A Defense of Dualism: The Writing Center and the Classroom

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2832-9414.1275

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People who work in writing centers often fall prey to professional insecurity. We feel misunderstood and unappreciated in our own departments (if we even have a department) and in the larger academy. Our marginal status makes us feel exploited by those with more institutional power and vulnerable in times of retrenchment. Our insecurity has led, as Thomas Hemmeter observes, to ongoing attempts at self-definition. Since no one else recognizes or understands us, we feel the need to continually announce and invent ourselves. And we do so, says Hemmeter, through "a discourse articulated in dualities," the fundamental one being a "contrast of writing center instruction to classroom instruction" (37). To give ourselves a distinctive identity, we oppose ourselves to something with which everyone is familiar: the classroom.

Hemmeter is critical of these efforts, arguing that our self-definition is self-defeating. His way out of the logical trap writing center apologists find themselves in is to eliminate that pesky "self." Perhaps the writing center is not a thing at all, but rather an "idea . . . a linguistic phenomenon . . . a text still in the process of composition" (44). But this is sheer evasion. Whatever its phenomenology, the place where I work is a place. Until the writing center gives up its locational status altogether in favor of virtual reality (a not unimaginable prospect, but one Hemmeter doesn't imagine), the work that writing center people do, like the work that classroom teachers do, will take place somewhere, and denying or ignoring the where-ness of that work won't help us much--either in the quest for self-awareness or in the attempt to improve our services.
For I want to argue that the writing center is a place, and a place with political as well as metaphorical status. Hemmeter is helpful in unpacking the metaphors by which writing centers have defined themselves, but he is curiously silent about what Harvey Kail and John Trimbur have called "the politics of peer tutoring." If the writing center has a raison d'etre, it must be politically grounded, for in the center, as in the academy at large, there is no non-political reality.

Kail and Trimbur observe that peer tutoring has been institutionalized within the academy, claiming that "collaborative learning and peer tutoring are now recognized as innovative contributions not only to the writing abilities but more broadly to the liberal education of undergraduates" (5). For them, the question "is no longer why such programs are necessary, but how tutoring can best contribute to the development of writing abilities and the intellectual life of undergraduates" (5). Central to such inquiry is the issue of where and under what conditions tutoring should take place. According to Kail and Trimbur, the exploration of that issue has profound political implications. They distinguish between two general approaches to peer tutoring: the curriculum-based model and the writing center model. In the former, "peer tutors are, as it were, written into the plan of instruction. They're part of the course" (6). In the writing center model, on the other hand, tutoring takes place outside the classroom, in a writing center.

Kail and Trimbur favor what they call the writing center approach to tutoring because they believe that by locating itself "at a remove from the normal delivery system of curriculum and instruction, in the semi-autonomous space of writing centers," (9) such tutoring, which is based on the principle of collaborative learning, "precipitates a crisis of authority" in the traditional hierarchical approach to teaching and learning. Curriculum-based approaches, on the other hand, reinforce that hierarchy by identifying the tutor with the teacher and classroom—the traditional seat of knowledge and authority in academe. Such programs "suppress the crisis of authority precipitated when students work together, domesticate it, and channel the social forces released by collaboration into the established structures of teaching and learning," while tutoring based on the writing center model "provides students with a form of social organization to negotiate the crisis successfully and reenter the official structures of authority as active agents rather than as passive objects of transmission" (11-12).

For Kail and Trimbur, authority in the academy is tied to hierarchy. Teachers have authority and power over students because teachers are higher on the academic ladder; they have accomplished more and presumably know more. This authority teachers have is intrinsically neither good nor bad, but one danger posed by teachers' authority is that it can breed student passivity. To the extent that students see themselves as acted upon rather than as agents of their own destiny, as subject to the authority of others rather than subjects
of their own academic journey, they do not develop the independence and initiative necessary for intellectual growth. That independence and initiative (or power) is facilitated, say Kail and Trimbur, by forms of social organization that enable students to locate themselves within "the official structures of authority," not as "passive objects of transmission" but rather as "active agents."

