways in which we compose media for ourselves and our student writers. It's not a matter of embracing or resisting. It's a matter of considering the possibilities for thinking that can or should occur in our centers and providing the opportunities for our staff members and students to find themselves and their work within mediated processes. Note that design thinking, creativity, and multimodal thinking do not require new media. We can and should rework our understandings of low-tech options for composing and learning in writing centers. In nearly every case I can imagine, the involved, complicated thinking of monumental value to writing centers—new forms of noise that Beth Boquet in *Noise from the Writing Center* brought to our attention in 2002—encourages us to actively and intentionally create *messy visual noise* resulting in creative residue that is the most amazing experience a writing center can offer. When you take a step back after a consultation or a work-

shop, you're left with the highest of highs, the euphoria of seeing higher-order thinking in action. What you see (and what you're left with) is cutout paper dinosaurs stuck onto butcher paper that connect line drawings suggesting and promising a *future* artifact representative of complex compositions of thinking.

Designing thinking and creativity encourage writers to make use of available materials—old media and new media—and the network of thinking artifacts that propel us toward whole, complex compositions. The resulting project can take the form of a fully digital multimodal composition. The thinking involved, however, happens long before any code is written or videos edited. The network is created in sketches, mappings, and line drawings on paper or maybe on screen by hand before they are translated, coded, or migrated into their final form. This process empowers students by making their thinking visible in low-stakes situations. The innovative writing center must be a low-stakes space for possibility thinking to happen.

Table 4. Revised Bloom's Taxonomy in the Writing Center

Revised Bloom's	Definition	The ways writing centers work
Create	Produce new or original work	Produce artifacts, creative residue, compose in multiple modes, develop visible ideas
Evaluate	Justify a stand or a decision	Take a position on design decisions, strategies, or approaches
Analyze	Draw connections among ideas	Draw connections between modalities, texts, and materials
Apply	Use information in new ways	Implement new ideas to solve traditional issues; apply untested mode in a new way or in new application
Understand	Explain ideas or concepts	Explain and recognize modal affordances and choices in a multimodal text (or multimodal thinking)
Remember	Recall facts and basic concepts	Define and state plans for modal, composing development

Through their composing process, students can rework their understandings of media (or new media). The writing center is an ideal space for this to happen, as we pride ourselves on our willingness to explore new topics or new approaches with students. In these spaces, students can also see how media function and how we, as interested composers ourselves, navigate these media.

### **Innovating the Future of Writing Centers**

I think we should view writing centers and writing center work in a certain way. We know the work we do is 1) academic, 2) rigorous, and 3) informed by best practices, research, and scholarship that is often published in our major journals. Newly envisioned journals like *Southern Discourse in the Center: A Journal of Multiliteracy and Innovation* specifically review work that offers new, provisional, and futuristic perspectives. This journal offers a productive and welcome disruption in writing centers as a way of contributing to the conversation and building on the great work already published from our programs. With an eye toward innovation, we're prompted to ask "what if?"

### **Shaping the Future**

I would like to see a future shaped by new ways of multimodal thinking, new ways of designing spaces to respond to complex and dynamic consultation practices, and reframing media as composing and thinking opportunities that we shape for our students and faculty. I would also like to see us become thought leaders in this area. To move in this direction, I suggest four



related moves:

- Drawing new attention to how we teach and learn through and within our spaces
- Thinking about our work off the page but also on the screen and in different modes and media
- Thinking about students' thinking in multiple modes
- Rethinking media and the artifacts we use to talk to students about their writing (and writing process)

It's the perfect time to think about the future of writing centers: the "new media, new spaces, and all the ways writing centers work."

### **Innovation for Writing Centers**

Finally, I would like to encourage a culture of innovation for writing centers.

- *Innovation*: I'd like to encourage pedagogical and theoretical approaches that draw from the outside, reshape our writing center theory and practice, that then have a new or refashioned output.
- *Opportunistic thinking*: As writing centers, centralizing intellectual spaces with high value added to our institutions for writing, of course, and also thinking and thinking processes, I encourage us to engage in intellectual, scholarly conversations about what if and what could be to shape the future of our work.
- *Embrace creative and multimodal noise*: The most impactful

consultations and workshops that I see are the ones that generate visual noise. It's those that you don't have to see in person to know that something amazing happened—creative, multimodal residue—the mix of the written and visual—the evidence of intellectual and physical movement.

