

A Conversation *With* Beth Boquet

By: Lori Rogers, Michigan Technological University

Learning with tutors' is the theme of the joint meeting of the 19th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and the 21st Annual Midwest Writing Centers Association Conference to be held in Lawrence, Kansas this Fall. For our keynote speaker Elizabeth Boquet, learning with tutors is a daily practice. Boquet is Director of the Writing Center and Associate Professor of English at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut. Her published work has appeared in scholarly journals and edited collections, and her new book, *Noise from the Writing Center*, was released earlier this year by Utah State University Press. For the past six years, she has served as an at-large representative on the Executive Board of the International Writing Centers Association. Recently, I had the opportunity to talk with Boquet about this year's theme, her new book, and her upcoming keynote address. My impression--We have a lot to look forward to this Fall!



Beth Boquet

When I asked Boquet about her work with tutors and how that work influences and inspires her, she reflected first on her own work as an undergraduate peer tutor. "Those early sessions that really marked me and some of my early teaching experiences were really painful and were marked by moments of intellectual crisis and moments of 'Who am I?' and 'Will I be any good at this ever?'" Boquet explains that those experiences have taught her the importance of providing tutors with ways of reframing the work that they do. "I don't think it has to be such a painful process." Boquet acknowledges that "some of the tutors' experiences are going to be hard, challenging, and risky and those things are good. I want to try to avoid those moments or at least help tutors to think about how they might avoid those moments where they end up feeling really bad." Boquet sees these efforts as "part of working with tutors to develop a philosophy of teaching and learning that is really about who they are as people, and who the students are that they are working with as people, and how you come together as two people to create meaning."

In her work with tutors, Boquet believes that "if I'm a tutor advocate, then it frees the tutors up to be an advocate of the students with whom they are working." It is clear that this role also brings Boquet a great deal of joy and professional energy. "There is something so fresh about working with people who are at that juncture of gaining a measure of intellectual independence. . . . For some of the tutors, it's the first time they have taken something that they have been learning in a class and maybe learning throughout their disciplinary studies, if they have been lucky, and really thinking about what it means to operationalize that learning, to formulate a

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“I can see why the writing center becomes the hard-labor camp of the academy. What would happen if we were to seize that designation, admit that the writing center is indeed a place where actual labor (*gasp!*) takes place, look our colleagues in the eyes and say, yes, we work with our hands.”

—Beth Boquet *Noise*



MWCA State Consortia Initiative

By: Jane Cogie, Southern Illinois University

I would like to remind you of the opportunity to collaborate with others involved in writing centers through the Midwest Writing Center Association state consortia. While the activities of consortia are shaped by the specific interests of their members and thus vary from state to state, they may include, for example, a website or listserv for information sharing, informal gatherings at specific writing centers within the state, or collaboration on conference presentations. The amount of participation is up to the individual member. As I noted in the last edition of this newsletter, MWCA state consortia already exist or are being formed in the following states with the following state representatives:

Illinois (Jane Cogie, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, jcogie@siu.edu)

Kansas (Michele Eodice, University of Kansas, michele@ukans.edu)

Minnesota (Jane Opitz, St. John's University, jopitz@csbsju.edu)

Missouri (Suellen Meyer, St. Louis Community College-Meramec, smeyer@mccmail.stlcc.cc.mo.us).

If you are from a state that already has a consortium and are interested in joining, the state representative would be pleased to hear from you. If your state doesn't yet have a consortium, please consider starting one. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have on joining or starting a MWCA state consortium (jcogie@siu.edu). We look forward to hearing from you.

MWCA Executive Board Members Contact Information

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Minnesota State University Moorhead

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Coe College

University of Iowa

Michigan Technological University

Concordia University - St. Paul

Southern Illinois University

shaws@mnstate.edu

fcondon@stcloudstate.edu

michele@ku.edu

jfrankli@pittstate.edu

rmarrs@coe.edu

CCoggins66@aol.com

lrogers@mtu.edu

friedrich@csp.edu

Jcogie@siv.edu

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philosophy, and to enact it in a way that feels right and good. I feel that when I get to work with tutors, and when I get to watch them, I feel challenged and pushed to be in a place where I remember what it is like to have that fresh feeling. And that makes me want to have it again and again."

That fresh feeling is often derived from those moments in a session that are the toughest to predict, to theorize, to access. It is these moments of excess, Boquet argues, "that we are writing off because we can't account for them the way an administrator might want us to account for them." Boquet posits that "these are the very moments that students don't really get anywhere else. That is what is intriguing to me in talking about the excess. In trying to fit ourselves into some sort of disciplinary and professionalized mold we are really discounting and devaluing the very things that make our spaces incredibly important. If we don't advocate for that as a valuable part of academic and intellectual life then we can't expect anyone to advocate for that."

Boquet's new book, *Noise from the Writing Center*, explores these moments of excess and argues for a higher-risk/higher-yield model of writing center work. Boquet explains that this type of pedagogy encourages tutors to look for "moments that are new--to see each tutoring session as an opportunity for growth for both tutor and student." Boquet explains that by contrast, lower-risk/ lower-yield pedagogy suggests a model where tutors have become very comfortable and very familiar with exactly how a session is supposed to proceed. Higher-

risk/higher-yield is more like "finding out who this person is who has just sat down across from me and from there we can start to think about the writings that he or she is working on." According to Boquet, the tutor needs to be thinking, "the first task is laying myself on the line and not just being comfortable with some sort of script that I inherited in my staff training class." Boquet suggests that tutors who have been working for a year or more develop built-in questions that they can ask students bringing in a "typical" writing assignment, the research paper for example. Becoming too comfortable with the way a session might go may not "necessarily engage the student who is sitting across from you." For Boquet, "that is the challenge and the exhausting thing about the higher-risk/higher-yield model. It means that every time (at least to the best of your ability) that you sit down to tutor you are fully present in the moment with this other person."

