



2016

CONVERSATIONS

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Monique Quintana and Jonathan Leggett

THE WRITE WAY TO SPEAK: CONFIDENT COMMUNICATORS IN THE WC

Monique and Jonathan were classmates as undergraduate English majors and they are now colleagues in the Creative Writing Program, where they are both working on their Master's Degree in Fiction. Monique is known for being quiet and serious, and Jonathan is known for his consistently chipper demeanor. He smiles a lot. As with many students, both have faced insecurities when it comes to verbal communication. Tutoring at the Writing Center has helped them to explore new ways of expressing themselves with confidence.

Monique: In the Writing Center, we give students tools to cultivate the idea that writing is a process. One of the reasons why students, and people for that matter, find writing to be such a daunting task is because it is a form of expression, and expressing our thoughts is often scary. For as long as I can

remember, I have always been self-conscious about the way I speak to people, whether it's public or on the most intimate of levels. It wasn't until I was an adult that I discovered how liberating writing could be. I realized that I felt more confident when I expressed myself through writing. When I first started tutoring at the Writing Center, I appreciated how much written communication was valued.

The Response Lenses

In the Writing Center, we make use of response lenses. Some are based on the pedagogy of Peter Elbow, while some were created and developed by our directors. These response lenses help readers look at a text in a specific way. For example, we have a response lens called Center of Gravity. This

response lens gets the reader to write about what sticks out the most to them about a text.

Over time, I noticed that our Assistant Director, Kirk Stone, was using the response lenses when he was speaking to me, and it made me realize just how important they are in building a community amongst our tutors. I've come to realize that we've created a unique discourse community here in the Writing Center, and I wanted to see how I could use that learning to be a more dynamic communicator.

Responses lenses that could be applied to everyday speech:

Sayback: where one person is checking with another person to see if what they think they're saying is really what they meant to say.

- Are you saying overall that...
- Are you saying overall that you can't go to the concert with me?

Voice: Voice lens that looks at the kind of voice(s) a writer is using. I hear your voice as...

- I hear your voice as angry. Did I do something to offend you?

More About: a lens where one person states that they want to hear more about a specific thing.

- I want to hear more about...
- I want to hear more about the project you're working on for your women's studies class.

Play-by-Play: lens where one person reacts to another in real time.

- I'm feeling this way because...
- I'm feeling hurt that you didn't invite me to your party. You know I don't have Facebook.

Center of Gravity: lens where one person says what sticks out to them about something...

- A Center of Gravity for me is...
- One thing that sticks out to me is the way the he spoke about his wife. He seems to really be proud of her.

Reply: lens where person reacts to what a person says by discussing what it reminds them of

- This makes me think of the time I went to Paris. I was surprised at how many people spoke English, and it made me realize how widespread the language is.

Almost Says

Almost says where one person says what they think another person is saying but not quite.

- You're almost saying that you don't like your neighbor.

Reflecting on Lens Speak

“As I’ve noticed in my conversations, if you give someone the opportunity to express themselves more accurately, they will take it.”

Monique: The lens I think we all organically use in speech is the Reply lens. Whenever someone speaks to us about something, we are usually always compelled and or/ expected to offer some kind of verbal response. Now that I'm thinking about it, I've been using the Reply lens my whole life. When I was a kid, my dad was always taking my brother and I to the movies. As soon as the movie was over, my dad and I would analyze the movie, which really got on my brother's nerves, but eventually he would offer his own response.

Lately, I've noticed that I've been using a variation of the Sayback lens when I speak to people, especially when I'm interacting with students. They'll explain something to me and I'll respond with, "I hear you saying..." or "Are you saying..." I find that I like doing this because it makes me feel like I'm giving the the other person the opportunity to confirm or clarify what I think they're saying. This also helps me to get a better understanding of what the person is saying. Sayback is often described as a soundboard, an image I like because it illustrates the necessity of conversation.