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## *Back to the Center*

# The Writing Lab at the College of Charleston

BONNIE DEVET

Horse-drawn carriages ply the streets of Charleston, S.C., and the ever-present wispy gray of Spanish moss drapes live oaks. Amid this idyllic scene sits the campus of the College of Charleston, which the locals affectionately call “the College.” Nestled inside the College’s Addlestone Library is the Writing Lab. Founded in 1975 (and one of the oldest writing centers in South Carolina), the Writing Lab originated as a classic comma clinic, serving students in a developmental English course. Happily, over the years, the Lab has dispelled this image, now serving students from across the curriculum, with the majority of the clients coming from courses other than English. It is not unusual to find a History student working at one table while a Biology student is writing a lab report at another. The Lab has evolved to become an educational center for writing on the campus.

### **Location in the Library**

Being inside the library has been beneficial. The Lab doubled its space when it moved into the library, with a room 900 square feet and a bank of five computers edging around the room’s



*Andrea McGrath with pen and client, Fall 2009.*



*Brad Marialke with client, August 2010.*

sides. This move has also led to a symbiotic relationship with the reference librarians. The very first term the Lab moved into the library, consultants and librarians met to learn what services we could provide each other. Consultants know the basics for using the library's web page so they assist clients with this fundamental resource. For clients conducting more in-depth research, consultants refer them to the librarians for appointments. The library staff, in turn, relies on the Writing Lab for its expertise. For example, the staff turned to the Lab when the *MLA 8th* edition was issued, asking us to train the reference librarians in this new system. The reference librarians also let the Writing Lab set the date when the library and the College itself would officially switch over to the new documentation system. In effect, the Writing Lab has become the leader for introducing this new documentation method to the entire campus. Such a favorable relationship with the library has made the Lab's role more prominent on campus.

### **Being a Part of a Learning Commons**

Besides being located in the library, the Writing Lab is also part of a larger learning commons, called the Center for Student Learning

(CSL). The CSL is composed of labs offering tutoring in foreign languages, math, sciences, accounting, and speaking, all directed by faculty like me. While the CSL funds the consultants' work and provides space for the labs, the Department of English provides

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## CENTER *in*SIGHT

*The College of Charleston, founded in 1770, currently serves about 12,000 undergraduate and graduate students.*

- Writing Lab started: 1975
  - Director: Dr. Bonnie Devet
  - Director Status: tenure-track faculty member, English Department—50% release time
  - Location: Main campus inside library
  - Size: 900 square feet
  - Staff: 22 Undergraduate, peer consultants
  - Hours Open Per Week: 100
  - No. of Consultants Per Hour: 2 (because of budgetary restraints)
  - Recruitment of Consultants: Faculty nominated
  - No. of Clients Assisted Annually: 1400 student for about 2800 visits (all walk-ins)
  - Honors/ Awards: First Certified Writing Center in S.C.; Outstanding Peer Tutor in Southeast (Southeastern Writing Center Association); Outstanding Student Employee; Outstanding Scholarship Award (Article) International Writing Center Association; 17 publications and conference presentations by consultants
-

me with fifty percent release time to direct the Lab.

Being part of a constellation of walk-in labs benefits the Writing Lab. I have ready access to other lab directors, who are, after all, right down the hall, so I can discuss problems and seek out ideas for developing the consultants. Such cross-fertilization benefits the consultants, too. For instance, when they discover students may be having trouble with Advanced Algebra, consultants just walk their students over to the Math Lab. The grouping of labs has helped us all.

### **Linking the Writing Lab to the Educational Mission of the School**

The Writing Lab has woven itself into the fabric of the College by stressing that the Lab provides an education to the consultants themselves. In fact, in 1992, it became the first writing center in South Carolina to be certified through the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), which sets national standards for tutor training. Being able to point to such certification helps the Lab establish how it develops its consultants. Today, the Lab offers all three CRLA levels of certification, the first lab at the College to do so.

The Writing Lab stresses its educational role in another vital way. To administrators, I emphasize that the Lab fosters the consultants' *development* not *training*. The latter means handling daily details, like writing reports on consultations, filing handouts, or even just learning how to sit next to clients when helping them. These are repeatable duties that change little from day to day.

However, *development* means helping consultants to learn how to judge circumstances and to anticipate as well as solve problems. While I might *train* consultants on how to file handouts, I want to *develop* them so that they can create handouts based on their experiences assisting clients (Devet, "Writing"). So, I emphasize to administrators that the Writing Lab is a place that develops its workers.

