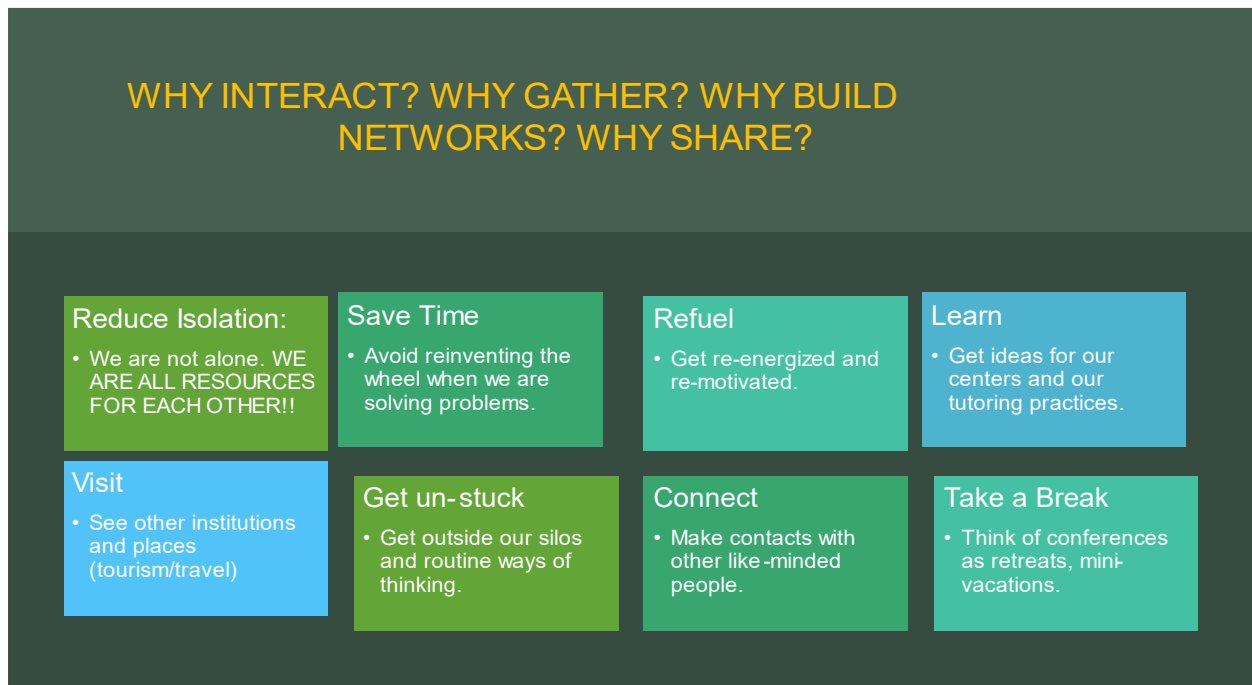# Fostering Writing Center Communities of Practice: Sharing Ideas, Building Networks, Constructing Conference Proposals, Carol Severino, University of Iowa

## WHY INTERACT? WHY GATHER? WHY BUILD NETWORKS? WHY SHARE?

**Reduce Isolation:**
- We are not alone. WE ARE ALL RESOURCES FOR EACH OTHER!!

**Save Time**
- Avoid reinventing the wheel when we are solving problems.

**Refuel**
- Get re-energized and re-motivated.

**Learn**
- Get ideas for our centers and our tutoring practices.

**Visit**
- See other institutions and places (tourism/travel)

**Get un-stuck**
- Get outside our silos and routine ways of thinking.

**Connect**
- Make contacts with other like-minded people.

**Take a Break**
- Think of conferences as retreats, mini-vacations.

## Different Kinds of Conference Presentations:

### Vary by Type of Interaction:

1) Roundtable Discussions: More informal than panels; sometimes attendees go from table to table to discuss different topics.

2) Workshops: Require audience participation in learning activities.

3) Individual Presentations: You will be included on a panel possibly with related presentations by the conference organizers.

4) Panel Presentations: You propose as a team, usually of 3 or 4; each of you speaks for 15-20 minutes.

### Vary by Main Type of Evidence Employed:

1) Practice-Based
2) Reflection-Based
3) Narrative-Based
4) Case Study-Based
5) Conceptual or Theoretical
6) Based on Empirical Research
7) Combinations of 2 or more of the above

## A Process for Generating Ideas for Conference Proposals:

1)Brainstorm as many topics as you can; don't censor yourself.

2)Choose the most compelling and do-able topic.

3)Formulate and Reformulate questions about it.

4)Discuss your questions with others face-to-face and over email to get other perspectives.

5)Read about your topic and questions. How have others addressed it?

## Suggestions:

1)Start with the Conference Theme: e.g., Community; Diversity and Inclusion

2)Start with issues in your own writing center practice:

   a) What types of papers in what stages and in what fields are more challenging to help with

   b) What profiles of writers are more challenging to work with (e.g., procrastinators, perfectionists)?

3)Generate topics from your readings:

   a) What common writing center assumptions do you disagree with (e.g., your job as a tutor is to make yourself unnecessary to the student)

   b) Which writing center metaphors do you consider controversial (e.g., diagnosis/treatment)

SAMPLE TOPIC: HELPING WRITERS WRITE ABOUT READING

Q1: How do we help writers decide which passages to summarize, quote, or paraphrase?

Q2: How do we help writers make their review of the literature argue for the significance and timeliness of their study (the gap it fills) vs. merely listing and summarizing sources.

Q3: How do we help students doing too much "textual borrowing" learn how to "use their own words"?

**Goldilocks asleep in the bed that is Just Right**



Sample Topic: The Relationship between Higher and Lower Order Concerns

Sample Question: To what extent should Higher Order Concerns come before Lower Order Concerns when tutoring a draft?

Formulating Research Questions:

USE THE GOLDILOCKS PRINCIPLE: Not too broad or too narrow. (from the *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, 2016)

TOO BROAD: Are writing centers effective?

TOO NARROW: Why do we have so many appointments on Tuesday nights?

JUST RIGHT: Does the number of a student's visits to the writing center correlate with their grades/number of publications?

## AN EXAMPLE OF A PROPOSAL USING THE TEMPLATE:

Most tutoring manuals say that Higher Order Concerns such as argument and organization must always be addressed in a tutorial before Lower Order Concerns, such as syntax and word choice. However, authors of these tutoring guides seem to be overlooking the fact that many students/ researchers are not writing in their native language and need as much help with language as they do with argument and organization. In this presentation, I argue that we need to weave lower order concerns into discussions of higher order concerns based on Blau and Hall's idea of "informed flexibility" (2002) and based on survey data from international students at my writing center that say that often language concerns are often more important to them than argument or organization.

## DRAFT YOUR CONFERENCE PROPOSAL: A COMMON TEMPLATE

Some scholars/practitioners say _____about _____; however, they seem to be overlooking _____. I argue that _____based on _____ and _____ and based on my experiences with _____ and _____.

**Recommended Resources:**

For those beginning to do research: Chapter 8 ("Research in the Writing Center") and 9 ("The Writing Center as a Community" in Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli's *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors Sixth Edition,* 2016.

For more advanced researchers of second language writing, including in the writing center: Polio, Charlene and Friedman, Debra A. (2017). *Understanding, evaluating, and conducting second language writing research*. NY: Routledge.

TedED Video on "Zombie Nouns" and How to Write Directly: https://ed.ted.com/lessons/beware-of-nominalizations-aka-zombie-nouns-helen-sword