



IWCA Conference Notes

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The St. Thomas University staff during lunch at SWCA at Bryant Conference Center (left to right: Aryanne Schommer, Kathryn Drumheller, Karen Mejia, Dr. Kevin Dvorak (director), Lynne Roman, Aileen Valdes, Noralis Lambert, Brittany Griffin, Lily Antonio)

Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2011 Conference Notes

It was a wonderful experience to attend and present at the 2011 Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference! I enjoyed learning about other tutors' experiences in their respective writing centers, as well as sharing some of my own experiences. One of the topics that really resonated with me focused on the idea of challenging, or more closely analyzing, the tutoring pedagogical tools or "rules" we generally employ at our writing centers, such as the student must always read the paper aloud or only speak in English. Throughout my experiences as a tutor, I've learned that there is not a set method that works with all students, so this discussion triggered my interest in taking a more active approach to practicing different techniques and considering the different advantages and disadvantages in respect to these general "rules."

I am glad to be back in St. Thomas University's writing center, where I look forward to brainstorming new ideas with my colleagues, and discussing how we can implement different tutoring techniques we learned about during the conference into our sessions at the University Writing Center (UWC) in order to best serve the STU community. I can honestly say that this experience acted as a catalyst for us, as individuals and as a collective tight-knit unit of peer tutors, to continue improving our tutoring skills and pedagogical practices, as well as becoming more involved in the writing center field.

-Aileen Valdes

St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor

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Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2011 Conference Notes Continued

“The audience was kind, and every time I made eye contact, everyone had a smile on their face.”

-Brittany Griffin



St. Thomas University tutors finish their presentation, “Helping At-Risk Students Succeed: The Writing Center as a Center for Student Retention Efforts” (left to right: Brittany Griffin, Lynne Roman, Noralis Lambert, Karen Mejia)

The SCWA conference was the most phenomenal encounter up to now in my college career. All the hard work and preparation was worth every modicum of effort. In all honesty, this conference surpassed all of my expectations.

When I was offered the opportunity to present at the SWCA conference in Alabama, I was doubtful. Public speaking is not my forte, and I did not feel well-matched when it came to the other presenters. I felt that many of them had a great deal of experience in contrast to me, but with some convincing, I gave in and accepted this offer.

My presentation was based on the group tutoring program at St. Thomas University. The audience was kind, and every time I made eye contact, everyone had a smile on their face. The crowd was very courteous and attentive; it felt as if I knew them all. Suddenly my fear of public speaking eased, and it just felt comfortable. This feeling of comfort was not just during my presentation, but in general. Every single person was welcoming.

It was such a privilege to be surrounded by people who shared the same love for writing. I was inspired by many of the tutors who demonstrated their techniques when it came to tutoring. I felt really blessed to partake in this conference, and I grasped a lot of useful information.

To be honest, this trip trumped my vacation in the Bahamas. The overall atmosphere in Tuscaloosa was heartfelt, and the town was lively. From the music scene to the school pride, the entire town was vivacious. If I ever have another opportunity to attend a conference in any state or town, I would gratefully accept it because this was an extraordinary event.

-Brittany Griffin

St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor

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“I was inspired by many of the tutors who demonstrated their techniques when it came to tutoring.”

-Brittany Griffin



Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2011 Conference Notes Continued

The weekend I spent at the SWCA conference was unforgettable. It felt great to be surrounded by people who are interested in the same field and topics as me. I was able to learn so much from all the different tutors and directors that were present. It was also great to hear what other tutors are doing in their writing centers that differ from my writing center.

I was able to attend a workshop where I learned how different tutors deal with their difficult sessions. This workshop also offered many tips and solutions that I will employ at the writing center when I tutor.

Apart from learning from the wonderful presenters, having the opportunity to present my project was a very rewarding experience and it has motivated me to continue working and finalize my project that deals with gender at the writing center. This conference has really encouraged me to become a better writer and a better tutor. Attending this conference has reaffirmed the love that I have for English and writing.

