THE ST. MARTIN'S SOURCEBOOK FOR WRITING TUTORS

Christina Murphy
TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Steve Sherwood
TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

BEDFORD/ST. MARTIN'S

BOSTON ♦ NEW YORK

Senior editor: Marilyn Moller
Development : Susan Cottenden
Managing editor: Patricia Mansfield Phelan
Project editor: Amy Horowitz
Cover design: Sheree Goodman

Manufactured in the United States of America.

3 2 1 0
l k j i h

For information, write:
Bedford/St. Martin's
75 Arlington Street
Boston, MA 02116

ISBN: 0-312-11729-9

Acknowledgments
Jeff Brooks. "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 15.6 (1991): 1-4.
Irene Lurkis Clark. "Collaboration and Ethics in Writing Center Pedagogy." *Writing Center Journal* 9.1 (1988): 3-12.
Anne DiPardo. "'Whispers of Coming and Going' : Lessons from Fannie." *Writing Center Journal* 12.2 (1992): 125-44.
Toby Fulwiler. "Provocative Revision," *Writing Center Journal* 12.2 (1992): 190-204.
Cynthia Haynes-Burton. "'Thirty-something' Students: Concerning Transitions in the Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 18.8 (1994): 3-4.
Shoshana Beth Konstant. "Multi-sensory Tutoring for Multi-sensory Learners." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 16.9-10 (1992): 6-8.
Andrea Lunsford. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal* 12.1 (1991): 3-10.
Christina Murphy. "Freud in the Writing Center: The Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well." *Writing Center Journal* 10.1 (1989): 13-18.
Stephen North. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* September 1984. Copyright 1984 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission.
Judith K. Powers. "Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer." *Writing Center Journal* 13.2 (1993): 39-47.
Steve Sherwood. "Humor and the Serious Tutor." *Writing Center Journal*. 13.2 (1993): 3-12.

PREFACE

In planning *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, we began with the question of what knowledge would be most valuable to writing tutors in assisting the learning processes of others. We concluded that tutors would benefit from having an overview of the tutoring process, a sense of the philosophical issues that influence writing center practice, and information on resources for further inquiry. These three concerns are reflected in this book, particularly in the scholarly essays we have chosen to include. These essays focus on both technique and theory, portraying tutoring as a process of interpersonal and social negotiation—one that merits investigation, interpretation, and debate.

We hope that this book will fill a niche between manuals that teach beginners simple tutoring techniques and philosophical treatises that too often divorce theory from practice. We envision this book as a personal guide and resource for tutors that will allow them to see tutoring as an ongoing, evolving process that they will help define.

Of the many people we wish to thank, Marilyn Moller and Susan Cottenden, our editors at St. Martin's, were especially helpful in providing insight, guidance, and exceptional advice in developing this manuscript. We also wish to thank our reviewers, Tim Barnet, Chris DaVinne (both of Ohio State University); Christine Cozzens (Agnes Scott College); and Maura Taffe (Wright State University) whose insightful comments helped guide our revisions. Their assistance and support reflected the best ideals and collaborative spirit of writing center practice.

Finally, we express our appreciation to Mary Sherwood, Frida Blumenberg, Joe Law, Mary Lane, Margaret-Rose Marek, and Mary Nell Kivikko for the patience, kindness, and encouragement that good friends provide.

Christina Murphy
Steve Sherwood

Freedman, Sarah, and Melanie Sperling. "Written Language Acquisition: The Role of Response and the Writing Conference." *The Acquisition of Written Language: Response and Revision.* Ed. Sarah W. Freedman. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1985.
Gere, Ann Ruggles. "On Imitation." Paper given at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Atlanta, March 1987.
Harris, Muriel. *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference.* Urbana: NCTE, 1986.
Hodges, Karen. "The Writing of Dissertations: Collaboration and Ethics." Paper given at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Atlanta, March 1987.
Kroll, Barry. "Why is Plagiarism Wrong?" Paper given at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Atlanta, March 1987.
Lichtenstein, Gary. "The Ethics of Peer Tutoring." *The Writing Center Journal* 4.1 (1983): 29-35.
Neulieb, Janice. "Proving We Did It." *Writing Lab Newsletter* March 1980: 2-4.
Rochelle, Larry. "The ABC's of Writing Centers." *Writing Lab Newsletter* Sept. 1981: 7-9.
Sullivan, Patrick. "The Politics of the Drop-In Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* May 1984: 1-2.
Trimbur, John. "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" *The Writing Center Journal* 7.2 (1987): 21-28.
Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