Another way I help administrators see the Lab as an educational arm of the College is by aligning the Lab's peer development with the institution's goals and objectives. For instance, my school's Strategic Plan stresses a goal of "pursu[ing] and shar[ing] knowledge through study, inquiry, and creation in order to empower the individual and enrich society" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic" 5). When consultants conduct writing lab staff meetings based on articles they have read about composition theory or tutoring methods, they are meshing with the school's stated goal of sharing knowledge. Over the years, peer consultants





have also demonstrated their ability to contribute their knowledge by publishing articles and by making conference presentations about their work. In fact, the consultants like to think of the College's Writing Lab as "a lab of scholars for scholars." The College also encourages faculty and students to engage with the local area. To carry out this educational goal, I take consultants to other writing centers where they meet fellow consultants and make presentations on how our lab handles different types of clients. Over and over, I try to line up the Writing Lab's work with our school's strategic plan, making the Lab a central part of the College's educational mission.

### **Staffing and Development**

The consultants who are all undergraduates are nominated by faculty and paid by the hour. While there is no tutoring course per se, they do undergo intensive development prior to the start of classes, and they attend additional sessions throughout the term. These sessions are often conducted by more experienced consultants on a variety of topics, such as BOLO ("Be On the Look Out" for different types of clients) and "The Absent Professor" (where consultants learn about the "third voice" in any consultation, that of the instructor). Conducting these sessions makes consultants feel invested in the Lab. In fact, loyalty is quite high. Consultants frequently work two or three years, and when they spend a term studying abroad, they request that I hold a spot for them in the Lab so they can resume their work upon returning.

### **The Future**

The future holds opportunities. I am constantly striving to



*Wide shot, Spring 2010.*

improve how I develop the consultants. In their work, consultants already use process approaches to composition, engage in collaborative dialogue, and help clients develop their own voices (Beaufort 16). However, I want to do more. I believe consultants and clients should be engaged in “transfer of learning,” where consultants understand how they are transferring into sessions their own knowledge about writing and how they can assist clients to carry over writing concepts from one discipline to another (Devet, “Transfer”). Then, consultants and clients will acquire proficiency when approaching any writing task, be it in college or beyond the academy’s ivied walls.

On a more immediate note, the College’s Writing Lab, like all labs, also needs more staffing. Budget concerns force us to have only two consultants per hour, and because the Lab operates on a walk-

in basis only, clients often have to wait for assistance. To improve its service, the Lab needs additional funding and staffing—perpetual problems faced by every lab.

## Conclusion

No one symbol can possibly encapsulate a writing lab. But, for the College's Writing Lab, it would be our famous spoon pens. Consultants have attached plastic spoons to ballpoint pens so that when clients come without writing tools (and because of computers, they often do arrive so bereft), the consultants offer them one of our spoon pens. While these pens are a novel way to keep the tools from walking off, the pens do more: they symbolize the Lab's work. Consultants do not spoon feed the clients; they offer support for their writing. Invariably, clients smile, even laugh at what they call "the clever pens." Such reactions show student writers are becoming relaxed and thus, a bit more receptive to consultants' suggestions and assistance. They know we are there to help.



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## *Consultant Insight*

### To Direct, or Not *Too* Directive

BRADY EDWARDS

How does one become an effective non-directive consultant when necessary, a directive consultant when called for, and an effective teacher in the classroom? And how does one productively negotiate these roles? Such questions, while easily posed, are quite seminal to our field. Indeed, Steven J. Corbett goes as far as to claim, “no single issue in writing center theory and practice gets at the heart of the one-to-one, small group, or classroom instruction as the question of directive/nondirective teaching methods” (82). Such a reality forces writing center consultants and teachers to contemplate these questions and their methods on an individual level in order to think about how well they are meeting the needs of students during consultation. In order to address these issues, this column will highlight some of my own experiences in regards to teaching and conferencing on the college level as a way to help readers understand its importance and results on interactions with students and their progression as writers both in the center and the classroom.

I am currently a graduate instructor at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) and will be for the next several years; however, this

last semester I was also a consultant in UNR's Writing Center. After learning of my opportunity in the writing center, my interest was piqued concerning the roles and situations people like myself inhabit and how best to negotiate those roles and environments in a productive way for all involved (i.e. teachers, students, and writing center). The work of Corbett, D.R. Ransdell, Peter Carino, and my own experience have convinced me that individuals who work as both instructors and consultants need to be able to move back and forth between these roles, and do so smoothly, depending upon student need in individual moments in order to be effective in their roles and that learning the when and why behind such changes is vital for both student and instructor success.

