**University of Sydney**

**Susan Thomas**

*Learning to write by writing to learn: How writing centres and creativity can transform academic writing instruction*

*Abstract*
*While national agendas and individual university mission statements seek to make Australian higher education more inclusive for an increasingly diverse student population, the contribution that writing centres can make to achieving these goals has been overlooked. This article outlines the rationale, development, and growth of the Writing Hub at the University of Sydney to advocate for writing centre/writing across the curriculum (WAC) collaborations as the future of writing instruction in Australia. By reimagining academic writing instruction as creative, collaborative practice, Australian higher education can move beyond the antiquated deficit remediation model.*
*Keywords: creative writing, academic writing, writing across the curriculum, writing centres, writers' centres*

> If thought is internalised public and social talk, then writing
> is internalised talk made public and social again.
> – Bruffee 1984

> Both fields [academic and creative writing] are better served by a richer
> view of writing that articulates the values of a creative, productive art,
> "practical" in much wider terms than would be imagined.
> – Hesse 2010

This article outlines the development of the Writing Hub at the University of Sydney to make a case for writing centres and writing across the curriculum (WAC) as the future of academic writing instruction in Australia. It argues for writing pedagogy as a collaborative, interdisciplinary, epistemic, and creative practice that aims to improve writing more organically by focusing first on the development of writers themselves.

This concept is hardly novel. Claire Woods and Paul Skrebels (1997), Anne Surma (2000), Kate Chanock (2004), and Jan Skillen (2006) have argued for a rethinking of writing instruction in Australia, including the possibilities of WAC and writing centre approaches, for over two decades. Their work echoes Stephen North's 'The Idea of a Writing Centre', which argues convincingly for supporting the critical nexus of writer, audience, and text in the writing process (North 1984). However, while writing centres around the world have evolved to reflect a changing field of research after the social and global turns in writing studies, the stereotypical perceptions of writing instruction that North lamented in the eighties still pervade much academic writing instruction in Australia, particularly in the 'sandstone' institutions. Despite notable exceptions at the Universities of Queensland and Adelaide, La Trobe, UniSA, Murdoch,

Wollongong, and the ANU, academic writing instruction in Australian universities is sometimes confined to a few pages on Learning and Teaching websites. In stark contrast are the rich traditions of Australian creative writing instruction and the proliferation of thriving 'writers' centres' and various professional networks that promote creative writing by supporting writers and linking creative writing instruction to cultural contexts beyond the academy. There is much that Australian academic writing instruction can learn from both writing centres and creative writing pedagogies.

Douglas Hesse, a leading composition theorist, believes that the pedagogies separating academic and creative writing instruction are not as static as we might think. He argues for a further blurring of the lines:

> We're at a crucial professional juncture, needing to find a good mix between being "about" writing/composing (that is, as focusing on interpretation, on analysing texts or literate practices) and being "for" writing/composing (that is, focusing on production, on making texts). This polarity can be thoroughly deconstructed ("analysis is productive," etc.). However, if we go too far toward being "about" composing, we privilege students as scholarly interpreters and researchers in ways paralleling the ways literary studies initiates its students. While students having knowledge about composing is eminently worthy, ignoring different kinds of writing for wider audiences and purposes is marginalising, especially when digital tools and networks expand the production and circulation of texts. Here's where some assumptions and practices for creative writing can prove useful. (2010: 34-35)

