

Outward:  
From the Writing Center to the Classroom

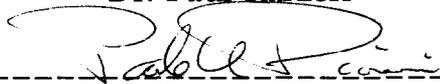
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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## Introduction

This project is an attempt to sort out and reflect upon an aspect of my college education not found in the curriculum for Secondary English Education: teaching elements of English in a one-to-one setting. From August 1993 through December 1994, I worked as a writing tutor in the Ball State University Writing Center, working with individual students on their writing and helping them learn how to recognize and improve both their weaknesses and their strengths.

The chapters in this collection describe a number of my experiences as a writing tutor. To those who have never worked with students' writing in collaborative, one-to-one learning situations, these entries may seem fragmented and disorganized. This perception is ironically accurate. I have isolated each of these accounts as they each occurred, showing few obvious connections among them.

In the section following these descriptions of my tutorials at Ball State's Writing Center, I hope to make some sense of my jumbled and disjointed experiences. I have designed this project with a sequence which will allow a reader to live and learn the way we tutors are often forced to: working with a student; feeling confused and unsure or excited and confident about the session; then reflecting upon and making meaning of the interaction with the writer and his/her writing.

## Brice

The name written next to mine in the appointment book was not familiar to me. I started to fill out the demographic sheet, using what little information had been recorded in the appointment book: the student's name, the course for which the student was writing, and the student's professor's name. When Brice arrived, I knew I had never worked with him, and as I thumbed through the file drawer without finding his file, I knew he had never before visited the Writing Center. I greeted him and introduced myself.

I led Brice to a table and asked him for the rest of the information needed for his demographic sheet and student file: he told me that he was in his third year at Ball State, and that he had voluntarily made the appointment with me; his professor had not referred him to the center. As we chatted, he pulled his essay from a folder, so I asked, "What is your paper about?"

He just looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled a little bit. He didn't say anything, so I rephrased my question.

"What was your assignment?"

"I don't remember. Let me get the sheet out." I didn't really think anything of this; some college students actually finish assignments weeks in advance and forget the original assignment by the time they go back to revise.

He went to his bag, pulled out another folder, and brought it back to the table. He opened the folder and produced an assignment sheet describing an essay in response to a novel. Because I like to know a little about student essays before I begin reading them, I asked the next obvious question: "Which book did you read?"

"I didn't actually read the book," he replied shyly.

"Did you watch the video or something?"

"No," he said, "someone else read the book." I was getting a little concerned, and I think it was probably obvious to him.

"Just read the paper and tell me if it's okay," he ordered.

"I won't know if it is okay unless I know the basis and purpose for it. So, tell me something about it first. What part of the book did you write about? The characters? The symbolism?"

"I don't know. Just read it and look for any grammar errors." He was starting to sound frustrated, but I was getting annoyed too. I could not figure out why he would not tell me about his paper. Then I realized that I had assumed he had written it early, and he was unfamiliar with it now. I had never asked him when it was written, or when he had last read over it.

"Have you checked it for errors?"

"No." He was wasting no words on me at this point.

"When was the last time you read over it?"

"I never read it. I didn't write it." I could feel my temperature rising. My face started to turn red, and my ears started to feel hot.

"Let me get this straight," I began apprehensively. "You are bringing a paper into the Writing Center, where we give writers help with their writing, and you did not even write this paper?" He nodded. "I am a writing tutor. How am I supposed to help you if you did not write this? Where did you get it?"

"A friend of mine wrote it," he told me, with that same little smile on his face. "Couldn't you just proofread it so I can turn it in?"

I calmly responded, as we do to all requests for proofreading, "It is against our policy to proofread, but that is beside the point. I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but what you are doing is plagiarizing, and you can be kicked out of the

university for it. I can't help you. We tutor writers here, and you have not written a single word."

He smiled again and gathered his things. He stood up, slipped on his coat, and sauntered from the room. I looked up at another tutor who had been sitting close by.

