

Project Number: 51-JOT-0316

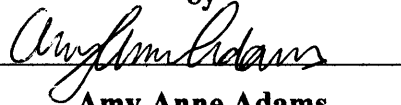
WRITING PROCESSES AND PEER TUTORING AT WPI

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report:
submitted to the Faculty
of the

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science

by



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Date: May 26, 2002

Approved:

1. writing
2. tutoring
3. training

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ABSTRACT

This project focuses on college students' writing habits, peer tutoring, and tutor training. Data was gathered from interviews with WPI writers and writing tutors as well as WPI's Writing Workshop's tutoring database. The literature review and data analysis show that many college students use an abbreviated writing process based on the one taught in pre-college English curriculums. Tutor training must encompass a greater discussion of these student-specific writing habits and the resulting demands they put on tutoring goals.

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities across the country offer writing assistance in the form of peer tutoring. Often called Writing Centers or Workshops, these programs offer an opportunity to students who might need assistance at any point in their writing process. If they come to the writing center they will find a student like themselves who has been specially trained. This training, in the case of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, is designed to "[hone] students' writing skills while teaching them to become effective peer writing tutors" (Lebduska). The actual training process may differ from college to college, but the extensive reading list on the topic of peer tutoring is universally known. Tutors in training will read books like *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* and will read articles on rhetorical and writing theory published in periodicals such as *College Composition and Communication* or the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. In fact, this is the exact reading list for WPI's tutor training workshop.

These resources provide information on different aspects and methods of tutoring including conversational tutoring, constructive writing strategies, active listening, and facilitating. Tutors also learn extended writing processes that include brainstorming, outlining, revising, and producing multiple drafts. Those processes were also taught throughout their pre-college English classes. Additionally, they were advised to use the process to compose papers from the middle outward. Most college writers are not only familiar with these writing procedures, but also regard them as the "right" way to write. What this project examines is the college student's tendency to abbreviate that process to a top-to-bottom endeavor, eliminating multiple drafts and making surface-level changes

only. Through the Literature Review and Analysis sections, this project explores what reasons college students have for their specific writing process, how peer writing tutors can help these students (if at all), and what the relationship between the two means for peer tutor training. A further discussion and possible solutions can be found in the Conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to the 1960s, a typical American English class would focus on the end result of the writing process. Students submitted an essay or paper and teachers graded that final product. In class, students may have learned the parts of speech, proper sentence structure and punctuation, and the many idiosyncrasies of our English language. This fundamental knowledge could then be applied to students' writing. As Elizabeth Bouquet notes, writing instruction was meant to "focus on the individual, practical, skills-centered nature of composition" (468). In her essay "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions," Bouquet shows how the evolution of writing centers (in their concepts, goals, and practices) was a reflection of the changing priorities of English curriculum. She notes that one particular writing lab, the University of North Carolina's Composition Condition Laboratory, was explicitly intended to be a "grammar fix-it shop" (468). What this writing lab's purpose implies is that helping someone with their writing means helping them evaluate how well their word choice and placement meets precise grammatical rules. Bouquet goes on to argue that this sort of curriculum "[focused] primarily on the individual rather than the social nature of composing."

In her study, *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (1971), Janet Emig also notes that the social nature of composing - "sending a message, a communication out into the world" - is often neglected by English teachers and states that "too often, the... teacher [is] interested chiefly in a product he can criticize rather than in a process he can help initiate through imagination and sustain through empathy and support" (97). During the 1960s and 1970s, this conflict between "product" and "process" came to a head and there

was "a shift in emphasis in teaching writing from the product of writing activities (the finished text) to ways in which text [could] be developed" (Furneaux 257).

Over the past forty years, there have been four major movements in the changing theory of composition. The *expressive stage* occurred in the late 1960s. People acknowledged that there needed to be a purpose and driving force behind writing, one that wasn't based on just creating a "product." To create something honest and innovative, the expressive view had writers concentrate on their true, inner voice while writing. It seems this inner voice would guide a writer to a finished product that truly summarized their feelings. This method certainly addressed the developmental aspect of writing - getting one's thoughts out on paper - but it did little more.