Hesse's distinction between being 'about writing' and 'for writing' is astute. Too often in Australian higher education, students are asked to analyse and interpret texts and write about that analysis and interpretation rather than working to invent, revise, and refine their own texts for specific audiences and purposes – as creative writing students do in a writing workshop or studio. Students meet in small groups, swap drafts, discuss their process, and 'perform' their work for their peers, receiving valuable constructive feedback. But in the standard Australian academic writing classroom, there is not always this space for conversation and 'live' peer review. Instead, there may be a focus on correcting grammar, a discussion of the 'modes' of writing, perhaps a lecture on what makes good writing – or a slideshow featuring prolific writers reflecting on their craft; but there is rarely the same degree of actual writing, talking, sharing, drafting, and revising that takes place in the creative writing classroom. As a wise old professor once remarked, no student ever learned to write by reading about how to do it. Nevertheless, this approach is pervasive. The reasons are many, from writing teachers with academic training in fields other than language and writing to challenging economic models that privilege the mass-produced, content-driven lecture/tutorial format. Bottom line: the small group/studio/workshop model is expensive, and arguments for alternative pedagogical models aren't helped by the view of academic writing as 'remedial' or a study skill – a second-class enterprise to the 'real' business of the university. And while this stigma is universally recognised, Australia's academic writing culture has not evolved at the same pace as programs in England, Europe, America, and Asia (Thaiss et al 2015). Japan, for example, has its own Writing Centers Association, with the Komaba Writers' Studio at the University of Tokyo promoting the concept of learning to write through discussion rather than correction, and training peer tutors to guide students through questioning rather than direct instruction.

But despite the development of writing centres around the world, including a few in Australian universities, there is not yet a pervasive writing centre culture in Australia. As North writes, 'the members of my profession, my colleagues, people I might see at MLA or CCCC or read in the pages of *College English*, do not understand what I do. They do not understand what does happen, what can happen, in a writing centre' (1984: 433). In making the case that writing centres exist 'to talk to writers', not 'to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum' (1984: 440), North counters common misconceptions of writing centres by outlining the idea of a writing centre as follows:

> The essence of the writing centre method, then, is this talking. If we conceive of writing as a relatively rhythmic and repeatable kind of behaviour, then for a writer to improve that behaviour, that rhythm, has to change-preferably, though not necessarily, under the writer's control. Such changes can be fostered, of course, by work outside of the act of composing itself… By and large, however, we find that the best breaker of old rhythms, the best creator of new ones, is our style of live intervention, our talk in all its forms. (1984: 443)

Creative writing practitioners, of course, made this connection long ago, as evidenced by the abundance of writers' centres across Australia, offering creative writers more agency and autonomy in their own writing processes. The centres also provide safe havens where students can get to know themselves as writers and workshop their drafts in a relaxed, uninhibited, and multi-dimensional environment beyond the classroom. Following the same model, academic writing centres can provide a multidisciplinary platform from which to introduce the concepts of collaborative writing and writing to learn, key tenets of WAC, and practices that creative writers already privilege. Writing to learn has long been promoted by the Australian Council of Educational Research as an alternative for teaching writing in the schools (see Meiers & Knight 2007), but has never really caught on in an education system bound by strict timetables and syllabus requirements, not to mention a culture of 'teaching to the test'. And it is this conditioning that students bring with them into tertiary writing classrooms.

With these ideas in mind fifteen years ago, I embarked on carving out a dedicated space for both a writing centre and an academic writing program at the University of Sydney, where ideas for pedagogical reform were hard to sell in 2005. At that time, a WAC program was beyond my wildest dreams, but my experiences over the last decade have given me a new perspective on why both writing centres and WAC are essential components of any successful academic writing program – and the potential both represent for the future of academic writing instruction in Australia. Beyond promoting the concepts of writing centres and WAC, I wanted the Sydney Writing Hub to pioneer a new culture of writing instruction at Sydney – and in Australia – comprising research and teaching excellence, certainly, but also a firm commitment to community outreach and activism. In the absence of a strong academic writing tradition, and with no local disciplinary peers or graduate students in the field, I envisioned committed, student-focused staff and peer tutors from a range of disciplines uniting to create a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to writing instruction – a 'Burkean parlour' where conversation, collaboration, and invention would flourish, where students could move effortlessly between their classes and the writing centre, and where genuine thought and reflection would flow between formal and informal learning spaces. Rather than merely *supporting* the writing program, I wanted the writing centre to be *integral* to the work of the writing program, as North urges, merging a de facto Department of

Writing and Rhetoric with a globally-connected writing centre, dedicated to the twenty-first-century writing needs of students. I wanted the centre to look outward as much as inward, as a rich resource for secondary students and teachers, providing leadership for writing in schools – and developing a strong community engagement profile and globalising mission, with consulting services for corporations and support services for low-income schools and community groups.