Jonathan: As I've begun using the lenses in everyday conversation, I've noticed my conversations and discussions have become more satisfying. What I mean by that is I'm getting more out of verbally communicating with others than I had before. At first, I was skeptical about the lenses transitioning well from being used as a tool in written language to oral language, but it has done just that. I believe lenses work in verbal communication as well as it does in written communication because they introduce themselves in natural everyday language as well as give an opportunity for clarification and accuracy. As I've noticed in my conversations, if you give someone the opportunity to express themselves more accurately, they will take it. So, let's focus on an example.

I've been using "Center of Gravity" quite often. Although, "Center of Gravity" doesn't directly ask questions, it welcomes them, which allows me to be included in a conversation as well as discuss things in closer detail, like why a particular thing stands out to me. "Center of Gravity" is providing a responder to consider my perspective on things and welcomes questioning it because it places me as an active audience without evaluative language.

For example, if I said, "I hated that movie because it wasn't for me" which is unfortunately an acceptable form of feedback in verbal language, it doesn't allow someone to join or initiate a

conversation. Instead, the comment is alienating because evaluative language like “I hated” emphasizes my desire to place judgement and the phrase “it wasn’t for me” undercuts the credibility of that judgment. A responder may simply dismiss the comment or feel like their input isn’t welcomed.

If I were to use “Center of Gravity” instead, I might say something more specific and welcome a question, “What stood out to me was the dialogue. It had many clichés throughout.” This might insight a responder to question, “Why were you focused on dialogue?” or “What sort of clichés were being presented?” A conversation can build around these questions which, as I’ve noticed, lead to a discussion with more substance.

Before tutoring, I struggled to express myself. My mind would flood with many different things I wanted to say. I wouldn’t be able to decide what was the appropriate thing to say, or the most accurate way to get my ideas across. In the past, I’ve spent a lot of time debating about whether or not I should say a particular thing. After tutoring, I’ve learned ways of examining my ideas and expressing myself in a more confident way.

How can our Response Lenses Help Students Become Powerful Communicators?

“I realized that I felt more confident when I expressed myself through writing. When I first started tutoring at the Writing Center, I appreciated how much written communication was valued.”

Monique: Many of the students that sign up for our small writing group are not super confident when it comes to verbal communication. I imagine that this self-consciousness stems from many different reason. Like myself, some of them are naturally shy, quiet, and/or serious. What I mean by serious, is that they are stoic and not inclined to emote in very intense ways. Some students are on the other end of the spectrum. They realize that they are natural talkers, and through experience, have become wary of offending people.

Our response lenses can be tools that students can utilize in their everyday speech. Originally, the questions imbedded in our response lenses were borrowed from speech and applied to the writing process. So, what we are encouraging is something that has been present in our communication all along.

The response lenses help us to become more aware of our very human inclination to make inquiries through communication.

I trust the response lenses because they always generate ideas, and all ideas generate meaningful discussions. Using the response lenses has helped me to communicate with other people in a new and profound. I’m able to express reply to people and in turn, welcome their reply to me. This kind of communication validates all speakers in a conversation, so speaking is not merely speaking, but a meaningful exchange between people. It really feels like a gift.





Michaela Jones

ME TOO: FINDING COMMON GROUND AT THE WRITING TABLE

I remember my first day of freshman year well. I walked nervously to my first class 25 minutes early, discreetly eyeing the campus map on my phone. My professor, in the last semester of his teaching career, greeted me warily. We sat together in the empty room – the awkwardness hanging around us like sticky air – until a fellow classmate walked in and banged through the empty desks. Everyone was uncomfortable, and no one was friendly. (*Yes, Mom, college is going great! The people are really nice here!*)

The rest of the semester followed suit: my classes challenged me, my relationships shifted, my family dynamic evolved, and I felt incredibly alone through all of it – most of my closest friends had either rushed sororities or moved

away. While I wasn't failing according to most standards – I kept my grades up, learned how to manage my time, got a rewarding job, etc. – I spent many hours considering whether or not I was cut out to enter the real world. My emotional state was a wreck.