"What just happened here?"

## Janice

Janice is always so nonchalant. She calls me Tiff, and she never cares if we start on time or twenty minutes late. She tells me funny stories about her sons, Jaysun and Justin, and no matter how lousy her day has been, she is always perky and ready to write.

Janice and I often work on things other than writing. We brainstorm on topics for her speech class, work on answering the questions for her Sociology study guides, and do searches on the library network for things she needs in other classes. Working with her has been a treat, and I look forward to seeing her every Tuesday.

I meet and talk with Janice's English instructor, John, quite often because I work with many of his students on a regular basis. We have commented many times on what a joy Janice is to have as a student. When her instructor conferences with her, she brings me notes on what he has suggested she work on, and we immediately begin work on the goals they have set together. Janice had a conference with John late in the second week of November, and he returned an essay she had written a few weeks earlier.

Because Janice is so pleasant to tutor, I have had many successful tutorials with her. There are a million mini-stories to tell about Janice, but none so inspirational as what happened in our appointment on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, 1994.

On that Tuesday, Janice pulled from her folder the essay John had returned to her during their recent conference. At first glance, it looked as if John's pen had suddenly sprung a violently red leak. But then Janice pointed out that they were not bad comments. I saw the word "**BEST**," just like that, all capital letters. He remarked feverishly that this essay was the absolute best she had written all

semester. He could not stress enough how pleased he was with her improvement, and by the words, "**GREAT JOB!**" I could tell he was completely sincere in his praise.

I nearly started to cry. I almost shouted at her. All I could say was, "I am so proud of you!" And I said it over and over again. I kept telling her that she really didn't even need me, and that I had known she could do it all along; she just needed some encouragement. She got really excited, and we essentially abandoned our appointment for the day! We spent the rest of the hour talking about her kids, Justin and Jaysun, and their month-old Halloween costumes.

I told her before she left to call me if she decided she didn't need to meet with me the following week. I was only teasing, but she replied, "Believe it or not, the point is for me to not need you guys anymore."

She was absolutely right.

## Lucy

Lucy, a smiley, high-pitched, first semester freshman, was always extremely obvious as she entered the Writing Center. She was just a few minutes late, as usual, but on this particular day, as she plopped down into a chair across from me, she was visibly down-trodden and frustrated. I asked her about her day, about her irritating cold, which she had been trying to remedy for many weeks. She then unwrapped her regular cherry Blo-Pop and prepared to get to work. I asked her the same question I ask all of my regular students when we meet for appointments, "What are we going to work on today?"

That was all she needed, and Lucy began to "slam" on both her teacher and the nature of the assignment her teacher had returned to her that very same day.

"This assignment was hard! It didn't make no sense. I wasn't even gonna do it, but at least I tried!" She continued to tell me how much she struggled with writing that paper and that she finally started it on the night before it was due. She figured that her professor owed her more than green marks all over the page for her effort and torment, if not for the work itself.

The essay she pushed toward me was one paragraph in length. The perforated edges of the paper used in the university computer labs were still attached, and there were green ink scribbles covering what little print was on the page. As I looked at a visual representation of what her instructor probably assumed was twenty minutes of actual writing, at the most, Lucy rattled on about the impossibility of the assignment and what little information she had that could be useful in this assignment.

"Whoa! Slow down, Lucy! What was the dang assignment? What are we talking about?" I was completely lost in the onslaught of her anger, frustration, and

the one paragraph in front of me, from which I was to decipher the assignment which was giving Lucy such a fit. As she composed herself enough to tell me what she had been assigned to write, I gathered that her instructor wanted the students to interview someone they found interesting and write a profile essay about him/her. Lucy had chosen a young woman who lived down her hall. Lucy had asked her interviewee about the way music had affected her life and managed to get quite a bit of workable information from the interview. From what I could understand from Lucy's paragraph, she simply did not realize that there might have been a need to follow up on some of her interviewee's answers for the sake of clarity in her writing. But more importantly, she did not understand the purpose of writing an interview/profile essay. She did not realize that what her subject had to say was of least importance to her instructor, but that she would be graded on her ability to put her information on the page in an interesting and meaningful manner. I began to explain these things to her, and she simply became more and more frustrated.