Since its launch in 2011, the Writing Hub at the University of Sydney has, to varying degrees, done all of these things. It represents the first program of its kind in Australia (independent writing program plus writing centre) to grow into a fully-fledged Department of Writing Studies, administering accredited writing courses and a writing minor, with plans underway for a major in 2020. In addition to offering writing support services for students, facilitated by carefully selected Student Writing Fellows (peer tutors), who have completed a rigorous orientation and mentoring program, the Writing Hub also offers professional development and writing workshops for high school teachers and students as well as the corporate community through its consulting services. As the benefactor of a variety of disciplinary influences, the Hub fosters a confluence of diverse theoretical and pedagogical communities, both inside and outside the academy, representing a departure from the way writing is normally conceived of and taught in Australia. Emphasising writing as a discipline within a rhetorical framework places a clear focus on invention, interdisciplinary collaboration, writing in the disciplines, and writing to learn – the foundational aims of WAC. Riding the wave of the global turn in writing studies, the Writing Hub concept had been pitched at the right time, and each new step in its development has seemed to correspond with an important university initiative. In the end, however, the Writing Hub is not at all what I'd thought it would be – or precisely what I had set out to create. My initial instinct in 2004 as a newly-minted, overly-anxious academic had been to transplant in Australia the US writing instruction model I was familiar with (a rookie mistake), but it had become clear very quickly that this would never work. A successful Australian academic writing program would have to reflect its national educational traditions and aspirations, its unique geographical and cultural context, and – perhaps most importantly – its institutional mission to help determine its local identity. And since creative writing was already well-established (and respected) in Australia, I began looking for theoretical and pedagogical commonalties. However, as Tim Mayers argues, an alliance between academic writing and creative writing won't make much of a difference in traditional English Departments that tend to compartmentalise both (Mayers 2005). And while writing centres can provide an alternative pathway for a co-mingling of creative and academic writing practice, free from the political and theoretical divisions of tradition-bound departments, it is important to consider the institutional mission and theoretical climate of individual universities – and the often delicate balance between honouring the past and preparing students for the future.

As Joseph Janangelo writes in *A Critical Look at Institutional Mission: A Guide for Writing Program Administrators*, 'excessive evocation of past traditions can make an institution appear to be about the then and there rather than the here and now' (Janangelo 2016: xiv). Finding the balance between the University of Sydney's traditions and aspirations seemed an obvious first step, with the aims of internationalisation, as represented in the university's Strategic Plan (2011-2015) a logical place to start. Strategies Three, Four, Five, and Thirteen, in particular, seemed relevant for developing a writing program with a strong focus on global citizenship:

Strategy Three: Initiate a University-wide program of curriculum renewal.

Strategy Four: Enrich the experience of University life for all our students.

Strategy Five: Expand and diversify opportunities for students to develop as global citizens.

Strategy Thirteen: Prioritise international engagement on a regional basis to support the effective development of University-wide partnerships and networks. (University of Sydney 2011)