Writing centers, as "semi-autonomous" spaces, can serve as one of those forms of social organization through which students learn to negotiate issues of authority and learn to take more responsibility for their own learning. Such an enterprise is especially important for those students who previously have not been successful at working within the educational hierarchy. Such students may have suffered at the hands of the system. Often their lack of success results in an apathy born of the conviction that school is someplace where they don't fit. If these students are going to succeed, they need to develop confidence, initiative, and persistence. While the classroom is a place where those qualities can be developed, it is also ultimately the arena where they must be displayed and where they will be evaluated. The writing center affords students the vantage point to stand apart from that arena, to get out of the game for a time, to develop the necessary critical distance before reentering as active, intentional participants.

To be sure, most composition teachers are interested in developing purposefulness and intentionality in students, and many take concrete steps to foster such traits. For example, Dana Heller describes a "paragraph of intention" assignment which offers "the student's own account of what he or she has tried to do" in a draft. In it, the student "moves from a private engagement with the text to a public engagement with the text. The switch is aimed at encouraging awareness of intention along with a sense of authority in reference to both the internal and external life of the work" (212). But what about the student whose statement of intention boils down to, "I want to fulfill the assignment," or "I hope I'll get a good grade"? What can the person who created the assignment and who will assign a grade on it say to such a writer?

The teacher's dilemma in such instances is similar to that faced by parents interested in helping their children learn independence and initiative. As a parent, I recognize certain responsibilities to set boundaries, communicate expectations, and model mature decision making. I have some vision of the kind of person I hope my children will become, but I don't envision either passive automatons or duplicates of myself. Yet my parental power— conferred by legal, economic, and social sanctions—constantly threatens to stifle some of the very traits I want my children to develop. Abdication of that power is probably not possible, short of abandoning my children, nor is it desirable. I don't think it is egotism or power mongering to assert that my children need parental influence. But they need another kind of influence
as well, one that I cannot provide. As a parent, I depend on other people and other institutions to help my children develop certain qualities, a development over which my influence is limited. Some of those limitations are physical and emotional, but others are social and political. The very fact that I'm their dad imposes constraints on our relationship and on their development, constraints that may sometimes need to be transcended by someone outside the family.

Who those someones are and what my children need from them varies. Sometimes my children need to hear what I have already told them, but they need to hear it from someone else, someone with no overt authority over them or no obvious vested interest in their development. Sometimes they need to hear alternatives to the old man's point of view. Often they need to be listened to and taken seriously by someone who doesn't "have to."

A parent's relationship with those someones is complex indeed. Even while recognizing the important developmental role other individuals or institutions play in my children's lives, I may feel threatened by the possibility that my parental authority is being challenged or undermined, or that my values are not being reinforced. Clearly, there are some people I don't want my kids hanging around with at all, and there may be others I'm simply not sure about because I don't know enough about them and because I know I won't be there to monitor my children's interactions with them.

One parental response to this kind of uncertainty is to look for extensions of parental authority—surrogate parents. Institutions—the church, the school, the day care facility—as well as individuals, are evaluated according to the extent to which they will reinforce parental values and dictates and are invested with an authority that flows from and feeds back into the parents' authority. The problem with this approach is that it can produce conformity, narrowness, and passivity. Unexposed to alternate points of view and unchallenged in their tacit acceptance of received wisdom, children do not develop the capacity for critical thought. Additionally, to the extent they sense that the other key players in their lives serve mainly as extensions of their parents, children will not experience the liberating feeling that others are interested in them—not out of a sense of duty or obligation—but simply for their own sake.

This dilemma of parenting I have been describing is one manifestation of the larger dilemma of education: how to provide both challenge and support, how to acknowledge values while promoting freedom and independence. Like the parent-child relationship, the teacher-student relationship is limited, constrained by political realities. Just as children need access to responsible nonfamily members, so too do students need access to responsible colleagues who have no direct relationship with an instructor or a course.

In the classroom, the most common alternative to the teacher as a point of access for students is the teaching assistant (TA). TAs serve a variety of
functions, but fundamentally they exist to serve instructors. The TA, then, is part of what Kail and Trimbur call a curriculum-based approach. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it “operates through official channels” (6), i.e., the curriculum. The TA serves the curriculum by serving the instructor; only indirectly does the TA serve the student. This is well and good. Teachers can be more effective if they are well-supported, and more effective teachers will make for better-served students. But students also deserve direct support that is unmediated by the instructor, and that support can be better provided by a tutor than by a TA—by someone, in other words, who is not affiliated with the course. By standing apart from the classroom, tutors provide a means of interrogating academic hierarchy. They provide an audience whose relationship to a student’s writing is not governed by the same kind of “oughtness” as is the instructor’s. They constitute a different kind of authority, one which is less “given” and more negotiated. As such, they can facilitate the development of self-awareness and independence.