I read once that freshmen who don't feel personally supported during their first few months of college have higher drop out rates. This isn't surprising; when students don't know what to expect, don't know how to navigate the system, or don't have important relationships to lean into, they feel like I did; they begin to lose hope. I was very lucky in that I found communities of people that made me feel welcomed and loved. While some fractured

relationships of my past healed, some didn't. I learned to cope and mend. I figured out how to situate myself in new spaces and new experiences. I came out on the other side okay.

When I reached my junior year and started tutoring at the Writing Center, most of my hurts from freshman year were long gone and forgotten; that is, until I met my tutees, began writing with them, and re-lived their fears and tears with them. When I heard them read about their experiences, my heart hurt for them and hoped for them at once. I knew what they were in for, and I wanted so much more for them than what I went through. I wanted to tell them that everything would be okay if they just kept going, kept moving forward, kept meeting new people, kept sharing themselves with the world. But I couldn't say that to them – I couldn't be *that* tutor.

So instead, we wrote about what it was like to grow up and go to college and be afraid sometimes. After everyone read, a silent pause would hang for just a minute too long – a silence not unlike the one felt by my professor and I that first unfortunate day of my freshman year. Yet, there was one important difference: the sound that broke the silence. From one of the freshmen, the same two words repeated over and over and over again: "Me too," followed by a sheepish smile or a nervous laugh or eyes wide in surprise. Then, the floodgates opened. We'd keep writing and talking about our life experiences bringing us each to that moment at the writing table. We learned about writing and revision, of course, but we learned that often the most human and most loving response to any utterance is, "Me too."

Sometimes, though, outside pressures tried to creep in. One day, a tutee brought in a copy of her English 5B draft and introduced it to the group reluctantly. "Guys, it's not good," she said, "My whole class said it sucked." We

looked down at her paper, and saw that it was covered in red circles, arrows, and pointed comments about commas and spelling mistakes. We all sighed – frustrated to remember that outside of our Writing Center world, people weren't always in agreement; people didn't always understand. So, we sat still, waiting to see what would happen next with that red, tattered draft.

Another group member asked quietly, "Can you print a clean copy for us to read?" The writer frowned – no. She didn't have the money on her card. Instead of accepting that answer, he stood up, pulled out his I.D., and walked her over to the computer lab, where he printed a clean version of her draft. They returned to our group momentarily, and we started reading – quickly falling back into our familiar routines of writing, sharing, and chatting. What began as an unfortunate encounter with criticism ended with a redemptive period of revision. My group members, that day, took care of each other.

By reading and writing in our small groups, we figure out how to listen and speak with greater thoughtfulness. We take our time, think things through, and share ourselves bravely. Writing helps us figure out how we relate to one another, and in those relationships, we find ourselves as part of a community of thinkers. We become part of a team.

I know that me being a tutor can't possibly save tutees from heartbreak, or loneliness, or anxiety or dropping out of college, but I do know that something unique and special can happen when willing writers sit down together regularly, seeking common ground. My hope is that those who write at and in our center find that college and writing don't have to feel so scary; there are lots of people willing and able to offer support and care. Lots of people are rooting for you, and want you to feel successful. You are not alone; you are welcome here. You, too.

“We learned about writing and revision, of course, but we learned that often the most human and most loving response to any utterance is, ‘Me too.’”



Ashley Truong

ON THE FUN OF WRITING

When I was in elementary school, I kept a journal recording my daily activities. It was fun at first, but after a while it began to feel tedious. Many of my entries began the same way: “Today I got to school early,” or “Today I got to school late,” followed by a laundry list of the homework I did or food I ate. I quit journaling after a while because it became nothing more than a chore.