-Lilyeth Antonio

St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor

“This conference has really encouraged me to become a better writer and a better tutor.”

-Lilyeth Antonio

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“After presenting, I felt thrilled to learn about different activities in which other writing centers are currently engaging.”

-Karen Mejia

I always get so thrilled when a writing center conference approaches (this was my sixth), and this year was no different! I definitely enjoyed learning about the history and growth of the Southeastern Writing Center Association.

I was able to participate at the conference by delivering the experience and outcomes of STU’s University Writing Center and Monsignor Edward Pace High School collaboration, which led to a large group discussion. Each individual in the audience demonstrated a great interest in the topic, and this allowed me to freely connect with the group. After presenting, I felt thrilled to learn about different activities in which other writing centers are currently engaging.

Overall, after attending this conference, I believe I have a better understanding regarding the SWCA’s purpose and the way it reaches out to individuals.

I always learn a lot from the many directors and professionals who attend these annual conferences. Having these conferences is a phenomenal way to gather and share knowledge, techniques, and experiences in the writing center field.

Writing rocks!

-Karen Mejia

St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor

**Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2011
Conference Notes Continued**

Special Thanks to Kevin Dvorak and the St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutors for their contributions to this issue of IWCA Conference Notes.

“I have never been surrounded by so many people who are enthusiastic about tutoring.”

-Noralis M. Lambert

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The Southeastern Writing Center Association conference is one I will never forget. I have never been surrounded by so many people who are enthusiastic about tutoring, which was impressive and exciting! The individuals who attended the SWCA Conference offered a comforting and humbling environment, encouraging me to take advantage of this amazing opportunity. After attending numerous workshops and sessions, my colleagues and I were inspired to enhance our tutoring skills and continue to do research on gender issues and other topics that will facilitate writing centers across the Southeast.

“I was amazed to hear similar challenging situations that took place in other writing centers. “

-Noralis M. Lambert

During one of the interactive sessions, the presenter asked the audience to write down the most effective approach they have taken during a session and how they handled a difficult scenario. I was amazed to hear similar challenging situations that took place in other writing centers. Fortunately, I learned numerous techniques about how to approach the tutee in a positive and effective manner when faced with unexpected situations. One of the tutors mentioned, “Always let the tutee know that you are on their team.” As the Athletics Department Liaison of the University Writing Center, that statement spoke to me because I am continuously mindful of the tutees' reaction. Athletes respond optimistically when you deliberately reveal your interest in making them better writers, individuals, or athletes.

The SWCA has definitely altered my perspective as a tutor, and words are not enough to express my gratitude.

-Noralis M. Lambert
St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor



Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2011 Conference Notes Continued



Start of lunchtime plenary, "SWCA @ 30: Past, Present, Future," delivered by STU tutor Aryanne Schommer

"The conference weekend was three days of learning, engaging, communicating, and building community."

-Aryanne Schommer

After working tirelessly for months on my presentation, I am so happy that I did not let nerves and fear stop me from presenting my research at the annual SWCA conference. The atmosphere at the SWCA conference was like no other, and even with presenting in a room of 200 plus, the encouragement, advice, and positive feedback from the SWCA audience was amazing.

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My lunch presentation, "SWCA at 30: Past, Present and Future," is the embodiment of the Turning the Tide theme of the 30th SWCA Conference at the University of Alabama. Building on past work, those in the writing center field continued to strengthen their present work and question what the future holds. The conference weekend was three days of learning, engaging, communicating and building community.

Along with meeting and interacting with those from other writing centers and organizations, what has truly stood out to me from the conference weekend was how much I was able to learn with my fellow tutors. Often, it is difficult to build strong relationships within a busy writing center, and at the SWCA conference, I created stronger connections with my fellow tutors.

The 2011 SWCA Conference was truly a success. In one weekend, I delivered a plenary presentation for the first time, met others within the writing center field, and bonded with fellow tutors. As a first-time conference attendee, I have had a great experience and look forward to many more conferences!