Since these aims corresponded directly with the goals of writing instruction (particularly WAC), as students are writing more than ever in a digital, globalising world, they were useful for demonstrating how and why the writing centre and writing program I envisioned could serve as a vehicle for the success of the university's globalisation ambitions. But despite an explicit commitment to internationalisation saturating the university's strategic plan and the proliferation of scholarship on the relationship between internationalisation and teaching writing in cross-national contexts, it isn't immediately obvious to institutions without an academic writing culture how the implementation of a writing centre and WAC program can advance their globalising aims. But since these institutions can no longer expect a homogeneous student body that will have learned to write before attending university, they are being prompted to rethink their approaches to literacy education to cater to a new generation of students. While the terms 'internationalisation' and 'global citizenship' are now ubiquitous in the mission statements of universities around the world, they are usually unaccompanied by clear implementation strategies – or explicit demonstrations of how such goals 'translate' on the ground, in the communities that represent the day-to-day business of universities. Since writing is a practice that all disciplines have in common and since writing centres are interdisciplinary by nature, they are able to achieve WAC outcomes more organically, free from the theoretical tensions and degree structures (with little room for electives) that can hinder writing instruction in individual academic departments. Uniquely placed to bridge the gap between the challenges and opportunities for local writing programs in globalising universities, writing centres are in a better position to connect the aims of writing with institutional mission across faculties, promoting a deeper understanding of writing to learn in a globalising world. Grounded in broader theories of invention and collaboration (Lunsford & Ede 1991; LeFevre 1986; Burke 1973; Booth 2004), rhetoric as an enabling discipline (Corbett 1972), rhetoric as a social construct (Berlin 1987; Trimbur 1989), the writing program administrator (WPA) as activist (Adler-Kassner 2008), and writing as epistemic (Leff 1978; Fulkerson 1979), academic writing instruction imbued with creative writing practice is ideally placed to identify shared institutional principles, passions, and interests and negotiate disciplinary, economic, and ideological tensions to carve out a space for transformative writing in a culture where such a practice once seemed, to use Susan McLeod's term, 'foreign' (McLeod 1995).

In *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centres*, Jackie McKinney encourages such multi-theoretical approaches to establish an alternative lens for considering writing centres and the work they do. Admonishing writing centre directors to move beyond the iconoclastic 'grand narrative' of writing centre work as service provision in order to determine what is possible within the boundaries of writing centres, McKinney argues that blind adherence to the 'grand narrative' can diminish the theoretical and pedagogical complexity of writing

centres, obfuscating the potential for new approaches (and roles) that challenge tradition (McKinney 2013). Similarly, Ben Rafoth's International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) conference keynote address, 'Faces, Factories, and Warhols: A r(Evolutionary) Future for Writing Centres', admonishes WPAs to see the possibilities rather than the limitations of writing centres in revolutionising the role of writing centres for the future (Raforth 2016). He expands on this theme in *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers*, encouraging writing centre directors and peer tutors to be more attuned to both the needs and capabilities of multilingual writers in the globalised university in order to better assist them as well as utilise their expertise in making writing instruction more meaningful for an increasingly culturally diverse student cohort (Raforth 2015).

While my own theoretical identity has undoubtedly been shaped by my North American training in rhetoric and composition, my pedagogical and administrative choices as a WPA, Writing Centre Director, and de facto WAC coordinator have been influenced every bit as much by what I have learned on the job through my exposure to diverse disciplinary cultures, theories, and approaches to writing instruction. I have developed meaningful collaborations with experts in creative writing, linguistics, English as Additional Language (EAL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Australian studies, and Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL), discovering anew that there is far more that unites than divides us. Steering clear of the 'advice narrative' that Caswell, McKinney and Jackson warn against in *The Working Lives of New Writing Centre Directors* (Caswell et al 2016), this article makes no attempt to convince others to adopt a particular institutional model or theoretical framework. Rather, it offers the development of the Writing Hub at the University of Sydney as but one example of the significant potential of writing centres to harness the expertise of interdisciplinary scholars to transform outdated writing cultures and promote an alternative more in keeping with the aims of today's globalising universities.

When I joined the University of Sydney as a lecturer in English in 2004, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences had offered two 'writing' courses for undergraduates: ENGL1000 University English, administered by the English Department, approved initially as a non-accredited functional grammar class that I had been hired to redevelop on the rhetorical model, and LNGS1005 Structure of English, a language acquisition course administered by the Linguistics Department. While neither ENGL1000 nor LNGS1005 was mandatory for first-year students, ENGL1000 was advertised as appropriate for 'mainstream' students and LNGS1005 for 'NESB' (non-English-speaking-background) students. Students seeking writing assistance were referred to one of the two courses based on their English language proficiency (IELTS) score alone, with LNGS1005 comprising mostly non-native speakers of English and ENGL1000 attracting mostly native speakers. There were no creative writing classes available to undergraduates at that time.