Where TAs primarily serve faculty, tutors primarily serve students. The role of tutors and the centers in which they work has been forcefully articulated by Steve North: “In short, we are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum” (440). The tutor, says North, “is a holist devoted to participant-observer methodology” who practices “a pedagogy of direct intervention” (438-439). In response to the teacher’s question, “How can I make use of the writing center?” North says, “[T]eachers, as teachers, do not need and cannot use, a writing center; only writers need it, only writers can use it” (440).

Tutors exist to serve students and they do so best when they are removed from the classroom—not only physically, but institutionally. Just as kids need to get out of the house and develop relationships “untainted” by family influence, so students need to get out of the classroom and meet fellow travelers who can support and empower them—without feeling like that relationship is going to affect their grade in the course, or that it is motivated primarily by a sense of institutional “oughtness.” For in the final analysis, everything that happens in the classroom is influenced by the prospect of evaluation; and to the extent that TAs are identified with the instructor and with the course, their role and their image are imbricated in that prospect.

As a teacher, I am aware of certain limitations in my relationships with students. I think it’s important that my students see me as a fellow traveler, as someone who is still on the road to understanding and enlightenment. But despite my best efforts to step out from behind the lectern, I suspect that my students usually see me as someone fundamentally different from them, and I cannot help wishing that they would find someone with whom they could more closely identify. It’s a problem of distance and authority we’re up against.
This problem is not unique to teaching. Other professionals also struggle to achieve the optimal relationship with the people they serve, which means confronting this business of distance. Modern Christendom, to take a far-reaching example, represents an interesting range of approaches to this issue. Catholicism, for instance, emphasizes the priest's set-apart status: he is celibate; he wears a collar; he listens on the other side of the confessional screen. In short, he's not like you and me. Some Protestant denominations, on the other hand, make the minister more of a fellow pilgrim: she has a family, wears a dress to church, and meets you for lunch at a restaurant. And in certain groups—e.g., Quakers, Mennonites, Plymouth Brethren—there is no professional clergy at all; individuals minister to each other.

At its best, the academy presents a similar range of roles for the teacher. Sometimes she stands apart, behind the lectern. By virtue of her training, knowledge, and experience, she is different from her students. But sometimes the teacher sits with his students around a conference table. By virtue of his interests, his openness, and his willingness to listen, he is much like them. And sometimes the teacher withdraws completely for a time. Students work together in groups, drawing on and assisting and challenging each other—without any overt teacherly presence at all.

Writing center tutors help enlarge and enrich this range of options for teachers and students. Tutors can be present as fellow pilgrims in a way that faculty cannot. To be sure, a tutor can be and often is perceived as an authority figure. As Karen Spear, drawing on the work of William Perry notes, dualistic thinkers are especially prone to fusing notions of truth and authority; hence, tutors need to employ nondirective strategies that will help resist some writers' authority needs (71). What Reigstad and McAndrew call "student-centered" or "collaborative" conferences will, from the political perspective I am presenting here, be preferred over "teacher-centered" ones (28-33). The advantage tutors have over teachers in this enterprise is that even if students try to invest tutors with authority, tutors can resist that role, while teachers, as long as they give grades, have a harder time shedding their image as authority figures.

Let me be clear about two things. First, there is nothing wrong with authority figures. Authority, like power, is inherently neither good nor bad. But authority, power, and hierarchy do define and constrain relationships. What I am arguing here is that tutors and writing centers provide an alternative to the authority of teachers and classrooms, and that that alternative is important as a catalyst to students' developing sense of independence and their own authority. Second, it must be emphasized that writing centers do not constitute an authoritative or evaluative vacuum. There is no nonpolitical reality. Writing centers occupy institutional space. Tutors exercise authority and engage in evaluation. Once again, though, I am arguing that the nature of that authority and evaluation is different.
One practical manifestation of that difference emerges in students' responses to grades on papers. Most writing teachers have known the frustration of returning papers and seeing students flip immediately to the last page, note the grade, and largely ignore the instructor's careful and copious comments; or returning ungraded but carefully annotated drafts with the admonition to revise and being met with the question, "Yes, but what grade would this have received?" Writing center tutors hear that question too, but precisely because they have no grade-giving responsibility, tutors are in a better position to deflect the question ("Well, because assigning grades isn't part of my job, I'm not really familiar with the business of grade giving."), turn it around ("How are you feeling about this paper? What grade would you give yourself?"), or personalize it as a way of prompting further discussion ("I have the same concern about my own writing: I often end up worrying a lot about what grade I'm going to get.")

