

Southern Discourse

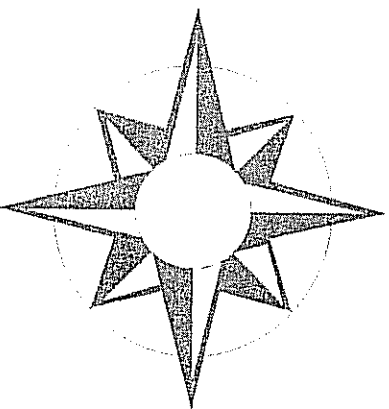
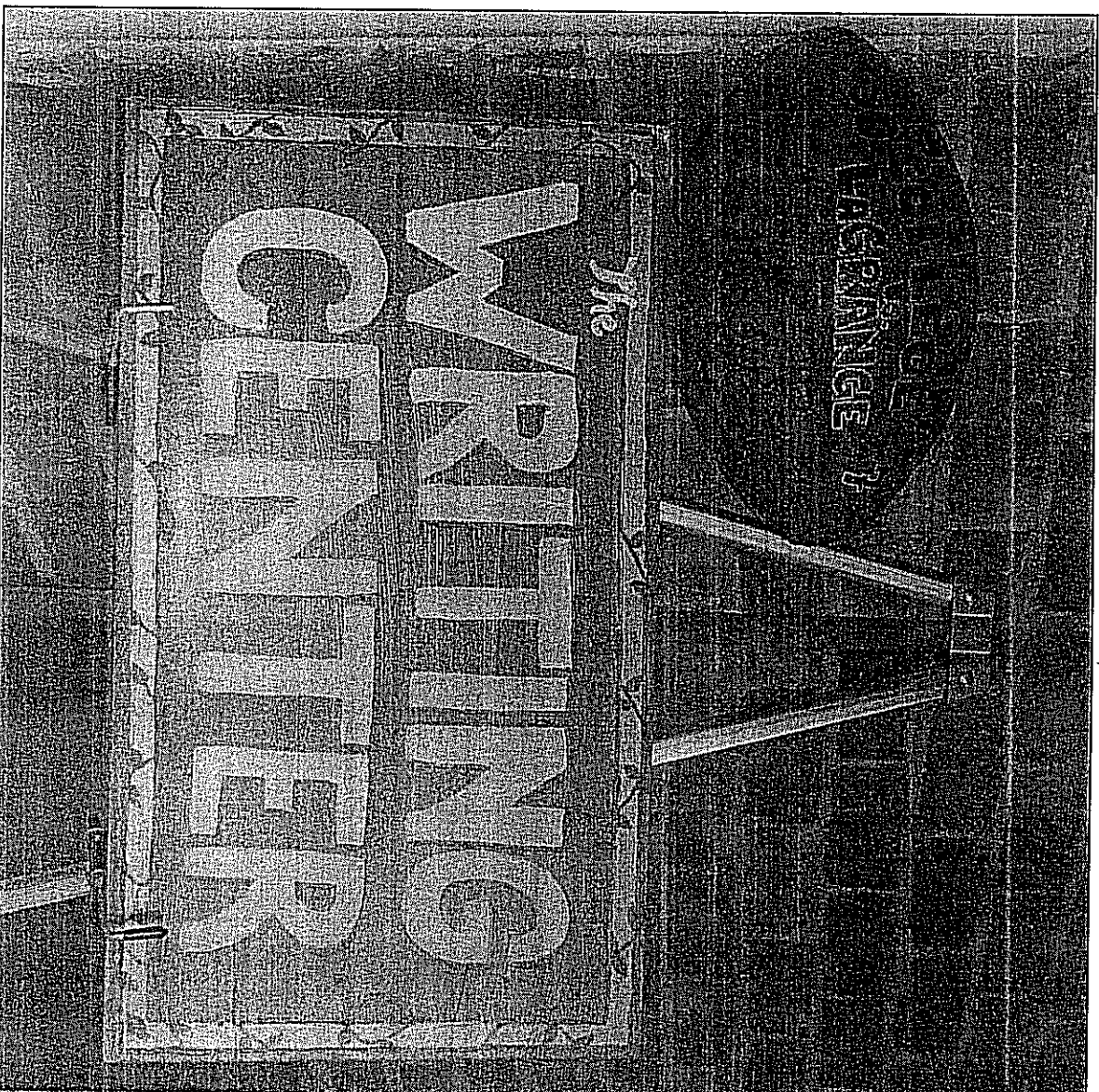
Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN



A Note from

the Editor: A Delicate Balance

Christine Cozzens,
Agnes Scott College



Christine Cozzens

This fall, I had to give *Southern Discourse* an extension. Like many of you reading this issue several months later than usual, as a result of budget cuts I had more to do during the fall semester, and I soon realized that something would have to give way. Many writing centers may be facing such decisions: where should we cut back our services or activities? What can we change or postpone? How can the budget be stretched with the least impact on our ability to fulfill our mission?

To a certain extent, all of us can address some of these problems with new, creative solutions. At the Agnes Scott writing center, we turned our semesterly print newsletter into a blog (<http://ascpaperchase.weebly.com>) with an associated Facebook page: the new format is easier for us, more timely, more student-friendly, and saves both paper and money. We'll miss traveling to the annual SWCA conference this year, but the mini-regional version will be held on our campus in February, and we're excited to welcome visitors and show off our center. There are losses in the new budget climate, but there are also gains.

But I also believe that in these times it is especially important for writing centers to reassert their centrality to the mission of the institution that houses them. Writing centers teach and support the teaching of writing, and writing is not an extra. Here at Agnes Scott, I am trying to be present whenever conversations about "essentials" take place. A large first-year class and an increased number of international students are two good reasons why the writing center needs enhancement, not cuts. We will do our part to use resources ever more wisely—that makes good sense at any time. But I try to make clear that we need resources because what we do at the writing center is what the college wants to do for its students: give them a voice—a strong, clear, ethical, articulate voice—in the world of the future. ✨

Lessons from the Writing Center: The Collaborative Student-Teacher Conference

Teagan Elizabeth Decker,
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

When I first began teaching writing, I knew I had a lot to learn. With ten years of experience as a writing center tutor, though, I thought that one-to-one conferencing with my students would be easy. As a tutor, I had learned to create room for dialogue, to listen to students talk, and to be patient and nondirective. As a teacher, however, I initially had trouble creating the same climate of collaboration. I found myself talking more and directing the conversation more forcefully. The presence of power in the relationship played a role in this change, as did the responsibility I felt to direct the student toward success in my particular class. The teacherly discourses I was learning to use in the classroom were making their ways into my office during one-to-one conversations with students.