Okay, time for a new approach. Calmly explaining all of this to her would not matter. She just was not interested in what she could gain from the assignment. What she was concerned about, however, was the comment her instructor scratched onto the bottom of the page: "This is clearly undeveloped. Are you seeing a tutor?" Lucy was referred to the Writing Center two months before she ever made an appointment. Time was running out for her, and midterm was already a thing of the past. She needed to improve her writing, not just on this essay, but on all of the revisions due in her writing portfolio, in the next six weeks. Lucy really had lots of work ahead of her, and clearly I had my work cut out for me as well.

We started to plow through the sentences she had written concerning her conversation with the "music lover." We found, together, that though she had

only composed one paragraph, each sentence she had written actually held the potential to become a topic sentence for a new paragraph.

"Where are the details?" I asked her gently. She looked at me with a puzzled expression upon her face. I posed this question because they were, without a doubt, missing from this first draft. Her instructor pointed out in her comments that Lucy failed to describe the setting of the interview, as well as any physical detail of her interviewee as she sang to Lucy and talked about her future goals relating to music.

Lucy just looked at me.

"I didn't know I was supposed to include all that stuff! How was I supposed to know? She didn't tell us nothin' about that!"

I was gettin weary of defending her professor, so I decided to change gears. I told Lucy that it did not matter what her instructor did or did not tell her because all of the requirements for the assignment were now stated in green at the bottom of her page. I then started to ask questions about the interview.

"What else can you ask her about her major? Do you know what a music engineer does? Can you describe it in a paragraph of its own? What was she wearing during your interview? How did her singing make you feel?" Lucy jotted down the questions I asked and then said, "I guess I gotta lot of work to do."

"Not near as much as it seems, Lucy."

"I'll work on it, talk to my friend again, and then I'll bring it back next week."

"I'll see ya then."

## Ray

I received a phone call in January of 1994 from the mother of a high school student. She and her family had recently moved to Muncie after her husband was transferred from a city in Michigan, and she felt that her son, a freshman at Central High School, was falling behind due to the differences in the curriculum of the two schools. She wanted an English tutor for him, preferably someone with a major in Secondary Education. I agreed to tutor him four days a week, thirty minutes each day.

She began to prepare me for Ray. She told me that he has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and that at times he had been known to simply tune people out. She mentioned several times that should there be any problem I was to contact his father immediately, and she gave me his pager number.

I was a little nervous about working with Ray. I knew very little about ADD, and Ray's mother gave me very little information on how to communicate with him; this was a real problem for Ray and me.

Essentially, Ray did not think he was having any trouble at all in English class. He simply did not care how poorly he did. He was fifteen years old at the time and was beginning to think seriously about cars, girls, and getting into trouble. He would do as little as I forced him to, and he never went out of his way to work on his own primarily because he saw no real purpose for having a tutor.

We were working on participial phrases, infinitives, and gerunds, and we had been doing so for nearly a full week, in conjunction with what his English teacher, Mrs. Fairly, was doing in class. We read the grammar book. We looked at examples. We did exercises his teacher assigned for homework. I gave him examples to define. He gave me examples, both verbally and in writing. He knew

the stuff, and he knew it well. We would have arguments about examples he generated, look up the answers in the grammar handbook, and find that he was right, and I was wrong.

We never met on Fridays, so I was forced to wait until Monday to find out how his test over participial phrases, infinitives, and gerunds turned out. I knew he would do well; he could have rewritten the text, he knew those rules so well.

By the time Monday finally rolled around, I was so anxious to find out how the test went, that I almost couldn't stand the wait for four o'clock. But when he came in, he did not look as anxious to tell me the results as I was to hear them. He got a D. All of that work (and not just memorization) and he got a D. I was terribly disappointed, and it wasn't even my grade. I asked him why, and he couldn't tell me.

