

Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



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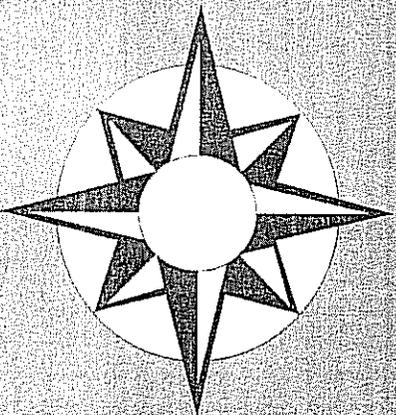
Lori Garvin reflects on writing through poetry (see back cover)



Back to the Center with the University of Montevallo (see page 8)

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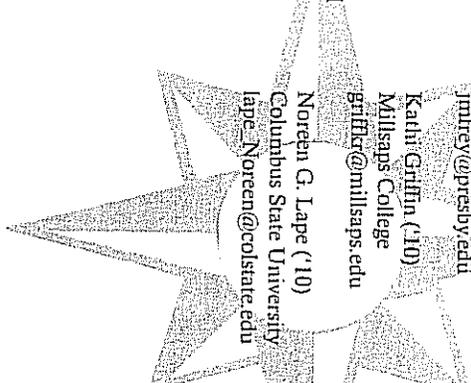
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A Note from

the Editor:
Mission Critical
Christine Cozzens,
Agnes Scott College



Christine Cozzens

The landscape of the United States and of academia has changed dramatically since I sat down to write this note last fall. The long presidential campaign is over, and a historic presidency has raised hopes here and abroad, but severe economic challenges have clouded the horizon and forced each of us to make significant changes and rethink our plans and hopes for the immediate and even the distant future. Some of you may have lost your jobs since then, but I hope not, because good writers and good thinkers are needed more than ever to help solve the problems before us.

Last Thursday following a board of trustees meeting, our campus received the chilling email we'd all been expecting from the president imposing a travel freeze, a hiring freeze, and other cuts and restrictions. Worst of all, the message said that all temporary or "blue form" positions would be reevaluated immediately. That included the entire peer tutoring staff and coordinator of the Center for Writing and Speaking (CWS). Within hours, the budget supervisor from the dean's office asked to meet with me the next day. I feared the worst and spent a very bad Thursday night scrambling together statistics and testimonials. On Friday afternoon, the budget supervisor came to my office and opened her comments with these words: "The dean wants you to know that the work of the CWS is mission critical." We were urged to hold the line on expenses, but suffered no cuts, layoffs, salary reductions, or other restrictions.

I don't like the jargon, but I love the concept. The work of writing centers and speaking centers is mission critical, not only to the future of the school, but to the future of the country and the world. I urge you to take that line of argument and the accompanying evidence to your deans, provosts, presidents, and faculties in the coming months.

A Tale of Two Schools:

A Collaborative Workshop

Karen Keaton Jackson,

North Carolina Central University

"Initially, I thought it was a neat idea to meet with the NCCCU folks, knowing that it is an HBCU. When I heard that our topic of discussion was going to be diversity and writing, I was wondering how that would turn out. I thought that we might focus on difference between traditional academic writing and African American vernacular, but I thought it would be somewhat strange to have the Duke tutors, who dealt with the range of people we have here and the NCCCU tutors, who presumably deal with a vast majority of African American students. I knew I had more to contribute in the realm of international and ESL students' writing than my experience with Af. American writers, and I didn't know how much that would overlap with the NCCCU tutors. —Duke Tutor

"I actually did consider the Duke Lacrosse incident in our meeting. Initially, I thought that there would be tension as a result of the recent controversy."
—NCCCU Tutor

"I really didn't have any positive expectations, to be honest. I didn't think we'd run in a field of flowers holding hands or even be friends. It's not that I wanted to shy away from going; I just wanted to make sure that I could establish that I deserved to be there. I didn't want to embarrass my school... I'm competitive... I didn't really want to make eye contact at first because I'm not rude and would have to smile and I didn't know if I would be acknowledged back..."
—NCCCU Tutor

"Before meeting with Duke University [tutors], I expected that I would talk with consultants that were experiencing some of the same tutoring experiences that I encounter in the Writing Studio at NCCCU. Although I knew their consultation process might vary from ours, I was sure that I would glean something from the meeting that would help me become a more effective tutor, confirm my present thoughts on tutoring students, or reveal some of my inadequacies as a tutor."
—NCCCU Tutor

"After hearing about the joint workshop with NCCCU, I looked forward to attending. Meeting with other writing tutors is always an opportunity to learn

more about how to be an effective tutor. I was curious to learn a little about what it is like to tutor at NCCCU and knew that they would have some different experiences. Admittedly, as an ESL teacher, I usually feel that I'm fairly aware of diversity related issues and am always happy to support such discussion."
—Duke Tutor

When we (my five consultants and I) first walked into the room for our joint workshop, the long rectangular conference table represented the dividing line. On one side members of their Writing Studio sat chatting with each other and catching up on current events, while on the other side of the table, my staff did the same. Ironically, the physical connection between the two staffs occurred when the only African American present from their school sat next to me, an African-American woman. Coincidence? Symbolism? Or just a person sitting down in one of the few available remaining seats? To be honest, I'm not really sure. But, it appeared the differences between the two Writing Studio staffs were as clear as black and white—figuratively and literally. Their school is private, while ours is a liberal arts state school. Their school attracts more affluent and upper middle class students both nationally and internationally, while ours educates students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds but has a specific mission to serve underrepresented groups including minorities and first-generation college students. Their school hosts a predominantly white student population, while ours is a historically black university.

Yet, with all of the differences listed above, our distinct characteristics have never been highlighted more than in 2006 when the Duke Lacrosse incident pitted our two campuses—Duke University and North Carolina Central University—against each other. It's no secret that North Carolina Central University (NCCCU) exists in the shadows of the more prestigious Duke University, even though they are located in the same city just ten minutes apart. And while I would venture to say that on an individual level, most students and faculty at both institutions were eager to move on from the 2006 event much more quickly than the media actually portrayed, on a broader level tensions between the two institutions ran high.