A mere two courses intended to meet all the writing and language needs of 48,000 culturally and linguistically diverse students at a leading international university was the first sign that a more comprehensive, holistic approach to writing support was needed. In addition to a formal academic writing program, I began to imagine a distinct space for a writing centre, having learned from my ENGL1000 University English students that peer review of drafts and participation in collaborative writing exercises could be perceived as cheating or collusion within a normal course context – further evidence that far from a discipline of learning and discovery, writing was perceived at Sydney as a remedial or second-class enterprise to enable the real business of a sandstone. When I suggested to English Department colleagues that a writing centre

would complement the work of the writing program, it was North all over again. Their initial response was, 'What's *that*? What would students in such a place *do*?'. But once I explained the concept and how it might work in the Sydney environment, I had their attention, if not their support.

My first step would be to reflect on Australia's unique cultural, geographical, and academic heritage to conduct a thorough needs analysis of writing at the University of Sydney. This would involve charting existing writing support structures, as well as eliciting student feedback on their particular writing needs and staff feedback on their observations of student writing through a series of formal and informal surveys, focus group interviews, and meetings with individual faculty. The results revealed diverse student and staff preconceptions – and misconceptions – of writing instruction.

When asked, 'Tell us about your experience of writing instruction/support at the University of Sydney', first-year students commented that while ENGL1000 and LNGS1005 had been helpful to some degree, they would ideally like to be able to discuss what they were learning (or not) in a more casual and 'non-judgmental' environment. Others remarked that the courses and services on offer were too 'one-dimensional' and 'high-stakes' – 'you either get it or you don't', and 'you get only one chance in assessments to make a grade'. When asked, 'What is your opinion of the value of feedback in the writing process?', first-year students commented that they learned the most from informal discussion with peers about the feedback they had received on their writing assignments, but 'by that stage it was too late to use the feedback to improve [their] writing and [their] grade'. Nearly all first-year students responded that workshopping a paper through a series of drafts and receiving pre-submission feedback on assignments would be far more useful than the brief cursory comments that normally accompany the final grade. Some of the most interesting responses came from EAL students, who resented having a standardised test (IELTS) determine which class they enrolled in – ENGL1000 or LNGS1005 – as these tests do not always present a complete picture of students' abilities. Several international students were confident that they could have succeeded in 'mainstream' courses with 'just a little extra help' outside the classroom.

In the surveys and focus group interviews, I asked students enrolled in ENGL1000, 'How do you feel most comfortable asking for help with writing assignments: asking a question in class, emailing or meeting with your teacher, asking a peer/friend/family member, searching online, or some other way?'. Almost unanimously, students indicated that they were more comfortable asking peers for help. As one of my more outspoken students put it:

> another student won't judge you if you get it all wrong because they aren't experts either. Professors, though, might remember stupid questions or silly mistakes and hold it against you when they're marking your work. Talking to a peer helps you think things through and get dumb ideas out of your system before you embarrass yourself in front of a professor. And sometimes the other person will have questions for you too, so it's a two-way street that you don't get with professors.

On a follow-up survey, I asked the students, 'How would you prefer asking a peer for help: in person or via email – and why?' Most replied that they might exchange papers via email in the first instance, but that talking about their concerns in person was usually most helpful. Answering the subsequent 'why' question, one student replied:

> Sometimes when I'm talking to someone else about my writing, I end up giving them a different version of what's actually on the page because I'm very careful about what I write, since I want to make sure I get it right, but when I'm talking, the words flow more freely and the person understands what I'm talking about a bit better.

When following up on this question in a focus group interview, I asked, 'So do you then go back and revise your writing based on the conversation you'd had with a peer?' The student replied, 'Yes. In some cases, the peer tells me to write what I just told them instead of what's on the paper.'