Later that week Mrs. Fairly called to talk to me about the things she would be moving on to in class during the upcoming week, and I asked her about Ray's test score. She told me that the reason Ray did so poorly on the exam was because he used foul language in the examples he generated.

## Victoria

Victoria signed up for regular appointments with me immediately after her professor suggested it. The essay she brought to her first session was a memoir. I asked her to read it aloud, as I do many students with fresh drafts of essays to be polished. She refused. I could not understand why.

"May I read it aloud?" I asked her. She was bashful and apprehensive about it, but she agreed. I read her memoir softly, keeping it just between us, and when I was finished, I was emotionally drained. The minimum number of pages required for her first draft was two. She had written seven pages.

Before reading the essay, I had simply assumed that Victoria was timid or that she disliked reading aloud. After reading the narrative she had written, I understood why she did not want to read it aloud. The pain of putting this experience down on paper must have been excruciating for her. It would have been even more traumatic for her to read her story aloud to a stranger in a room full of other students and tutors.

One evening, shortly after her divorce was final, Victoria was assaulted in her home by a neighbor. He had been stalking her for weeks, and eventually he forced his way into her home late at night, after she had put her two small children to bed. He beat her about the head and face and tore her clothes off. Her daughter got out of bed and came downstairs while the attack was taking place, and the man threatened to harm her as well. Both Victoria and her daughter, Leann, are lucky to be alive.

Victoria wrote this particular essay as part of her healing process. She is still struggling with what happened to her. It was very difficult for her to put the experience to rest, and reading the whole story to me was simply more than she could bear.

## Reflection

Since recently beginning student teaching, the last phase of my "college education," my interaction with students has shifted and changed dramatically from my experiences as a writing tutor, and, because of that shift, I constantly find similarities and differences which keep me connecting each class period with my tutorials in the Writing Center. One aspect of this interaction which has not changed significantly, however, is my love of spending time with students. Both in and out of the classroom, I have really enjoyed the millions of mini-experiences each interaction has brought me, as I have learned so much from each and every one.

Because in the classroom I see 113 students' essays rather than three or four, I very rarely have the luxury of sitting down with a writer for an hour or so, chatting about what (s)he has done well or what might help make an idea come across with more strength. Instead, I find myself doing something I always hated to see when going over essays with students in the Writing Center; I circle consistent errors and direct my students to the proper pages in their McDougall & Littell handbooks, or tell them to see me so we can discuss the major problems with the essays. I know deep down that these students are not going to look at those passages. I also know that only a few minutes reviewing the rules of commas or subject-verb agreement will not miraculously dissolve the errors for the second draft; nonetheless, I feel that if I don't give them at least that guidance, since I do not have the time to sit and

conference with each of them, I have left them with nothing more than their errors, some vague information, and a bunch of circles. I have to comment as briefly, and still as specifically, as possible on the content of the essay because they simply stop reading when they feel they have reached their tolerance level for teacher-babble.

This is not something I am used to; in the Writing Center, probably because my role was not that of a teacher, most students would listen to many different suggestions for improving their essays. In the classroom, however, students only want to listen to the suggestions which will give them the grade they want.

One similarity between my working in the Writing Center and my student teaching, which I have found to be more stimulating than shocking, is the fact that I am dealing with many different learning styles each day. When tutoring in a one-on-one fashion, I had only to deal with the educational "hang-ups" of one student at a time. Strangely enough, I am doing the same thing in my classroom, but at a much quicker pace. I may have thirty different "hang-ups" in my room all at once, but I am still only dealing with them one at a time; I have found this to be the only way to deal with them at all. It is impossible to combat all of the problems at once; there are too many factors involved. I have learned that I must step back and look at the entire situation, find the "squeekiest wheel," and begin dumping the grease there. Once I got a firm grasp on this, I realized that I had already learned it; I had simply learned it in a different context, and I did not make the connection until I re-learned it. This lesson was originally taught to me in the Writing Center.