Ryan and Zimmerelli, in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, when discussing how tutors can help writers through the writing process, point out, "Like the writing process, tutoring is dynamic. The interaction between tutor and writer as questions, answers, and ideas flow back and forth largely determines the content and direction of any tutoring session" (41). For me, this is a nice way of thinking about non-directive tutoring (or non-directive conferencing), where the discussion about the student, the assignment, and the paper flow organically as the two individuals converse back and forth. Of course, often the opposite is true (or at least can be) in the classroom where the teacher specifically directs students what to do, how to do it, and the reasons behind it.

Let me explain. Very early in the semester last spring, I met with student, let's call him Philip, who had made an appointment with the writing center due to the writing of a marketing advertisement he had been assigned as part of his employment. He came in a little agitated about what his boss wanted him to do and how

to solve the problem. He had clearly been to the center before because he talked easily about what he wanted, how I could help, and the issues with which he was dealing. Such interaction made setting the agenda quite simple. Mainly he was confused about what his boss really wanted and how to go about accomplishing such a task. I asked about his purpose and audience and how he wanted to present this information on the company's website. He was shocked at the usefulness of understanding a rhetorical situation and dutifully took notes while we discussed commonplace ideas like purpose, audience, genre, stance, and design. He seemed genuinely interested in why he hadn't learned this before and was pleased with the opportunity to use such a method in the future. Eventually, the consultation ended and he left feeling much more at ease with the prospect of discussing these issues with his supervisor in the future to better understand what he wanted of Philip in regards to these advertisements and how best to achieve such results moving forward.

Now contrast that experience in the writing center with this one in the classroom:

I often have my freshman students, around week four of the semester, turn in their first major assignment of the term: the rhetorical analysis. It is a different assignment for most of them. Up until this point in their academic careers, many have only been asked to summarize ideas from others or write personal narratives. The mere thought of having to analyze the work of someone else to better understand the tools she uses in order to be persuade an audience is something that is extremely foreign and, therefore, a little frightening.

One student, a very intelligent and outgoing young woman, asked something like this after I had dismissed class at the conclusion of a peer review: “How do I transition from this sentence into my thesis?” I quickly read what she had written and without much thought responded with a quick and direct answer, one that seemed to please her and fix the problem. She thanked me and left, and in that moment I didn’t think much of it. As I walked back to my office, however, I couldn’t help but debate within myself if I had really helped her as a writer. Was the advice I had given her really what she wanted to say, to argue? And even if it was, the way I phrased the thought was in my diction, my voice, not hers.

These concerns left me unsettled. By specifically telling her what to write and how to phrase that thought, I had taken control of her paper. I had, as Nancy Sommers points out, “appropriate[d] the text” (380). This reality haunted me. How many times had I done this? How many times had I taken away possibilities from students because my suggestions were directive (or even simply perceived as directive)?

If I had put more time and effort into this conversation, I could have asked open-ended questions about what she wanted to do and say, about the claims she was trying to make. But because at that moment I was still in “directive-teacher mode,” I listened to her question and simply shot back an answer. One author describes the downfalls of such a response when interacting with students in this way: “When we cannot distinguish our conferencing from our teaching we are often blind to the individual differences among students” (Black 33). Such an idea underscores the importance of really knowing our students, our



consultees, and their papers on a deep and individual level. As we do this, hopefully we will help our students become better critics of their own work, as opposed to simply telling them what we think they should write, even if they ask us direct questions.

Now, I, like Corbett and Ransdell, am not privileging one method—directive or non-directive—over the other (Corbett 94 & Ransdell 269). On the contrary, I have come to understand that each method has its benefits, but what is important in every situation and conference is assessing the student's needs and then deciding on what method will most benefit him or her. The best way to do this is to better understand each rhetorical situation and then decide how and when to switch roles depending upon need and circumstance (Corbett 94-95).