Finally, I asked the students, 'What would you think of a place where you could go (free of charge) to talk to a peer about writing assignments – everything from choosing a topic or interpreting a prompt to drafting, editing, revising, and maybe even interpreting feedback?' Responses indicated that most students liked the idea in principle, but seemed sceptical. 'Wouldn't this be considered cheating?', some asked, while others said that showing up to such a place would be 'embarrassing' if anyone they knew saw them there. When I asked how getting help from a peer in a writing centre would be different from getting help from a peer in another context, one student replied, 'because I usually ask a peer for help in private – not in a public place where others can see and possibly hear'. In my eagerness to build a writing centre, I had overlooked the possibilities of how students who had never encountered a writing centre culture might react to the concept, and was unprepared for their unflinchingly honest responses. However, these generous, candid responses provided invaluable insight into what was at stake in changing the culture of academic writing instruction at the University of Sydney.

To combat my students' negative stereotypes of writing centres and peer review, I began devoting the last half hour of the ENGL1000 seminar to 'writing centre conferences', where students would pair up with their classmates to talk about each other's work without the instructor nearby. I also showed the class videos of peer writing conferences being conducted in established writing centres around the world. We read articles from *Writing Centre Journal* and the *Writing Lab Newsletter* together, and I often discussed the peer review process for academics – and how it is central to our work. Eventually, the students began to understand the concept of a writing centre and to view the 'writing centre conference' as a source of strength rather than shame, a means of empowerment rather than embarrassment, and the single most effective weapon in their scholarly arsenal for improving their writing not just in a single class, but across disciplines.

The surveys and focus groups further pointed to students eager to be heard and understood, and to faculty divided, with some welcoming the concept of a writing centre and others believing that students should have learned how to write in high school – that it wasn't the university's job to teach writing, *à* la the infamous Harvard Reports of the late nineteenth century [1]. The most detrimental effect of the Harvard Reports had been the emphasis on superficial correctness, a trend that would dominate American composition instruction for the remainder of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth – an emphasis that still persists in Australia. The University of Sydney, like Harvard a century earlier, had failed to acknowledge that the standards expected of high school writers are completely different from those of university writers, making it impossible to learn to write for university audiences before actually becoming a university student. This essential concept of audience is seldom communicated clearly to high school students, who become obsessed with

content and 'key words',; hence the writing transition between high school and university marks a steep, anxiety-ridden learning curve for most.

An obvious problem is the absence of invention in high school assignments compared to the more autonomous writing expected at university, with little to no support offered for successfully navigating this paradigm shift. High performance expectations coupled with a lack of transparency and no common language around what makes good writing only add to the mystique of 'good writing' – leaving students to believe that it somehow happens by osmosis, or that good writers are born, not made, which only intensifies students' anxiety if they don't get it 'right' the first time, as few of us seldom do.

To make students more adventurous writers, I have argued for carefully designed spaces in the writing classroom as well as the writing centre that encourage conversation, that time-honoured catalyst for autonomous thinking, perhaps represented best by Kenneth Burke's unending conversation metaphor:

> Imagine that you enter a parlour. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defence; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (1973: 110-111)

Burke's depiction represents the creative, critical engagement with writing that writing centres aim to achieve in each writing centre conference – 'our talk in all its forms'. With conversation about writing central to every peer tutoring session, and with tutors asking questions and acting more as mirrors than assessors, students can see for themselves that the process of constructing arguments is creative, collaborative, dialogic, and ultimately multimodal, as it is not uncommon for these interactions to include (simultaneously) mobile phones, laptops, tablets, books, pens and paper, and (of course) other people. Above all, writing centre conversations dispel the paralysing myth of 'correctness' – particularly across disciplines – and eliminate the false dichotomy between novice and expert – archetypes that would have been drilled ad nauseum into most Australian high school students. An emphasis on conversation rather than rules and conventions further demonstrates to students how to adapt arguments for different disciplinary contexts, find their places in the conversation, and 'put in an oar'. Moreover, it underscores the need to develop habits of mind rather than 'skills', particularly creativity.