In the 1970s, the *cognitive approach* appeared and is commonly credited to the psychologists Linda Flower and John Hayes. Their point was simply that writing was thinking. To understand writing, one had to analyze what went on in a writer's mind during the composing process. Flower and Hayes observed that writers, and people in general, don't normally think in a simple, linear manner; they think laterally. For a given topic, a writer will have many changing ideas and impressions. When he is expected to write on the topic, he might not have one strong, definite, fixed feeling that drives him to produce a finished piece of writing (as the *expressive* school of thought would dictate). The cognitive approach acknowledges the inner voice as a thinking thing rather than strictly a feeling thing. Writers create text based on their knowledge and reevaluate that text to ensure their knowledge is being effectively conveyed to the reader.

But in the 1980s, researchers realized that a major element was missing from all of the previous writing-as-a-process movements: social context. Both writing with

feeling and writing to effectively convey your thoughts were important, but neither method acknowledged that writing was "a social activity, dependent on social structures" (Sankaran). "Writers do not operate as solitary individuals, but as members of a social/cultural group" (Furneaux). As readers, we subconsciously evaluate all incoming text against our own experiences. Writing, then, has meaning because it means something *to us*, or as Sankaran puts it, "writing can only be understood from the perspective of a social context and not as a product of an individual."

This acknowledgement of the social aspect of writing is the basis for the more recent movement of writing theory: the *discourse community* stage. Here, the social context of writing is considered but, in addition, writing acts as a *discussion* between members of a society. This community is comprised of writers and readers in a given social context. If writers understand the expectations and character of their community, they can better gauge their writing to this audience. Problems can arise, however, when defining a community and to what extent some members are welcome in it, particularly students and their place in a professional community.

These four shifts in writing and composition theory have affected English curriculum and students in different ways. The more recent theory of writing towards a discourse community puts students in an awkward place. In his article, "Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals," Peter Elbow expresses the difficulties he faces trying to convince his college writing students that their writing should be considered part of an academic discourse: "How shall I teach my students to *place themselves* in the universe of other writers?" (78). He wants them to write knowing that

what they have to say is interesting, important, and worth writing. They should acknowledge that their work is an assertion of their place in an "ongoing intellectual conversation." Elbow finds difficulty, however, in convincing his students to assume the roll of an academic writer. He observes that students write their papers, not for themselves, but for their teachers. "When students write to teachers they have to write 'up' to an audience with greater knowledge and authority" (81). In this way, students don't enter an academic community with hopes of self-expression/realization and further discussion with fellow academics. Elbow finds that "the basic subtext in a piece of student writing is likely to be, 'Is this okay?'" (81)

This question reflects students' reluctance to enter into the discourse community; they may feel their writing and thoughts are worthy enough. In Elbow's view, their hesitation is largely due to their impression that *teachers* assume the roll of "academic" and students cannot share that same roll. "The academic is reader and grader and always gets to decide what the student text means. No wonder students withdraw ownership and commitment" (76). It is Elbow's wish that students would see "the act of writing as an act of finding and acknowledging one's place in an ongoing intellectual conversation with a much larger and longer history that what goes on in [his] classroom" (78). The mantra of writers who do enter those "conversations" isn't "Is this okay?" but rather "Listen to me, I have something to tell you" (82).

One reason Elbow cites for students' feelings about their place in the discourse community is that "the structure of the academy tends to militate against that stance. And of course the structure of the classroom and the grading situation militate even more

heavily against it" (82). It is important to note that this article was published in 1995 and that Elbow was writing from his experiences teaching writing to college students at UMass Amherst. Janet Emig wrote of similar concerns over the grade-based writing of twelfth graders in 1971. Despite the gap in time, their points are similar. Like Elbow, Emig suggests that students write for "ultimately the evaluation of another" (97). As mentioned earlier, she places some of the blame on teachers who assign writing that will later be easy for them to evaluate and grade. Emig specifies the *five-paragraph theme* as an assignment that meets those teachers' goals and is widely used. The five-paragraph theme consists of "one paragraph of introduction ('tell what you are going to say'), three of expansion and example ('say it'), and one of conclusion ('tell what you have said')" (Emig 97). With this rigid framework, teachers are able to quantitatively evaluate the piece of writing. Whatever teachers' motivation for using the five-paragraph theme, Emig reports that in 1971 it was "tightly lodged in the American composition curriculum" (97) and, based on personal experiences and those of this project's interviewees, it is still used on today's high schools.