With students' work, which is often filled with lots of little "scratches and dents," the problems must be solved one at a time, starting with those which cause

the most trouble. To accomplish this, as a tutor, I learned to read the students' essays, look at the overall situations, and then decide which course of action to take in order to combat the most vital problems. As I apply this technique in my teaching, I now see quite clearly that this plan of attack is useful in a million situations outside of the writing tutorial.

I have come to realize, as I step into new "student messes" every day, that my most important lessons occur when I find myself dealing with students' personal situations. There is no way to escape handling these situations because they will always affect students' classroom performance -- especially in writing. This, too, is something I learned while tutoring, as is evident from the descriptions of my tutorials presented here. These things, which my tutorials taught me, find their ways not only into my classroom, but into my interaction with other teachers, friends, and loved ones as well.

In the hours Victoria and I spent together each week, I learned many, many things, but none so vital as the lesson she taught me during the tutorial I have described in this project. During that hour-long session with Victoria, she forced me to understand the importance of remembering how little I know about my students' lives beyond the Writing Center. I have always understood and believed in the personal nature of writing, but I never dreamed I would read something so traumatic and life altering in an assignment for English 101.

I think that up to that particular point, I looked at each student essay in the same manner. Every essay that every student brought to me seemed to be just a jumbled bunch of ideas which desperately needed sorting. I always seemed to

assume the role of the "sorter" for the student. But Victoria did not need her thoughts, order of events, or description sorted and put into their proper places. She had accomplished all of those things long before she brought her memoir to me. She didn't need a counselor, for she had been seeing one regularly since the night the police picked up her stalker. This was when my dilemma surfaced. I did not know what I could do for her because I felt that sifting through her essay for mistakes would be a major violation of her experience; I would be poking around in her living nightmare. I did not think I could get beyond the words and content in the essay to tackle all of the now seemingly truly meaningless junk her professor suggested she work on.

At that moment I understood that there is so much more to teaching students about writing than process, mechanics, and all of the other non-descript English "stuff" writing is perceived to encompass. I realized that a piece of writing is actually a piece of a person put on a page by way of pencil, pen, or word processor, and that no piece of writing can be addressed until the person whose life has been put on that page has been addressed first.

An experience I encountered during student teaching reinforced this idea for me. I assigned my Advanced Placement students to write a short, reflective piece discussing their expectations for the A.P. Exam, which they will take in a few weeks. One student had a lot of trouble staying focused in her essay because she feels she has been cheated by her English teachers; she feels they have prepared her for neither the A.P. Exam nor college English. Thus, her personal feelings and frustrations kept her from successfully completing the assignment.

After talking with her, I assured her that her feelings are completely valid and should be taken seriously by all of the teachers she feels have failed her. But then we talked about how to complete the assignment using the constraints I had established. We both knew that she was not trying to dodge writing about what she expects from the A.P. Exam; she simply feels very unsure of what will be expected of her on that exam and in college. The other things on her mind needed to be addressed before she could channel her writing back to the task at hand.

This idea spills over into my semester with Ray. He is such a complex kid, as most are at the interesting and terrifying age of 15. I constantly felt that he was just another "pain in the neck" adolescent, until I physically, not figuratively, sat myself down and tried to figure out just exactly what it was that made Ray behave the way he did.

As I worked my way through more education classes, I began to understand that there could be any number of factors leading to behavior like Ray's, and it is amazing how many nasty and unfair things he might have perceived to be in his life at the time I was tutoring him: his family had recently moved from the only home he had ever known to a new state; he had been forced to leave his pets in Michigan; he was starting at a new high school; he was away from his friends and the things he enjoyed doing, such as skiing and snow-boarding; his younger brothers and sisters were requiring more attention as they attempted to adjust as well. It is no wonder Ray developed an attitude problem and was having trouble in school. What he probably needed even more than an English tutor was some quality time with his family and the chance to feel a part of something again. He

needed some extra parental encouragement. He needed to try a school club or an athletic team. He needed to join a church youth group like the one he left in Michigan. However, he did not have enough time for these activities because he was with me for thirty minutes every afternoon, after his hour-long Spanish lesson and before his thirty minute algebra tutorial.