-Aryanne Schommer
St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor



Lunchtime plenary, "SWCA @ 30: Past, Present, Future," delivered by St. Thomas University tutor Aryanne Schommer

Southeastern Writing Centers Association 2011 Conference Notes Continued



STU tutors take a quick break from conference activities to explore the UA campus (left to right: Karen Mejia, Aryanne Schommer, Lily Antonio, Aileen Valdes, Lynne Roman, Noralis Lambert, Kathryn Drumheller, Brittany Griffin)

“I come from a very small university, so it was amazing to see such a large and vibrant community.”

-Kathryn Drumheller

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“I found the environment to be academically conducive that it encouraged me to work harder at improving my tutoring skills.”

-Kathryn Drumheller

The SWCA conference was great! I’ve been to a psychology conference before, but this was much different. The workshop presentations gave it an interpersonal feeling, which I found to be perfect considering we are tutors and writing center directors and must work in that environment all the time (so hey, why not have some more practice with interpersonal skills?).

I come from a very small university, so it was amazing to see such a large and vibrant community. Not only was I able to learn new ideas from the conference presenters, I was able to see and experience the “big college” way. I found the environment to be so academically conducive that it encouraged me to work harder at improving my tutoring skills.

I also presented at this conference. It was the first time I have given an oral presentation to a group of about 35 people. That in itself was an incredible experience! It was very fulfilling to share some of the results I found with others, instead of keeping to myself.

I hope everyone continues to share their new discoveries so that we can all continue to learn and grow.

-Kathryn Drumheller

St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor



The Conference on College Composition and Communication Conference Notes

The Conference on College Composition and Communication was a wonderful experience! I felt honored to attend and present at CCCC while still in the process of finishing my undergraduate education. I was very anxious because I was around so many influential individuals in the writing center field. I presented alongside Dr. Kevin Dvorak, also from St. Thomas University, Dr. Shanti Bruce from Nova Southeastern University, and Dr. Paula Gillespie and Dariel Suarez from Florida International University. Our presentation was entitled "Usando Espanol para Tutoria en Ingles: A Study of Writing Center Tutoring Sessions involving Bilingual Tutors and Students." I was pleased that the audience was interested in learning and sharing their experiences and challenges working with multilingual students.

I attended various other sessions and enjoyed every one of them. The only downfall was choosing which session to attend, especially when more than one interesting session was scheduled for the same time slot. Aside from learning about different techniques employed and scenarios at other writing centers, I enjoyed the opportunity of watching such amazing presenters that really knew how to work the crowd and keep us laughing while sharing knowledge about important topics in the field. These lively presentations made me aspire to develop my presentation skills.

I feel that this conference really motivated me to continue being active in the writing center field. I look forward to conducting more research while earning a Master's degree, so that I may have the opportunity to present again at CCCC.

-Aileen Valdes
St. Thomas University Writing Center Tutor

"I was pleased that the audience was interested in learning and sharing their experiences and challenges working with multilingual students."

-Aileen Valdes

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"I feel that this conference really motivated me to continue being active in the writing center field."

-Aileen Valdes

Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”



Steven Corbett

*Southern Connecticut State
University*

Introduction

By: Steven Corbett

A vivid and memorable moment made me realize that I was by no means alone in thinking about the importance of small-group tutoring and the role of the response group facilitator. It was at the 2003 IWCA/ NCPTW Jointed Conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania. In addition to being treated to the taste and smell of copious amounts of chocolate, attendees also had the privilege of taking part in several workshops and presentations dealing with this important tutorial topic. In the sessions led by Melissa Nicolas a small, mock group-peer-response facilitation subtitled “The ‘Just fix-it’ or ‘We just want to work on grammar’ group” acted out the problem of the uncooperative student with style. We learned in this session the importance of being patient with students, but not letting them take advantage of us in group situations. Other groups presented “The apathetic group” and “The ‘We don’t trust the writing fellow’ group.” The way these last two groups dealt with issues of authority and trust echoes ideas found in the work of Smulyan and Bolton. In their 1989 essay, the authors show how peer tutors leading small groups can communicate aspects of the writing process that teachers cannot because of the teacher’s role as ultimate authority over grades. Smulyan and Bolton conclude by suggesting why tutors help stir the authority/trust-issue pot. Like the Nicolas groups above, tutors had to deal with students who were “afraid to share their writing” or “took everything I said as law” or “didn’t take [them] seriously” (48).