AFFIRMING DIVERSITY

Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer

Judith K. Powers
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Judith Powers states that collaborative approaches that tutors use to good effect with native writers often fail when applied to ESL writers, who bring to the writing center different cultural values, needs, rhetorical strategies, and attitudes toward the tutor-student relationship. For example, the minimalist technique of having students read their papers aloud so that they can "hear" when diction or organizational problems arise does not appear to work for ESL writers. As a consequence, tutors may have to intervene more directly in ESL writers' texts, acting less as collaborators than as "informants." Powers makes a strong case for what she calls the need for an "attitude adjustment" on the part of writing center tutors when it comes to assisting ESL writers; tutors will find her article, which first appeared in 1993 in The Writing Center Journal, *especially helpful in making such an adjustment.*

THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING WRITING CENTER has recently experienced a dramatic increase in ESL conferencing, brought about mainly by the establishment of a writing across the curriculum program on campus and by changes in the way we teach first-year composition courses for international students. In responding to the almost three-fold increase in numbers of ESL conferences over the past two years, our writing center faculty has begun to question whether traditional collaborative strategies are appropriate and effective for second-language writers.

Probably more than anything else, the past two years' influx of ESL writers has pointed up two significant—and interrelated—concerns to writing center faculty. The first is how firm our assumptions are about our job and the "right" way to accomplish it. The second is how little training we as a faculty have in the principles and techniques of effective ESL conferencing. On both counts, we probably do not differ greatly from writing center faculties across the country. This paper presents the problems we encountered in conferencing with ESL writers and discusses the processes that evolved as we sought solutions.[1]

Traditional Conferencing Strategies and the ESL Writer

Since our writing center faculty was largely untrained in teaching ESL writing and unaware of the many differences in acquiring first- and second-language writing skills, the increase in numbers of ESL conferences proved a mixed blessing. We were delighted, on the one hand, to be reaching a greater number of second-language writers on campus; on the other hand, we sometimes felt frustrated when these conferences did not work the way we expected. Unfortunately, many of the collaborative techniques that had been so successful with native-speaking writers appeared to fail (or work differently) when applied to ESL conferences.

When ESL writers came into the writing center, we tended to approach those conferences just as we would conferences with native-speaking writers, determining what assistance the writers needed through a series of questions about process and problems, purpose and audience. In both cases, our intention in adopting this strategy was to establish a Socratic rather than a didactic context, one which we hoped would allow us to lead writers to the solution of their own problems. Occasionally, conferences might involve the direct exchange of information (e.g., when numbers should be spelled out). More typically, though, we intended to lead writers to discover good solutions rather than answers, solutions that were theirs, not the tutor's. Unfortunately, this process, which has generally served native-speaking writers well (Harris, Leahy) and is justifiably a source of pride for those who can make it work, was often ineffective for our second-language writers, especially those confronting college-level writing in English for the first time.

Perhaps the major reason for this failure is the difference in what the two groups of writers bring to the writing center conference. Most native-speaking writers, for better or for worse, have come to us with comparatively broad and predictable experiences of writing and writing instruction in English. When they have problems with some concept or technique, it is therefore relatively easy for writing center faculty to intuit the source of their difficulty and adjust our questioning to help them discover new, more workable principles. A writer,

for example, who is trying to force two points (or four points) into three paragraphs is likely to have been drilled in the five-paragraph essay format and can be guided fairly easily to discover that not all ideas break down into three parts. ESL writers, however, seldom come to the writing center conference with any substantial background in writing and writing instruction in English. Attempts, therefore, to play off such experience in devising collaborative strategies are likely to fail.

Furthermore, ESL writers typically come to the writing center conference with first-language rhetorics different from the rhetoric of academic English with which they are struggling (Grabe and Kaplan; Leki). Since what these writers already know about writing is based in those first-language rhetorics, it is likely that attempts to use common collaborative strategies will backfire and lead them away from, not toward, the solutions they seek. Consider, for example, the common and fairly simple problem of helping a writer understand that a conclusion should contain no new, unsupported ideas. While it is fairly easy to impress a native-speaking writer with the logic of this rule (because the term *conclusion* itself implies it), the rule is not at all logical to writers from cultures where effective conclusions do, in fact, include new ideas. In this, as in other conferencing situations, those attempting to assist second-language writers may be hampered not only by the writers' limited backgrounds in the rhetoric of written English but also by their learned patterns as educated writers of their own languages. As another example, bringing ESL writers to see the logic of placing important material at the beginnings of English paragraphs may, at times, involve overriding their long-time cultural assumptions that such material should appear at the end. Because collaborative techniques depend so heavily on shared basic assumptions or patterns, conferences that attempt merely to take the techniques we use with native-speaking writers and apply them to ESL writers may fail to assist the writers we intend to help.

