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## Book Review: Tutoring Writing

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*Tutoring Writing* edited by Muriel Harris (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1982), 294 pages.

Reviewed by Thomas Nash, Auburn University

Every discipline, in order to demonstrate a sense of academic community and purpose, must have its charter, its compact, its *manifesto*. For writing center directors, this is such a document. Those who have waited patiently for the publication of *Tutoring Writing* will be pleased by the useful mixture of pedagogy and practicality contained in the pages of this anthology. But even more pleasing is the fact that *Tutoring Writing* articulates the major assumptions and methods that lie behind the popularity of the tutorial technique. Muriel Harris' text is destined to become the cornerstone of what we may now call an intellectual discipline, the writing laboratory approach to teaching composition.

In the past, one of the problems faced by administrators and teachers who wanted to create or improve a laboratory has been the inaccessibility of information. Articles on the laboratory approach have been poorly received by the editors of well-established journals; thus, useful essays have been widely scattered, often finding a home in local or regional newsletters. In a practical sense, the personal letter has been the main source of exchange among writing center practitioners. As a result, many labs suffer an identity crisis, which Harris describes in her preface: "Often born in haste, with few guidelines and little history to go on, labs must define their roles as they grow, an experience as bewildering as constructing a violin while playing it." That frustration is now past. Finally there is a document—and a surprisingly well-conceived one—that provides a framework for progress in the laboratory discipline. It is premature to say that *Tutoring Writing* will have the same impact as Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, but the comparison is a natural one. Harris' anthology contains most of the important articles about labs that have been published or circulated during the past several years. Although *Tutoring Writing* may be highly useful for people developing new laboratory programs, the book probably will have the most value for directors of established centers, because the essays underline the critical issues of the profession and



suggest new directions for research in the field.

*Tutoring Writing* is a collection of 29 articles, written by experienced laboratory directors, with essays grouped into six chapters. A lengthy appendix (35 pages) presents referral and report forms from many college and university writing centers. The bibliography of further sources (6 pages) should be beneficial to researchers.

The first chapter, "The One-on-One Process," lays down the foundations and philosophies of tutorial education. Aviva Freeman's "A Theoretic Context for the Writing Lab" provides a model of the writing process. This initial essay, which borrows heavily from discourse theory, is general—an introduction to the sequencing of skills in any writing task. Rudolph Almasy's "The Nature of Writing-Laboratory Instruction for the Developing Student" focuses specifically on the unique characteristics of writing laboratories and how those characteristics encourage proficiency in the composing process. Other essays by Anita Brostoff, Thom Hawkins, and John Roderick articulate the intricate relationships between tutors and students with a special emphasis on the assumptions that underlie such relationships. Chapter One is clearly the most theoretical section in *Tutoring Writing*.

Chapter Two, "Diagnosing Writing Problems," is a survey of formal and informal methods of diagnosis. Central to this chapter is a Muriel Harris-Vincent Puma debate, originally conducted in issues of *College English*, on the value of prewriting questionnaires and interviews as cues to detecting writing anxiety and the causes of error. Also found here is Stephen North's demonstration of the uses of a Composing Profile as a diagnostic tool. The chapter concludes with Doug Hunt's analysis of formal and informal diagnostic methods and with Helen Mills' observations on diagnosing learning disabilities and handicaps in students.

Chapter Three, "Tutor Training," is a lengthy chapter with thoughtful articles by Judith Fishman, Phyllis Sherwood, Lil Brannon, Marvin P. Garrett, Deborah Arfken, and Susan Glassman. Unfortunately, "Tutor Training" is the single chapter in the book that fails to fulfill its promise—not because the essays lack intelligence and direction, but because an essential article is notably absent from the collection. In the selections on tutor-training, most of the authors mention prominently Kenneth Bruffee's "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth through Peer-Group Tutoring," originally published in *Liberal Education*. Of course, there must be good reasons for this exclusion, including possible difficulties over copyright. However, the constant references to Bruffee's principles, here and in other essays in the anthology, raise a natural curiosity about the Brooklyn Plan, a

curiosity that is unrelieved by the careful explanations of the adaptation of the Bruffee method at other universities.