A lot of the students who come to the Writing Center feel this way about writing. In fact, almost all of them have told me that they don’t like writing because they always get graded on it. Some have said that they do like writing, as long as it’s not for school and they can write whatever they want to. But most of the

time they hate it because they get stressed out about all the questions they have to answer and the rubric they have to follow. When writing becomes nothing more than checking off the boxes on a rubric, of course it feels like a chore.

This makes me sad, because the best writing I do is writing that I have fun with. Like the students who come to the Writing Center, I hate having to answer restrictive prompts. In fact, I hate being required to do things that should come out of natural curiosity, like bringing in questions about a topic being covered in class. Turning learning into an assignment really kills the joy of it. Likewise, turning writing into a rubric kills the enjoyment inherent in it.

I'm a fiction writer, so a lot of the fun I have while writing is in making up stories and characters. But even when I'm not doing fiction writing, I'm getting a kick out of putting words to the page. I love being able to express myself; I love how accomplished I feel when I articulate something that was only an abstract idea in my head before; most of all, I love finding a genuine voice.

I've been writing ever since I was a kid. A lot of my early stories are terrible. Of course they would be—I was just a kid. I enjoyed writing them immensely though, and since I'm a child of the Internet Age, I also enjoyed putting them on the web for others to read. None of my stories ever got explosively popular, but I received my fair share of comments. Each positive one delighted me, while each negative one sent me into a slump where I swore I'd never write again.

As I got older, I began writing fanfiction for the books and TV shows that I loved. People often look down on fanfiction. They think it's unoriginal and unsophisticated. Even I'll be the first to admit that fanfiction is not always the most stellar display of craft in writing. But it *is* a stellar display of creativity. At its very core, fanfiction is about taking something you love and making it better. It's about filling in the gaps of a story, or adding a whole new dimension to a beloved world or character. Some of the most fun I've ever had with writing was when I wrote fanfiction.

And one of the best things about fanfiction is that the only rule is to tell a good story. There *is* craft in writing fanfiction. I learned the basics of characterization and plotting by reading and writing it. However, the craft is always in the service of telling an enjoyable story. There's no pretension in it (although there's more than a fair share of pretentious fanfiction writers). We're all just having fun.

Even when I wrote fanfiction, however, I was self-conscious about the very clear division between fanfiction and "real" writing. "Real" writing was supposed to be serious. There should be deep themes that leave the reader pondering, and the sentences themselves must be carefully structured to sound a certain way. I can't really tell you how exactly I thought they should sound; but I knew it subconsciously from years of being forced to read the English canon. I thought my writing should sound like the readers my teachers made me analyze and write essays

about. Otherwise, it wasn't worthy of being taken seriously.

This "real" writing is the kind that's reinforced in creative writing workshops. When I started the MFA program, I quickly discovered that there are many, many rules in writing. There are rules about who your narrator should be; there are rules about what kind of structure your plot should follow; there are even rules about what should go into your story. The mileage varies by person, but there are a lot of people who treat these rules like law and grade creative writing by their rubric—hence the rise of the "workshop story," or the story that is perfect in a

technical sense but lacks any life.

Not so surprisingly, I found myself hating writing after only a semester. It gave me anxiety to start a story. Like my students at the Writing Center, I began to focus only on meeting the requirements that I had been taught. I stopped thinking about my characters as friends whose stories I was telling and began worrying instead about whether I was using dialogue or interiority to the best advantage. I didn't write a lot because I would quickly run out of steam after the first couple of paragraphs. It wasn't fun anymore, so why do it?

I don't know when this attitude changed, but at some point, I became really scared that I would hate writing forever. Writing is the only thing that I'm sure I have a talent for (on a good day, anyway). When people talk about things that you're meant to do, I know with certainty that writing is that thing for me. The thought of losing it left me unmoored. I needed to do something about it, so I decided on the simplest course of action: stop caring about the rules.

It still takes some work—before I start a story, I always repeat to myself that it's only a shitty first draft. I can write gibberish if I want to. The point is just to get the initial idea onto the page. Sometimes I still get the sweats when I begin a story, and I find myself focusing too much on whether a sentence is constructed just so. But I've started finishing stories again, and contrary to my worst fears, they weren't terrible. In fact, I was even getting better at writing. Best of all, I was having fun again.