Others who have reported on their experiences as small-group facilitators (often done in writing classrooms rather than at the center) have echoed these and other concerns – while also expounding on the benefits of small-group tutoring, including opening avenues for closer writing classroom/center connections and teaching students how to better tutor (peer review) each other’s work (Spilman; Lawfer; Shaperenko; Corbett “Bringing the Noise,” “The Role of the Emisary”; Decker). Especially promising, as well as slightly problematic, is Teagan Decker’s idea of the “meta-tutor.” Decker claims that tutors leading small-group tutorials should “become meta-tutors, encouraging students to tutor each other. In this capacity, tutors are not doing what they would be doing in a one-on-one conference in the writing center, but rather they are showing students how to do it. Their role, then, does change, but at the same time remains consistent” (27). The contributors to this symposium offer vignettes and conclusions that complicate and enrich Decker’s notion of the meta-tutor in small-group tutoring and peer response.

“We learned in this session the importance of being patient with students, but not letting them take advantage of us in group situations.”

-Steven Corbett

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Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”

Introduction Continued...

Stephanie Serenita offers an interesting combination of perhaps the best of both instructor-led conferencing and peer review in her description of small-group tutoring. She explains how instructors can encourage the same sorts of agency, authority, and maturity students exhibit during peer review, but maybe with a touch more focused instructor input and guidance from time to time. And Stephanie Gruessner, with a little help from our undergraduate colleagues Marissa Brown and Fantasia Gordon, tells an informative and entertaining penultimate story of her attempts at pushing through her shyness in realizing her role as a GTA. Stephanie G. illustrates, through humor as well as acumen, how the lessons learned during classroom peer review can be brought to one-to-ones and vice versa. Together, the co-authors in this multi-logue (professors and students) provide compelling reasons and vivid recommendations for the importance of reciprocal teaching and learning between the type of individualized instruction made famous in writing centers, the typically larger-group instruction of the writing classroom, and pedagogical points in-between.

“She explains how instructors can encourage the same sorts of agency, authority, and maturity students exhibit during peer review...”

-Steven Corbett

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Negotiating Authority and Trust: Successful and Semi-Successful Group Tutoring Sessions

By: Stephanie Serenita

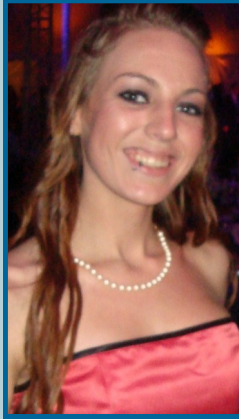
“Many of their fears lie in the expectations that their teachers have for them, and whether or not they are capable of living up to these expectations.”

-Stephanie Serenita

A lot of what’s involved in the teaching of college freshman students starts with understanding that most, if not all of them, are intimidated by the leap from the realm of high school to the world of college academia. Many of their fears lie in the expectations that their teachers have for them, and whether or not they are capable of living up to these expectations. As a GTA in Dr. Steven Corbett’s English 101 class this past Fall 2009 semester, I noticed a certain element of maturity about the students when they were faced with owning up to their ideas and opinions in front of a peer audience. It is imperative to present the concept of audience, ownership of ideas, and academic discourse to a classroom of college freshman in a writing course (or, for that matter, any student in a college writing course). One way Steven and I implemented these ideas was by holding group tutoring sessions.