Despite the higher level misconceptions surrounding our schools, Vicki Russell (the director of the Duke University Writing Studio) and I have always held a great deal of respect for one another and maintained a goal of holding a joint training session with our tutoring staffs. Finally, on September 19, 2008, our intentions became reality as my staff of five consultants and I traveled to Duke for a half-day workshop with seven of her tutors on diversity and writing. Vicki supplied the location, refreshments, ice breaker activity and closing activity. I prepared the workshop about tutoring diverse learners.

As evident from the quotations at the opening of this essay, much curiosity and anxiety was felt on both sides. I was hopeful that all of us would be able to get past stereotypes and sweeping generalizations about each other and have real meaningful dialogue about what it means to tutor diverse learners in our respective contexts. However, from my initial observation of the divided conference table, I admittedly was uncertain about how the day would unfold. Even one of the Duke tutors noticed the division in the room: "It was curious to note we tutors seemed to align ourselves on opposite sides of the table according to our institution."

Fortunately, Vicki created a great icebreaker to help ease anxieties and establish some common ground. She began by showing a video clip of the theme song from the western movie *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. After we enjoyed the music and visual images, Vicki then asked us to share the good, the bad, and the ugly experiences we have had in our Writing Studios. Perhaps to the surprise of many tutors, there were similar experiences shared with which we could all identify. We shared the challenges of getting students and faculty across campuses to appreciate writing as a process. We expressed the joys experienced when students have an "a-ha" moment—a breakthrough where progress is made and they become more independent writers. I think this common ground helped us gain mutual respect, an acknowledgment that some writing center issues are universal. Having the mutual understanding probably made it easier to delve into the actual workshop where we tackled issues that are much more delicate and controversial.

I began my portion of the diversity workshop by having the group brainstorm various definitions for the term literacy. Often we note how one of our roles in writing centers is to help increase students' literacy skills, but what exactly do we mean? Through our discussion we found that being literate can have multiple meanings. We decided that literacy is context-specific and includes the ability to comprehend and communicate in a variety of settings such as being computer/technology literate or culturally literate. We discuss notions of power that come with being literate and how that affects communication in particular settings. Yet, we agreed that the most generally accepted and mainstream definition of literacy, particularly in the education system, is the ability to read and write. I then questioned the group about underlying assumptions that accompany that basic definition, which actually could be

extended to "the ability to read and write in Standard English." What is the effect on students of color and others who may speak non-standard dialects? Are certain students empowered to speak while others are silenced? How should we view non-standard dialects and their speakers in writing classrooms? In writing centers?



Diversity Workshop with NCCU and Duke University

Once these questions were raised, an in-depth discussion emerged. Some tutors from both institutions were more conservative, noting that Standard English indeed is the standard medium of exchange in our society and that all students, regardless of background, should learn to communicate in that way. Period. Other tutors, again from both schools, were more liberal, agreeing that as institutions of higher learning we have a responsibility to teach Standard English while acknowledging the emotional concerns and stresses that students of color can experience. For if the only mode of acceptable communication in colleges and universities is different than the dialect they use at home with family and other community members, how does that affect their attitudes toward writing instruction?

To get a first-hand understanding of what speakers of non-standard dialects may experience, I conducted an exercise that I have used in previous English and teacher education courses that I explain in detail in the article "The Compositionist as 'Other': Critical Self-Reflection From An Instructor of Color in an Urban Service-Learning Classroom." I began the exercise by telling the workshop participants that we were going to take a look at five sentences written in Black Dialect from Geneva Smitherman's groundbreaking 1977 text *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America*. I told the group we all would be reading each of the sentences aloud—individually. I went on to read the five sentences and then turned to the Duke tutor to my left and instructed her to do the same. As is usually the case when I perform this activity, I heard some nervous giggles and saw many confused faces, including faces from the seven Duke participants—one African-American, one Asian-American, and five white Americans—and faces from my own staff, which is 100 percent African-American. Many participants hesitated, then began their journey of reading the sentences, some butchering them all along the way. Others added their own flair,

including a different tone to correspond with the context of the sentence. Once everyone completed the task, I asked them why they thought I had them do this.

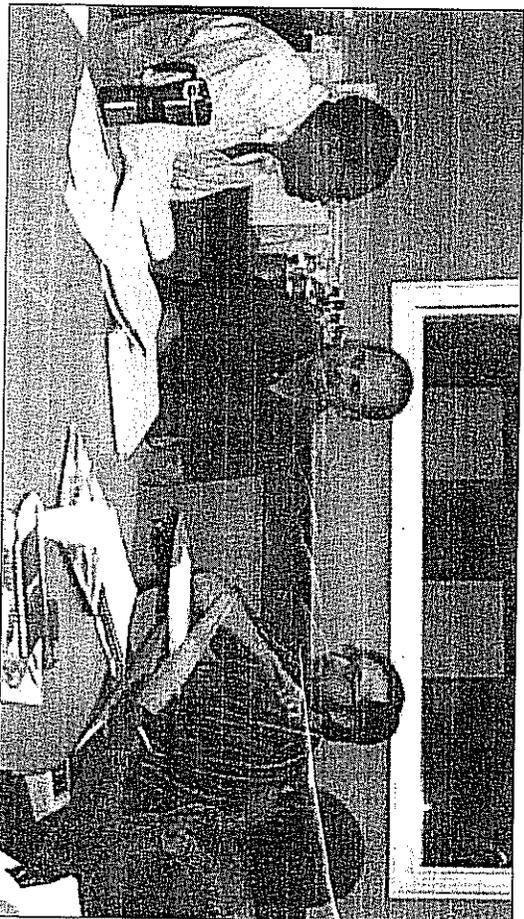
Initially, there was silence. Then, one young woman from Duke said something to the effect of "So you could hear me sound really 'White'?" Fortunately, the comfort level was established where she could say such a statement openly and we could all laugh with her as she said it. I am paraphrasing a bit, but I did assure her that was not my point. Well, not exactly. While the point was not to reinforce stereotypes, the purpose was to open everyone's eyes to the difficulties and feelings of discomfort non-standard dialect speakers may feel in our classrooms, in our writing centers, each day. I have always struggled to balance embracing the identities, including the literacy practices, students bring into the classroom while simultaneously preparing them for success in mainstream society. Moreover, it can be easy to say what a group of people should do as far as conforming their ways of communicating when we are not a part of that group being forced to change. Many of us in our writing centers ask students to read their papers aloud and adjust their word choice and sentence structure to meet Standard English requirements. But how might our students feel when we ask them to do so?