In addition to using five-paragraph themes, many present-day English teachers use class time to aid students in constructing their themes. One focus is to study writing as a process. In high school English textbooks (and even those found at lower grade levels), composition is broken down into well-defined steps: pre-writing, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing (NCREL, among others). The steps between pre-writing and publishing are thought of as a cycle, which should be repeated until the writer is comfortable with his or her work. For a professional, "publishing" may actually entail

getting their work out into the public as a book, for example. Submitting a finished paper to a teacher or professor would be considered "publishing" to a student.

Most students at WPI have learned these lessons in composition theory, be it in high school or in courses here at WPI. The first part of my work for this project is to reveal what WPI students know the theories of writing as a process and show what their impressions are of this composition technique. My theory is that most college students will not only remember learning this method, but they will also regard it as "the right way to write." When they are given a writing assignment, they feel that they *should* (or that they would like to) complete each step of the process - brainstorm ideas, create a draft, edit the draft, revise and create additional drafts, and finally submit a final draft. My argument is that, despite acknowledging this method as the "right method," college students abandon it when it comes time to actually write. As it will be revealed in the Analysis section, many WPI students go from "pre-writing" to "publishing" in just one step.

The College Student's Approach to Writing as a Process

I believe that there are two main reasons WPI students do not adopt the theories/guidelines of writing as a process: they feel they don't have time and/or they know that they can get by without it. The first of these two reasons is quite straightforward. WPI's project-based curriculum and face-paced, four-term scheduling gives students a fantastic education, but also, a fantastic workload. Strict deadlines for courses and projects, participation in a busy campus lifestyle, and perhaps a tendency

towards procrastination all result in a student's need for streamlining their writing process.

Their decision to modify the detailed process of writing they learned is justified because, as this study reveals, their final grade for the work is satisfactory. In his essay "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms," John Trimbur mentions that "grades [are] the central measure of success in higher education" (117) and, speaking as a person who is presently being educated at an institution for higher learning, I agree. All of the work a student does in college is, for the most part, driven by grades. Of course, college is meant to act as preparation for an occupation. A portion of what students learn can be directly applied to tasks found on the job. But even before they can put this knowledge into action in the work force, they must first prove they *have* this knowledge. Proof comes in the form of a diploma. A diploma is awarded for sufficient completion of degree requirements. It is each professor's job to decide whether these requirements have been met by evaluating each test, quiz, homework, and/or piece of writing a student has produced for the particular class they teach. These facts lead students to write with their final grade in mind, pass in papers, and question professors as exactly as Elbow has indicated - "Is this okay?"

As it will be revealed later by the information gathered in the interviews, college students have one audience in mind when they write a paper: the professor (or rather, the person who will be giving them a grade). If rhetoric is the art of persuasion, then what argument is the student making and what exactly is the student trying to persuade the professor to believe? Superficially, it's the thesis of their paper. The student has made a claim in their introduction and supports that claim in the body of the paper. But the

pathos that the student uses and what the student is truly trying to get the professor to believe is that the paper they are reading deserves a good grade. The drive and inspiration to write ultimately comes from a need to graduate.

Based on student interviews that will be discussed in the Analysis section, I will demonstrate how both the time and grading issues contribute to the students' streamlining their concept of the writing process.

Where Do Writing Tutors Fit in to a Student's Writing Process? Where Does that Process Fit in to Tutor Training?

If a student's writing goes from a mulling over of ideas to a printed final draft in one step, where might a writing tutor enter in to this process? The first question that must be asked, however, is "what exactly is the purpose of a writing center?"

One book that is frequently required reading in a tutor training course is *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* by Toni-Lee Capossela, which Capossela herself describes as "explor[ing] important consulting issues in the order in which they normally arise during a session. The rest of the book presents readings by writing teachers, consultants in training, and writing center veterans" (iv). In his very first chapter, Capossela covers what a tutor *is* and *isn't*. Its prominence at the beginning of the book means that defining the job is a major issue faced by tutors and perhaps tutees.