Similar to the one-on-one tutoring session, a small-group session focuses on each individual student’s work for a half hour, while the other students (preferably from the same peer review group) collectively offer insight and comments on the work presented. Throughout my experiences this past semester with different tutoring styles (one-on-one tutoring sessions, in-class workshops focused on one or two papers as a class, and group tutoring sessions), I have found the group tutoring session to be one of the more helpful methods with students.

Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”



Stephanie Serenita
Southern Connecticut State
University

Negotiating Authority and Trust: Successful and Semi-Successful Group Tutoring Sessions Continued

For example, my first experience with a group tutoring session involved a group of three girls who were very self-motivated and enthusiastic about class. I found that throughout the session, the three of them offered more help and insight than I could try to muster in-between their vigorous comments and thoughts on the paper at hand. Although I felt as though I wasn't participating as a teacher “should” during this tutoring session, I couldn't help but be astounded and proud that these three students were teaching each other, and in turn, themselves. It wasn't all about me and my intellectual ability and what I thought could help their papers. Rather, it was about the students—what they know, how they can help their papers grow, and in turn, how they were growing as writers and co-teachers of the craft.

But what happens when a group tutoring session goes awry? In the second group session I held that day, none of the three students came prepared. The first student had his first draft instead of his second, which we had just looked at during a classroom peer review session. How productive could his half hour session be? The second student only had half of his first draft written, with little to no focus in his paper. Is it then the instructor's job to point him in the direction he needs? My knee jerk reaction would be “yes,” but why should a teacher give a student answers and direction if he came without any questions prepared and especially with the lack of work he had completed? The second student didn't seem to mind that he was wandering in the dark, which eventually led the entire group to amble in the shadows of his half-hearted paper.

The third student, like the second, came in with under half of what was supposed to be the completed second draft. At this point I started to wonder if this group was ever going to find their way out of the dark. I pointed out how unproductive this hour and a half session had been. Their final draft was due soon, and with little to no changes or improvement in anyone's paper, I didn't really see the helpfulness of this peer tutoring session. Ah, but wait...a beacon of light began to glimmer through the mist—the responsibility factor in the world of academia. One of the group members started to speak about what he hoped to accomplish in his paper and how he meant to get there. This jump-started a productive conversation between the group members about their papers and where they wanted to take them next. In the end, the maturity level of the group rose, leaving them understanding what went wrong in this group session and how it could be more productive the next time.

“At this point I started to wonder if this group was ever going to find their way out of the dark.”

-Stephanie Serenita

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Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”

Negotiating Authority and Trust: Successful and Semi-Successful Group Tutoring Sessions Continued...

As teachers and tutors of college-level writing, we have a responsibility to our students to present them with cognitive thinking skills and effective discourse and communication. We are lovers of the craft and we must pass it on and teach it as we know and feel it. One of the most effective ways to pass on this craft is to make the students responsible for themselves and the knowledge that they have obtained. A heightened sense of maturity about their writing is what is going to help them through the world of academia that they have just entered, enabling them to become stronger writers and students.

“We are lovers of the craft and we must pass it on and teach it as we know and feel it.”

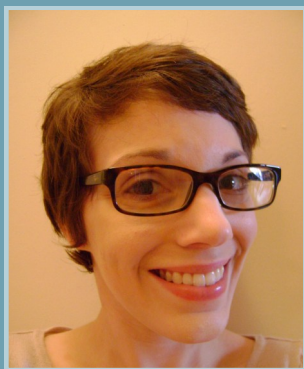
-Stephanie Serenita

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Stage Directions and Playing the Role of GTA

By: Stephanie Gruessner with Marissa Brown and Fantasia Gordon



Stephanie Gruessner
Southern Connecticut State University

I admit it: I was afraid of freshmen. My role as a GTA for a freshman composition course, however, forced me to confront that irrational fear. I spent the first weeks observing Professor Steven Corbett walk among the students during peer review sessions, eagerly joining them or squealing with delight at a particularly good paper. It seemed easy enough to simply sit down by a cluster of three people and then dazzle them with probing questions. Unfortunately, such was not the case with me. Though I had never actually fainted while speaking to people, I was never fond of feeling that rush of anxiety, the same rush of anxiety that came whenever I approached students.