Chapter Four, "Choosing Multi-Media and Self-Instruction," is a lively group of writings exploring the new frontiers of audio-visual lab instruction and computer-assisted lab instruction. Even those who now view technology with disdain will find this section enlightening. In the first essay, Mary Epes, Caroline Kilpatrick, and Michael Southwell describe the evolution and applications of the now-famous COMP-LAB program of York College (CUNY). In a convincing manner, the authors defend audio-visual methods, especially in overcrowded and underfunded laboratories, against the serious objections of their critics. Marc Nigliazzo follows with a survey of hardware and software available for supplemental tutoring labs, providing a veritable Christmas list of instructional programs for the writing center director. Don Norton and Kristine Hansen complete the chapter with a description of the CAI system at Brigham Young University, offering in addition a comprehensive survey of other CAI systems operating in this country. Norton and Hansen also contribute a valuable bibliography of sources, many of them published in journals not often trafficked by humanists, and therefore probably unknown to most center personnel.

The fifth chapter, "Structuring the Writing Lab," outlines options for staffing, organizing, and funding a new writing center. Andrea Lunsford's "Preparing for a Writing Workshop: Some Crucial Considerations" is a checklist of necessary procedures preliminary to opening the doors of a tutorial center. Lunsford's model of a university laboratory includes suggestions about placement, diagnosis, instructional goals, funding, and teaching materials. The subsequent article, Tom Flynn's "Beginning a Skills-Development Center in a Small School," volunteers a necessarily-different model for a small college or branch-campus laboratory. In "The Writing Lab and the Composition Class: A Fruitful Collaboration," Betty Bamberg examines the successful coordination of supplemental writing laboratories and the composition classroom. Her examples come from a number of labs in the California State System of Higher Education, as well as from some of the better-known writing centers across the country. Bamberg's essay finally focuses on high school laboratories in Huntington Beach, California, providing a nice introduction to the two essays that conclude the chapter. Sharon Sorenson's "The High-School Writing Lab: Its Feasibility and Function" is written from the perspective of a high school laboratory director, and its companion piece, "The Secondary-Level Writing Laboratory: a Report from the Field," is written from the perspective of two university professors, James Collins and Charles

Moran, who observe and evaluate a high school tutorial program in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The final chapter, "Maintaining and Expanding the Writing Lab," is a *potpourri* of information on public relations, record-keeping, evaluation, and laboratory research. In this section, Patricia Teel Bates discusses "The Public-Relations Circle"; Jon Jonz and Jeanette Harris talk about effective methods of record-keeping in a writing center; Janice Neuleib gives helpful advice on procedures for "Evaluating a Writing Lab"; Harvey Kail and Kay Allen describe successful methods of research in a college lab; and George Hayhoe indicates new directions for laboratory efforts in "Beyond the Basics: Expanded Uses of Writing Labs."

In a sense, *Tutoring Writing* reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of the remarkable diversity of programs that we call writing labs or writing centers. In the pages of this book, readers will find advice on ESL instruction, spelling programs, sentence-combining, LSAT cram sessions, community service projects, dyslexia diagnosis, prewriting heuristics, and furniture arrangement. Of course, with such a Gladstone-bag of topics, readers cannot expect every article to address their particular needs. Harris has attempted, in selecting materials for each chapter, to include essays designed to comfort all the special-interest groups of this profession. Although this eclectic approach works remarkably well, a few of the essays seem short-sighted, concerned only with the problems and goals of a limited audience. Nevertheless, a great majority of the contributions offer more than a description of a single, isolated writing center; most of the authors are evidently aware of the complex nature of services that labs offer.

*Tutoring Writing*, despite its minor flaws, is a long-sought collection of essays, engagingly written, serving the many needs of its readers. First, it is a sourcebook for those who would create or upgrade a writing laboratory. Second, it is a map that charts the directions we have been heading and the paths for future study. Finally, it is a *manifesto*, a tangible document that contains the tempered proofs of the emergence of an academic community, peopled by scholars and teachers who, despite their diversity, share a growing sense of identity and purpose.