A productive way of thinking about how directive to be in any given situation is to think through the terms of agency and self-efficacy: "You have agency when you decide you have a role to play with what is going on, and self-efficacy is the ability to act on that role" (Macauley) This is not to say that one's role will always be one or the other, that of directive instructor or non-directive tutor, but simply that a key to being an effective teacher or consultant is to understand your role in the moment and to choose thoughtfully, according to the context, how best to proceed for the student's benefit and future development in understanding his/her own writing process (Corbett 94-95). Peter Carino, in "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring," puts it in these terms:

*Tutors should be taught to recognize where the power and authority lie in any given tutorial, when and to what degree they have them, when and to what degree they are absent in any given tutorial. When they can do so, they can proceed using techniques — nondirective or directive — based*

*on their position in the tutorial. (109)*

For Carino, the answer of how to recognize these roles is focused on the tutor's knowledge of the given task. Carino goes as far as to outline his argument in this way:

*The watchword in tutor training should not be nondirective peership, but flexibility. Tutors should learn to shift between directive and nondirective methods as needed, and develop some sense of a sliding scale.*

- *More student knowledge, less tutor knowledge = more nondirective*
- *Less student knowledge, more tutor knowledge = more directive methods. (110)*

Now, one could argue that I was following Carino's model when I answered my freshman's question about her thesis. However, it is vital to note that my role was different in that particular situation. I was not a peer in that situation. Instead, I was in a position of authority as the instructor, which, as Sommers points out, changes the context of the interaction: "Students make the changes the teacher wants rather than those that the student perceives as necessary," leading to a type of appropriation of the text (380).

To avoid such appropriations of texts, we might find the advice of Lauren Johnson Black useful, who argues for the implementation of what she calls "speech genres" in which teachers and students are more at ease with conversing with one another on equal ground; in so doing, individuals are better able to understand and shift roles according to setting and formality. One way Black accomplishes this equality in conferencing is to have the student record the conference. This way, the two can actually have a conversation, as opposed to having the conference morph into a

dictation session where the teacher explains what needs to happen and the student dutifully takes notes (32-35).

By asking questions and having a conversation with my freshman student, I would have been better able to address her concerns and questions about the thesis and in the process would have gotten to know her and her writing style on deeper level. Ryan and Zimmerelli (among others) would call this rapport building: "Conversation not only establishes rapport but also engages the writer in the session immediately ... [this type of conversation allows you as the tutor] to match the writer's goals more adequately with what actually appears in the paper and more readily offer suggestions to make the writing more effective" (19).

As graduate teaching assistants and writing consultants, we have multiple roles. These roles force us to interact with students in a variety of situations and environments. We need to be much more conscientious about the current contexts we occupy at any given moment in order to better assist those with whom we work. In so doing we can avoid the habit of appropriating texts and, instead, discuss with others their goals and aspirations for any given text, fostering effective communication in the process.

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## *Book Review*

# Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors

ALLISON HUTCHINSON

Review:

Mackiewicz, Jo and Isabelle Kramer Thompson. *Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print.

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*Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors* is an ambitious project with two stated goals: "(1) to present an analytical research tool that others outside our locality can use to examine writing center talk, specifically writing center tutors' talk, and (2) to provide a close, empirical analysis of experienced tutor talk that can facilitate tutor training" (2). That Mackiewicz and Thompson are largely successful in this project is owed to several of this book's features: its attention to method

and methodological detail, its review of relevant literature and organization, and its implications for future writing center research and tutor training programs. While not immune to criticism, *Talk About Writing (TAW)* presents writing center scholars, directors, and coordinators with a variety of research opportunities and empirically-driven recommendations for tutor training.

*TAW* is a study that, in some ways, may seem 30 years overdue. The impetus for this study can certainly be traced to Stephen North's (1984) admonishment that, "[T]alk is everything" (444). More than 20 years later, Dave Healy (1995) wrote, "From one perspective, talk is the center's ether; from another, talk is always dissipating into the ether, from whence it can never be reliably retrieved" (188). Mackiewicz and Thompson's study retrieves writing center talk from the ether and centers attention on empirically researching what North suggested over 30 years ago: "If the writing center is ever to prove its worth in other than quantitative terms [...] it will have to do so by describing this talk: what characterizes it, what effects it has, how it can be enhanced" (444). These echoes of lore are the foundation of this study's methods and methodology, but it seeks to empirically investigate lore.

*TAW*'s clear outlining of methods and methodology in Chapter 3 is an asset to writing center researchers and/or professionals. Mackiewicz and Thompson have done extensive research using cognitive scaffolding (Mackiewicz and Thompson 2014; 2013; Thompson 2009), and John Nordlof (2014) recently used Vygotsky to discuss writing center theory, an indication that this method is becoming relatively established in the field. Mackiewicz and Thompson analyze 13 highly-rated tutoring sessions conducted by

ten experienced writing center tutors using cognitive scaffolding theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as, "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (20). "[M]ore capable peers," in a writing center setting, can clearly be read to mean "experienced" tutors. The researchers identified the tutors as "experienced" because they "were all in their second year or more of working in the writing center" and "had completed a semester-long training practicum" (Mackiewicz and Thompson 50). A main reason the researchers feel this is an effective methodological approach is, "in writing center conferences, collaboration established through rapport and a shared commitment to the intellectual exploration required to achieve an agenda can theoretically push forward a student writer's writing ability" (21-22).