For the first month, I hovered behind students as they peer reviewed each other’s papers, occasionally spooking them when I suddenly appeared in their midst. After this, I graduated to asking simple questions such as, “How’s the paper looking?” or “That’s a really good comment.” By midterm, I had managed to speak in halting phrases and point at computer screens. It was difficult to read the work and come up with comments on the spot, near impossible from my position lingering behind their chairs. Every time I shuffled toward a group, I felt this crushing sense of bothering them and disrupting their work. So it was not a surprise when I received an evaluation of “awkward and not enthusiastic” from a few midterm student evaluations.

Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”

“In his natural habitat, he easily joined any group and scanned down the page, engaging students in their own texts.”

-Stephanie Gruessner

Stage Directions and Playing the Role of GTA Continued...

On many levels, meeting one-on-one was my first experience alone with a student, trying to speak and write simultaneously and finding that it is much more difficult than I imagined. I learned to streamline comments and assess higher-order concerns over later-order concerns. After those meetings, I studied (Professor) Steven like a nature documentarian on a Discovery Channel program. In his natural habitat, he easily joined any group and scanned down the page, engaging students in their own texts. It was not until the final paper of the semester that I shoved up a chair by a group of three students and attempted to establish my presence.

“Mind if I look on?” I asked.

“Ok,” they said, and I inched my chair closer, laptop precariously balanced on my knees.

“What paper are you working on?” I continued.

“Marissa’s.”

“Yeah, I remember that one. I read it before class.”

Silence.

“I like that example there.” I pointed to her screen.

Silence.

I pulled my laptop closer and began scanning another girl’s paper to fill the void of conversation, inserting comments in the margins. Finally, the girls began looking over a new paper, the same one I had been commenting on.

“What paper are you doing?” I asked.

“Fantasia’s.”

“Yeah, I looked over that paper,” I said, edging into the group so I could fit my laptop between theirs. “Let’s talk about her paper behind her back.”

“That’s funny because you really are behind her back,” Marissa said. So we all proceeded to gossip about Fantasia’s paper, remarking on other group members’ comments, and for once I managed to read through an entire paper and offer suggestions, holding their attention.

“So we all proceeded to gossip about Fantasia’s paper, remarking on other group members’ comments...”

-Stephanie Gruessner

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Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”

Stage Directions and Playing the Role of GTA Continued...

In my work with Steven throughout the semester, I gathered useful skills that might apply to future teaching, but even more, life skills. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the GTA has been the ability to speak comfortably with students, to think outside myself to what students need. From the start of the semester, I had been concerned that I was bothering students by lurking behind them and checking up on their work. But Steven assured me that the students want the sort of attention that comes from visiting them and engaging them in conversation about their work during class. Caught in the middle between student and professor, I achieved an awareness of what concerns students, and how Steven responds to those needs, in order to craft better verbal and written comments.

In my group’s final review session with Steven, Marissa pulled out a breakfast sandwich, so Steven sat back and called a brunch break. In waiting to begin the session, Steven leaned in and told the girls a secret: presentation can count for more than content. It didn’t matter what he said at a conference, but it did matter that he said it with enthusiasm. You have to show people that you’re confident, even when you’re not. He nodded toward the girls conspiratorially.

“Sometimes you have to fake it until you make it,” he said. And, listening, I thought for a moment that I might just as easily take that advice.

“And, listening, I thought for a moment that I might just as easily take that advice.”

-Stephanie Gruessner

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(Giving and) Taking Center Stage: Conclusion

By: Heather Brady and Michelle LaFrance



Heather Brady
Southern Connecticut State
University

Stephanie Serenita and Stephanie Gruessner demonstrate that learning the art of becoming a facilitator or meta-tutor is complicated and can be approached from different angles, both parties (tutors and students) often learning important lessons in the process.