Conferencing, like many collaborative and student-centered activities, is an assumed positive in composition pedagogy. We might say: "She is such a great teacher—she is always conferencing with her students." The conference, however, is fairly under-researched compared to activities such as peer-review or even writing center conferencing. Laurel Johnson Black, in *Between Talk and Teaching: Reconsidering the Writing Conference*, researches and theorizes the conference in ways that are productive to both teachers and tutors. She applies critical discourse analysis to transcriptions of student-teacher conferences and finds

"an asymmetrical language interaction, drawing its rules from both the discourse of the classroom and from casual conversation" (12). This description points to the unease I felt as a new teacher conferencing with my students: although I tried to create a casual conversation in conference, the power and responsibility I had as a teacher placed me in an institutional role that was difficult to resist. Even when I had internal pep talks with myself before conferences, reminding myself to relax and let the student talk, I ended up leaning forward and giving teacherly instructions.

After struggling with these unanticipated problems for some time, I followed Laurel Johnson Black's lead and audio taped one of my conferences. The conference was with a student who was very quiet in class and who, among her classmates, had the most trouble with writing. I chose to tape this conference

because I felt it would stretch my skills to the limit: I wanted this student to feel comfortable enough to visit me again in the future; also, she was a difficult student to get to talk.

The transcript of the conference I recorded confirms my impression that, as Laurel Johnson Black says, the conference is an uneasy combination of teacherly talk and casual conversation. I do let the student ask questions and guide the discussion to some extent. I begin by asking her a very open ended question: "How are you doing. . . with the class and the quarter and everything" She answers this by beginning to discuss the portfolio assignment and letting me know that she had begun to work on this by selecting essays to include. Later on, she also asks

questions that guide the conversation. She asks about some make-up work that I had asked her to do, and then later asks about my grading criteria.

Although I do ask open-ended questions, and these open-ended questions are an important strategy to encourage students to participate in the conference on their own terms, these questions by themselves didn't seem to achieve the collaborative conversation I am after. What I think provides some insight into my conference with this student is to look at evidence of what Black calls



Teagan Elizabeth Decker and Student

"digressions" or "story-telling." In a conference transcript Black analyzes, the student, who is having trouble interpreting a poem, instead of discussing the poem begins by telling a story about a family funeral (34). At first the story seems randomly digressive, but it ends up giving the student a strong connection to the poem that he might use to begin writing his paper. What seems digressive is actually productive.

While the student is speaking, the teacher "supports his story by acknowledging that she is listening ('backchanneling' words such as *Min-hmmm, Uhh-huh* and *Yeah*) and cooperatively overlaps her speech to support him" (35). A strong indication of my domination of my transcribed conference is that the student backchannels more than I do. I embark on long discussions of topics while she indicates her attention by saying "yeah" or, in one case, laughing. Although this does show that she is engaged, I would like to see me backchanneling for her more. In total, I engage in backchanneling three times while she backchannels ten times. This shows that I am engaged in telling stories while she is not. Black's transcript suggests that letting students tell stories is a good way of finding out more about them and their writing and getting to possible solutions. To prompt this reticent student to engage in storytelling I would have to ask follow up questions to encourage her to expand on her statements and continue speaking. Instead, I often simply listen to one of her statements and then change the subject, or, if she asks me a question, I answer it and then digress to another topic of my choosing without asking her more about her question.

A good example of this is early on in the conference when we are discussing which paper she should choose. We are equally engaged in this topic for a few conversational turns, but when she says, "Yeah, well, I think I can relate to the first one more," I respond by completely shutting down this line of discussion, asking: "Do you have any questions?" This open-ended question that ordinarily would appear inviting serves in this case as a conversational roadblock. After this she turns to questions of missed work—not as potentially fruitful as the conversation we had been having. What if I had asked her to say more about "relating to the first one more"? She may have had something to say that would have helped us to discuss that particular paper and how it could be revised. What about this paper was "relatable"? What about the other paper was alienating?

At another juncture in our conversation, I ask: "So what kinds of things do you think you will be working on in your revision?" This seems to be a good question, as she answers in some detail, saying that, "Um, when I was re-reading some of the paragraphs they seem kind of awkward. Like the way I put it. So like it would be hard for readers to know And the grammar" After this, I pick up on her reference to audience awareness and digress on this

topic. The student's backchanneling comments are overlapped with my comments; she is very engaged in what I am saying, and I remember her smiling and nodding at this point. Although she is engaged, the conversation is led by me. I could have taken advantage of her revelations about revision plans as well as her interest in audience to take the conversation to a more specific level. Does she want some help from me with grammar? Paragraph cohesion? Does she have any plans for how to tackle these problems she has so successfully identified in her re-reading?

Analyzing this transcript in terms of storytelling sheds light on my strange transformation from a tutor to a teacher. I knew that I needed to change something about my conferencing technique, but wasn't sure quite what it was. This transcript helped me to see that what I need to do is listen to what the students say and ask them to expand on topics they initiate, always leaving room for them to digress and come to understandings on their own. I know that I did this all the time as a tutor, but the power dynamics weren't as strong in that situation, so I wasn't compelled to constantly redirect the conversation. Power, even the temporary and circumstantial power of teaching, is seductive. My tutoring background makes me more aware that I am exercising and enjoying the power of being a teacher, but it doesn't automatically give me the internal resources to stop myself from dominating a conference. I thought I could fall back on the speech genre of the tutoring conference, but it became clear that as I moved from tutoring to teaching I had to develop a new genre that took into account my role as teacher if I wanted to share conversational power with students and retain the collaborative nature of one-to-one tutoring that I valued.