The authors engage in analysis at the macro- and microlevel: The macrolevel involves the three stages of conferencing: opening, teaching, and closing, and the microlevel involves tutoring strategies, of which there are three main categories, instruction, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding (4). "These three categories contain a total of 16 individual tutoring strategies," Mackiewicz and Thompson explain (4).

*TAW*'s literature review in Chapter 2 provides a sound basis for its methods and methodology. The literature review also folds in some of the study's findings, a way of introducing readers to topics elaborated upon in chapters 4 through 8. The authors observe:

*We found that, even though early mandates for writing center tutors prescribed open-ended questions, closed questions can benefit student writers too. They can simplify immediate responses, lesson confusion, and allow tutors to lead student writers in inappropriate and efficacious directions. (35)*

Mackiewicz and Thompson use their familiarity with writing center lore to entice researchers by providing some pushback to that lore. This pushback is evidenced with findings from their study, and these juicy moments do, admittedly, make a pretty satisfying read. For instance, the researchers address disagreement in writing center lore about whether the student writer or the tutor should read aloud: “[C]urrent reading research suggests that the phenomenon of mind-wandering may in fact be more prevalent in reading aloud than in silent reading” (106). In other words, a student reading their own work aloud may experience mind-wandering. Therefore, the authors conclude, tutors reading aloud may be “a good pedagogical choice” (106).

After laying out their methods in Chapter 3, Mackiewicz and Thompson repeat their analysis methodologically in each of chapters 4 through 8. For example, each of these chapters concludes with “Implications for Tutor Training” (or in the case of Chapter 8, “Implications for Tutor (and Fellow) Training”), a feature I will discuss in more detail shortly. The macro- and microlevel analysis begins in Chapter 4, “The Three Conference Stages and Tutoring Strategies: The Overall Results.” Chapter 5, “Instruction Strategies,” discusses which strategies were used and how in each of the three stages of conferencing. In Chapter 6, the authors hone in on “Cognitive Scaffolding Strategies” in each conferencing stage, then Chapter 7 moves on to “Motivational



Scaffolding Strategies”; these are two of the four most used strategies, as we are told in Chapter 4. A case study with an especially advanced tutor comprises Chapter 8, and the study concludes with Chapter 9.

The organization in *TAW* makes it accessible to busy writing center professionals and researchers who are probably unable to read the volume in a continuous fashion. Readers whose time is limited can plan which areas to focus on by starting with Chapter 9. From there, those with less extreme demands on their time can read any of Chapters 4 through 8 based upon their personal or contextual interests. For instance, a director, coordinator, or scholar interested in the variety or number of topics discussed in a tutoring conference should investigate Chapter 4. Reading this book out of order or selectively should not pose too much of a concern as long as readers familiarize themselves with or accept the researchers’ methods. The authors reiterate formerly made points and direct readers to those original passages.

As for how talk about writing can be enhanced, *TAW* has exciting prospects for future writing center research and empirical evidence for informing and advancing tutor training. Mackiewicz and Thompson note at the outset and the conclusion that their coding and methods of analysis can be picked up—and adapted, if necessary—by other researchers. Because this field has no prescribed method for conducting empirical research, having a starting place for analyzing tutor talk is reassuring for both novice and seasoned researchers. After all, developing one’s own coding scheme from scratch is time-consuming, and time is a luxury that many professionals in academic settings do not have. Researchers wishing to employ the coding and analysis schemes used in this

study should pay attention to the list of six assumptions used in this theoretical framework (see page 3). Most likely, those involved in writing center work will readily recognize and agree with these assumptions, but it is nonetheless important for moving forward with a research agenda that employs another study's codes and methods.

The results of Mackiewicz and Thompson's study characterizes talk about writing as follows: "close to half (44%) of the tutoring strategies that tutors used were instruction," and overall, "tutors used four strategies the most: telling (instruction), pumping (cognitive scaffolding), suggesting (instruction), and showing concern (motivational scaffolding)" (79).

