



Peer Tutoring

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the supporting awareness that they are not alone as they work on papers. They also can develop the trust and skills of group work that will make later collaborative efforts—including group revising—more effective. And this approach, as I put it in “Teamwork and Feedback,” “is more productive with inexperienced and unconfident writers than it is to say, ‘Write a pretty complete draft, and then five students will tell you what they think of your work’” (p. 74).

By emphasizing, as I have, the need for collaboration during all stages of student writing projects, I have not meant to imply that Kenneth Bruffee thinks group work should be limited to revision, editing, and evaluation. In fact, *A Short Course in Writing*—an excellent resource for anyone interested in collaborative learning—reveals his concern for collaboration throughout the writing process. Professor Bruffee’s comment simply emphasized one of my two theses, while I have emphasized the other. And I am glad for the chance to think about his comments and to enter into this exchange of views.

Findlay College

Peer Tutoring

As one who has also been working with peer tutors in a writing center since the early 70s, I read Thom Hawkins’ essay, “Intimacy and Audience: The Relationship Between Revision and the Social Dimension of Peer Tutoring” (*CE*, September 1980), with a good deal of interest. Like Hawkins I have come to believe that peer tutors can provide a vital link in the writing process for students who are struggling to develop a broader repertoire of styles and a better understanding of the role of voice and audience in their written compositions. Yet I am very much disturbed by the political situation that sometimes lies behind peer tutoring, one that is too often founded on the notion

that basic studies are remedial and not worthy of university credit, something that should go on outside the mainstream of the academic world, supervised by graduate teaching assistants or instructors without tenure-track appointments.

As long as English departments refuse to recognize developmental courses as integral components of their writing programs, they will continue to be funded in inadequate ways and operated with loosely defined goals and objectives put together on the spot to meet the needs of the student who wanders in on any particular day. It is not enough to offer drop-in help with assignments required for “real” university courses. The work that goes on inside a writing center should be real enough to earn academic credit on its own merits. There is no question that peer tutors can play a major role in that work, but all too often they are relegated to providing last minute assistance with term papers (with peak demand usually occurring the last few days of each semester) or, worse, clerical support for the hapless student forced to cope with programmed texts, computerized answer sheets, or multi-media learning packages.

The most promising writing centers offer learning situations in which writing is treated as a developmental process, with each assignment logically followed by another, encompassing the full range of expressive, referential, and persuasive contexts. Because students often emerge with a variety of needs, the system of instruction should be flexible enough to accommodate itself to the needs of the individual served. Some students require hours of instruction to improve their scribal fluency; others are already masters of the personal style, but fall apart when it comes to low-context, formal analysis. Still others need more specialized help in meeting the demands of technical or professional writing. At a drop-in center the student is often at the mercy of the expertise of the tutor who happens to be on call the hour he or she arrives. And in almost every case, the assistance provided is

product-oriented, with the primary goal a favorable grade on one or two particular assignments.

Writing centers need academic credit, both to establish their credibility and to insure that their methods and practices are pedagogically sound. We do our students a disservice by placing them in "bonehead" noncredit classes that reinforce their lack of confidence and remind them that they are not capable of doing "real" academic work by themselves. Most universities offer students credit for learning the rudiments of a foreign language. Should not students be awarded credit for developing their ability to handle the variety of stylistic and rhetorical options offered by their own language? A writing center gives them the chance to experiment with prose in the same way they experiment in the laboratories of the sciences. Is it too much to ask that they be rewarded for their efforts in learning something that is just as new for many of them? At the same time a credit-bearing course permits the department to exercise standards of quality control and professional direction. It guarantees that full-time members of the staff will take an active interest in what is going on, and perhaps learn something themselves in the process.

Professor Hawkins makes a strong case for the affective aspects of collaborative writing, and I agree that the personal dimension of teamwork is highly satisfying. But it can also be highly satisfying for the tutors in a more cognitive way. The key is to design a system that allows tutors to learn as much as they can about rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and modern methods of urban education while making sure that their attempts to apply what they learn are carefully monitored and supervised. Students working in writing centers should be encouraged to read such professional journals as *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *Freshman English* on a regular basis, and should be free to participate with members of the composition staff in holistic

grading exercises and decisions about the entire writing program when appropriate. Robert Zoellner's essay "Talk-Write: A Behavioral Pedagogy for Composition" (*CE*, January 1969) and William Labov's "The Logic of Non-Standard English" (in his *Language in the Inner City* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972]) offer useful starting points for discussion, while Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Francis Christensen's *Notes toward a New Rhetoric* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) suggest models for tutorial application. *Basic Writing: A Collection of Essays for Teachers, Researchers and Administrators*, edited by Lawrence N. Kasden and Daniel R. Hoerber (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1980) is also a good resource book, with contributions from several notable authorities in the field. The training of peer tutors is essential for the successful operation of a writing center, and it cannot be left to chance. A carefully planned preparatory course does the whole department a service.

The writing center approach to individualized instruction in basic skills does not provide all the answers to open education, but it can be designed to insure that it is not part of the problem.

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Thom Hawkins Responds

Gregory Waters considers only two options in the delivery of tutoring services. He talks about the very real dangers of a "drop-in" service, then contrasts such a loose operation with the assumed benefits of tutoring in a credit-bearing course. However, a third option for tutoring exists on many campuses across the nation, including Berkeley. Our students voluntarily make appointments to see tutors, usually several days to a week in