Gruessner learned a lot from her experience of discovering her role in the classroom. As a graduate student and teaching assistant, Gruessner was attempting to navigate the situation of being, as Muriel Harris puts it “a hybrid creation – neither a teacher nor a peer” (371). Harris explains that “good tutors must be fellow learners as well as fellow writers” (380). Gruessner describes how at first her comments and additions to the groups felt intrusive and nonessential. However, as she navigated the situation of being “caught in the middle between student and professor” she became more acutely aware of students’ needs and how to meet them.

Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”

(Giving and) Taking Center Stage: Conclusion Continued...

“Teaching students how to effectively teach each other is not easy, but when it happens the results are well worth our effort.”

-Heather Brady and Michelle LaFrance

As she found her footing in the classroom her students benefited enormously from the camaraderie and understanding they felt from her as a fellow learner, but one with a much greater understanding for the craft they were studying.

Correctly negotiating that liminal space between authority and peer can result in tremendously effective tutoring moments. Serenita demonstrates this when she wisely held back from “participating as a teacher ‘should’ during [the] tutoring session” and instead sat back and facilitated the students’ empowerment as they embraced responsibility for their own learning and the learning of those in their group.

Teaching students how to effectively teach each other is not easy, but when it happens the results are well worth our effort. As students teach each other they learn immensely about their own writing in the process. Harris writes that “classroom teachers who use peer-response groups are [...] prone to being marginalized because their teaching has a [...] kind of invisibility” (381). Yet through these brief examples we can see that preparing for and monitoring peer-tutoring groups is an art that takes thoughtfulness and patient practice. In the writing classroom where peer review is successfully incorporated, the teacher – or visiting tutor – becomes not an imparter of knowledge from on high, but a facilitator of self-regulated, life-long learning.

Finally, the important idea of the meta-tutor is one that could perhaps be more explicitly emphasized during tutor training. As Decker explains, this role is different from the one tutors engage in one-to-one. In a one-to-one setting tutors need only share what they can about the writing process, while meta-tutoring requires a level of metacognition that enables a tutor to teach students how to do what they do. This metacognition could do so much to make both peer tutors and student writers more aware of what they are learning and why each step of what they are learning is important in improving their own and fellow students’ writing. In short, we believe, it will make them better peer tutors or peer reviewers one-to-one and one-to-many. It can help tutors and student writers reap the benefits of the best of both worlds between peer response and peer tutoring (see Harris). And though meta-tutoring and tutoring are slightly different, it would not be too hard to explain the difference to tutors and even provide opportunities for them to rehearse and reflect, through discussion, on both. When opportunities to discuss metacognition emerge, we should take the time to talk about what meta-talk has to offer.

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Michelle LaFrance
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Image and Imagination: Small-Group Peer Response and the Role of the Group Facilitator as “Meta-Tutor”

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Reflections from the 8th annual Writing Tutors Conference “The Lay of the Land: Surveying Writing Center Geography

By: Sara Kapadia, University of La Verne Tutor

Introduction

The eighth annual Writing Tutors Conference ‘The Lay of the Land: Surveying Writing Center Geography’ at Riverside, California, unearthed several main themes. The themes that reverberated with some writing tutors were those that touched upon the personal connections between the tutee and tutor. Various aspects of this unique connection were discussed in the many sessions. This reflection will touch upon three aspects of the tutor-tutee relationship; the long term change in the tutors themselves as a result of their tutoring roles, the multi-faceted tutoring session itself and the need for time and space for tutees to think for themselves.

“The themes that reverberated with some writing tutors were those that touched upon the personal connections between tutee and tutor.”