The tutors began to speak openly about their own discomfort and the reasons behind that discomfort when asked to read the Black English sentences aloud. Some noted their discomfort stemmed from their inability to connect with the context of the sentence and their inability to express themselves in a way that was "normal" to them. (Many, out of habit, "corrected" the sentences and used Standard English while reading aloud.) The discussion was honest, open, and very real.

After this exercise, we completed one final activity for the day. I separated the participants into groups of three or four (with each group containing tutors from both institutions) and had each one read an excerpt from an autobiography from a scholar of color. One group read a portion of Danling Fu's *My Trouble Is My English*, where the Chinese author explains the struggles she faced when entering an American English graduate program; the second group read from Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*, where the African-American author discusses his childhood semi-self and the dialect he used with each persona (Black English vs. Standard English, depending on the audience and context); the third read from Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory*, where the Mexican American shares the challenges he experienced as a child communicating with his family as he and his siblings learned Standard English while his parents chose to communicate primarily in Spanish; and the last group read from Victor

Villanueva's *Bootstraps*: From an American Academic of Color, where the Latino American shares his experiences in public school and how the teachers who connected with him most were not necessarily those of the same race, but rather those who took the time to really care about the students and their whole lives.

After a discussion of the Smithsonian exercise and the autobiographical excerpts, did all of the tutors, specifically those of the majority, learn what it is like for nonstandard English speakers each day? Of course not. Yet, this workshop at least forced them to leave their comfort zones for a short while, hopefully long enough for those willing to become more critically conscious to realize, in part, how some students may feel on a daily basis and then reconsider how they interact with them.



Small group discussion

I am grateful to both staffs for opening up and giving the dialogue a chance to be successful. I knew there may be some anxiety on both sides initially. And as some of my tutors' initial comments show, I anticipated there may perhaps be more concern on our end given the racism and classism that continue to plague our society each day. The issues discussed that day are not ones with solutions we can wrap up in a neat bow. They are complex and require consistent attention and effort if we want to see change. But, the dialogue shared on that day was promising. I think we all left that workshop better tutors, directors, and individuals who are more sensitive to the feelings of the students we encounter each day.

Compass Points

Remembering A Writing Center Director and Friend

Craig Crist-Evans

(March 4, 1954- March 24, 2005)

Pamela Childers, The McCallie School

It is not easy to write about Craig Crist-Evans even close to four years after his untimely death, but I want to share what I have learned from him since we first met in 1993 when he became assistant director of the Caldwell Writing Center at The McCallie School. As a writer, teacher, researcher, innovative educator, and enthusiastic human being, Craig challenged me to work harder at those same skills with humor, encouragement, constructive criticism, and friendship. These qualities I admire in writing center directors who are involved across disciplines.

Craig was a poet, first and foremost, a lover of language who wished to share that love with all whom he met. Our students watched us discussing poetry, arguing over grammar or punctuation rules, sharing literature and our own writing with them, and laughing about our own mistakes. They also saw that two strong, independent personalities could work collaboratively to interact with them on their own language or that of others. We put together our first writing center brochure, which still exists, and redesigned many activities in the writing center to include more creative writing issues and opportunities for student interaction. My husband and I even collaborated on a day-long workshop with Craig at Ft. Lewis College in Durango, combining art, writing and music. Needless to say, Craig's interests were cross curricular, including Global Awareness, a college course he taught.

When he left McCallie after two years to move to his alma mater Vermont College, Craig co-developed, directed and taught in the MFA in Writing for Children program, the first program of its kind in the country. Phone calls, emails, and occasional visits to his campus and conference sites kept me updated on his latest poetry, research and teaching accomplishments. At least twice a month, we also continued to critique each other's poems and writing ideas long distance. Finally in 2001 Craig returned to writing center work when he accepted the position of director of the writing center and writing across the curriculum

program at Mercersburg Academy (PA). He immediately implemented a peer tutoring program with volunteer juniors and seniors, and initiated a summer Young Writers' Camp for younger children. When Craig's students at Mercersburg learned of his death, colleague Jim Applebaum said, "They wrote in grief about his unique bonding with them and his grace at motivating them to trust their writing voices."

Outside of the writing center, Craig gained broad recognition when his first book, *Moon Over Tennessee* (Houghton Mifflin 1999), won the International Reading Association/Lee Bennett Hopkins Promising Poet Award and his first novel, *Amaryllis* (Candlewick Press 2003), received a starred review in Kirkus. *Shadow of My Father's Hand* (Breakfast Serials 2004), *North of Everything* (Candlewick 2004), and his poetry collection *No Guarantee* (New Rivers Press 2004) followed with many awards. His essays and poetry reviews in *Bloombsbury Review* and publication of poetry in such journals as *Paris Review*, *The Nebraska Review*, and *Prague Review*. Craig will always be remembered as a great American poet by those who have been touched by his words. He described his writing in this way:

When I sit down to write a poem, I don't know anything. Yet, I feel as if I'm standing at the edge of clear and shining bridge between the universe and me. Everything is possible. I have only to find the words, like steps along a bridge, that let me go anywhere. I tell myself and I tell my students that poetry is energy and music. A poem is a little word machine that requires us to take a deep breath and speak out loud. Let the words become music, and listen. The meaning of the poem is the melody of its spoken sound on the breath, the thing you hum when you've forgotten the words. Remember how the music makes you feel and you will remember the poem.

But what does all of this have to do with writing centers and writing across the curriculum? Everything. Craig participated actively in IWCA, leading sessions and workshops at NCTE in San Francisco, Atlanta and Indianapolis, and IWCA in Savannah and Hershey, sometimes even bringing his tutors. As a writing center director Craig practiced what he preached, enthusiastically sharing his own

"Compass Points" continued on page 13



Craig Crist-Evans,
photo courtesy of Breakfast Serials

Communication in the Writing Center

Brittany L. Nagel, North Carolina A&T State University

The fall semester has come to a close and before we know it, the spring semester will be upon us. It has been a hectic semester, to say the least, here at A&T's Writing Center, especially since we are planning the 2009 SWCA conference we will be hosting in February here in Greensboro. Nevertheless, among the chaos, we have also been productive. Tutees have flooded in at great turnover speed this year, and most of us here can look back and say that we have had a successful fall.