Now, after six years of experience teaching writing in the classroom and six years of teaching writing center tutors, it would stand to reason that I have made some improvements to my conferencing techniques. And it's true, I have. I do let students talk and tell stories. I support them by backchanneling, listening, nodding. But it is an everlasting struggle not to dominate; in some ways, this struggle becomes even more acute as I become more confident that what I have to say to students will help them improve. I am constantly reminding myself that 'improvement' is not the only goal of a conference. Laurel Johnson Black recounts a formative conference she had with one of her college instructors,

Dr. B:
"I handed him my paper silently and sat down. He held the paper out for us both to read while I held my chin in my hands and let my long hair fall forward to shield my face. He began with the first page, and line by line, word by word, he showed me where I'd failed, used the wrong construction, argued the reverse of my point, or made no sense at all." (2)

The Rhetoric of Grammar: Expressive, Transactional and Poetic

Richard Blankenship,
Appalachian State University

Grammar... the word even *sounds* bad, yet it is an integral link between thought and language. Unfortunately, grammar is regarded by many to be a necessary evil with which we must deal. As I prepared to present this information at the Southeastern Writing Center Association conference, I realized I have always considered language rules to be an aggravating obstacle and hindrance to creative expression. However, research into the field changed my attitude as I realized that grammar is in fact a primary function of rhetoric. Rhetoric is not only the power of persuasion but is an effect which engages the audience deeply through the use of language and a distinct style or voice. John T. Gage's article "On Rhetoric and Composition" states that rhetoric involves the "aspects of the work that may be assumed to have been under control of an author for the purpose of attaining some end" (Lindemann and Tate 28). The basic premise of rhetoric is authorial control, which involves more than simply how the argument is constructed but also includes how the language is used and the way in which nouns and verbs are proportioned. Therefore, grammar, along with word choice, is the cornerstone of rhetoric (Weaver, *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* 3). As rhetoric has the purpose to attain some end, then the author should have immense control over the best way to structure the syntactical and semantic connections.

The key to having a productive engagement with the student or client in a writing center session is to address grammar not as being isolated, but always within a rhetorical context. The mechanics of grammar are not really low in priority but will inevitably be solved if the larger rhetorical issues are first addressed. It is not productive to focus on traditional, prescriptive grammar to the neglect of the purpose intended by the author. Grammar can actually help writers create a style or voice, and to productively implement grammar into writing involves revision or process. Syntactic maturity refers to the relationship between the deep and surface structures of the language. A sentence is syntactically mature if it expresses a relatively high number of underlying propositions in relatively few words (Weaver, *Grammar for Teachers* 68). Grammar

is best taught during the revision stage, as the writer refines the rhetorical effect of the work, instead of during the prewriting stage and certainly not through isolated exercises divorced from a broader context of meaning and purpose.



Richard Blankenship Tutoring a Student

James Britton says the functions of writing are expressive, transactional and poetic (*Grammar for Teachers* 86). Children before the age eight are still in what is called preoperational stage of intellectual development, and their writing is exclusively *expressive*, meaning they do not have an intended audience, but are expressing ideas, feelings and meanings for themselves and personal satisfaction only. The next stage in writing development is *transactional*, which means writing to an audience, and the third stage is *poetic*, which evokes a response from the audience. Much of the problem arises between the expressive and transactional stages, because writers are hindered by too much emphasis on 'correct' grammar, which stifles their creativity, so they become copyreaders instead of conduits for originality (*Grammar for Teachers* 61). We punish for mistakes when in fact the mistakes are usually indications of improvement. Often, when students misspell words, compose run-ons or sentence fragments, their mistakes indicate that they are trying more advanced vocabulary and more complex structures and should be encouraged instead of punished. Negative reaction hinders their growth, so

Compass Points: "But there is no joy in Mudville" or Is There?

Pamela B. Childers, The McCallie School

On my way to work the first week of school, I was thinking of all the institutional cutbacks cause by the country's financial woes. What about all the writing centers losing funding, programs that have been dropped, and positions eliminated? How will we keep doing what we know works across the curriculum and at all academic levels? Then, somewhere in the back of my head I heard the words "But there is no joy in Mudville." I started laughing my way down the W Road into Chattanooga and up Missionary Ridge to work. I thought, *Now where did that line come from in the midst of all our miseries?* So, I turned on my computer and searched for a copy of "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Lawrence Taylor:

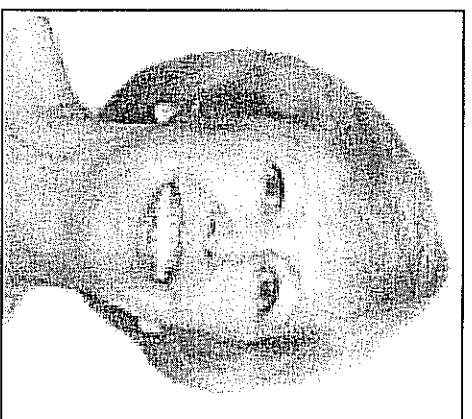
I'll never know what made me think of that poem; it sounds more like something Al DeCiccio would come up with because he's a big Red Sox fan. Maybe it's the time of year with the October World Series, but how does it connect to what's going on in the writing center and writing across the curriculum (WAC) communities? I discovered in my search that this poem is the single most famous baseball poem ever written, and Thayer first published it in the *San Francisco Examiner* on June 3, 1888, under the name Phin. A good friend of William Randolph Hearst and former Harvard Lampoon writer, Thayer signed his humorous Lampoon articles "Phin." Hearst had hired Thayer and few other Lampoon writers when his father gave him the *Examiner* to edit. Weeks after the poem's publication, it was republished in a New York paper as written by "Anon." Then in August, the poem was read at a performance in New York City attended by the New York and Chicago baseball clubs, and the audience loved it. From that point it continued to gain popularity throughout the baseball world.

This story does seem to have some connections to writing, but how does it connect to the present situation in writing centers and WAC programs? If you are familiar with the poem, you know that Casey "struck out," leaving the bases loaded with two outs in the last inning, and Mudville's team lost the game. That's why "there is no joy in Mudville." But, those of us whose salaries have been cut or not raised, whose programs lack funding, and whose staff is almost non-existent will not let down our students, our schools or even our larger communities, not like Casey. Our Mudville will have joy because we won't "strike out." Unlike Casey, we will leave our egos at the door and not accept the

responsibility for the whole institution. Cooney "died at first" and Barrows

"Did the same," but "Flynn let drive a single," and Jimmy was "safe at second," just as our students, staff and faculty try to help us "win the game." It was all up to Casey, but it does not have to be left up to just one of us. We don't know yet if we are in Mudville, so we can't tell if we will win or lose with the financial situation. We've just got to get out there and give it our best effort. Every team wants to win the World Series; we all want our writing centers to be successful, to be the best they can possibly be even without the budget, staff, and equipment we may have had in the past. How do we bring joy to our Mudvilles?