So many things can and do affect a student's academic performance. As a teacher, this is a lesson no professor could have taught me. It took real life interaction with a "problem student" for me to understand that often times the lack of motivation and achievement is a result of much more than a distaste or apathy for the subject at hand. To get to the heart of the matter, a teacher or tutor must respect the student enough to explore the situation, rather than simply making a judgment based on the evidence in the gradebook.

I was reminded of this when dealing with Denise, a twelfth grade sports fanatic who found herself in my second period class this semester. My supervising teacher made it a point to tell me absolutely nothing about a student until I came to him with specific questions. At the end of the first nine weeks, I had to fail Denise. I had approached her and discussed the assignments she was missing in the middle of the term, and I expressed to her how important it was for her to make those assignments up. She responded favorably to completing her missed work, but then never handed any in.

When report cards came out, and she saw her F, she was very upset. She was not upset that she did not pass English; she was upset because her failing grade made her ineligible for softball. She wrote me a letter explaining that since her father

passed away, basketball and softball were the only ways she could vent her frustrations. She apologized for not taking my mid-term warning seriously, and told me about the problems she was dealing with at home with her mother's adjustment to her father's death. Eventually, with the help of my supervising teacher, Denise and I worked out a contract for the work she was missing. She signed a contract stating that she would turn all the missing assignments in by the first game; I signed a contract approving her eligibility for softball upon receipt of those assignments. Once we came together and dealt with each other on a human basis, rather than on a level of an angry student and a frustrated teacher, we found solutions.

As a novice, I realize that I am extremely naive about many things. I never realized just how unsuspecting I was until my session with Brice. I assumed many things about this student, without having met him prior to our tutorial. I considered the option that perhaps he had done his work so conscientiously that he had finished it too early to remember the assignment. I assumed that perhaps he had not read over it in such a long while that he could no longer recall just exactly what he had decided to write. But not once did I suspect that he had purchased his essay from someone else. I had forgotten how simple it is for some students to slide through school without doing any real work. All of the people with whom I went to high school, who never turned in an assignment they had personally completed, had slipped my mind. I guess I was too idealistic, believing that anyone in college deserved to be there and could be trusted to do his/her own work. Now, I am not really sure. But what I do know is that this experience will never leave me now. As

I step back into the realm of compulsory education, I will recall how simple-minded I was in my session with Brice.

While my twelfth grade academics were writing fiction, I was confronted by a student who bluntly asked, "You do know I have been writing all of Shawn's essays, don't you?" I simply answered, "How would I have known that?" She went on to tell me that she had not really minded at first, but that he had recently become pushy about it. I was flabbergasted. I was not sure of how to address the student who had been "borrowing" essays, and I did not know what to do with this student who just came right out and admitted to "loaning" them to him. I made an agreement with both of them. Shawn, the one who had not been writing, wrote new essays to replace the ones he had turned in but had never written; Jenny, the young lady who had been writing twice the number of essays as she had been asked, wrote one more for me. It was titled, "Why it is Important to do My Own Work and Nobody Else's." All's well that ends well.

One idea that I felt education professors were attempting to impress upon us was that teaching is a very tough and thankless job, but that every once in a great while, a true feeling of pride and thanks will come from a student, and that these rewards are what teaching is really all about. Fortunately I wasn't forced to wait until I had endured endless hours in the classroom to sense this amazing feeling. My first experience with the intrinsic rewards of educating occurred on that Tuesday before Thanksgiving with Janice.