John Trimbur argues that the phrase "peer tutoring" is a contradiction in terms. The word "peer" implies that a tutor should be a "co-learner" and emphasize the student relationship between the tutor and tutee. At the same time, the word "tutor" suggests that

their relationship should be expert-tutee, or in other words, the tutor is really a "little teacher." Trimbur notes that it is difficult to provide a concrete solution. However, he suggests that instead of performing a balancing act - shifting from role to role - the peer tutors should be both "peers" and "tutors" simultaneously.

Steven North recognizes the overwhelming misconception of writing centers. Many students consider them to be grammar clinics or "fix-it shops" for poor papers. Even the group who most often sponsors the center, English departments, can perpetuate this stereotype. An ideal writing center, according to North, improves writers themselves not just individual papers. This task is accomplished by creating a dialog between writer and tutor.

This idea of peer tutoring as an equal exchange between two writers is evident in the word choices of many of the authors. Kenneth Bruffee frequently uses the word "conversation" to describe a tutoring session, for example a "conversation within a community of knowledgeable peers" (131). This word illustrates Bruffee's expectations of a typical or ideal tutoring session. "What peer tutor and tutee do together is not write or edit, or least of all proofread. What they do together is converse" (133). Peer tutor training encourages the tutors to do just that: not just talk to the tutee, but also get the tutee to talk to them.

What this dialog is meant to ensure, and what is echoed throughout tutor training materials, is that the tutor will not be rewriting the tutees paper for them. Books such as *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* offer suggestions for how to bring the tutee into a discussion of their writing. Through *active listening*, a tutor can address a tutee's concerns making them feel more at ease and more comfortable with discussing their

writing. With phrases such as "'What I'm hearing you say is...,' 'It sounds like...,' 'And I also heard you say that...,' and 'I can hear that...,' [the tutor] feeds back what she believes to be his message" (17).

Another method a tutor can use, found throughout writing center theory, is to act as a *facilitator*. The Bedford Guide offers this advice for a fictional tutee, Shelly:

The best way to assist Shelly is to focus on her thoughts and ideas rather than on the paper itself. Instead of making judgments about her draft, describe your reactions as a reader and ask questions that invite her to further examine, explore, and clarify her own ideas and approaches. By reacting as a reader you are *facilitating* (a word that means 'making easier'). (19)

A tutor can involve a tutee by simply asking questions. They may request a clarification of an idea or more information about a specific topic. They can ask whom the tutee is writing for and for what purpose. By adding *silence and wait time*, a tutor allows the tutee to respond effectively to active listening and facilitating. It is hoped that by combining all of these methods, a beneficial discussion will have occurred.

If a student does not have a written draft to discuss, what should I tutor do during their session? The answer, found in many works of writing center theory, is to provide the tutee with the means to begin writing. Peter Elbow suggests using *raw writing* before settling down to write the body of a paper. "If it's a small job such as writing a memo in 30 minutes... [Engage in] 15 minutes of raw writing, and use your remaining time to look with fresh eyes through what you've written, figure out what you really want to say, and just write out your final draft – perhaps use substantial portions of your raw writing unchanged" (*Writing with Power*, 33).

These and other theories for how to help students in a tutoring session are studied, discussed, and practiced in the training of writing tutors. Tutors are encouraged that the aspects and steps suggested to help along one's writing process can be applicable to a tutoring session. In that way, any writer coming in at any stage in his or her writing process can be served. What this study supports, however, is that if a college student goes to the writing center, they don't ask for help in many of the developmental steps of the writing process because many of those actions are skipped in their abbreviated writing process. For example, the *raw writing* Elbow uses in the initial stages of the writing process becomes, for college students, exactly what is turned in to his or her professor. There really isn't a rough, second, or final draft; there's just a paper. Any amount of "raw writing" is never changed or edited. Where, then, would a tutor fit into this writing process? The Analysis section of this study presents data from WPI's writing center and student interviews which show that tutees often enter the writing center with a completed paper (their first and final draft) and ask for help with grammar, spelling, agreement, and otherwise superficial concerns.

