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In his preface to *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*, the editor, Gary A. Olson, discusses the writing center's move from "chaotic adolescence" to adulthood (p.vii), a move evidenced by the field's growing urge to reflect on what happens in writing centers, since one sure sign of adulthood is a willingness to examine and try to understand the self. The essays in the three sections of this book—Writing Center Theory, Writing Center Administration, and Special Concerns—are indeed various self-reflective efforts on the part of writing center directors and tutors. The essays in the first section show the connections between theories of the composing process, individualized writing instruction, peer tutoring, and collaborative learning. Those in the second section, by describing the experiences of adolescent writing centers, present object lessons for the writing centers that are still just a gleam in someone's eye. The final section's essays combine theoretical, administrative, and methodological concerns to varying degrees in discussions that range from faculty and student attitudes toward writing centers to the needs of foreign students and business writers.

As I read this book, I discovered two purposes in it, one explicit, the other so subtle that it might be missed. (In fact, this second purpose could very well be my own projection of what I think a book like this *ought* to do.) The book's explicit purpose is to discuss theory and administration as they pertain to writing centers, making it a useful resource for anyone who is just getting involved in a writing center—whether establishing one or beginning to tutor—and who has basic qestions such as where the money comes from, how tutors are trained, what kind of paperwork is involved, and how one addresses the varying needs of student writers.

The second purpose, the one I may be projecting, is to increase our awareness of what we do when we tutor writers; that is, to make us critical examiners of the tutoring process each time we engage in it, to move us to a level of meta-awareness. It may be that I spotted this second purpose because the first one didn't meet my needs. Anyone who has already spent several years working in a writing center and thinking about the composing process, as I have, will have already considered most of the issues presented in this book and will find few insights here. Instead, experienced writing center personnel may find suggestions and ideas with which to argue. I found most of my arguments in the third section.

One argument is with Thomas Nash, who presents, in "Derrida's 'Play' and Prewriting for the Laboratory," various exercises to help students learn invention strategies —but the exercises struck me as being mechanistic and not at all like real writing. As I was reading this essay, an image came to my mind of a dancer doing warmup exercises at the *barre*:the exercises may resemble dances, but they aren't dance. They only help the dancer keep herself prepared, in shape, for doing dance. One might argue that writing exercises serve the same purpose, keeping the writer in shape for doing writing, but I disagree. Writing is not a set of steps that can be combined in various ways to build a performance; it is a search for meaning and a search for the best way to present that meaning to others. Exercises, even mechanistic ones, may be fun, but they rarely give students the experience of searching for meaning and form.

I also wanted to argue with Alexander Friedlander who, in "Meeting the Needs of Foreign Students in the Writing Center," suggests using materials (such as controlled composition) that English as a second language (ESL) instructors are beginning to abandon. He points out that ESL students present special cases to the writing center tutor because of their particular language problems, and specially designed materials will help these students overcome their difficulties with the language. But recent research in second language acquisition suggests that the best way to help ESL students acquire English is *not* to treat them differently; rather, we should engage them in discussions about the meaning of their texts. ESL students acquire the language best through meaningful language use, which cannot occur when they're doing repetitive exercises.

The repeated references to exercises and other materials to be used in the writing center disturbed me throughout this book. First of all, many researchers question whether what is learned from such exercises

transfers to actual writing.As long as such questions exist, and as long as we view composing as a recursive rather than linear process that involves a search for meaning, then the only materials a writing center needs are the students' own texts.

Second of all, I found it ironic that a book which begins with a glorious article on writing centers as interpretive communities where students can learn to construct knowledge through conversation, should end with articles describing exercises that improve language skills. Perhaps a book that aims to be both practical and theoretical would have trouble avoiding such ironies; perhaps by trying to include something for everyone the editor set the stage for unavoidable contradictions. (Another sign of having reached adulthood is a willingness to accept life's contradictions.) It takes a reflective reader—someone willing to stand back momentarily and consider the ideas from a broader view—to resolve the contradictions for him or herself. This is where the meta-awareness comes in, which I'll return to later, after I've discussed more of the book.

The second section, on administration, contains advice for establishing a writing center, covering such practical matters as convincing one's school that a writing center is feasible, locating sources of funds, hiring and training tutors, and designing efficient forms. People who have worked extensively in writing centers would acknowledge the advice in this section as wise and helpful. They would also spot two problems that are only just barely touched upon here : lack of respect for tutors among faculty, and demand for justification of a writing center's expense.

