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From the Editors

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From the Editors

Albert C. DeCiccio and Joan Mullin

This issue offers readers a celebration of writing center research and of the authors who model for us a scholarly re-visioning by building on years of work by our writing center community. Each of these author-researchers has been in writing centers for years; each has published in areas related to this *WCJ* article; each has pushed his or her own boundary. As writing center theorists-practitioners, these colleagues model what writing center professionals must *be*: enactors of our theories. We most effectively teach others to write by writing and discussing our writing with colleagues; we explain research processes to others by engaging in them ourselves and involving others in that practice; we exemplify the meaning of our philosophy—that there are no mistakes, just opportunities to learn—by re-examining our own claims and assumptions. We see all of this at work in this volume.

With a nod to Peter Carino’s work on writing center history, Neal Lerner searches for the historical Robert Moore. Familiar to many of us is a common thread of victimization that has dogged writing center conferences, presentations, and publications. Lerner challenges this legacy of “antagonism,” finding instead a “disciplinary history that is built upon continuity and persistence.” Lerner chooses to rethink “the narratives that tell us where our field has been and where it might be heading,” realizing “that these narratives like all narratives (like this narrative) are subject to the perspectives, desires, and goals of those who tell them.” His commentary serves, not only to make readers re-consider writing center evolution, but to review historical assumptions about our theories and the practices that emerge from them. This is exactly what the next three articles do.

Exemplifying not only the good use to which IWCA grant money can be put, but also ways in which all of us might continue to push and question our own research, Irene Clark continues her analysis of “directive” tutoring. Modeling for us a quantitative analysis of tutor and student definitions of, and attitudes towards, perceived “directive” and “non-directive” tutoring, Clark finds that “it is the individual attention and the opportunity to discuss a paper in terms of topic and process that contribute most significantly to student satisfaction and that the notion of a ‘best’ way to conduct a writing center conference, like the ‘best’ way to do anything involving human interaction, cannot be determined in any

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absolute sense.” Building on her previous work and that of recent scholars, Clark’s findings reinforce “the necessity of developing a flexible approach to the issue of tutor directiveness,” a claim that in the climate of hands-off tutoring twenty years ago would have been considered writing center heresy.

Closely examining such language in our tutor manuals and the language used in tutorials as well as in self-reported perceptions, Terese Thonus investigates “[w]hat makes writing tutorials different from other institutional conversations (e.g., doctor-patient, teacher-student)” by looking at “the third party, the course instructor . . . [the] silent participant.” Extending her own work with ESL student-perceived, audience expectations, Thonus employs triangulated inquiry and interactional sociolinguistics, giving us another perspective on the term “directive.” Thonus asks us to re-think our pat answers to how “tutors, tutees, and course instructors perceive the tutor’s role[.] What are the tensions implicit in expectations they hold of the tutor’s role(s), especially as they compare to those of the course instructor? And, finally, how can the answers to these questions offer a better understanding of the context(s) of writing center interaction?”

Afraid of the kinds of tables and charts implemented by Clark and Thonus in their quantitative studies? So was writing center historian Peter Carino. Yet, his and Doug Enders’ guide to quantitative research for the qualitative-minded challenges their own assumptions about writing center usage—and about data collection. Building on the work of Cindy Johaneck, Carino and Enders challenge a common writing center assumption: frequency of writing center visits increases student satisfaction. They claim that “[u]ltimately, we find ourselves answering our research question deconstructively, positing a ‘yes’ based on one way of reading the data and undoing it with a ‘no’ based on another, or placing the two answers side by side to say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’” But they further claim that “if our conclusion is finally inconclusive, have we wasted our time, have we decided that what the statistics tell us is not worth the effort? We don’t think so.” In a double-visioned examination, Enders and Carino not only model a way to investigate our assumptions, but examine the quantitative and qualitative tools we use for our research.

If your head is spinning from the numbers by the time you finish the articles in this issue, you will welcome Carol Severino’s field tested review of Ben Raforth’s *A Tutor’s Guide: Helping Writers One to One*. Pointing out the positives and negatives of the text, Severino concludes that the *Guide* “neither talks down nor talks up; it is neither patronizing nor pedantic.” Cindy Johaneck moves away from explicit tutor training manuals in her review of Donald Finkel’s *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut*. Johaneck reads this text as a “compelling inquiry that we should find useful

as a tutor training text and as a challenge to ourselves as classroom teachers and writing center directors.” Finally, mirroring the emphasis on reflection and re-vision that each of the articles in this volume practice, Lisa Lebduska reviews Bill Cope’s and Mary Kalantzis’ *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. Pointing to the continued need to explore texts outside of our immediate disciplinary area, those that complement and expand our work, Lebduska notes this book’s ability to “bring together uniquely the multitude of concerns informing what making meaning in the twenty-first century entails.” She claims that writing center scholars will find this text “useful for thinking about their own practices and for acquiring a language to help them articulate the complexities of what they do.”

We hope that these reviews, together with the other articles in this volume, will serve to support your present practices, give you data for strengthening your theories and your claims on campus, and model methods for keeping your own writing center, and our profession, viable through continual re-vision.