Looking ahead to the Fall conference, Boquet plans, in part, to share her experiences using a different staff training model. In the last chapter of *Noise from the Writing Center*, Boquet discusses the staff training program at Rhode Island College, which is under the direction of Meg Carroll. Adapting this program to her own teaching, Boquet is collaborating with two undergraduate peer tutors on the design and teaching of the staff training course. Boquet is excited about the many things she has learned "working so closely with the tutors on a course that I have owned for a long time." And I, for one, am looking forward to hearing more about it in October!

Register for MWCA/ NCPTW Conference!

Name: _____
(Title) (First) (MI) (Last)

Position/Job Title: _____ College/organization: _____

Address: Home or Work

Daytime Phone _____ - _____ - _____ Fax _____ - _____ - _____
E-mail _____ SSN (optional) _____ - _____ - _____

Fee Options:

Participant & Student Registration

- Participant Registration \$85
 Student Registration \$40

Parking permit(s): \$4 each day

- Oct 24th Oct 25th Oct 26th Total parking = \$ _____
Total due = \$ _____

Payment Options:

Check enclosed, payable to the University of Kansas.

Bill company PO # _____
Credit Card Type _____
Billing Address (If different from above)

Cardholder Name _____

FEIN (required for invoicing) _____

Card Number _____

Expires __ / __

If you will need special accommodation, please check the box and a member of the Continuing Education staff will contact you.

Housing:

The conference will take place at the Kansas Union on the main campus of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. Room blocks have been reserved at the following hotels. Please make your reservations according to the deadlines listed because room availability cannot be guaranteed after that date; mention that you are attending the KU Continuing Education Peer Tutoring Conference to receive rates listed.

SpringHill Suites

Call 785-841-2700 by **September 26, 2002**, to receive the rate of \$74 king or \$84 queen double.

Westminster Inn

Call 785-841-8410 or toll free 888-937-8646 by **October 10, 2002**, to receive the rate of \$45 single or \$55 double.

Eldridge Hotel

Call 785-749-5011 by **September 24, 2002**, to receive the rate of \$95.50 queen suite or \$127.50 king suite. A limited number of rooms are available.

Five Easy Ways to Register:

Mail to:

The University of Kansas
Continuing Education
1515 St. Andrews Drive
Lawrence, KS 66047-1625.

Fax: 785-864-4871

Web: <http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>

E-mail: kuce@ku.edu

Phone: 785-864-KUCE (864-5823) or toll free 877-404-KUCE (404-5823)

Nominations for MWCA Executive Board: 3 Positions Available

Nominations for three member-at-large positions to the MWCA Executive Board are now open. Each position is a three-year term. All nominations must include a brief biography--about 150 words. The deadline for nominations is July 15, 2002. Voting will take place at the annual MWCA meeting October 25-27, 2002, at the University of Kansas. Nominations, including a brief biography, will also be accepted from the floor of the conference.

Send your nominations via snail mail or e-mail to:

Frankie Condon
St. Cloud State University
English Department
St. Cloud, MN 56301-4442

The 2002 MWCA/NCPTW Conference: “Why Lawrence?”

✍ By: Michelle Eodice, Writing Center Director at the University of Kansas ✍

The Coe crew asked me to write this brief article for the MWCA newsletter on the theme “Why Lawrence?” – the site of our next MWCA conference. As I considered the question, it occurred to me that I asked myself that same question when I moved here almost four years ago. But I assure you that from my very first visit I found this small city welcoming, fun, and full of diverse activities. We urge you to explore Lawrence when you attend the MWCA/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing joint *Conference on the Prairie* in October 2002.

Kathy Shine Cain, whom many of us know as the writing center director at Merrimack College back in Massachusetts, did her post-doctoral work here at the University of Kansas. She made it a point to remind me that we are fibbing a bit when we say this is a “conference on the prairie.” She is right—we are at the eastern end of a state that just seems to get flatter and flatter (and more dull-looking!) as you head west. In fact, I arrived in Lawrence the first time expecting to find a huge expanse of dull, dry prairie stretched out before me, but in fact felt right at home with the hilly, tree-lined streets, thanks to the early settlers who introduced the greenery from back east. While Lawrence is not officially “prairie” we do have a small tall grass prairie reserve nearby and I’d be happy to take you out there—it is amazing to look at the actual ruts and swales left by thousands of Conestoga wagons taking the Santa Fe Trail through Kansas.

History all around

Lawrence is attractive not just for its college town charm, but also for its rich history. The history includes an original settlement of abolitionists from Massachusetts, the harboring of John Brown, and several visits from Jesse James. Much of the guerrilla activity that precipitated the Civil War was plotted or carried out here in Kansas. The “Free State” image is still evident in Lawrence; one of the best restaurants in town bears the name *Free State Brewery*.

Some of you will stay at the restored and historic Eldridge Hotel, the hotel Quantrill’s raiders burned down at least once. This period in United State history is violent, controversial and fascinating, and if you are like me and enjoy reading primary sources, visit http://www.ku.edu/carrie/kancoll/books/cordley_history/ch_main.htm#contents for an engaging history of Lawrence written by the Rev. Richard Cordley in 1895.

Articles and news items for the Fall 2002 issue of the **Midwest Writing Centers Association Newsletter** should be sent to Bob Marrs; Coe College; Cedar Rapids, IA 52402 (e-mail address: rmarrs@coe.edu).

Submission deadline: November 15, 2002

Newsletter Editors: Bria Michael and Sarah Bruncker, Coe College Writing Center

MWCA Newsletter
c/o The Writing Center
Coe College
1220 1st Ave. NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402