I have never been so proud of anyone as I was of Janice when I saw that essay. She was thrilled with her accomplishment, and I was ecstatic! At that moment, I

felt that "thing" that makes teachers keep teaching, and I just beamed -- I could feel it! After I calmed down, I wondered how long I would have to wait until I felt that wonderful sensation again. As it turned out, not long at all. Just recently, a young woman in my fifth period class wrote the most incredible essay I have ever read. The assignment was to retell Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" in the perspective of someone outside of the story itself. I only required the essay to be two to three pages, but Janel wrote a full six pages, with an afterword explaining how her interaction with Seymour Glass changed her life. I was overjoyed with her work, and I somehow managed to get her excited about it too. The deadline for submissions to the high school literary magazine was still a few days away, and together we worked to get her essay ready for publication in it. We will get to see her work in print in just a few months.

Like Janel and all of my other students, Lucy afforded me so many great experiences that I could not possibly describe them in a few sentences. She needed so many different things from me. She relied heavily on my explanations of her instructor's comments and on my pushing her into what she really needed for her writing to improve. So often, I had to just let her sit alone at a table and do what she could on her own, rather than sitting with her and piecing together ideas and essays. Lucy did not need a tutor as badly as she needed a sounding board and a translator. She had such wonderful ideas, and she was extremely motivated by the fact that she was teetering on the verge of taking English 102 all over again in the Spring. I never had to fight to keep her on track once I got past her frustration, which usually only meant a matter of listening for a few minutes while she belly-ached about her class,

classmates, and her instructor.

I have this feeling that many of the students with whom teachers become easily annoyed are like Lucy. These students need to sense that their teachers are aware of their frustrations and are willing to work around them, and I think that so often teachers are forced to worry about whole classes to such an extent that they seem to forget the individuals who make up those classes. Thus, classes can become uncomfortable for all involved; without a doubt, Lucy's negative attitude and constant complaining was a distraction for her instructor, as well as her classmates. I found, as Lucy's tutor, that students like her often just need a little shot of encouragement.

I have not yet learned how best to handle a student like Lucy in a classroom setting, and it may very well be that the most effective tactic is to simply ignore the student for the sake of the immediate classroom environment; but for Lucy's sake, and for the sake of students like her, I feel that encouraging interaction and help from a teacher and/or classmates would probably be more helpful, if the student is willing to accept it.

My reflections on the time I spent with Lucy illustrate another very important attribute tutoring offers, and refers back to my discussion of handling a variety of learning styles. Through working with several different types of students, which a tutor undoubtedly will do, a tutor is able to identify with various learning styles and personality types. This is the best preparation for teaching twenty to thirty different students with twenty to thirty different needs every class period.

Essentially, my experiences with students in the Writing Center and the

classroom will continue to bounce off of each other, reinforcing all of the important lessons I have learned. There was a time when moments in my classroom reminded me of moments in the Writing Center. But now, as I near the finishing of this project, memories of my tutorials remind me of incidents in my classroom. For me, there is no way to separate the two, and I would not want there to be because the true learning in all of these experiences stems from the versatility of the contexts of the lessons.

## Assertions

I know that many students enter college having chosen education as their course of study. I also know that not all of those students finish their education degrees. Many change their minds about teaching once they get into the psychology and methods of the major. It is very hard for education majors to find the value of all of the theory of education when we have never had the opportunity to explore those methods and elements of psychological/cognitive development in a true educational setting until late in our college careers. For this reason, many education majors are disappointed by the required coursework and leave the major all together.

Tutoring, however, gives education majors the chance to put that theory to work with just one student at a time early on in the college programs, rather than forcing them to plunge in during student teaching without ever having had contact with the possible problem spots of their particular content areas or with the students who have those problems. Currently, Ball State Elementary Education majors are required to tutor for their reading and math methods courses. Secondary Education majors, however, are not required to participate in that type of course work. Because of this, I truly believe that if all secondary education majors tutored regularly while completing their degrees, whether in an organized center, such as Ball State's Writing Center, or privately with local students, we would have more

"good" middle and high school teachers in the schools, instead of losing them to the theory education majors are bombarded with in college.