Unfortunately, I cannot say all. One of our tutors came to the decision that she did not wish to return next semester. I must admit that it did not come as a great shock to the rest of us. It is not that we disliked this person, nor is it that she was not a "good tutor," so to speak. The problem was her communication style. She was unwilling to share her ideas with the rest of the writing center staff or communicate effectively with the director and other tutors, and she was generally withdrawn and introverted. Of course, there were numerous good qualities about this tutor as well and her presence will be missed. The point I am making is not about what could have changed or how the situation could have been made better. After all, many of us were unaware just how unhappy she was in the writing center. What the decision did do, however, was reinforce to us just how important communication really is in the writing center, not just between tutor and tutee, but also among fellow tutors and other staff.

Here at A&T we support and maintain a writing center grounded in collaboration. At the end of every week we shut our doors and engage in meetings that include discussing articles on writing center pedagogy and any



Brittany Nagel and Erica-Brittany Horhn

issues that may be present in the writing center, whether it is a tutor having trouble with a difficult tutee or a difficult session that someone experienced. We even discuss anything personal that may be going on in the writing center, because we recognize that we are all individuals and that irritations and conflicts may arise. We believe that communication is the key to solving any problems, and we strive to achieve harmony in our writing center. We must if we want to remain collaborative. With the advent of the conference planning, communication and collaboration have become even more important this semester. However, not every individual prefers or even likes collaborative efforts.

Among many people to touch on this subject, Andrea Lunsford has noted that collaboration is not ideal for everybody. In her 1991 article, "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," Lunsford identified two types of centers that frowned upon, or completely ignored collaboration—garret centers and storehouse centers. She defines storehouse centers as a "station

or storehouse, prescribing and handing out skills and strategies" and garret centers as center which are "informed by a deep-seated attachment to the American brand of individualism...they see knowledge as interior...solitary, individually derived, [and] individually held" (93-4). These centers are what forced her to continue her research on collaboration, and what she found was that students generally agreed that collaboration was, in fact, "the most important and helpful part of their school experience" (94), thereby reaffirming her belief, as well as ours, that writing centers should be collaborative.

At the same time, Lunsford also notes that creating collaborative environments can be difficult. The first problem she notes is that collaborative environments call for "problem defining and solving; division of labor tasks... division of expertise tasks... and reject(s) traditional hierarchies" (95). With the conference planning, we find ourselves more and more engaged in tackling problems as they arise and determining which take priority. We often divide up tasks based on who is available and who can best handle the task. For example, one of our tutors is an accounting major, so he is often given any financial tasks that arise such as the budget coordinating

Back to the Center

A Profile of the University of Montevallo's Harbert Writing Center

Glenda Conway, University of Montevallo

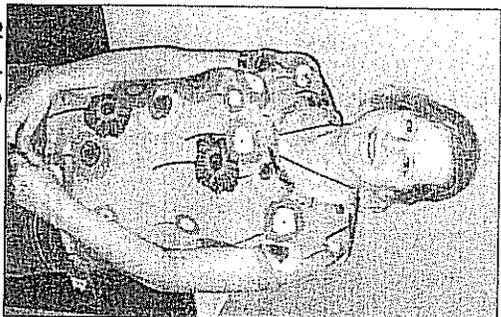
I first entered the Harbert Writing Center at the University of Montevallo in the spring of 1995 during the day of my on-campus interview as a candidate for the English Department's opening in rhetoric and composition. HWC, as I have since learned to call it, was then, and continues to be, located in a large one-time classroom on the third and top floor of Comer Hall, a modest brick WPA-era office and classroom building.

As a Ph.D. student from a sprawling urban university, accustomed to modern blandness in my schoolrooms, I immediately loved the Harbert Writing Center's quirky lack of definable style. Chrome-legged tutoring tables with formica tops were matched with pairs of heavy blonde-wooden chairs featuring moss green or tangerine vinyl seat coverings. Around the room's perimeter were various pieces of expected and surprising pieces of furniture—from a sturdy oak office



Tutoring session in the Harbert Writing Center

desk to a discarded dormroom worktable and a mirror-topped chest of drawers. As anchors, two bookcases held lines and stacks of worn-out dictionaries, unadopted composition textbooks, and outdated literature anthologies. I thought it was a lovely room.



Glenda Conway

My position had been advertised as a "Tenure-track Assistant Professor of rhetoric and composition to serve as Coordinator of the writing center." In other words, to fast forward a bit, I accepted a job as a faculty member with course release time for coordinating the center. I was thrilled about the opportunity that writing center administration would give me to offer individual students the kind of help I would never have dared to have sought during my undergraduate years. Later, I was to realize that my job also afforded me a major role in enhancing the graduate school and job readiness of my department's undergraduates and Master's level students.

At this point in my narrative, I feel a "rewind" is necessary. In the mid 1980s, my predecessor and the pioneer in initiating the writing center on my school's campus, Loretta Cobb, an intensely loyal graduate of the University of Montevallo and of the Middlebury College Breadloaf Master's-Level Writing Program, was hired as the developer and director of a writing center that was to be funded by a successful Birmingham businessman named John Harbert. The writing center would be named for Mr. Harbert and would be housed in the English department. Mr. Harbert would later tell people that if he had visited a writing center at his undergraduate institution, Auburn University, perhaps he might not have failed his freshman writing class.

For Loretta Cobb, neither the Harbert nor any other university funds were allotted toward employment of tutors for the writing center. It shocks me to report that she was hired as director of a program for which she was given no hiring budget herself. Nonetheless, semester after semester, she was able to recruit, inspire, and train rotating staffs of volunteers and work-study students. Loretta, who retired in the mid-1990s after over twenty years of service, was never granted faculty status, so she had limited opportunities for influencing decisions regarding departmental funding or other matters. She was never given funding for tutor salaries.

When I was hired, I was given a budget line for paying a master tutor and also for paying students who would be hired as peer tutors, advantages I didn't even know to appreciate. I also was given access to the proceeds of the Harbert

Foundation account to use for conference travel and other expenses. Within a few weeks after I began in my position, I had, mostly based on the chair's referrals, a staff of eight graduate and undergraduate tutors—all trained in rushed late afternoon meetings.