That last stanza of the poem says, "somewhere . . . the sun is shining bright . . . men are laughing, and . . . children shout." It is only in Mudville that there is no joy. We must learn from those outside our Mudville to find out how we, too, can find joy in our work under dire circumstances, which we can hope are only temporary. We can also collaborate with others on our campuses, forming new alliances to change the way we do things. For instance, we cannot fight the cutbacks in salary, but we can be thankful for the jobs we have and try to reevaluate our priorities. What can we still do or how can we use our time more efficiently to free us for other jobs we have been given? We cannot change the budget cuts that eliminate staff, but we can find ways to get volunteers or offer courses that will help us staff our writing centers. How can we work within the framework of our existing schedules to handle the load? We cannot deny the loss of a travel budget if we were lucky enough to have one, but we can creatively find grants, scholarships and even fund raisers or use of frequent flyer miles to enable us and our students to attend conferences. Where are there funds that we can tap into for support of projects? We have to ask the tough questions, be more humble than the "haughty" Casey, and face the challenges. We cannot change the score of the last game, but we can create better odds for joy in our Mudville in future games.



Pamela B. Childers

Casey at the Bat

The Outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play,
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
A sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.
A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest
Clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast;
They thought, if only Casey could get but a whack at that -
We'd put up even money, now, with Casey at the bat.
But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
And the former was a lulu and the latter was a cake;
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.
But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
And Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;
And when the dust had lifted, and the men saw what had occurred,
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.
Then from 5,000 throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
It knocked upon the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.
There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.
Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt.
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance gleamed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.
And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped -
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one," the umpire said.
From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore.
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;
And it's likely they'd a-killed him had not Casey raised his hand.
With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;
But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said, "Strike two."

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered fraud;
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.
The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate;
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate.
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.
Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;
But there is no joy in Mudville - mighty Casey has struck out.
"Phin"
(http://www.baseball-almanac.com/poetry/po_case.shtml)

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Writing Center Web URL: _____

2009-2010 Membership

Student \$12

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Back to the Center: Points of Convergence at the Mississippi College Writing Center

Steve Price, Mississippi College

In fall 2008, I returned to Mississippi College (MC) after spending four years in the frozen cornfields of western Illinois at Monmouth College. Escaping the snow was a big reason to leave, I'll admit. But the strongest draw was the MC Writing Center. Many writing centers have more glamorous facilities, bigger budgets, and more impressive yearly statistics. But few writing centers feel as *real* to me as ours at MC, where the nineteen-year history is marked by such artifacts as a migrating notebook, the "Prescription Pad," and a game ball awarded by the football team.



Mississippi College Students

"The Write Lab" was founded at MC in 1990 with Susan Lassiter, then a full-time instructor, as the first director. The lab was more a concept than an actual space: it existed in the offices of English faculty who tutored students

during designated office hours. Appointments were reserved and tracked in the "Write Lab" notebook, which was passed among faculty throughout the week. Tutoring didn't necessarily sit well with all the faculty, as Susan remembers "pulling teeth" to get them to participate. Still, the lab was successful enough to be a central component of the campus's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program and to secure a Sears grant, which was used for computers and campus-wide workshops.

By the time Kimberly Harrison arrived in 1997, the WAC program—and the grant money—had fizzled out, but the "lab" had been renamed the Writing Center and moved, along with the English Department, to Jennings Hall. The refurbished 100-year-old former residence hall is a beautiful three-story building with an inner courtyard surrounded by balconies. Although it had no dedicated space for the writing center, it did have two offices designated for the English department's graduate teaching assistants to share. Under Kimberly's tenure as writing center director—and as coordinator of the Graduate Teaching Assistant or GTA program—the GTAs became keepers of the notebook and the official writing center tutors.

By 2000, Kimberly's departure created a void in skilled leadership that meant little was accomplished in the writing center. Even the notebook foundered. A new director was needed, and the position was politely declined by everyone before falling to the junior member of the department: me. I had a steep learning curve during my two years as director. Sarah Liggett trained me as a teaching assistant at LSU and taught me to embrace the challenges of freshman composition. But I had no writing center training and no writing center background. Back then we typically saw fewer than fifty writers per semester, so I'd like to believe that damages were slim. Still, even though I worked hard to self-educate, I cringe looking back at my work as a new director.

"From tutoring, I have learned that people often get more than they expect in the writing center. Many times, writers come in for little more than a quick spell check and leave instead with a better grasp of their thoughts and ideas."
- Joe Kuykendall, graduate tutor

My most infamous "accomplishment" was an attempt to provide writers with a record of their session and a plan for after they left the writing center. After much well-intended searching, I purchased a carbon

receipt book and titled it, quite proudly, the "Prescription Pad." Luckily, we avoided diagnosing any writing illnesses on the Prescription Pad. And luckily, Kerri Jordan arrived as our new director of freshman composition and the writing center in 2002. She politely abandoned the Prescription Pad, and I quickly saw how much I needed to learn.

During Kerri's time as director, between 2002 and 2008, the MC Writing Center underwent its most prominent changes and significant growth, beginning with . . . a room! To our good fortune, a large office nearby was occupied by Dr. Glenn Eaves, former dean of arts and sciences. Dean Eaves liked the English department, liked the GTAs, appreciated the emphasis on good writing, and at his retirement in 2002 bequeathed his office to the writing center. The notebook—and the writing center—finally had a permanent home. First order of business: we purchased a second-hand kitchen table. The new table was round, of course.

In 2005, Kerri petitioned for and received funding to support a growing center, designed as part of the English Department's new writing major and minor. She also began recruiting and training undergraduate writing tutors in a three-credit course titled "Practicum in Writing Consulting." The inaugural group of undergraduates officially began tutoring in fall 2006, increasing the number of tutors from five to six graduate students to ten to fifteen undergraduates. The first undergraduate tutors were an exceptional group: one is currently in his second year at Harvard Law School and many others are pursuing graduate degrees in fields such as Psychology, Business, English, TESOL, and Linguistics.

I was still trapped in the snow (directing the writing center and communication across the curriculum program at Monmouth College) when I learned about the growth of the MC Writing Center. Around 2006, tutors began visiting freshman composition courses to facilitate peer critiques, working with international students, and conducting campus-wide writing workshops. The number of sessions logged each semester had quadrupled. And, Kerri began a writing center partnership with MC the football team, using the freshmen players' study hall times for writing conferences. The teamwork paid off in November, 2007, when Head Coach Norman Joseph invited Kerri to a team meeting and awarded her a game ball, signed by all the players, from the 50-7 Choctaw victory over LaGrange College. It's hard to ignore a writing center where the director gets a game ball.