The sense of audience that ESL writers bring to the writing center has also affected the success of our typical conferencing strategy. Experienced writing center faculty can lead native-speaking writers to a fuller awareness of certain writing principles through questions about their audience—what the members of their audience already know about a subject, what purpose a reader might have for reading their piece of writing, what kind of people make up their audience and what qualities will impress that group. Using this Socratic technique, in fact, helps us avoid the didactic role of identifying correct and incorrect approaches. However, second-language writers, already handicapped by an unfamiliar rhetoric, are likely to be writing to an unfamiliar audience as well. Part of what they need from us is knowledge of what that unknown audience will expect, need, and find convincing. Thus, ESL writers are asking us to become audiences for their work in a broader way than native speakers are; they view us as cultural informants about American academic expectations.

Predictably, as a result of these differences in the educational, rhetorical, and cultural contexts of ESL writers, our faculty found themselves increasingly in the role of informant rather than collaborator. We were becoming more direct, more didactic in our approach, teaching writing to ESL writers essentially as an academic subject.

Understanding the Need for Intervention

In this shifted role lay the crux of the difficulty we increasingly experienced with ESL conferencing. Because our whole writing center philosophy—our Socratic, nondirective approach—was (and is) geared away from the notion that we are teachers of an academic subject, it was not easy for us to see ourselves as cultural/rhetorical informants with valuable information to impart. One unfortunate result of this situation was that writing center faculty tended to define conferences where ESL writers got what they needed from us (i.e., direct help) as failures rather than successes.

This problem occurred in ESL conferences involving all aspects of writing. Writing center instructors found themselves, for example, telling writers what their audiences would expect rather than asking the writers to decide, answering questions about the sufficiency of the evidence provided in a particular context rather than leaving that decision to the writer, or showing writers how to say something rather than asking them what they wanted to say. When such exchanges occurred, we found it difficult to view them from the standpoint of the ESL writer for whom the conference might have been a success; rather, we measured them against our nondirective philosophy which we appeared to have betrayed.

The distance between the needs of the ESL writer and the assumptions of the system has perhaps been most apparent in conferences where ESL writers have come to us for help with editing and proofing. Like many writing centers, the University of Wyoming Writing Center handles the perennial problem of students wanting drafts edited with a policy statement: We will teach writers editing and proofing strategies but will not edit or proof for them. This distinction serves us reasonably well when dealing with native-speaking writers. It is less successful, however, in setting workable parameters for ESL conferences, partly because our ESL conferees have difficulty understanding the line it draws, but mostly because the techniques we use to teach editing/proofing strategies to native-speaking writers seldom work for ESL writers. These techniques, which largely involve reading aloud and learning to use the ear to edit, presume that the writer hears the language correctly and is more familiar and comfortable with the oral than the written word. Native-speaking writers reading aloud can typically locate problem passages, which we can then discuss with them, suggesting principles upon which they can base editing decisions. In this scenario, we hope writers learn to raise and answer their own questions.

Neither reading aloud nor editing by ear appears to work for the majority of ESL writers we see, however. Few beginning second-language writers "hear" the language "correctly," and many are more familiar with written than with spoken English. Since they have no inner editor prompting them to stop and raise questions, we are likely to adjust our technique to their needs and dis-

cover we are locating errors for ESL writers in a way that looks very much like editing. When we find ourselves backed into this situation, we immediately begin to raise questions about our appropriation of writers' texts, an anathema in writing center methodology not only for practical reasons inherent in working with classroom assignments but also because our aim is to demystify writing for conferees and increase their self-reliance and self-confidence. While the intervention that ESL writers appear to require of us in working with editing problems does not differ greatly from the intervention involved when we assist those same writers with rhetorical structure and audience, it strikes us more forcibly because it is familiar and easy to perceive. In fact, it looks very much like the "bad" kind of help native speakers sometimes want when they bring papers in to be "corrected."