Pumping questions are one of the most interesting implications of this study, but it is a practice only two of the ten tutors employed in the closing stage of the conference. An example of one of those pumping questions a tutor poses is, "What would you say is the main thing you're going to work on when you go home?", to which the student replies, "Reflecting back to the thesis statement" (118). The authors recommend, "writing center directors should consider [this strategy] for tutor training" because when student writers "develop their own summaries of conferences and set their own goals," they will be "more likely to recall the range of topics they covered, to delineate the most important topics, and then to formulate strategies for addressing those topics" (120).

Although the study reports clear results, the suggestion above typifies a few hasty generalizations that relate back to, "what effects [talk] has" (North 444). While the suggestion to use pumping questions in the closing stage is sensible in that it draws

upon writing center theory and lore, the authors' study does not necessarily provide evidence for this claim. In the two cases where tutors used this strategy, it is unknown if the student writers acted upon the goals set at the end of the conference. Some of this problem is related to the questionnaire used to evaluate the sessions chosen for analysis, which points to a second problem: The only clear effects this talk has on student writing according to this study are that the tutoring sessions garnered positive appraisal from their participants. Tutoring sessions were selected for analysis based upon how the tutors and student writers answered two questions using two kinds of Likert scales (47). Both writers and tutors were asked, "How would you rate the success of the conference?" (47). Tutors were asked, "Do you think the student will incorporate the ideas discussed into his or her writing?" and student writers were asked, "Will you incorporate the ideas discussed into your writing?" (47). Even if a student writer responded that he was "very much" likely to "incorporate the ideas discussed," we do not know if that is partially owed to whether or not his tutor used a pumping question in the closing stage. Even then, the student could report likelihood of incorporating ideas (suggesting a revision was made), but never follow through. While selecting highly-rated sessions is initially a good basis for analysis, additional criteria would add depth to this study. But the authors are candid about the shortcomings of their research, noting that, "we have not examined the quality of student writers' revisions" (179) and aptly citing the "'vexing issue of measurement'" (qtd. 180) as a difficulty associated with determining a session's effectiveness. Another problem in the study related to talk about writing's effectiveness goes back to the read aloud strategy. The authors conclude that tutors reading

aloud instead of students can be “a good pedagogical choice” (106) and they report how often tutors in their study used this strategy, but they do not evaluate how effective it is. Again, we do not know whether students rated their sessions highly as a result of the strategies tutors employed, such as the read aloud strategy in this example. With only two questions asked, as I mentioned above, this survey does not provide a substantial enough evaluation of the sessions.

Mackiewicz and Thompson respond to two of North’s three calls for research: they characterize writing center talk and suggest how it can be enhanced, but due to an ineffective questionnaire that is foundational to their methodology, they lack an answer to how effective writing center talk is. However, *TAW* is less about assessment and effectiveness and is more about the talk that occurs in writing tutoring sessions. In other words, this study is a building block for more studies that examine writing center practices; knowing “what characterizes” talk about writing can move researchers to assess “what effects it has” (North 444). Recent incidents in the North American writing center community would indicate talk about writing is still undervalued in many institutions, and Mackiewicz and Thompson’s work is a reminder that more research on writing center work is necessary. *TAW* both upholds and challenges writing center lore, a practice that research and scholarship in this field must constantly bear out if the imperativeness of writing centers is to be effectively communicated to stakeholders. Despite its drawbacks, *TAW* offers writing center professionals an outline for research that can be duplicated or scaffolded upon. It is a tool that can and should be taken up because there is much building yet to do.

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## Contributors

**Dr. Scott Whiddon** is program director of Transylvania University's writing center as well as their major in Writing, Rhetoric, and Communication. After serving two consecutive terms as SWCA's Kentucky representative, Scott was elected to the board of the International Writing Center Association. He has earned a Bingham Award for Excellence in Teaching as well as SWCA's Christine Cozzens Award, with recent publications in *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* and *SDC*. Scott is also active in music composition, scoring two recent documentary films and serving as music director for the Harry Dean Stanton Film Festival in Lexington, KY.

**Dr. Stacia Watkins** is Director of General Education and the Writing Studio at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee and an Associate Professor of English & Modern Languages and Film & Creative Media. Dr. Watkins co-authored *The Pop Culture Zone: Writing about Popular Culture* (1st ed.), a chapter in *COMPbiblio: Leaders and Influences in Composition Theory and Practice*, and two peer-reviewed articles. She is the President of SWCA, and she works as a consultant, leading faculty trainings for writing programs and centers. She is an event planner, a gifter, a traveler, a pop culture buff, and a lover of all things Kentucky.