The writing center—and the new writing major, and the MC English department—tugged me back to Clinton, Mississippi, in fall 2008. As I walked

back into the writing center as the director, I found a place that in some ways doesn't stand out from many other centers: we tutor primarily freshmen and sophomores,

focusing on the core writing classes; we're seeing a growing number of international students; we work hard to convince the rest of the campus

that we're not a fix-it shop; we try to create a friendly, fun, comfortable environment for the writers who visit. We certainly don't have a lot of bells and whistles in our former-dean's-office space—no AccuTrack on our single computer; no covers for group work; no iPods or video cameras. We don't even have an extra shelf, right now, where we can stash the still-used writing center notebook. It still resides on the second-hand kitchen table.

"Tutoring has allowed me to help others and develop a valuable understanding of various cultures at the same time."
-Andrea Boyles, undergraduate tutor

By the Numbers

Mississippi College: approximately 3500 undergraduate and 1500 graduate MA students
Writing Center Director: Dr. Steve Price
Writing Center Age: 19 years
Number of Tutors: 16
Number of Tutorials: 450 in Spring 2009
Hours of operation: M-R 9-5, F 9-3
Website: <http://www.mc.edu/academics/departments/english/writing/>

What we do have at MC is a writing center that links many formerly divergent components of the English department and campus. The center is an integral part of the writing major, freshman composition, and GTA program, serving as a point of convergence where each of those components meet. The convergence is highlighted as tutors in the practicum go into English 101 classes to facilitate peer critique groups; as undergraduate tutors mentor GTAs in the writing center; as ESL instructors, outside of English, invite our tutors into their classes as

What's the Point?

Toward the *Commatosa*

Peter M. Carriere,

Georgia College and State University



Pete Carriere

The invention of writing seems to have been followed by the invention of punctuation systems to aid readers in resolving ambiguities in texts. Ironically, of course, the attempt to clarify ambiguity sometimes resulted in increased confusion, as when punctuation marks were defined as indicating the length and importance of members of a sentence. If I remember right, Strunk and White never mentioned sentence membership, so this definition seems to create rather than clarify ambiguity, and I'm glad I don't have to try to explain it to my students. Besides, they are infinitely more proficient at written ambiguity than classical pointers ever were.

An early expert in point-invention was Isidore of Seville, who flourished between 560 and 636 according to M. B. Parkes's 1993 book *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*. According to Parkes, one of Isidore's major accomplishments was to realize that "writing was no longer merely the record of the spoken word" (21), a realization some of my students came to a long time ago, and without Isidore's help.

Some of Isidore's marks may be very useful today. For instance, he writes that "the asterisk is placed against [verses] which have been omitted in order that what seems to be omitted may shine forth" (quoted in Parkes 173). I think students could easily use this mark to indicate places in their writing where something has been omitted in order that the meaning "shine forth". Eventually, of course, assuming that this mark catches on, they could omit everything and just put a hummingous asterisk in the middle of every page of their essay. Think of how much shining forth would occur!

Of course instructors could also use Isidore's mark. How about putting a large asterisk down where the grade would normally be in order that the meaning of the grade shine forth? Just think of how quick paper-grading could become using this method!

Another mark that may have possibilities is the cryphia, which is the lower half of a circle with a period inside of it:



According to Isidore, the cryphia "is placed against those places where a hard and obscure question cannot be opened up or solved." This mark is definitely usable by writing instructors. Who among us cannot remember reading a student essay and arriving at a point in the writing where some hard and obscure question occurs in our mind about just what the student is trying to say? So when this happens, all we need to do is stick a cryphia over in the margin! No need to try to explain our objections in language; we have a great mark to do it for us? I think this mark might speed up grading immeasurably, don't you?

But my favorite Isidore mark is the dipole: >. Unfortunately, this word is too close to the word "dipole," which is a type of radio antenna, so I would propose that we change it to "dipple." With a "dipple," we could say things like, "This section could use a dipple," or "Why don't you dipple this?" Of course, we could always just use the symbol, too.

How is it used? Well, according to Isidore it is used to "separate or indicate the testimony of Holy Scripture." But we could always enlarge the meaning to indicate the testimony of any authority figure. We could even use it before our written remarks to remind students of the significance of our observations on their writing, thus dipping our remarks!

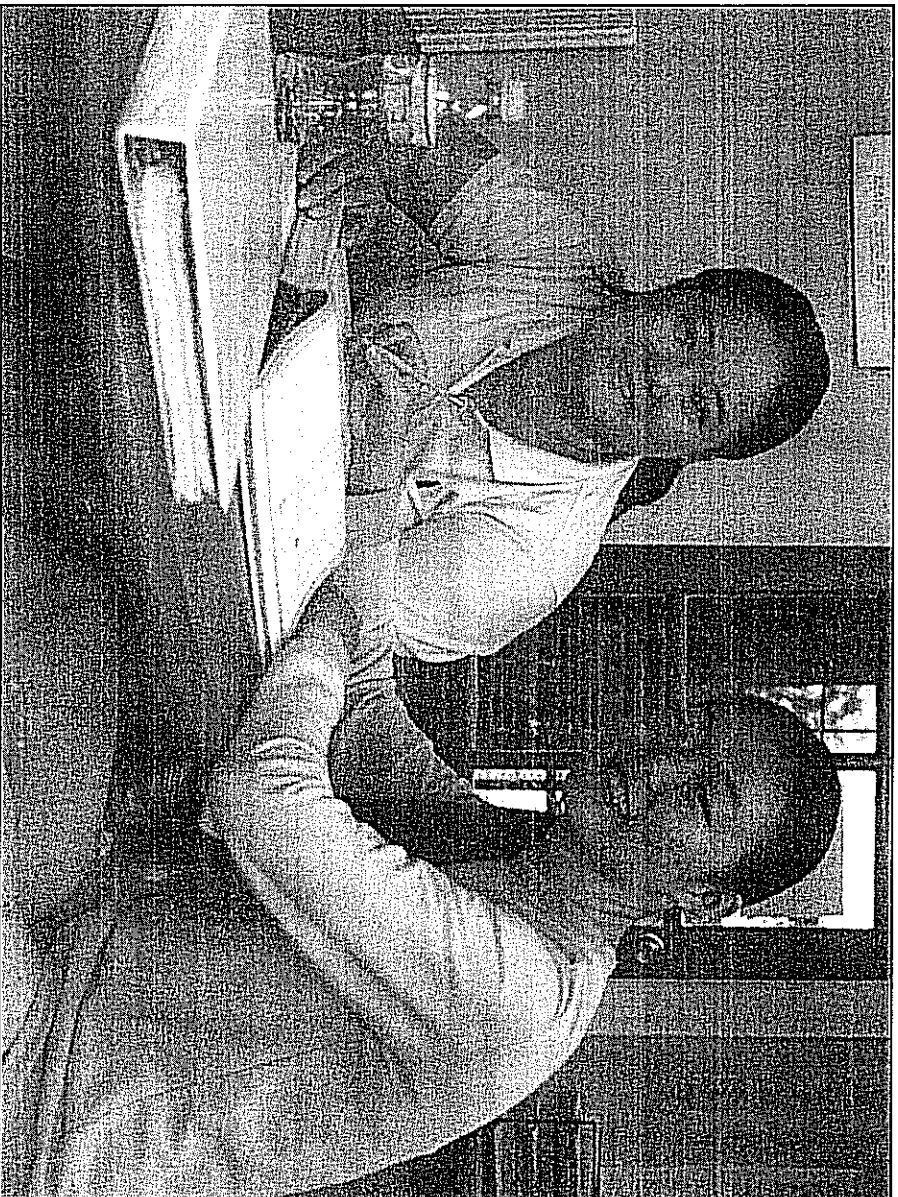
Isidore of Seville was only one of many figures from antiquity who tried to create a punctuation system. Take Cicero, for instance. According to Parkes, a copy of a manuscript by Cicero was found in Italy in the first century that contained a K used as a punctuation mark. Parkes writes that for Cicero "A K set off by points indicates the beginnings of a new *kaput*. . . ." (12). Punctuation may have come a long way since Cicero and Isidore, but I think we've lost some valuable writing tools in the process—like the K to indicate a *kaput*. Think of the times we have all longed for some way of letting students know symbolically that something dire had inserted itself into their writing, perhaps indicating the need to start over. A *kaput* does that service marvelously, and I, for one, think we ought to revive it.