Such a paper is created by using a linear writing strategy. In her essay "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Nancy Sommers clearly outlines the ways in which "experienced" and "inexperienced" writers compose and revise papers. Student writers (the "inexperienced") practice linear composition. They write their paper from top to bottom, starting with the proposition/thesis/introduction. When they revise this work, they use the "thesaurus philosophy of writing" (180). According to Sommers, the "experienced" authors practice a nonlinear approach when writing. Beginning with the body of the work, the writer is able to discover what his or

her proposition is and then add it to the introductory paragraphs. The ideal way to revise one's work is to look for a consistent support of the proposition. The emphasis is on content rather than grammar.

Elbow spends the first chapter of his book, *Writing with Power*, outlining "Quick Revising." Granted, the instructions are intended for self-evaluation, but the advice still pertains to the tutor/tutee relationship and right-way-of-writing theories. When commenting on the order in which one should compose a paper, Elbow states, "So now you have a draft and a clear statement of your main idea. Finally you can write what you need for an introductory paragraph or section" (35). This quote clearly indicates that Elbow expects a writer to brainstorm, construct the body of a paper and identify a main idea before he or she writes introductory material.

Unfortunately, this entire process does not often happen on the college level. Data collected for this study supports Sommer's claim of "inexperienced" writers: most students write their papers from top to bottom - from the introduction, through the body, to the conclusion with just an initial brainstorming/development process in mind. While the students continue to receive satisfactory grades for their "inexperienced" efforts, there is little to motivate them to reach for a more "experienced" position. As students' writing is accepted they grow confident that they can continue to use their sleek modification of process writing. How, then, can writing tutors begin to uphold the writing center mantra of "Make better writers, not just better papers" if students don't feel the need to become a better writer?

Using the data collected from eight interviews with WPI writers and tutors, the Analysis section will provide insight into answering the questions raised by the Literature

Review. I will then outline the implications of my analysis in the concluding section and I will provide suggestions as to what WPI's tutor training course could change, if anything, as a result of this discussion.

ANALYSIS

WPI Students and Their Writing Process

As I've stated before, I believe that WPI students have a notion of what they *should* be doing to produce a piece of writing. When I conducted my interviews, I asked the students what they knew about writing strategies and techniques for composition. Most interviewees hinted at "ideal" theories and ideas about what they were "supposed to do." All of these theories and ideas came from high school English classes. When I later asked what kind of strategies and techniques the students use at the college level, there was a large gap between what the students learned they should do and what they actually practice. In this section of the Analysis, I will explain the "ideal," the "actual," and the reason that gap between the two exists.

Before I get to *how* students write, it may be useful to explain *what* they have to write. Based on my own experiences and those of my interviewees, high school English teachers not only teach ideal writing techniques, but also what parts there should be in an ideal paper. For a typical persuasive essay assignment, teachers ask that students start with an introductory paragraph that includes a thesis sentence, provide three pieces of evidence that support the thesis, and conclude with a paragraph that restates the thesis and ties everything together - the five-paragraph theme. One interviewee summed up his explanation with, "And that is the ideal way of making a paper or an argument according to the English teachers." Another stated "The number three is a magic number for English teachers... I need three points of evidence to support my point... and if four comes along that's great, but two is too little."

What can these statements reveal? The interviewees may have learned the "magic three" technique in high school, but its overall purpose seems to have remained in their minds while composing papers at the college level. They admitted that their essay may not be exactly five paragraphs in length, but they try to make sure what they do produce has 1.) an introduction that includes a thesis 2.) arguments that support the thesis and 3.) a conclusion. Their goal is to deliver these items in a coherent, cohesive manner.

Hoping to help students obtain that goal, high school English teachers also taught many of my interviewees the process they should follow to write a paper. One interview explained in detail the procedure he was required to perform:

The teacher taught that you always sat down and made a chart of all your ideas... you put your thesis in a bubble in the middle... and then you put your three points in bubbles connected to it... then you put little details on to it and you branch out and make a big tree... step two was making an outline... then you... wrote your three supporting paragraphs and maybe your introduction and then your conclusion was always last. And then you were definitely were supposed to have two or three drafts.