It might be assumed that the writing center's political distinctiveness is dependent on peer tutors, who would more likely be perceived as fellow travelers than would someone like one of Carol Severino's "lab teachers," who are all graduate students. The University of Iowa's Writing Lab is closer to the British tutorial/independent study model than it is to the peer tutoring/drop-in writing center. Students work with the same teacher twice a week for an entire semester, so the experience is more like a course than is what goes on in the typical drop-in center. But as Severino's experience indicates, what happens in the lab is distinctive for reasons other than a shared student status between consultant and writer. "Working in the lab democratizes both students' and [lab] teachers' ideas of what writers are and do. They realize that writing is not just a unique or elitist talent bestowed on the fortunate few" (14). This democratization occurs absent, not because of, a relationship between "peers." It occurs, in part, because the dynamics of the lab are different from those of the classroom. Severino's lab teachers read, "not to correct and grade, but to get to know the student, her background and culture, her strengths and weaknesses. Teachers respond to their students' writing not so much in the persona of teachers as in the persona of the writers they themselves are; as writers of essays, stories, letters, and poems, they have the same goals as their students" (13).

In my own institution, a recent administrative decision resulted in the partial merging of roles that had hitherto been separate: the TA and the tutor. By creating a single pool of undergraduate teaching assistants (UGTAs) which would staff both the Reading & Writing Center (RWC) and the TA positions in the Humanities Department, the top brass hoped to improve the quality of UGTAs' work and also to streamline operations. They imagined that having one person responsible for hiring, training, supervising and placing all UGTAs—both tutors and classroom TAs—would result in greater consistency and better performance. They further assumed that the
new arrangement would make more efficient use of UGTAs' time. If UGTAs were unengaged with students or paperwork from their courses, they would become available to work with walk-in students in the Center. That assumption was used to justify a 25% cut in the combined budgets of the RWC and Humanities TA support.

The experiment was generally unsuccessful. For one thing, many TAs (like faculty) use office hours to do paper work when no students come in, so the savings afforded by having idle TAs available for walk-in tutoring were minimal. More important, by having to wear two hats—tutor and TA—UGTAs experienced heightened role conflict. Who are they—extensions of the instructor with a responsibility to espouse her/his party line, or employees of the Center with an obligation to its philosophy and practices? Are they advocates of the curriculum and the instructor, or advocates for their fellow students? Furthermore, locating TAs in the Center complicates the institutional status of the space. Is it primarily an extension of the classroom, or is it an alternative to the classroom?

Positing the writing center as an alternative to the classroom is based on convictions more psychological and political than pedagogical. As I have argued, students need people and places in their academic lives that are free from the stigma of grades and from an atmosphere of obligation. While grades may continue to motivate most of a student's academic behavior—including the decision to visit a writing center—being able to talk about and work on assignments with people who have no grade-giving power (or interest) is important in helping students develop intrinsic motivations for their studies.

But if my perspective is mostly psychological and political, many writing center spokespersons tend to see their distinctiveness as primarily pedagogical. Muriel Harris, for one, has long argued for the efficacy of individualized instruction, which she opposes to the “generic” instruction of the classroom:

[M]ost educators think of education in group terms. Students sit in classes, move in groups, pass through the educational system in large numbers. If someone uses the word “student,” there is a generic student in mind. Classroom teachers of writing can talk about “the writing process” as if it applies universally to all writers, about textbooks that work for whole levels of students (e.g., basic writers, traditional freshmen, advanced composition, and so on). Yet, what writing centers are about is the antithesis of generic, mass instruction. We are committed to individualized instruction, to taking the student out of the group and to looking at her as an individual, as a person with all her uniqueness (19).