Cicero also used "Oblique strokes": "Oblique strokes indicate minor pauses at

sense breaks after *cola* or *cominata*. . . ." (Parkes 12). I like the idea of taking a break with a *cola*, or perhaps something stronger, but the *cominata* reminds me of the *Educational Stigmata*, a grading condition in which, mesmerized by student writing, we enter a hypnotic state and suddenly wake up to discover that red ink we never applied has appeared all over the essay. So I would like to suggest that the *cominata* be replaced by the *commatosa*. The *commatosa* would be used at the end of student papers when our mental faculties have begun to drift into a quasi-comatose state, and the only thing that dully thuds against our brain over and over again is "what's the point?" ✧

"Back to the Center" continued from page 9
writing partners; as the law school welcomes a graduate tutor to develop workshops for first-year law school writers; as the head football coach brags about the writing center to parents at a Preview Day.

These points of convergence exist because of our tutors, who embrace the intellectual and interpersonal challenges of tutoring and their own role in giving the writing center its identity. As a part of the writing program, the tutors (whether they're majors or not) look at not only strategies for tutoring but also at



Mississippi College Students

"Every time when I see student writers leaving the Writing Center with clearer thoughts about their pieces and a better understanding of writing, I feel, what a rewarding job of working in the Writing Center!"
-Lingshan Song,
undergraduate tutor

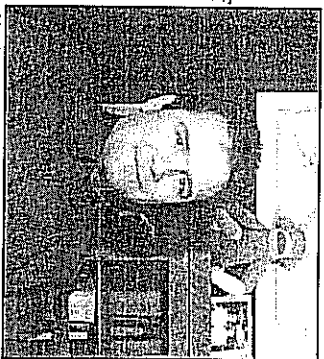
the entire tutoring session as a "text" for analysis. The center makes concrete many of the issues we want our program to address, including the politics of language, academics, and the academy. The tutors see language at work in a way no discourse, rhetoric, or tutoring textbook can capture, and ultimately, they benefit as much as anyone from the experiences. The *idea* of the Writing Center working with an ESL class or traveling to the law school may start in the head of the director or another faculty member, but the tutors at MC, buying into our program, put the ideas into action. When it comes right down to it, our tutors show a lot of trust in the game ball, the second-hand table, and the latest version of the notebook that refuses to disappear, even after nineteen years. ✧

Popcorn and Newsreels:

Finding Pygmalion

Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina Aiken

During the discussion of *My Fair Lady* last time, I touched upon what I have come to call the Pygmalion Effect in the teaching and tutoring of writing. We don't have to read too far into our literacy narratives, within both writing centers and popular culture as a whole, to see the Pygmalion Effect in action. Henry Higgins, for instance, is intent on developing Eliza Doolittle into a woman of learning and esteem, not unlike the people with whom he likes to identify. As we learn from Eliza's father, though, such learning and esteem come at a cost. Similarly, we who teach and tutor writing would not be doing so if we were not at least somewhat able to write in a manner valued by the institutions we represent. When we work with students, I think it's fair to say that we want to help those students write . . . well, write the way we write.



Karl Fornes

We are often fond of our role in helping students find their voices, such as those voices might be. Nonetheless, we would be doing students a disservice if we did not also help students to be confident that their voices coincided with the voices of the university. As Nancy Grimm pointed out years ago, it's unwise to ignore the regulatory role of writing centers in shaping students' institutional success, including adopting the institutional values such success requires.

The work of a writing center often teeters in a delicate balance between being simultaneously liberatory and regulatory. For all of its faults and shabby sentimentalism, the film *Finding Forrester* does a pretty darn good job handling the apparent paradox between the regulatory and liberatory nature of teaching writing. In short, the film is about Jamal Wallace, a gifted teen from the Bronx, who finds himself enrolled in a stodgy Manhattan private school at the same time he is developing a relationship with a reclusive Pulitzer-prize winning author, William Forrester (played by Sean Connery at the peak of his sexy old man days).

Jamal meets with Forrester daily; they write together. Slowly and purposefully, Forrester introduces his apprentice to the secrets of the writer's world, his advice on the writing process sounding eerily like the proverbial kinda flaky but wonderful high school English teacher: "you write your first draft with your heart and you rewrite with your head" and "the first key to writing is . . . to write, not to think." Using imitation as invention, Forrester provides Jamal with an old manuscript, orders him to begin copying and "when you begin to feel your own words, start typing them." The expressive approach is pretty obvious throughout Jamal's interactions with Forrester. After all, expressivism seems the best way for a young disadvantaged kid to find his own voice, thus freeing himself from the shackles imposed by the socioeconomic conditions surrounding him.