**Brad Walker** is the Associate Director of Communications for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium at UCLA, where he supports the Consortium's external communications efforts through writing, editing, website development/management, and graphic design. He is also a freelance communications consultant, specializing in design and marketing services for education clients such as the Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Education Research Alliance at Vanderbilt University, and the Washington D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education. Brad previously taught courses in composition, communication design, and professional and technical writing at Lipscomb University. He received an MA in Professional Writing from Carnegie Mellon University.

**Dr. William M. Bryant** is a lecturer in the Pamplin College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Augusta University. His research interests include the philosophical and cultural foundations of education, critical pedagogy, identity construction, listening, silence, and rhetoric. His taught courses include: *Fundamentals of Human Communication, Persuasion, Communication for Professionals, Communication and Culture, Fundamentals of Academic Inquiry, Introduction to Research Methods and Honors classes.* His most recent publication, *Breaking all the rules: Radically reinventing moral education through compassionate discipline*, can be found in *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*.

**Kimberly M. Cuny**, MFA, is faculty in UNC Greensboro's Communication Studies Department and has served as director of The University Speaking Center since 2003. Kim is also Adjunct Assistant Professor of Theatre where she is a North Carolina Theatre for Young People teaching artist. Kim currently serves as Co-Director of UNCG's Multiliteracy Centers program, Managing Editor of *The Communication Center Journal*, and Student Advocate for the Communication Centers Section of the National Communication Association (NCA). Kim earned NCA's VonTill Communication Centers Newcomer and Hobgood Distinguished Service to Communication Centers Awards, the National Association of Communication Centers' Ferguson Research Award, and Teaching Excellence.

**Marlina M. Davidson**, M.A., is a lecturer in the School of Communication and Speech Center Consulting Coordinator for the University of Nebraska at Omaha. In the Speech Center she consults with faculty, staff and students on presentation skills and instructional communication techniques. She focuses on business communication, training/coaching and oral communication skill development. She received her M.A. in Communication from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and B.S. in Organizational Communication-Speech Communication from Northwest Missouri State University. She is currently working on her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research interests include instructional communication and communication centers.

**Russell Carpenter**, Ph.D., is Executive Director of the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity and Associate Professor of English at Eastern Kentucky University. Dr. Carpenter is Immediate Past President of the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) and has served as Chair and Past Chair of the National Association of Communication Centers (NACC). Recent books include *Sustainable Learning Spaces: Design, Infrastructure, and Technology* and *The Routledge Reader on Writing Centers and New Media*. He is editor of the *Journal of Faculty Development* and Editor-in-Chief of the *Communication*

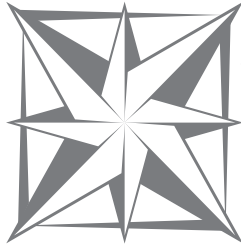
*Center Journal*. His forthcoming book project is *Design for Composition*, with Sohui Lee, under contract with Parlor Press.

**Bonnie Devet** is a professor of English at the College of Charleston (South Carolina), where she has directed the writing lab since 1989; she also teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in grammar, technical writing, freshman composition, advanced composition, the theory and practice of writing labs, and the teaching of composition. With her research interests in the training of writing lab consultants as well as teaching grammar, business communication, and freshman composition, she has published widely in *CCC*, *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, *WCJ*, *Composition Forum*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *Journal of Teaching Writing*, *Journal of Academic Writing (EATAW)*, and several edited collections.

Before pursuing a PhD, **Brady Edwards** spent a number of years teaching writing as an adjunct and visiting instructor at multiple institutions. Currently, he is student at the University of Nevada, Reno, specializing in writing program administration with an emphasis in teaching assistant training, mentorship, and professional development and writing center studies. He loves playing tennis, watching movies with his wife, and reading to his four sons.

**Allison Hutchinson** has an MFA in poetry from Naropa University and has taught college composition and reading. She has also served as a writing center tutor and trained disciplinary tutors using CRLA standards. Currently, she is in her second year in the Rhetoric and Writing PhD program at Virginia Tech. Working with materials science engineers for the past year and a half introduced her to business and technical writing. Her passions include community college, learning assistance, and writing centers. Her latest research project involves procedural rhetoric in learning management systems.





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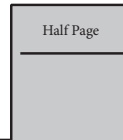
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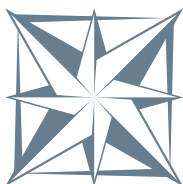
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