The mixed feelings that the ESL editing issue engendered were not a new problem for the writing center. Throughout our history, we had faced and handled requests for assistance in editing ESL texts, responding to them more or less on a case-by-case basis, with varying levels of confidence in our decisions. Almost every semester, for example, the demand for editorial assistance with ESL theses and dissertations reaches the point at which writing center faculty begin to complain in frustration about ESL writers expecting them to correct and rewrite texts. Each year, the staff has vowed to establish a clearer policy that will prevent abuses of the system, discussed the subject vigorously, realized that doing so would limit the open-door policy we value so much, and consequently let the subject slide.

The primary difference between our past ESL conferencing experiences and our experiences of the last two years was our awareness of an emerging pattern in ESL conferencing that called into question some of our fundamental assumptions about what we do. Increased numbers of second-language conferences, as well as conferences involving a larger variety of writing tasks, highlighted difficulties in applying our traditional conferencing strategies to all aspects of second-language writing, not just editing. What had once appeared scattered instances of ineffectiveness in our typical approach became symptomatic of a broader inability to meet the needs of ESL writers with the same basic methods we use to assist native speakers. This realization led us to question whether our past reluctance to confront directly the issues involved in ESL conferencing was really the benign neglect we had assumed it to be or whether we were unintentionally undermining the principles we meant to protect and distancing ourselves from the needs of a large group of writers.

Adapting Conferencing Strategies to Assist ESL Writers

Once genuinely convinced that traditional collaborative strategies often do not work with ESL writers, our faculty realized that the key to more effective ESL conferencing was an attitude adjustment on our part. We had to accept that ESL writers bring different contexts to conferences than native speakers do, that they are, therefore, likely to need different kinds of assistance from us, and

that successful assistance to ESL writers may involve more intervention in their writing processes than we consider appropriate with native-speaking writers.

For those of us whose experience has demonstrated the virtues of nondirective conferencing techniques, simple acceptance of the need to adopt more directive strategies was not always an easy first step. Part of the difficulty in taking this step stemmed from the fact that the differences between native-speaking and second-language writers are sometimes masked by a deceiving familiarity in what they say and do. When native-speaking writers come into the writing center expecting us to tell them what is *the answer* to a problem or the *right* way to express an idea, we may see them—often quite rightly—as either "timid" writers who need their self-confidence boosted, teacher-dependent writers who want an authority to appropriate their writing, or "lazy" writers who want someone else to do their work. In any of these cases, we see our job as getting the writer to assume responsibility for the writing. ESL writers who come to us expecting answers to questions about where their thesis statements should appear, how many developmental paragraphs they must have, how much and what kind of support a point requires, or how an idea should be phrased too often appear to fall into one of these categories: they appear to be insecure, to be abdicating responsibility for their texts for one of the above reasons.

Although the questions that ESL writers ask us are deceivingly similar to the questions native speakers sometimes raise, the contexts of the questions make them substantially different. What we discovered is that failure to recognize the essential difference in these seemingly similar questions severely undercuts our ability to assist second-language writers in acquiring the academic writing skills they need. If we assumed such writers were shy or dependent writers who merely needed encouragement to take charge of their texts, and if we adopted our usual collaborative approach to bring about that recognition of ownership, we were unlikely to achieve our accustomed results because we were applying an attitude solution to an information problem. If we assumed the worst—that the writers were lazy and were trying to get us to take over the writing—we might be travelling even further toward the wrong solution, based on the wrong evidence. We were, in fact, unlikely to provide useful help to ESL writers until we saw the questions they raised about basic form and usage not as evasions of responsibility but as the real questions of writers struggling with an unfamiliar culture, audience, and rhetoric.

To extend the benefits of conferencing and collaborative learning to ESL writers, writing center faculty must understand what these writers need from us and how their needs differ from those of native-speaking writers. The principal difference in the two conferencing situations appears to be the increased emphasis on our role as informant (rather than collaborator) in the second-language conference. Because we know little about ESL writers' rhetorics, backgrounds, and cultures, and because they know little about their current academic discourse community and the rhetoric of academic English, we can assist them only by becoming more direct in our approach, by teaching them writing as an academic subject. Doing so may, in fact, involve teaching them directly what their writing should look like by supplying them with formats for presenting written responses

to various academic assignments and informing them of what their audiences will expect in terms of presentation, evidence, shape, etc.