The essays by Loretta Cobb & Elaine Kilgore Elledge ('' Undergraduate Staffing in the Writing Center'') and Linda Bannister-Wills (''Developing a Peer Tutor Program'') discuss tutor training. Cobb & Elledge write that training is crucial—tutors should understand what they're doing and who they're dealing with. Bannister-Wills also emphasizes the importance of training, suggesting a developmental model: Instead of simply giving tutors an initial orientation and then leaving them on their own, writing center directors should provide ''a training program that is an integral part of day-to-day center operation'' (p.137). This training program could include a practicum, assigned readings, and periodic staff meetings, all of which would give the tutors the opportunity to discuss problems and questions they've discovered while tutoring and to learn from shared experiences.

These three writers also note in passing that tutors have an important function that frequently goes unrecognized. In another essay in this sec-

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tion, "The Bottom Line: Financial Responsibility," Peggy Jolly describes traditional attitudes that undervalue the tutor's role: "Tutorial work is seen as part-time or peripheral to the 'real' teaching that goes on in the [English] department" (p.105). This attitude exists at most schools and can be traced to faculty attitudes toward graduate assistants in general and toward writing instruction in particular. Few faculty members treat graduate assistants as colleagues, and when graduate assistants are teaching or tutoring writing—menial tasks that full-time faculty are rarely required to do—this only reinforces the hierarchy that exists in many English departments. (Undergraduate tutors find themselves in a worse situation because they haven't reached even the lowest rung on the ladder—they're still on the ground—and the students who use the writing center are below them!) This hierarchy undoubtedly influences whether tutors view themselves as members of the teaching community and whether they take their jobs seriously.

Rodney Simard discusses tutors' attitudes in "Assessing a New Professional Role: The Writing Center Tutor," in the third section of the book, and he raises the issue of how to get the tutors to see what they do as more than just a way to earn money—to realize that they can effect "a change in the course of a student's academic career and process of self-discovery" (p.204). And Olson, in "The Problem of Attitudes in Writing Center Relationships," also in the third section, describes the attitudes of faculty and students toward the writing center. Part of a writing center's success depends on everyone—faculty, administrators, tutors, and students—taking the writing center seriously. This means understanding the role of individualized instruction in writing improvement as well as appreciating the importance of those who teach writing.

The problem of justification is also closely linked with attitudes toward writing instruction and writing centers. Jolly's point about traditional attitudes toward tutoring is part of her explanation of why writing centers must be able to justify their worth "to the satisfaction of the administrator in charge of departmental budgets" (p.105). In her article, Jolly writes that funding is critical for writing center success, that there are various local and national funding sources, and that any prospective source will want to see some kind of proof that they're getting sufficient return on their investment. (The banking model of education becomes the business model of writing center administration: our investors want their quarterly dividends.) Cobb & Elledge, Olson, and C. Michael Smith also discuss justifying the writing center's existence and expense in the second section of this book. Other depart-

ments at schools jealously eye the money that goes to the labor-intensive writing centers, and they, along with the administration, want proof that the money is being well spent. Proof such as higher scores on writing achievement tests and fewer errors in student papers.

But something Jolly mentioned in passing startled me: She wrote that as writing centers become more successful, they become more expensive. Of course. Success means more clients; more clients require more tutor hours, more administrative work—more money. We can see that writing centers don't really fit the business model, which claims that successful businesses are efficient and efficient businesses reduce costs.

Of course, in schools where competition for funding is fierce (as well as in the real world), justification becomes a political issue —something which the writers in this book, with one exception, have ignored. A few of them warn that writing center directors will have to justify their expenses, prove that what they're doing works—and, except for Smith, they all suggest ways to do this (pre- and post-testing, statistics on use of the writing center, even student grade point averages). Smith, on the other hand, in "Efficiency and Insecurity: A Case Study in Form Design and Records Management," quotes from Jon Jonz and Jeanette Harris's article in *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs:* " Keeping elaborate records and generating mountains of impenetrable statistics to prove the merit of a writing center is self-defensive records keeping; it leads to claims that cannot be substantiated and to arguments that should never be joined" (pp.120-121). The insecurity we feel when we start a new endeaver engenders self-defensive record-keeping to help us justify what we're doing.

It would be cavalier of me to urge writing center directors to somehow gracefully ignore any questions from administrators about our success rates. Ignoring administrators' demands can be a political, and thus financial, mistake. But neither should we simply accept these demands without trying to discover their source. We need to study how the issue of justification is connected with the issue of writing instruction. As long as schools institute "computer-scored, multiple-choice error recognition tests" after the first semester of English composition (like the University of Central Arkansas, as reported by Bannister-Wills, n.12, p.143), writing centers will be asked to justify their operations. Until our colleagues understand what constitutes improvement in writing and thus success in writing instruction, we will be faced with irrelevant and unhelpful questions about statistics.

Helping our colleagues gain a better understanding of writing instruction requires that we understand it better ourselves, that we con-

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tinually move to the level of meta-awareness that allows us to examine what we're doing. Meta-awareness of various sorts is what most of the essays in the first section are concerned with.

Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch, in "A Philosophical Perspective on Writing Centers and the Teaching of Writing," take their cue from Ann Berthoff and urge that teachers become philosophers: ". . .instruction cannot be purposeful and directed unless it proceeds from sound conceptual premises that teachers understand, remain conscious of, and continually modify in light of their own experiences with students" (p.36). The sound conceptual premises are to be found in discussions of theory and research like the essays in the first section of this book. If we take these essays as a starting point, we can see that writing teachers and tutors must consider cognitive development and the nature of knowledge in addition to composing process research and discourse theory. As our understanding in these areas grows, we can broaden the writing center's goals beyond improving writing abilities. That, however, is the place to begin, and several of these essays address that goal directly.

Brannon and Knoblauch suggest that one way to help student writers improve is for teachers and tutors to replace analytical models of discourse that focus on form with organic models that focus on meaning. By responding to meaning—by telling student writers the doubts and questions we have as readers of their texts—we help them understand the results of the choices they've made. Then, as experienced writers, we can help them explore other choices to find the most effective ones.

Another suggestion for helping student writers improve comes from Karen Spear, in "Promoting Cognitive Development in the Writing Center." She suggests, using Piaget's model, that basic writers haven't reached a level of abstract thinking; they are unable to assume "a metaperspective that involves awareness not just of thought contents but of thought processes" (p.63), and thus they have problems with complex writing tasks. For Spear, then, writing centers become a place where a student's cognitive development is pushed forward, a push that admittedly requires change on the part of the student: changed attitudes towards authority and changed "assumptions about the nature of knowledge and values" (p.69). The goals of the writing center have thus broadened to include not just improvement in writing, but also changes in student attitudes as well as a meta-awareness that Spear considers to be a prerequisite for writing improvement.

In "The Writing Center and the Paradoxes of Written-Down

Speech,'' Patrick Hartwell also discusses meta-awareness, but of a different sort. He first presents a slightly modified version of Flower's writer-based prose. Both theories explain student texts that are telegraphic and thus difficult to understand, but whereas Flower's writer-based prose results from insufficient reader awareness, Hartwell's written-down speech results from not distinguishing between the different situational requirements of talking and writing. For Hartwell, the way to move students beyond written-down speech is to make them aware of what they are doing and why. He suggests that, through tutoring, student writers can gain metalinguistic awareness (the ability to monitor their own language use, p.59) and use that awareness to help themselves improve as writers. (Mary K. Croft, in her essay in the third section on dealing with the reluctant student, also discusses ways to make students aware of their attitudes towards writing.)

I have to admit, though, that I thought Hartwell's ideas about written-down speech were a red herring. The more exciting part of his essay, the part that I believe Thom Hawkins was referring to in the book's introduction when he wrote that Hartwell's conclusions '' seem a tantalizing invitation to further speculation'' (p.xiii), is his point about meta-awareness. For Hartwell, writing centers can help inexperienced writers become aware of what they do when they write and why. He asks students three questions: Why do people write? What do people do when they write? and How do people learn to write? The answers he gets from these students shows that part of the job of a writing teacher, and also of a writing center tutor, is to help students revise their models of writing. The revision becomes possible only when the students are aware that they have models—only when they have reached a level of meta-awareness. Tilly Warnock and John Warnock, in "Liberatory Writing Centers: Restoring Authority to Writers," also discuss "revising the student," by which they mean helping students become critically conscious of their own writing, a consciousness that expands to include the writing class and eventually the world.

These articles present ever-widening views of what a writing center can and should do, all involving increased awareness on the part of students or tutors or both. Ken Bruffee's article, "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind,' " seems to go the furthest. Bruffee argues that the source of thought and knowledge is collaboration through talk. Learning is a social activity. Thus people naturally engage in collaboration every time they use conversation with peers to help them understand the world. Writing centers provide a place where students can collaborate (converse) with peers; what's more, writing

centers can become interpretive communities for students, paralleling the professional interpretive communities that exist in the real world.

What we do in writing centers suddenly takes on tremendous importance as we discover the larger realms in which our work affects students. This discovery is perhaps the ultimate sign of our having reached adulthood: the realization of how seemingly small events effect changes on unexpected levels. Our talk with students helps them learn how to talk with other students, and all this talk is helping them construct knowledge for themselves.

There's no doubt in my mind that writing centers have reached adulthood. Writing center personnel have begun the self-study that signals an adult's analytical curiosity and ability to stand back and examine what he is doing. We are also, I hope, able to accept the new roles that arise as our abilities develop. It's difficult to know what stage awaits us after adolescence and adulthood, but we can only hope that it isn't doddering old age.

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