After a few semesters of realizing the difficulty of organizing tutor meetings and training sessions, I designed and proposed a one-hour course, Practicum in Writing Center Tutoring, which has since been required of all newly-entering tutors. The course's first reading always has been Jeff Brooks's "Minimalist Tutoring" article; however, I like to immediately follow with readings on libratory tutoring and Freirean pedagogy in order to show the problematics in choosing one instructional method or another. Further, I consistently ask prospective tutors to read Anne DiPardo's "Lessons from Fannie" article, as I believe its rather lengthy and tedious narrative of non- and mis-communication between Fannie and her writing center tutor is one that tutors need to experience—viscerally—in order to become severely self-conscious of their own tutoring interactions. Each time I reread the tutoring practicum, I supplement my staple texts with recent articles from the Writing Lab Newsletter, the Writing Center Journal, and Southern Discourse as a way of helping me and my tutors keep up with the latest concerns in writing center theory and pedagogy.

During the summer before I took my position, I read for the first time Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center." I was greatly influenced by North's argument that the writing center exists for students rather than for teachers. When I arrived at UM, I had my arguments prepared on this matter, but I found that my chair had already decided to allow me complete freedom in creating policies. I think I have used that freedom well in defining the writing center as a place where students and writing consultants talk about writing in safe and purposeful ways.

One policy I adopted almost immediately after becoming HWC coordinator involves the reporting of sessions to faculty. For a number of reasons, I did not think it was right for peer tutors to write reports about their sessions with students that would be sent to those students' teachers. Nevertheless, I knew some form of reporting could have advantages in some situations. For example, some teachers encourage or require students to visit the writing center, which means that documentation is a necessity for which a cooperative writing center would need to adjust. Accordingly, I devised a two-part form on which students who visit the writing center may write their own session reports to their teachers. The original of this form is sent in hand mail to teachers and the copy is kept in writing center files.

One goal I have for this article about my writing center is to acknowledge the burden carried by our field's earliest writing center directors in getting the value of one-on-one peer instruction recognized on their campuses. Very often, these initiators were dismissed by faculty as being embedded in the pedagogical and thus trivial. Very often, these writing center pioneers were unencouraged in their work, even while the concepts of writing centers were growing more and more highly valued by their campus administrators.

I know that if not for the work of Loreta Cobb, my writing center's initiator, and of countless other innovative writing center directors of the past and present, the work of writing centers and writing center administrators would not be as widely known and uniformly respected as it presently is. I feel fortunate to have inherited a writing center for which I can determine policy on the basis of both knowledge and intuition, where I am trusted to make good decisions.

Since my arrival at the University of Montevallo, I have felt that the Harbert Writing Center has been respected as an integral component of the educational offerings on my campus. I believe a large part of this respect comes from my position as a tenure-track faculty member. I offer my tale in the spirit of a case study rather than as a proof of something.

By the Numbers

The University of Montevallo: a state-supported liberal arts institution of approximately 2,300 undergraduates and 450 graduate students.

Coordinator: Glenda Conway

Writing Consultants: 10-12 undergraduate and graduate students, with each required to complete a one-hour course, Practicum in Writing Center Tutoring, during the initial semester of employment.

Student visits: (during Spring and Fall 2007) approximately 1,300 sessions. All visits are drop-in, and lengths of visits vary base on projects and student needs.

Operating schedule: 39 hours, Monday-Friday

Recruitment of Writing Consultants: campus-wide, through faculty recommendations.

What's the Point?

Or What's the Puncture?

Peter M. Carriere,
Georgia State College and University

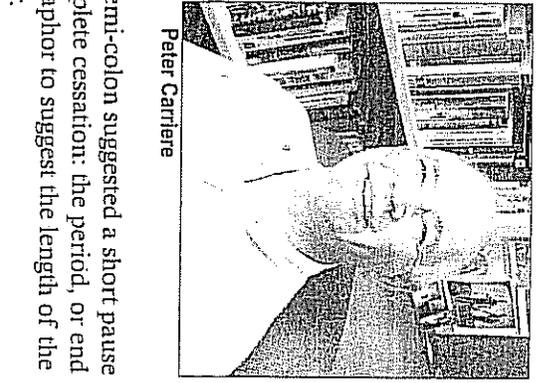
I am beginning to appreciate Sam Johnson's ironic definition of a writer of dictionaries as "a harmless drudge." The more I consider human efforts to create graspable ways to indicate speech through symbols (even more to the point of trying to symbolically imitate special nuances of speech—pauses, for instance), the more I begin to feel like a drudgey.

What can be confusing, of course, is that words used for grammar and punctuation have their origins in other things. Take the words "punctuate" and "punctuation." There is a close relationship between "punctuate," "puncture," and "point." The "point" suggests a small hole, or puncture, in a piece of paper resembling a dot; hence pointing to mean inserting punctuation marks in a text. And hence punctuation uses a system of dots resembling small punctures, as in the period. Which is why an early English grammar text defined the colon as "made with two prickes," or dots resembling holes, one above the other. The OED quotes a J. Eliot writing in 1593, "I desire you to peruse my periodical [sic] punctuations, find fault with my prickes, nicks, and tricks." As I've always maintained, however, students should never be allowed to see the primitive and crude underbelly of punctuation uncovered by definitions like the one for the colon or J. Eliot's "desire!"

In the initial, broad definition of "punctuate," the OED informs us that it means "to point masonry," which literally means to repair brick walls by adding mortar between bricks where it has fallen out. Following that definition is this one: "to insert punctuation marks." Typical of the OED, though, after the first broad discussion in which these two insights appear, definitions are listed as 1, 2, 3, etc. Definition 1 is "to point out, note," interpreted as obsolete or rare. The OED illustration of this definition reminds me of student writing, making it neither obsolete nor rare: "You have punctuated me so many remarkable [sic] things, and novelties thereof. . . . Imagine the admiration that the following remarkable student novelty was met with: 'John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.'"

Definition 2 is what we think of when we hear the word "punctuate": "to insert punctuation marks . . . to mark or divide with points or stops. . . ." The word

"stops" here refers to vocal pauses, a way of punctuating texts that scribes used for centuries but that today has fallen out of favor. I think we should revert to the vocal-stops method of punctuation; that way there wouldn't be many errors in student essays, and we could improve our student evaluations remarkably! And it would restore the metaphorical power of this statement in the OED by Coleridge: "Since the receipt of your kind . . . letter [sic], one interruption after another has punctuated my answer from a semi-colon to a full stop."