Unfortunately, not many education majors have the opportunity to experience the "feelings" generated by being a good teacher. And equally unfortunate is the fact that the rewarding nature of educating, which is one of the many reasons college students declare education as a major, is lost when education majors are pushed into learning about the research done in the field without first experiencing a need for the solution found in the research. For many education majors, there simply are no connections between the enjoyment one finds in working with children and the lifeless, theoretical information they feel they are being forced to learn.

While the theory and psychology is extremely important, so is maintaining the passion an education major feels for teaching when (s)he originally declares a major in education. This is another very strong argument in favor of tutoring while earning a teaching degree. Working individually with students keeps the inspirations to teach alive in those students who are struggling with the other requirements of the major. The faces of students are constant reminders of why being an education major is so important; and often, being with a regular student after a particularly down-heartening week of study or an extremely difficult exam in educational psychology class, can be very uplifting, giving the tutor one more reason to remain steady with his/her decision to teach.

Tutoring reinforces the decision to teach for those who are cut out for a career in education; likewise, those education majors who really are not suited for teaching

may realize that fact while working one-on-one with individual students. Tutoring requires a very definite understanding of the subject matter, a great deal of patience, and a desire to be with and help students, just as teaching does. And also, as is the case with teachers, it does not take long to find out whether or not a tutor exhibits these essential traits and behaviors. Thus, tutoring is excellent practice for applying the "educational" skills we have been gaining throughout college, and it is the perfect opportunity for exploring the compatibility of oneself with the teaching profession.

Tutoring has also supplemented my learning through the direct contact with actual students, which is, to a large degree, missing from the curriculum for secondary education majors. In the secondary education program as it stands today, outside of personal observations, secondary ed. majors are not given the opportunity to actually be with a student and attempt to teach him/her something until quite late in the program. For most of these majors, the first time they ever try to teach does not occur until during the third year. This is simply too late. By the third year, an education major has spent thousands of dollars and hours working toward a teaching degree. Upon entering the classroom for the first time, many education majors realize that they simply could not, and do not want to, handle the frustrations of teaching. Had those teaching majors been exposed to the true work of an educator, rather than the theories of teaching, earlier on in the major, this shattering realization of time, effort, and money wasted might have been avoided.

Tutoring in an organized center, such as Ball State's Writing Center or Learning Center, is the perfect gateway into the much larger professional arena of

education. The insight and experience available to tutors through student-tutor interaction; collaboration with other tutors; close work, guidance and reflection with directors, instructors, and professors; and professional opportunities, such as attending and presenting talks or workshops at conferences and publishing personal writings, are invaluable to education majors. Since working as a peer tutor in the Writing Center, I have attended four professional conferences and made presentations at two of them. I have submitted and had accepted for publication an article in a national professional journal. I have received guidance and support from people with similar interests and goals as my own, and I have made friends who will continue to support my aims throughout the years to come. Interestingly enough, since I began my student teaching, I have made similar friendships and found colleagues with whom I share similar interests and philosophies. Working in the Writing Center has prepared me more for the culture of a school environment than I ever dreamed it would.

For all of the reasons presented here, in my narratives, my reflection, and in this final portion of my project, I truly believe that any and all education majors, regardless of level (secondary, elementary, early childhood), and regardless of subject area, should be encouraged to tutor, in any setting, during their teacher training. Had it not been for my experiences in Ball State's Writing Center, I truly feel I would not be prepared to join the professional arena of education as well as the universal community of educators. Simply put, tutoring gave me what the curriculum for Secondary Education majors did not. Thus, I believe that it is time for all administrators and curriculum supervisors to recognize the legitimacy and value of

the tutoring experience to the teaching major, and recommend that students add it to the existing training programs for teachers at all levels.