By 'habits of mind' I am referring to specific terminology featured in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, a resource produced jointly by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project (Council of Writing Program Administrators 2011) – three leading US-based professional organisations dedicated to improving academic writing pedagogy. The *Framework* identifies eight desirable habits of mind: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and

metacognition as 'ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students' success in a variety of fields and disciplines' (2011). While these habits of mind are developed naturally in creative writing classrooms, they are also strengthened through writing centre conversations, an effective vehicle for helping students focus on the development of proven habits and behaviours that can strengthen their writing – particularly in environments where there is no culture of formal writing instruction.

Johnson connects the habits of mind with writing transfer, arguing that transfer signifies more than acquiring a skillset to use in different writing situations (Johnson 2013), while Busekrus contends that: 'since tutors help students to engage in the process of learning as well as develop writers, the habits of mind are a cohesive part of writing centre dialogue. Connecting goals with habits of mind increases the likelihood for transfer to other writing contexts' (Busekrus 2018). She further notes:

> Embodying a certain persona also affects how and if transfer occurs. Writing centres position the tutor as a reader rather than a judge of the student's work, balancing listening to and directing the student. Giving negative undertones prevents students from engaging with their writing, which discourages transfer. The dialogic model:
> 1. addresses specific praises in students' writing strengths and motions ways to build on those strengths;
> 2. allows the student to talk, inquiring about their ideas and giving validity to them;
> 3. connects purpose, audience, context, and genre into the conversation; and
> 4. shows how a skill may fit into the larger context of learning and future applications of the skill. (2018: 108)

Writing centre conversations, then, are uniquely placed to support the transfer of writing across disciplines that WAC programs encourage by presenting writing as a means of creative engagement rather than merely a mode of assessment. As James Berlin reminds us:

> in teaching writing we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it … we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it. (1987: 766-776)

Fifteen years on, I have come to believe more than ever in the power of writing centres for helping students order and make sense of their world. We must assist them in the transitions they will face between secondary and tertiary education – and ultimately into a profession – by offering them a common language around academic writing, as well as collaborative, transformative writing experiences at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, informed by the rich tradition of creative writing instruction and galvanised by unending conversation. But this is not to suggest that conversation alone, or a return to the doomed expressivism experiment of the seventies, is enough to transform academic writing instruction. Nor am I suggesting that grammatical rules and accepted conventions of academic writing should be ignored, but rather that these are technicalities more akin to style and editing than invention and creativity – and that there is a place for all of these in a more imaginative approach to academic writing instruction. When we think of Aristotle's five

canons of rhetoric, invention comes first, with arrangement, style, memory and delivery to follow.

Responding to the need for more established guidelines and a common language around academic writing instruction in the Southern Hemisphere, Lisa Emerson (Massey University) and I have co-founded the Asia-Pacific Writing Research Network (to be launched later this year). It is our hope that through this organisation, scholars in academic, creative, and professional writing across the Asia-Pacific region (including writing centre and WAC directors) can come together to share best practice, devise a set of regional priorities (our own Framework for Success), and cultivate a dedicated space for embracing the conversations, creativity, and collaboration that will determine the future of writing instruction in our region – our talk in all its forms. Only by working together can we challenge outdated cultures of writing instruction and further professionalise the work we do.

## Notes

[1] In 1898, the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric at Harvard University had concluded that:

- It was absurd that the college, the institution of higher education, should be called upon to turn aside from its proper functions, and devote its means and the time of its instructors to the task of imparting elementary instruction which should be given even in ordinary grammar schools.
- Preparatory schools were to blame for student inadequacies, since schools trained their students to pass certain entrance exams and nothing more.
- Preparatory schools should devote more time to English studies, specifically to English composition.
- Admissions requirements should be raised immediately to a point where lower schools would be forced to take the matter in hand or see most of their graduates barred from admission to Harvard. (Kitzhaber 1990: 40-45) return to text

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*Susan Thomas is Former Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning and Founding Director of the Writing Hub and WRIT Program in the Department of Writing Studies at the University of Sydney.*

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