While the point Harris is trying to make is valid—classrooms and writing centers are different—some of her word choices are unfortunate. Labeling the classroom as the site of “generic, mass instruction” is an
overstatement that does not do justice to the manifest variety of pedagogies and classroom strategies to be found on any college or university campus. Also, as Hemmeter has observed, individualized instruction, with its essentially romantic conception of human nature, is at odds with a now widely accepted social constructionist theory of knowledge and an attendant belief in the efficacy of collaborative learning. Furthermore, emphasizing the differences between classroom and center should not obscure what those two realms have in common nor deny the ways that both realms are institutionally constructed and constrained. After all, both places are removed, physically and psychically, from where students live. Because neither exists outside the academy, both share some the academy's inevitable artificiality.²

But although both the classroom and the center are institutional constructs, they are not equal. Although they share the same mission—to nurture better writing and to develop better writers—they fulfill that mission differently. Those differences can give rise to mistrust, defensiveness, and cross-purposes—especially, as Mark Waldo notes, if the writing classroom and the writing center do not share a common theoretical perspective. But even when they do, some tensions between classroom and center—like the tensions between parents and nonparental alternatives—seem inevitable.

For example, there is the matter of time. Tutors can spend twenty to thirty minutes or more with students, a luxury writing teachers don't have. In our center, the average writing conference is about 35 minutes. While many composition instructors recognize the importance of talk in the improvement of writing and would like to confer individually with their students, the demands of regular half-hour one-to-one conferences simply cannot be accommodated within a normal teaching load.

Writing instructors may also be envious of tutors' freedom from the grading imperative. Being able to discuss a writer's work, without the anticipation of eventually grading that work, makes it much easier for a tutor to let the writer retain control over her own writing. “Student-centered” and “collaborative” conferences are more difficult for teachers to pull off because students know that eventually their “collaborator” is going to give them a grade. Grade-giving, of course, affects not only the teacher-student conference, but classroom dynamics in general. In the dialogic, collaborative, process-oriented classroom, the naked grade on the page can be a rude shock for writers who have hitherto seen the writing enterprise as founded on and fostered by a spirit of mutual inquiry among kindred spirits.

The classroom/center relationship is also threatened by attitudes regarding turf. Academic freedom means I decide what goes on in my class, and protocol dictates that my colleagues don't butt in. It is not uncommon for people who have been members of the same department for years to have little or no idea of what their colleagues' courses and classrooms are actually like. Their students know, of course, but the power of the grade serves to limit
overt challenges to teachers from their own students. That someone with no stake in the course, however, might be sitting in judgment can be a threatening prospect for classroom teachers.

And the fact is that the writing center tutorial is a window into the classroom. Tutors, who see assignments and instructors’ comments on papers and who hear students’ complaints about particular teachers, are in a position to challenge the instructor’s judgment and competence. Of course, we are supposed to refrain from enacting that challenge. In North’s words, “[W]e never play student-advocates in teacher-student relationships ... we never evaluate or second-guess any teacher’s syllabus, assignments, comments, or grades” (441). But North’s unequivocal pledge is undercut by an observation in the paragraph immediately preceding the statement just quoted: “[W]e do a fair amount of trade in people working on ambiguous or poorly designed assignments, and far too much work with writers whose writing has received caustic, hostile, or otherwise unconstructive commentary” (440). North’s adjectives—“ambiguous,” “poorly designed,” “unconstructive”—are hardly nonevaluative, a fact not likely to be lost on classroom composition teachers. Our reassurances to instructors that we won’t second-guess them may not entirely assuage the insecurity engendered by knowing that people outside their classes are getting glimpses (and incomplete and perhaps distorted glimpses at that) into their classrooms.

If tutors sometimes wonder what is going on in the classroom, teachers sometimes wonder what really goes on in a tutorial. Are students who have been to the center doing their own work? Irene Clark has shown that a concern with the ethics of collaboration and peer tutoring has run throughout writing center research/scholarship. Writing teachers are glad to get clean copy and no doubt happy if the writing center can help move papers closer to cleanliness/godliness, but teachers are also concerned that what students turn in reflects their own abilities and efforts.

So there is potential for envy, mistrust, and misunderstanding between residents of the classroom and the center. We can minimize these feelings and maximize the effectiveness of writing centers if we encourage tutors to take advantage of the semi-autonomous space they inhabit in the following ways:

• framing directive or evaluative comments as reflecting the responses of representative readers. Instead of saying “I really like this paragraph,” try “For me, this part of the paper is especially effective.” Rather than “You need to tone down this language,” observe “Some readers may react strongly to your wording here.”