The experiences of all the other interviewees were very similar to this account. What students learned was that the ideal paper they had to write had to be written in an ideal way. They were taught that there were many more steps to the writing process other than just producing text. The curriculum of their high school English classes was based on a reflection of the non-linear writing process theory practiced by "experienced" writers, so students were required to perform pre-writing, drafting, revising, and proofreading. What all of these steps prevented was a student composing a paper linearly, or "top to bottom." Most interviewees mentioned that they were told to write the body of their paper first and then their introduction and conclusion. One interviewee said, "The ideal composition is

the one that you write and then you find your arguments afterwards. That's the ideal writing." That is to say, writers can only make a proposition or thesis *after* they've completely written (or "discovered") their supporting material. In the end, the students were graded on how well they conformed to this entire process and whether or not their paper contained the "magic three."

What is the purpose of having these requirements? The teachers may have believed that these procedures would help their students become better writers. If a student could make any of these steps a habitual part of their writing process, the teacher would have done his or her job. The student then went on to WPI with the idea of an ideal paper and an ideal process for writing it. They soon found out that high school English teachers are not the same as WPI professors. When asked what he learned in school about writing, one interviewee replied, "From WPI? Nothing." It's that simple. Students submit a paper. They are graded on that final product, not on how they got there. Professors don't ask for bubbles or trees. At the college level, students are solely responsible for what goes on before a paper's due date. They have full control over their writing process. So, then, what's the writing process of a typical WPI student? Do students put the "good" writing habits they learned to use? Not exactly.

The students I interviewed fully acknowledged the writing process they learned about was what they *should* do to produce a paper. As one interviewee stated, "The more drafts the better. The more you edit and revise the better it gets." However, when I asked the same student what steps he took to complete his latest writing assignment, he replied, "[the professors] usually give us a week's notice... you end up doing other class work for the first couple of days. Then you get to reading the [required materials]... and then

usually you kind of write a quick draft out and then the day before you type it up." In other words, this student knows process writing, knows its benefits, but has created his own modification that is "quick" and performed "the day before" the paper is due.

In fact, all interviewees expressed this exact sentiment. The student who coined the "magic three" phrase put it this way:

Here's the process. Step one is "wait"... [that] will take me about half the time... so then I have the other half [of] the time between when he assigned it to when it's due. And then it takes me maybe a day to decide what I'm going to write about and when I have a title and I have a topic and I have all the materials I need to do the research... I'll sit down and I'll turn it out as fast as I can... definitely top to bottom.

When I asked another interviewee what he did to compose a paper he answered, "Sit at a computer and just type. Just go. Out it comes and that's the way it stays usually." These two students and the rest of the interviewees *all* used the same three-step process: think of what to say, say it, then submit it to the professor. Essentially, this procedure is an abbreviated version of the writing process they learned in high school minus a few major steps - pre-writing and drafting, and usually even outlining and revising. The students who did mention outlining were either Technical Communications majors or trained writing tutors. However, even they admitted that they only used a "very loose outline" that they "didn't always write out" and, from there, "wrote from top to bottom."

So why do WPI students make this modification to the extensive steps they learned? Why have WPI writing tutors themselves, who are taught to promote the extended writing process and write non-linearly, abandoned these theories? Tutor or not, the answer was the same for all of the WPI students I interviewed: not enough time, a

lack of motivation, too much procrastinating, a touch of laziness, the overwhelming success of their modified style, or some combination of all of these reasons. The compilation of quotes below explain it best:

"It's because I'm too lazy to do any of those other steps that are helpful."

"Some people I know will wait until the absolute last minute, read [the materials] the night before and write the paper and they'll do fine."

"None of it really helped me... I still got a pretty good grade."

"I think a lot of people here [at WPI] don't... do outlining and pre-thinking... A lot of them just don't care."

"I usually can pull off a grade if I need to. But, it's a matter of time as well... It seems like a lot of people write at the very, very last minute and skip the revising part... It seems to work. I usually get pretty good grades in everything I do."

"I'm a procrastinator and a perfectionist. I am always waiting for the opportune time to write my papers and it's usually the last minute so there's usually not time to schedule an appointment with the writing center. That and a lot of the assignments I had to do were so short and not worth enough credit to bring in. I didn't think they'd be helped that much by coming in."