-Sara Kapadia

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Long term change in tutors’ roles and identities

The keynote speakers comprised of three graduated tutors who spoke to the audience of how their identities as tutors changed over time, illuminating on the many layered roles adopted while tutoring. Extrapolating to how their past roles now impact their current careers, the keynote speakers highlighted not only how tutees benefit from tutoring sessions, but how the tutors themselves evolved through these interactions.

“Cyffka emphasized how tutoring gave him the aptitude to convey the subtleties of language when communicating with scientists and professors.”

-Sara Kapadia

Mark Cyffka, from Harvey Mudd College, shared how his experience with international tutees has honed his skills for serving global colleagues in his current position as a Technical Sales Engineer. Cyffka emphasized how tutoring gave him the aptitude to convey the subtleties of language when communicating with scientists and professors. Millie Lein is a recent graduate of UC-Irvine with degrees in Literary Journalism and Criminology, and Law and Society, who currently works as a litigation clerk at an intellectual property law firm. Lein’s expertise in helping tutees with clarity in writing, led her to a distinctive opportunity to showcase her linguistic talent at the firm. By rebuilding essential core documents at her firm, Lein yielded greater access to crucial information for fellow colleagues. Chloe de los Reyes instructs multilingual students at CSU-San Bernardino, while also organizing an orientation and writing program for international students. Working with many tutees gave de los Reyes the confidence that directly affected her capacity as a self-



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The multi-faceted tutoring session

Throughout the conference, attendees had the choice of being at several sessions. Investigating the topics such as tutoring at a decentralized campus, physical features of the tutoring space, the diversity of the tutees, challenges of decoding the rubric, matching needs of faculty and of the student, fostering creativity and the mechanics of writing cultivated fruitful discussions. Many features of what constitutes a successful tutoring session were gathered. Some of the common conclusions drawn from this dialogue stated that tutees should be treated as individuals with specific needs; the tutoring session is as much about a mental framework as it is addressing subject and content writing; and that tutors and tutees are collaborators in the learning process.

“The tutoring session is as much about a mental framework as it is addressing subject and content writing...”

-Sara Kapadia

Nurturing an autonomous tutee

A constant thread that ran throughout most of the conference was that of nurturing an autonomous tutee. While the tutor role was seen as one of greater skill, most participants emphasized that an effective tutoring session is one in which the tutee takes responsibility for their own learning. Many examples of tutees becoming dependent on tutors underlined the risks of co-dependent behavior. Heated debate on various topics led to controversial questioning of what scholarly success is. How does a tutor help international students who struggle in English language but have advanced cognitive skills? What is the function of a tutor who detects a student at risk for severe stress? How does a tutee illustrate their understanding if they are afraid to question the power they believe the tutor has? When does the tutor take on the task of counseling? Such questions left fertile ground for tutors to engage in metacognition, by deeply analyzing their own thinking and philosophy of learning. Most participants agreed on the common goal of developing tutees’ skills that would aid that individual not just in the short term but so that each tutee leaves each session with skills for life long learning.

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“An aspect that was grazed upon but not elaborated was the differentiation of graduate students, undergraduate students, and college students.”

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Parting thoughts

The conference gave participants and attendees insights into tutoring approaches used by some writing centers in Southern California. These tutoring approaches encompassed philosophies of writing, pedagogy, ethical considerations, cultural awareness, and demographics of higher education and how each of these fit into the distribution of effective tutoring services. An aspect that was grazed upon but not elaborated was the differentiation of graduate students, undergraduate students and college students. These three groups of students have overlapping requirements but also a multitude of distinct needs. This conference proved to be a fertile ground for abundant knowledge sharing on the role of the tutor and their relationship to the tutee. Future conferences hold promise for further exploration of margins between tutee populations and the topics and issues that cross these various boundaries.

Future Conferences

Midwest Writing Centers Association :	Oct. 20-22, 2011
Southeastern Writing Centers Association:	Feb. 16-18 , 2012
International Writing Centers Association:	Oct. 25-27, 2012

For more information about these conferences and other future conferences visit the IWCA website.