Peter Carriere

Another passage quoted by the OED in definition 1c uses "puncturation" to mean interruption, as in this one from 1914: "Several of the men punctuated the first of the songs with boos and poots to represent the drum." Things have changed since 1914. Today, "boos" do not under any circumstances represent drums, and a "poo" at a songfest would be a social mistake equivalent to a category 3 hurricane. Another illustration from 1c definitely suggests my students: "They communicated with each other in a low drone. . . [sic] punctuated by an occasional deep-throated 'Ah!'"

Definition 1d means "to give emphasis to; to accentuate." I think the OED's illustration of this definition has possibilities for those who wish to enforce strict adherence to rules of grammar and punctuation: "He punctuated the command by firing another round into the ground in front of them." Think of the power of such a punctuation! Not only would it scare the pooh out of students, it would rather quickly result in students burning the midnight oil to learn all about the relationship between punctuation and grammar!

The last definition, number 3, is from biology. Amazingly, however, it has not strayed far from the definitions already mentioned: "to mark with points or dots, esp. with small circular punctures, or depressions resembling punctures." I think they mean tattoos, which we probably could enlarge to include piercings. This biological definition sounds remarkably similar to the one for pointing texts!

"What's the Point?" continued on page 15

"A Tale of Two Schools" continued from page 5

And so, by the end of the session, this is how some of the tutors were feeling:

"One thing that the session reminded me is that, of course, among African American writers there is already a large amount of diversity. I also enjoyed our discussion about the politics of someone changing their writing style or voice, and the politics of encouraging someone to do that as a tutor. I was reminded that the NCCU tutors deal with the same kinds of issues and politics with their writers as we do here, no matter what a writer's background."—Duke Tutor

"During the meeting and after, I realized that those consultants, indeed, dealt with some of the same issues that arise in the Studio at NCCU. I appreciated the lively discussions and the ease with which we communicated with one another. There did not seem to be any difficulty in relating to one another's tutoring experiences even with the differences in schools and consultant personalities... Overall, I was very pleased with the level of interaction and the materials used to give us insight into students' struggles with writing."—NCCU Tutor

"Once we got there and began discussing our different issues with the group, there was no way to distinguish one school from the next. Our ability to relate to the Duke tutors was proof that the controversy was not at the forefront of everyone's mind. In all, I believe that the meeting revealed the ability of all tutors to focus on issues that related specifically to our studios, and put aside those issues that we could not control. I walked away with a sense that our meeting was successful, in that it allowed us to share our feedback, but also explore new ideas and solutions in NCCU's Writing Studio."—NCCU Tutor

"The session did make an impression on me. I really appreciated how openly the NCCU tutors relayed their own feelings and experiences related to academic writing. I think what I took away from the sessions the most was the idea that it is not only non-native speakers who might be uncomfortable and unfamiliar with academic English. In addition, reading aloud in academic English can be a huge step outside a student's comfort zone. The pronunciation activity with African American dialect was enlightening and a good reminder as to what it feels like to be talking in a language that is not your own. The workshop was a very worthwhile experience and this ESL teacher learned to broaden her definition of what it means to be a non-native speaker of academic English."—Duke Tutor

Many thanks to Vicki Russell and the entire Duke University Writing Studio staff for making us feel so welcome. We enjoyed the collaboration and we hope to do it again!

"Communication in the Writing Center" continued from page 7

for the conference. Another tutor is in technical writing, so he is always given tasks pertaining to the Web site. When we were writing formal invitations for our speakers, or vendor invitations for the conference, we all came together to write them and passed them around for editing and any necessary changes. Finally, we do not have traditional hierarchies, and this can be seen by the fact that anytime we are busy, our director is more than willing to dive in and take a turn right along with us. She rarely delegates tasks to us, but rather, we agree upon what needs to be done at our weekly meetings and then divide up the tasks accordingly. We firmly believe in communication for problem solving and collaboration for finishing tasks and staying on schedule.

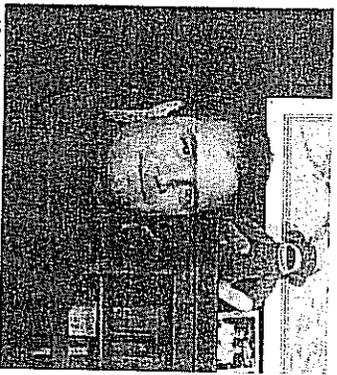
I would like to conclude by saying that the tutor's decision to not return was not the main reason behind my writing this essay. Rather, it was a situation that arose right around the time I had looked back at an older issue of the *Southern Discourse* and found a survey conducted by Shureen Campbell. In this survey, she found that very little communication, what she calls "chat," was taking place among tutors in the writing center. Most of the communication was about personal projects, but very little was about writing center projects. I was somewhat surprised only because, regardless of what the project is, for we discuss it in our center. Personal, school-related, or writing center-related, you can be sure it is being talked about in the writing center at North Carolina A&T. We edit each other's papers for school, discuss upcoming conferences, and often travel together; we collaborate on presentation topics and discuss submissions for presentations. We are not only resources for our fellow students, but we acknowledge and embrace the fact that we are each other's resources as well. This is not to negate individual efforts, or centers that support individual work and knowledge, but perhaps it is time that we all move towards a more collaborative effort, even if it is only a small one. Perhaps then, we can increase communication among tutors, tutors, teachers and staff, and perhaps fewer tutors will be inclined to feel unwelcome in a collaborative environment.

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Popcorn and Newsreels: The National Day on Writing

Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina Aiken



Karl Fornes

located at <<http://www.ncte.org/action/dayonwriting>> (“NCTE’s National Day”). According to NCTE President Kathi Yancey, if you are “interested in highlighting writing in its various shapes and in showing how important writing has been and is to society, the National Day on Writing provides a signature opportunity” (Yancey).

During the 2008 NCTE Conference in last November, International Writing Centers Association President Michelle Eodice and Past President Clint Gardner announced that the IWCA was planning to participate in the National Day on Writing. Eodice added that the IWCA has been invited to contribute to the “gallery of student writing from the writing center perspective” (Eodice). If you would like to participate, please contact Eodice or the IWCA. Other nonprofit partners include the National Writing Project and the Council of Writing Program Administrators Network for Media Action. For-profit partners include Verizon and Google. Yep. We’re playing with the big boys here.

