

On being a colleague

By *cchanock*

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In America, according to Hemmeter (1990, p. 35), “To read the publications of writing center teachers and administrators is to listen to a disenfranchised voice from the margins telling a tale of painful marginality”; and Australian writing tutors often share this feeling that they have much to tell their colleagues, but little chance of being heard. Is marginalization simply part of the job? This chapter will suggest that it does not have to be: where structural distance between the tutoring of writing and teaching in the disciplines is minimized, the social distance can be bridged, and collegial working relationships can be developed.

Several features of the context in which writing tutors work in my university combine to enable us to be seen as colleagues of (rather than a service for) our neighbors in the disciplines. First, we are situated in an academic area (a “Faculty”) comprising a cluster of related disciplines. Our location allows us to know the teaching staff, and to participate in their professional activities. Understanding the purposes of the disciplines enables us to help students write more effective assignments, which earns us the confidence of their teachers as well. Our “Faculty-based” model has attracted a good deal of interest among colleagues in other Australian universities, because it offers us opportunities to influence not only the academic careers of individual students, but the teaching of their courses as well.

In this chapter, I will describe the Faculty-based model and then discuss our experience of what is involved in – and what can be gained by – positioning ourselves as colleagues in this way. I’ll look at the possibilities for sharing ideas; teaching together; shaping curriculum; and influencing policy.

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Contact details **Email:** c.chanock@latrobe.edu.au

Contactable: Yes

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