• eliciting statements of authorial purpose. “What are you trying to do in this section?” “What do your readers need to know about this issue?” “What do you want your audience to believe?”
• encouraging autonomy. “Now that we’ve gone through this paragraph pretty thoroughly, why don’t you work on the rest of this page for awhile? I’ll check back with you in ten minutes.”

• deflecting overt requests for evaluation (e.g., “What grade would you give this?). Turn the question around: “What grade would you give yourself?” “How do you think this paper compares to other work you’ve done for this course?”

• playing up the value of other reader’s responses. “You might want to have another tutor look at this and see what she thinks.” “Has anyone else in your class read this?”

• showing an interest in the writer and her ideas. “I feel like I learned something by reading your paper.” “Tell me more about ________.”

In addition to taking advantage of our political distinctiveness in contacts with students, writing center directors need to be forthright in presenting and interpreting the center to classroom teachers in the following ways:

• opening up the center’s windows. Let instructors know what we do and don’t do, and why.

• behaving proactively regarding suspicions about what happens in the center. We must assert with Richard Behm that “collaborative learning as practiced in most writing centers is not plagiarism, that it is not only ethical but also reflective of the way people really write” (9).

• recognizing the potential fluidity of both classroom and center. Why can’t some of what a composition teacher wants to accomplish in class take place in the writing center? If students are working in pairs or small groups, they could do that work in the center with the opportunity to include a tutor in the discussion. Why can’t some of what tutors do with writers take place in the composition classroom? On writing workshop days, tutors could join the instructor in circulating around the room and doing short conferences. Having tutors in the classroom can help defuse the anxiety that some teachers may feel about being judged by tutors, as well as help tutors appreciate the demands and constraints of classroom instruction. For students, seeing tutors outside the center can help destigmatize the center and make it easier to go there with their own writing.

The relationship between the writing center and the classroom is complex. Not everyone who works in writing centers would agree with Steve North that “we are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum,” and even
those who do might wonder where their clients will come from if teachers perceive the center as an independent entity. But unless the writing center provides an alternative to the classroom, unless writers experience something there that is qualitatively different from what they find elsewhere on their journey through the curriculum, then justifying the center’s existence (and budget) seems problematic.

Colleges and universities have rightly rejected the in loco parentis role with which they have, at various times, felt saddled. The academy has insisted on its own independence and freedom as a prerequisite to its mission of fostering independence and freedom in its students. The writing center, as an academic institution, must also remain free to provide students a place to come, not because they have to, but because they experience there the freedom to realize themselves as writers—with their own intentions and purposes, with their own questions and insecurities, with their own strengths and vision.

From a parent’s perspective, sending children off to school will always be at least a little threatening, for one never knows what they will learn there. But the most successful societies have always recognized that developing good citizens and whole persons is a corporate enterprise. As a place within the academic community, the writing center takes up its part in the communal effort to nurture creativity, critical thinking, and self-directedness.

Twenty years ago, Peter Elbow made a disquieting claim—disquieting for those of us who justify our existence and our paychecks by saying that we “teach”: “It is possible to learn something and not be taught. It is possible to be a student and not have a teacher. If the student’s function is to learn and the teacher’s to teach, then the student can function without a teacher, but the teacher cannot function without a student” (ix). Elbow’s reminder is still timely. Whether we’re in the classroom or in the writing center, we should remember that we need students as much, and sometimes more, than they need us. Our task, if we believe in the collaborative nature of the educational enterprise, is to convince our students of what we believe in our hearts: that we all need each other.

Notes

1I use the term “tutor” reluctantly. As Lex Runciman has argued, “tutor,” whether in its British sense of aristocratic privilege or its American sense of remediation, has connotations that are hardly consonant with most current pedagogies. Nevertheless, “tutor” is still a widely-used term for which no replacement has yet been widely adopted. Also, since I make extensive use of Kail and Trimbur and since they use the term “tutor,” I use it here.

2Some observers, such as Geoffrey Chase, have suggested that decentralizing writing centers and locating them closer to where students spend most
of their time (e.g., in residence halls or in departments) will destigmatize the center and will enlarge and enrich the narrowly instrumental view of writing that most students bring to their academic work by helping them see that writing is connected to "the larger community in which they live" (2). Clearly, the center's geographical location can affect its atmosphere, and there are probably ways to lessen the institutional "feel" of the spaces we occupy. Nevertheless, I think we are naive if we assume that overstuffed chairs and a coffee pot in the dorm will significantly change the way students approach academic writing when they work with us.

Works Cited


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