At USC Aiken, we have had some preliminary discussions and are working to develop some activities on campus. I will definitely make October 20 and the NCTE’s online gallery a focus for my Composition Studies course in the fall, and we are hoping to get a writer on the schedule for our university’s annual writers series. It seems to me that the National Day on Writing is one of a very few opportunities for writing center professional and those interested in how

people write to shape the perception and role of writing in the larger society. One such project is the WPA Network for Media Action’s National Conversation on Writing, especially the nifty little film “Who Is a Writer? What Writers Tell Us” (<http://compille.org/NCow/>).

I hope SWCA folks choose to participate in the National Day on Writing, if only to highlight writing through the gallery. If you want me to highlight your efforts, please provide a description of your activities. In the meantime, mark October 20 on your calendars.

In the spirit of the National Day on Writing, there are several other dates that you may or may not want to add to your writing center calendars. I’ve organized the dates according to the traditional academic calendar beginning July 1 and ending June 30.

September 24—National Punctuation Day

<http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com/>
September 24 2009 is national punctuation day what would the world be like without punctuation probably a lot like texting we need punctuation though to communicate larger thoughts than texting allows this thought here for example is small and can be understood but punctuation would really help you read it would don’t you think maybe we should establish a national texting day and celebrate punctuation through its absence wait a minute i have an idea if you want to have some fun with punctuation give this paragraph to some friends and compare how you all punctuate it

January 23—National Handwriting Day

<http://www.wima.org/consumer/nhd.html>
Developed by the Writing Instrument Manufacturer’s Association, National Handwriting Day is celebrated every January 23, John Hancock’s birthday. I spend far more time on the keyboard than with a pen, but I still have fond memories of the cursive alphabet posted above the blackboard in Mrs. Flicker’s second-grade classroom and not-so-fond memories of the torture incurred by my attempts to replicate that alphabet on lined paper of my own. I never managed to make the little boat at the bottom of the upper-case “F” and, thus, was forced to use a strange combination of cursive and printing for my signature.

March 4—National Grammar Day

<http://nationalgrammarday.com/>
Sponsored by the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar (SPOGG, for the acronymphiles) and MSN Encarta, National Grammar Day apparently

provides an opportunity to be a grammar cop: "If you see a sign with a catastrophic apostrophe, send a kind note to the storekeeper. If your local newscaster says 'Between you and I,' set him straight with a friendly e-mail" ("National Grammar Day"). A quick look at the SPOGG Blog (link at bottom of Web page above) indicates that the society takes great delight in pointing out the grammar errors of others (Society for the Promotion). I enjoy demeaning others as much as anyone, but I take no great pleasure in using grammar errors to assert my own sense of superiority. Pardon me if I choose to celebrate grammar in a more appropriate manner.

April—Poetry Month

<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prnID/47>

The Academy of American Poets celebrates National Poetry month every April. If you have been wanting to hug a poet, April is the month to do so. I tried to draft a snappy little limerick for the occasion, but I kept getting stuck at Nantucket. (Maybe I should consider extending my emotional maturity beyond fourteen years old.)

I am sure that there are other writing-related days to celebrate over the course of the year, and you are welcome to celebrate them anytime you wish. In fact, I suspect that every day has some sort of celebration or another. I fear that over-celebrating, though, results in Soccer Camp Syndrome—if everyone gets a prize does the prize have any meaning? ✨

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"Compass Points" continued from page 6

experiences, learning from others, and collaborating on new projects, such as a session called "He Said, She Said: Feminist and Collaborative Theory in the Secondary Writing Center." When asked about his work in the writing center, Craig said, "I want to give students the knowledge that they can write—that their words are an important way to express life." I would often pick up my phone in the writing center to hear Craig say, "What if...?" when he had another new idea. I find myself repeating those words to others, knowing that my work with Craig as a colleague and friend starting in 1993 has had a strong influence on how I function as a writing center director and human being.

At the October 2004 IWCA Conference in Minneapolis, we paid tribute to Craig's writing center life and his poetry that continues to speak to so many of us. His sister Debbie flew in from Florida and writing center leaders Jon Olson, Leigh Ryan, Jeanette Jordan, and Dawn Fels joined others in reading from Craig's own works and sharing stories. Jon Olson later wrote in an IWCA Update (Fall 2005) article, "When it came to learning and teaching relationships, Craig was an energetic, upbeat creator of heavens through words." And, isn't that what each of us wants to create in our writing centers, a little bit of heaven? ✨

"Back to the Center" continued from page 9

The brief happy ending is as follows: As part of my job, I supervise a rotating staff of writing consultants who love to talk about writing and who talk about writing in productive ways, in a setting where helping others express themselves well is the primary goal. These supervisees themselves develop skills and humility through working one-on-one with other students in thinking about and revising their writing. Many of these consultants go on to become teachers at the secondary or college level. I feel honored to have a part in this process. ✨



Harbert Writing Center

President's Letter

Teaching Writing in an Age of Change and Hope

Beth Burmester, Georgia State University



Thirty years ago, Milna Shaughnessy observed in her groundbreaking pedagogical study *Errors and Expectations*, "Writing is something writers are always learning to do" (276). A decade later, Mike Rose reinforced the same idea, writing in *Lives on the Boundary*, "Error marks the place where education begins" (189). Complementing this teacher-oriented view with a student perspective from four years ago, Nathaniel Craig, a sophomore at Harvard, reveals what he considers is the best advice a teacher ever told him about writing: "You shouldn't start an essay with something that you know. That is, you shouldn't begin knowing something, you should begin not knowing something. There should be something that confuses you tremendously or that makes no sense to you and that should be the nucleus around which you form the paper" (Across the Drafts). In this trio of views, error is essential to eventual growth and success for writers, and a part of the writing process that every writer encounters. In order to get past the errors, the writer must have interaction with a reader. The best way to work with and through errors is found inside campus writing centers, where student writers talk about their ideas and their writing process with another writer, who acts as a reader, listening, questioning, and offering their impressions to move the writer toward realizing their goals.