WPI Students, the Writing Workshop, and Tutor Training Theories

The last quote of the previous section raises my next point: given WPI students' writing methods and motivations, how can tutors in the Writing Workshop help, if at all?

Presently, WPI's tutor training is done via a course worth 1/3 unit of academic credit. Its goal is to "[hone] students' writing skills while teaching them to become effective peer writing tutors" (Lebduska). Kenneth Bruffee's purpose for training tutors is "to make these students willing to criticize and to be criticized, as well as able to criticize astutely; to insist on a definition and practice of criticism which includes helpful positive evaluation; to direct negative response into constructive channels" (456). Trainees read about writing center theory, write papers, intern in the Writing Workshop, and respond to each other's writing. Amongst the material regarding writing center theory, trainees read works like Nancy Sommers's that discusses "experienced" and "inexperienced" writers. By reading essays like John Trimbur's, trainees learn how to negotiate their role as a tutor. "Just talking to them about [their writing] just as if you were asking them in between classes or something. Not that you're sitting there as a tutor, [but] just sitting there as their friend trying to help them through it a little bit."

The trainees learn (from reading the work of Stephen North and others) that their main goal is to improve a tutee as a writer, not just improve an individual piece of writing from that tutee, or as one tutor stated, "to help improve their writing process." Trainees are warned that many tutees come in for a "quick fix" and just want their grammar and spelling fixed. Would-be tutors are asked to look at the "bigger picture," try to get the tutee "to open up and talk about the assignment, gather their ideas, arrange those ideas [by] using an outline," go through each idea/paragraph "making sure it says what [the tutee] is trying to say... [and] relates to the thesis." Finally, as it was summed up by one tutor, "only after that [can a tutor] look at individual sentences and the smaller level things within the paper."

Therefore, tutors learn that, by their utilization of active listening and facilitation, an ideal tutoring session is "when the student controls it."

WPI Students on Tutor Training at WPI

Do present writing tutors at WPI, who have been through this training, feel that these expectations are realistic or even worthwhile? Are tutors actually capable of making better writers? As one tutor states, "They told us... to expect kids coming in for a quick fix and kind of, in a way, prepared us to deal with that, but not very well."

Another tutor made the point that active listening and facilitating "doesn't always work": "Trying to get it 'pulled out' they way they teach you in training, to get the student to say it, sometimes that's not what you *can* do... the [reading] material said that you shouldn't be as direct with students... you should... help them come to this realization of what they're doing... it doesn't always work." This concerned tutor had faced reluctant tutees who came in for their "quick fixes" and did not want to participate in anything more.

I asked tutors what they would like to see change in the training course and in the Writing Workshop itself. Each one acknowledged that there was a distinct dissimilarity between the tutoring situations they read about, learned, and discussed and the situations they were actually confronted with when they began tutoring. The most common suggestion to remedy this problem was to revise the required reading list (specifically, reconsider *Lives on the Boundary* by Mike Rose: "It was a really good book, and I liked it but I don't see that it necessarily helped me."). Tutors also thought that the *Harcourt*

Brace book and similar materials "were, for the most part, good for the exercises but part of it [the training course] needs to be more tailored to... WPI writers."

This tutor suggested that trainees gain real-life, WPI-specific knowledge by making a more aggressive use of present and past tutors. One assignment in the training course is to interview a present tutor about their job. Interviewees reported that there wasn't any structure regarding what to ask these tutors, and the tutors themselves weren't sure what to offer. One interviewee stated, "I had a hard time knowing what to ask them... Having it offered to me would have been easier... it's always harder to ask a question."

Overall, the tutors I interviewed seemed doubtful that they could turn their peers into better writers and, therefore, felt that the orthodoxy of the writing process and writing center theory present in their training didn't seem like something they could incorporate into tutoring sessions.

WPI Students as Tutees

WPI's Writing Workshop maintains a database of all tutoring session records. I monitored that data over a two-month period looking specifically at the reasons tutees listed for coming to the Workshop. When they make an appointment online they are asked to type responses to the following questions into a box on the page:

1. What, in your view, is the objective of your paper/assignment?
2. What do you feel you need the most help with (i.e. organization, transitions, grammar, etc.)
3. Are there any other concerns you have? If so, what are they?