On the other hand, Jamal must also spend each day at school, and the current-traditional bent in Jamal's private school is equally obvious, not just in the teaching of writing but in the entire enterprise. From the basketball practice in a cage on a roof to the classroom wall of famous authors' photos leaning down upon students, the rules-driven halls of Mallor-Callow High School wreak of formula and tradition.

The school is perhaps best characterized through Professor Crawford, the self-appointed literary guardian of all that is dead-white-man who spends class belittling innocent students for his own amusement. Professor Crawford is immediately suspicious of Jamal's written work and accuses him of plagiarism. His suspicions, however, are not based on what we normally identify as a simple change of a writer's voice; rather, he is suspicious because Jamal's writing is "too good." Jamal can prove himself only by writing in a way suitable to Crawford—namely, by writing while sitting in Crawford's office with Crawford, like the great authors plastered all over Crawford's classroom wall, looming over him.

Inevitably, the writing-as-liberation in Forrester's apartment and the writing-as-regulation of Mallor-Callow high school collide. Jamal submits for a writing contest the piece he developed in Forrester's apartment several scenes earlier, including the first paragraph belonging to Forrester. He then challenges Professor Crawford in class, starting with a nifty little "further" v. "farther" distinction. As one might expect, the vengeful Professor Crawford later identifies the opening paragraph of Jamal's contest submission as having been published forty years earlier under Forrester's name.

In the off-chance you haven't seen it, I won't ruin the film for you. I will, however, provide a little gift from the early days of the world wide web—that sounds funny, considering it was only seven or eight years ago—and a swell little concluding quote for this column.

<http://www.yourethemannowdog.com>

If the site doesn't make you laugh immediately, turn your speakers up a notch or two and wait ten minutes. 

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

"The Rhetoric of Grammar" continued from page 5

mistakes should be viewed in a positive light (*Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing* 5). The point is not to encourage students to always write however they want, but to engage them actively in a positive manner concerning grammatical structures: this means allowing their voices and the institutions to interact so new meanings may arise.

The expressive, transactional, and poetic aspects are not separate stages through which one progresses but are intricately intertwined. For example, the poetic contains expressive and transactional elements but is slightly more sophisticated in that once language reaches the poetic stage, it has the power to evoke a response. The stages are not simply chronological in development: children around ages eight or nine experience the transition from expressive to transactional as they learn to write for an audience, and the expressive, transactional and—I hope—poetic stages can all appear in a paper I write tomorrow. This understanding can be applied to consultations as certain documents or clients' writing styles may be viewed through the lens of these three aspects of writing. For example, clients and consultants can discuss ways to implement personal expression, then focus on refining for an audience, then consider deeper aspects in order to evoke a response from the reader(s).


We generally think of nouns and verbs as the most important parts of the language, but John Erskine turns this idea on its head and states:

What you wish to say is found not in the noun but in what you add to qualify the noun. The noun by itself adds nothing to the reader's information; it is the name of something he knows already, and if he does

not know it, you cannot do business anyway. The modifier is the essential part of any sentence. (*Grammar for Teachers* 82)

It is easier to write the main clause first and add modifiers later, and it is easier to modify predicates than subjects. Mature writers tend to reduce clauses and phrases to single words communicating a tighter coil of thought. Studies have been done comparing the writings of fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders with each other and with highly skilled writers published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (*Grammar for Teachers* 69). Surprisingly, the number of adverbial embeddings changed little from one group to another, but nominal and adjectival embedding increased with the maturity of the writer. The results of these studies suggest that adjectival phrases need the most direct instruction, while adverbial and nominal are better learned indirectly.

According to Constance Weaver in *Teaching Grammar in Context*, studies reveal that children's written grammatical constructions in writing do not catch up to their spoken until the seventh grade (123). This is obviously an immense gap, and in my opinion a key contributor to the gap is the unnecessary barriers we place between the expressive and transactional stages of writers' development. The oral aspect of language in the writing process is often overlooked, so one positive tactic of writing centers is to have clients communicate by speaking what they want to say in their papers because the grammatical structure in our brains are highly advanced. Engage the student or client in a positive, supportive manner; one way to do this is by orally rehearsing topics in order to generate ideas and more effective uses of grammar.

After my research and recent conference experience, I now better appreciate grammatical issues when they arise during consultations and no longer view them as mechanical exercises hinging on rules that are difficult to recall to memory. Rather, grammar is an effective medium of expression that can be utilized to convey meaning in response to, and within, a broader context. Writing center consultants, or tutors, must strive to encourage authors to put a part of themselves in the grammatical structures they produce, fusing together the expressive, transactional and poetic aspects of writing in a positive and productive manner that will result in rhetorically sound writing. 

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Treasurer's Report

Sandee McClaun, Roanoke College

Despite the difficult economic times, SWCA has stayed in the black financially for the past several years while continuing to provide various opportunities for our members to share their work and experiences. Our primary expenditures over the last few years fall into several major categories: general conference expenses, scholarships for conference attendance, SWCA and *Southern Discourse* awards, *Southern Discourse* expenses, board retreat expenses, Web site design and maintenance, and mailings. Memberships, of course, generate a significant portion of our income, in addition to funds generated by conferences.

We started the 2008-2009 academic year with \$13,890. Membership deposits totaled \$2520 for the year. We were also fortunate to receive delayed income of \$8,465 from the 2008 conference, giving us an income of a little over \$11,000 for the year.