Conclusion

Although collaborative learning is not a familiar process to most of the international students we see in the writing center, and some of the Socratic techniques we have developed as a result of this theory do not serve the ESL population particularly well, collaborative writing and conference teaching do work for these writers in some important ways. As with native-speaking writers, the process of verbalizing an idea often helps ESL writers discover a direction, and the act of sketching a structure (even with the help of a faculty member) clarifies the principles of that construct in a way merely reading about it cannot. ESL writers who describe their conferencing experiences mention a new awareness of audience, a clarification of the principles of organization, and the discovery of new vocabulary and sentence structures as benefits. In fact, just by acquiring a vocabulary to discuss their writing in English, second-language writers make a first step toward understanding and self-sufficiency.

But these benefits of collaboration accrue to ESL writers through *successful* writing center conferences. We can assist ESL writers to become more capable writers of English only if we understand what they bring to the writing center conference and allow that perspective to determine our conferencing strategies. Structuring successful ESL conferences probably requires that we reexamine our approach as outsiders might, making a real attempt to discard the rhetoric and patterns of thought that are so familiar to us as to seem inevitable. We might, for example, better assist our second-language writers by analyzing academic assignments from an outside perspective to see exactly what is expected in American academic prose, gathering information about audience expectations that recognize our culturally based assumptions, and learning to ask questions in conferences that will allow ESL writers to understand more about idea generation and presentation of evidence. Conferences based on this information and approach might appear different, on the surface, from conferences we conduct with native-speaking writers, but they bring us closer to accomplishing our writing center's goal of providing meaningful help to all campus writers with all kinds of writing questions.

When writing center faculty, with the best of intentions, apply collaborative techniques devised for native-speaking writers to ESL writers, the possibility of cultural miscommunication and failed conferences is inherent in the methodology itself. Since its inception, our writing center has struggled in concern and frustration over a frequent inability to make ESL conferences both successful for the participants and consistent with our conferencing philosophy. In retrospect, it appears that much of this struggle basically involved attempts to determine which of the conference participants was responsible for conferences that failed to meet one or both of these criteria. Sometimes we concluded that the writer was at fault for refusing to accept responsibility for the text and thereby undermining the collaborative process. More frequently, we blamed

ourselves for failing to apply our conferencing principles and techniques appropriately or allowing ourselves to be drawn into directive conferencing by an unusually clever or forceful writer. Our experience of the past two years has convinced us that we will increase the effectiveness of ESL conferencing only when we understand, accept, and respond to the differences between the needs of ESL and native-speaking writers. Attempts to reform or reshape the participants in the conference are unlikely to prove effectual; we must reexamine and revise the method itself.

Note

[1]Our ESL population (currently 465 students) is almost exclusively international students who have studied English in their own countries before coming to the United States. The largest group of students come from China, India, Malaysia, Norway, and Taiwan; they have achieved a minimum TOEFL score of 525 and have been admitted to the university.

Works Cited

Grabe, William, and Robert B. Kaplan. "Writing in a Second Language: Contrastive Rhetoric." *Richness in Writing: Empowering ESL Students*. Ed. Donna Johnson and Duane Roen. New York: Longman, 1989.

Harris, Muriel. "What's Up and What's In: Trends and Traditions in Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal* 11 (1990): 15–25.

Leahy, Richard. "What the College Writing Center Is—and Isn't." *College Teaching* 38 (1990): 43–48.

Leki, Ilona. "Twenty-five Years of Contrastive Rhetoric: Text Analysis and Writing Pedagogies." *TESOL Quarterly* 25 (1991): 123–43.

"Thirty-something" Students: Concerning Transitions in the Writing Center

Cynthia Haynes-Burton
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

As companies "downsize" and various industries lay off workers, many adults are returning to school to pursue a second career. To help them face their new challenges, tutors must recognize that "thirty-something" students have needs that differ from those of traditional students. Nontraditional students often suffer anxiety when confronted by a loss of the stability and identity their previous careers gave them. Most will likely balance multiple family and work roles in addition to assuming their new roles as students. They may also be reluctant to ask for help with their writing, and, when they do, they may tend to focus on basic problems with grammar and mechanics rather than on overall structure or support for their ideas. Writing centers are well suited to help nontraditional students make the transition back to school, Cynthia Haynes-Burton says. When such students