Of the 148 tutorial reports filed over January and February 2002, 110 tutees responded to these questions; the others left the box blank. 16 of the 110 responses described only the course the paper was written for. Of the remaining 94 tutorial reports, the most common issue students were looking for help with was "grammar": 56 students (60%). Secondly, students expressed concerns over "organizational" issues (40 students, 43%) and then "transitions" (15 students, 16%). Other keywords noted by five or more students included "flow, structure, clarity, and word-choices." Some specific responses included wanting someone to "just read over it," to "make sure everything makes sense," to get "someone else's eyes," to "just get a second reader," and to be told "what info is missing." One tutee reported needing help with grammar, structure, and "other writing related problems." Another tutee reported his intentions for coming to the writing workshop were "to improve my writing and get suggestions on how to change it." Yet another stated, "I get a lot of grammar problems. I hope I can improve my writing." This quotation indicates the student's idea that fixing grammatically errors will improve his writing, supporting Sommer's indication of "inexperienced" writers.

CONCLUSION

As I interviewed both tutors and non-tutors, I found that their experiences as students and their opinions as tutors were very similar to my own. Despite the fact that several of the interviewees and I major in Technical Communication, we still do not practice ideal writing habits. It is interesting to note that a major question asked by WPI's Writing Workshop director is "why don't tutors go to the writing center to be tutored themselves?" The reason is just the same for writing tutors as it is for the rest of WPI's students: there's no room for it.

Tutors are warned that the students who *do* come in to be tutored will only want help with their grammar. Of course, this is the only obvious reasoning. They've written their paper linearly, top to bottom, straight to the end, not looking back. They're not seeking new ideas on how to compose or how to organize. They've already done that with their own tailored writing method. As far as revising, editing, and drafting are concerned, students come in to the writing center because they don't want to do that step themselves. They've completed their writing and want someone else "just to make sure it makes sense." They're not looking to dramatically change their paper. They don't consider rearranging and removing pages of text "revising" anyway; they would say that is time lost, starting over, or failure.

In a way, tutors learn the composition methods that college students *avoid*. Students know the ideal and readily admit to their "avoidance" of it. Why? That method involves more work. Why use it if it's possible to survive without it?

So what can better equip a WPI tutor for this audience: less of an emphasis on the orthodoxy of writing center theory and more first-hand experience with WPI writers and what tutors will see. I agree with all of the suggestions made by the tutors I interviewed. If a writing center is supposed to create better writers rather than better papers, tutors must take a long, critical look at the kinds of writers coming into the writing center. How can these *exact* writers be improved? Tutors need to learn more about how WPI students, specifically, write. Only then can tutors gauge how they can help.

Furthermore, tutors need to decide whether students' writing actually needs improving. It *is*, after all, getting "the job" done - the job, of course, being to receive a satisfactory grade on a paper. Should tutors give them the grammar checks they ask for, or try to persuade them to use an extended writing process? Tutors should look at students' inspiration for writing, their intended audience, and the goal they wish to achieve with their writing. If tutors can acknowledge that WPI students are writing to impress their professors and receive good grades, they will realize that they need to help them with *that* writing process, not try to mold them into another.

What does this mean for the tutor-training course? It means eliminating books like *Lives on the Boundary* from the reading list, doing more to utilize current tutors' experiences (with additional interviewing opportunities and stories of personal experience), keeping composition theories but without so much emphasis, and finally, taking the most time to review the kind of writing that goes on at WPI: the ins and outs of the MQP and IQP. What should be included in each of those papers? Discuss the specifics of the Sufficiency. What questions do tutees ask most about them? And most importantly, assess how WPI students complete these assignments. How do WPI

students write? Given their writing style, how can tutors help them? Can tutors actually improve their peers as writers? If not, what *can* be done to help them? Tutors *can* be effective grammar checkers, but what aspects of a student-specific writing process do they have the ability to improve?

The Writing Workshop and its tutors can either cater to the abbreviated writing process of tutees (acting as "another set of eyes"), or aspire (like Peter Elbow) to break students out of their grade-based writing mentality. The latter seems far more difficult and improbable.

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