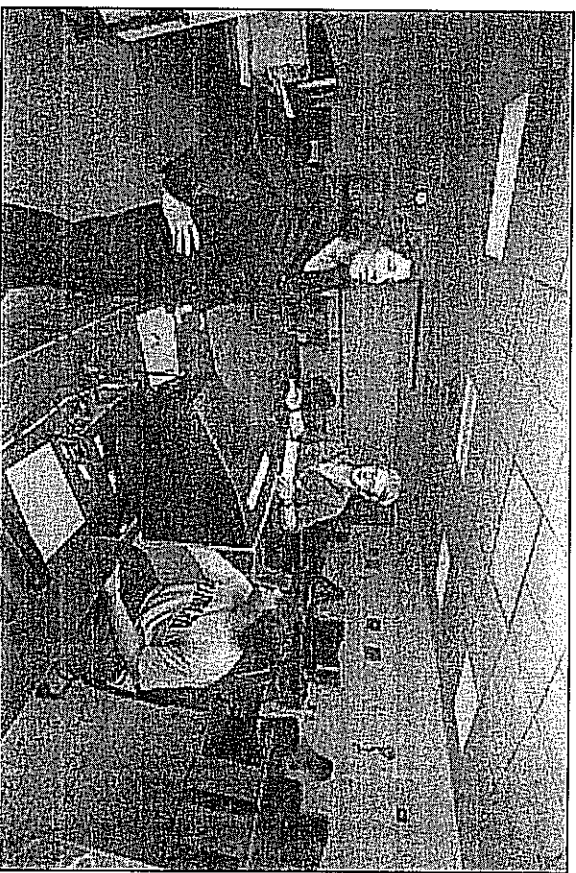
Many of our expenses are related to the annual conferences we host. General conference expenses include fees for facilities and food, stipends for keynote speakers, and printing costs for programs. Conference fees are typically received directly by the conference organizer and immediately turned around to pay for conference expenses. The 2009 conference cost close to \$21,000 to host, with conference fees and other funding offsetting about \$16,000 of that total, leaving about \$5000 of conference expenses to be covered from our reserves.

Our additional debts for the year totaled almost \$13,500. Last year \$1,790 was devoted to supporting and honoring the work of our membership through scholarships offered to tutors and presenters at the conference and prizes for the SWCA Tutor Award, SWCA Achievement Award, and the Outstanding *Southern Discourse* article. One of our largest categories of expenses outside of conferences is *Southern Discourse*. In 2008-2009 printing and mailing costs for the publication ran \$10,405. *Southern Discourse* is one of our best investments, however, as evidenced by the fact that several former SWCA members who have moved out of our region continue to subscribe to it—a clear testament to its quality. Our Web site is also an important public relations tool that we plan to continue to update and enhance; website design and maintenance ran \$860 for the year. The remaining expenses included such items as mailings, bank fees, and other basic costs.

We closed out the year (as of July 2009) with \$6435. We urge SWCA members to check the status of their memberships and renew as needed, so that we might continue to provide avenues for more conversations about writing and tutoring and share resources across our region. ✨

"Lessons from the Writing Center" continued from page 4

She did learn something about writing from this encounter, but also suffered a loss of control: "control Dr. B. had of my paper, my physical space, my words."



I will continue to look to tutors and writing center pedagogy as a reminder to share control of words, space, and even the physicality of writing itself—to allow room for students to take control of their learning. To remember that successful conferencing is a pedagogical experience in the form of a collaborative conversation rather than classroom discourse directly transferred to a one-to-one context. It is a struggle, but I am at my best as a teacher when I remember that I am also a tutor. ✨

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Letter from the President

Beth Burmester, Georgia State University

In 1985, I was a college freshman. The film *Back to the Future* came out. In the film, Marty McFly (played by Michael J. Fox), a high school senior, travels back in time to 1955, to his parents' senior year, in the same town he's known all his life. However, seeing it from the historic point of view, and how it was during their high school years thirty years ago, gives him new insight into understanding both his place and his parents. He's from the future, stuck in the past, and thinking about his own future, which depends on his success, and that of his parents, in the past. In the end, both intentionally and unexpectedly, he makes his parents' lives better, thus having an unanticipated positive benefit, from his participation in the past, on his own and his family's present and future. Significantly, Marty serves as a peer tutor to his father, guiding him to become more confident to act and think for himself. Most notably by the film's end, we see the tangle results of Marty's peer tutoring: George grows up to be a published writer of science fiction novels.



Beth Burmester

Allow me to argue that it is not mere coincidence that the occasion of the film and the decade of the 1980s saw a rise in writing center publications, specifically on texts about peer tutoring. As Harvey Kail notes in the Fall 2008 special issue of *The Writing Center Journal* dedicated to Kenneth Bruffee and the Brooklyn Project, "Bruffee publishes in the mid-1980s a series of essays that famously theorize peer tutoring as a paradigm of social constructionist pedagogy" (3). Moreover, Kail's assertion about the essays is proved by the example of Marty and George from 1985's *Back to the Future*: "Together and separately, they make a compelling argument for the value of organizing students to take each other seriously as writers and readers" (3).

At the 25th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in October 2007, Kenneth Bruffee gave the keynote address, speaking of the gains that tutors receive, as individuals and students, by tutoring others. The biggest of these benefits is the experience of teamwork and collaboration, which teach tutors and student writers the value of human interdependence. Or, as Bruffee stated in his speech, "being a writing peer tutor is related to all kinds of productive relationships among human beings. Your tutees learn from you, you

learn from your tutees, you learn from the writing peer tutors you work with, and they learn from you" (5). Furthermore, when surveyed for the Peer Tutor Alumni Research Project (developed by Harvey Kail, Paula Gillespie, and Brad Hughes), students who were tutors in college "five, ten, twenty years ago, say decisively that what you gain as a writing peer tutor prepares you to enter the working world successfully no matter what occupation or profession you undertake." And this leads us both to Bruffee's conclusion, and back to the film: "thoughtful young people like yourselves who are looking ahead to your future have a lot to get out of being writing peer tutors. You can learn things that serve you personally and professionally and that give you a background that will help you serve your families, your hometowns, your nation, and sometime maybe, our world" (9). Taking all of these benefits and lessons into account, SWCA saw this year as the ideal one to return our focus back to our tutors' voices and experiences, and to look ahead to how their voices create our futures.

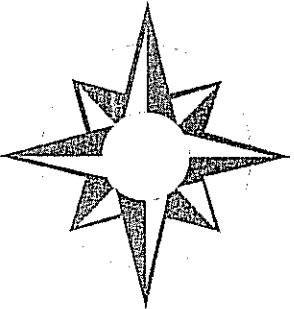
With that in mind, instead of hosting a single conference this year, we will be sponsoring mini-conferences, state-by-state. The theme connecting all of them together is "Back to the Future, Back to the Tutor." Each mini-conference, taking place during weekends in February, will highlight the work and research of tutors. We believe this format will promote more local participation and networking, as well as reduced travel costs, in light of our current economic environment. We also hope our local emphasis will boost the mini-regionals in the SWCA, and reach out to new members. We look forward to learning more about what our tutors are thinking and doing and talking about. ✨

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Southern Discourse

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SWCA Mission Statement

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 centers and others interested in writing centers from public and private secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities, and to individuals and institutions from beyond the Southeastern region. Adopted by the SWCA Executive Board 31 May 2003.