Thus writing, which occurs in the present tense, is clearly a continual process, an action, a verb—constantly changing and being changed. Writing is not a skill or talent, despite popular attitudes or legislation that would have us believe it is. Rather, writing is defined by the National Writing Project as "a means of inquiry and expression for learning in all grades and disciplines" (Nagin 3). For each writer, the composing of words on the page "is a struggle of thought, feeling, and imagination to find expression clear enough for the task at hand. Doing it well means being both a writer and a reader" (9) simultaneously. Because "[w]riting requires problem-solving and critical thinking" (10), communication

with other writers—contact with a real audience—becomes positively crucial for all learning. The definition of writing advocated by Lee-Ann Kasman Breuch, for a "post-process pedagogy," is "an activity rather than a body of knowledge," and she proposes that we re-examine "our methods of teaching as indeterminate activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic" (120). In fact, in her "transformative model," what is required is "active participation from teachers and students as collaborators," since "teachers and students are co-workers" (124). What happens when we see our writing center "tutors" as "teachers of writing"? What happens when we see them as both writers and readers? When we do this, we shift outside perceptions about the work achieved in writing center spaces, and we shift the role and position of tutors farther away from experts or editors, and closer to co-learners, to collaborative partners who teach and learn and communicate, creating new knowledge as they go, and creating an environment where students who regularly use writing centers and those who work within those spaces realize their potential for communication and critical thinking.

We have a history in writing center work that expands our place in the university; a history that reveals our intellectual contribution to academic success, if we reclaim it. Our history involves conversation as a teaching method, and writers coming to discover what they want to say by talking through their ideas with a receptive and curious listener. Students write better when they write for an audience who provides them with feedback that is aimed at understanding what they are trying to do, and that pushes them to communicate successfully with others. The National Writing Project identifies this goal from the point of view of the reader: why do people read what others write? What are they looking for in texts? Readers want writing that impacts their lives; they want writing that is "powerful, memorable, provocative" (15).

A wonderful example of this kind of text is the presidential inauguration address delivered by our 44th President, Barack Obama. While millions of Americans witnessed the speech, first-hand or via cameras, the flurry of commentary came after the text of the speech was reproduced on websites and printed in newspapers. Even so, it spurred conversation across the nation—casual conversations across the public, across the internet, and inside classrooms nationwide. While the speech itself is a genre of rhetoric not often used by students, its message has much to offer us in the writing community.

One line that specifically spoke to me as being highly relevant to educators came early in the address: "The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to

choose our better history." We can, even in these economically unstable times, stay strong and sponsor change that will benefit us. We can control our futures. One way to do so is to emphasize how we teach writing, and how our work inside writing centers is integrated with core academic missions for secondary and post-secondary education, promoting student engagement and writing across the curriculum. The call we should heed, professionally, is found toward the conclusion of the president's address: "Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions -- who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage." Let's join our imaginations and necessities to expand our work and convince our multiple publics of the true value of individualized and student-centered teaching.

President Barack Obama has moved millions of people, uniting multiple generations. Time magazine, among other media, cite the incredible increase in voter turnout (and campaign volunteering) for the under-25 age group. One consequence of the inaugural festivities on January 20th, has been to spark the ambitions of everyday people, and particularly students, to believe they can dream big, and through hard work, they can act in ways that make a difference in our global world, that make history. In addition to his many political roles, Obama was a teacher. Which brings to mind yet another American president, also living in an age of change and hope, and who, before attaining the presidency, held the first Boylston Chair of Rhetoric at Harvard College in 1806 (and it was a part-time job!): John Quincy Adams. His most quoted sentiment is used broadly in motivational and leadership venues, where it has lost some of its original intent, but I believe his words capture the work being done daily by writing center directors who are mentors to their staffs, and by writing center tutors who teach student writers, all of whom point us as an academic community, and as citizens of a democracy, toward a better future. He said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." Tutors are teachers, and teachers are leaders. Let this be the sentiment we take with us when we gather for the SWCA annual conference in Greensboro, North Carolina, to discuss, study, and celebrate how we create student success with writers, readers, teachers, and leaders. ~~24~~

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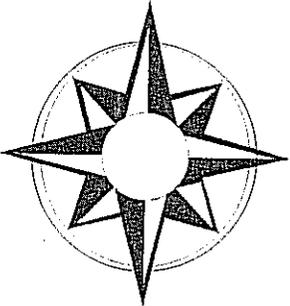
"What's the Point?" continued from page 10

Where, you might ask, did all of this stuff begin? What were the origins? Well, according to the OED, it might have begun with the ancient Hebrews. In 1659 a Hebrew scholar named Walton declared that "the punctuation of the Hebrew Text was an invention of the Masorites." And a hundred years later this observation was reinforced by a scholar named Stewwright: "The very circumstance, [sic] proves most evidently, that Masoretic reading and punctuation is a human invention hatched long after the true living pronunciation fell into disuse." So that's what happened! I'll bet that the true living pronunciation used vocal stops instead of the insanely complex marriage between grammar and marks of punctuation! Oh those obsessive-compulsive Masorites!

But the connection I find most appealing is the one in the OED that uses the definition of "punctuation" to mean "a form of percussion massage using the tips of the fingers." This use of the term is illustrated by this statement: "Punctuation is based upon the head and around the heart." Now who would argue with that? I wouldn't. Would you? And anyway, what's the point? ~~24~~

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Reflections on the Writing Process

Lori Garvin, Presbyterian College

Writing a paper is a single action, indistinguishable moves
more comparable to floating down a river than building a bridge.
Nonetheless, as this assignment's deadline looms before me,
I must stoically endure the task,
as Noah with his ridiculed ark,
or Atlas with his globular burden,
or perhaps only as a child lugging his sled back up the snowy hill.

Because starting out is so difficult for me,
the less distractions I allow myself at the beginning the better.
It takes time before the concentration really takes hold.

If my mood is not exactly fitted to a concentrated dose of verbal intensity,
I must exploit the physical aspects of the situation.

Often aiding the process are various bodily movements,
including (but not limited to) neck aerobics, paper clip acrobatics,
pacing, arm flapping, nose wiggling, lip biting, throat gurgling,
chair bouncing, handstand walking, plate spinning, and toe typing.

I try not to allow myself the freedom of experimenting with all of them at one sitting,
but sometimes I do have a little too much contained energy
that cannot be expelled through the subdued actions of
gentle key-stroking and mild page-turning.