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From the Guest Editor

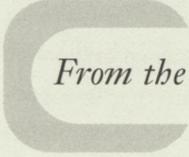
Harvey Kail

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From the Guest Editor

by Harvey Kail

Many readers of the *Writing Center Journal* know of Kenneth A. Bruffee's ground-breaking writing center work through his widely influential and still controversial 1984 essay "Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind." And this is surely a good place to start. Bruffee's influence on writing centers, however, really begins a decade or so earlier when in 1972 he publishes the first ever peer writing tutor training manual, *A Short Course in Writing*. In hindsight, we can see now that something of educational significance was growing in Brooklyn—and in a writing center, of all places. By the mid 1970's, Bruffee is already developing a national model of peer tutoring. In his first articles and book chapters on writing centers, he begins to forge the academic nuts and bolts necessary to construct and legitimize peer tutoring programs in colleges and universities. He calls this educational innovation the Brooklyn Plan.

The significance of the Brooklyn Plan for writing centers today cannot be easily overstated. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, in numerous publications and in brown bag lunches, faculty seminars, conference papers, and workshops, workshops, workshops, Bruffee argues for and demonstrates how to establish peer tutoring programs in writing centers. In 1980 he convenes the Brooklyn College Summer Institute in Training Peer Writing Tutors for the first of two summer seminars as a way to disseminate the Brooklyn Plan across the country. As a result of the Institute and the related work he had been doing in educating himself about writing instruction and writing program administration, Bruffee publishes in the mid-1980's a series of essays that famously theorize peer tutoring as a paradigm of social constructionist pedagogy. In fact, he argues, peer tutoring models the very ways through which knowledge is constructed in the academy. You can find these crucial essays listed in the selected bibliography of his publications in this issue. Together and separately, they make a compelling argument for the value of organizing students to take each other seriously as writers and readers.

While this special issue of the *Writing Center Journal* cannot hope to unpack 35 years of strong and purposeful teaching, research, and writing, it does aim to provide readers with a thick description of Bruffee's contribution to writing centers and to educational reform writ large. The issue begins with his 2006 keynote address to

the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and the context for his current work, revisits the tumultuous educational history out of which collaborative learning was constructed, and then focuses specifically on the Brooklyn Institute in Training Peer Writing Tutors and on *A Short Course on Writing*, which has become, indeed, a classic in Longman's "Classics in Composition" series (2007).

Kenneth A. Bruffee is surely one of the exemplary figures of writing center work, and all of us associated with this special issue of *The Writing Center Journal* dedicate it to him with gratitude and affection.

The Writing Center Journal

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4 *From the Guest Editor*