This is something that I wish I could convey to my students: all you need to do to improve is relax, write a lot, and have fun with it. I do say this to them, but I'm usually met with skeptical stares. They've been told for too long that

“When writing becomes nothing more than checking off the boxes on a rubric, of course it feels like a chore.”

writing is a chore, and a couple of words won't change that. I try in other ways, like doing shortwrites about things like their favorite movies or weekend plans. But nobody can force anybody else to change their mind, and I worry that if I push too hard they'll pull away.

Still, I want to do what I can to show them that writing is fun. There are rules that you have to follow, because in the end you need a good grade and that means following the rubric to

some extent. However, I try to show my students that there's no point in meeting the rules if you haven't even written anything yet. And you can't write anything until you just relax and put down whatever's on your mind. I want the students in my groups to walk away, if not with a love of writing, then at least with the idea that writing can be more than just an assignment. That it can be just them, talking to the world—and there's nothing more fun than that.





Jenna Wilson

THE ÜBER TUTORS

I've seen a lot of students come into our writing center who tell me that their teacher had them come because their writing is *so* bad, who were told they really needed help. They were told, essentially, that they are crappy writers. This is the mindset a lot of people have when we help them. Of course, the problem is not that they actually are bad writers. Most of the time, the problem is that many of these students have trouble acclimating to the often overwhelming conflict between the different expectations and demands of the varied discourses they encounter in the university (the habits of mind and language of the academy)—and on top of that, the sometimes frustrating idiosyncrasies of specific teachers' writing instructions (some teachers simply don't teach writing well). Often

these are working class students, students of color, or international students: students who are not from a privileged background. Since these are the students who, a lot of the time, are the ones recommended to visit writing centers for help, the tutoring they are given provides a crucial role in their adjustment to the discourse of the academy.

I think that one of the best ways to help students navigate these discourse-conflicts (or teacher-conflicts) is by writing at the table with them. Writing is where most of the communication in academia and in public discourse happens, so if we are trying to get students to think like writers and communicators, we need to be writing with them and communicating in that way.

Oftentimes, academic discourses are inaccessible to students because of the language of the academy, which can be confusing and foreign to those outside of that discourse. All students are capable of complex thought, but the language is a huge barrier to learning the kinds of academic thinking valued in the discourse, what are called “academic habits of mind.” I believe low-stakes writing with the tutor at the table can help students tap into their existing repertoire of language skills and translate them into academic discourse. Taking a cue from Peter Elbow, who calls this “speaking onto the page,” I argue that we promote language-use at the table that, in a way, defies the language of the academy, language that is personal, maybe even imprecise—in other words, student language. This not only helps students become more comfortable with writing, but it also helps them learn habits of mind that are expected of them in the university.

If, as writing tutors or as writing teachers, we want students to do hard thinking, then we need to let them do it. I think the Writing Center is one of the best places for that. At the Writing Center, students can do writing and thinking and then test it without the worry of grades, like in the classroom. When we have tutees writing at the table, they are doing something much more powerful than just talking. Low-stakes writing (such as focused short writes) provides a space for complex thought with the immediacy of speech, a middle ground between student and academic discourses. This is a space useful for negotiating disparities in university discourses and idiosyncrasies in writing instruction, because it is a space of translation, of bordering two discourses, something many students of color and international students struggle with in the university.

This space is the Writing Center table. It is a space of shared attention. It is a temporary space, where writers come together and lend themselves

to each other. Two, three, four of us sit together in the same physical space, yes—but somewhere else as well, somewhere beyond the material world. Pictures of this somewhere come through on notebook pages, residue of the energy of the exchange. You feel that energy when you’re writing and sharing. You don’t get as strong a hit of it when the tutoring is one-sided, when the tutor is telling the tutee what she sees or what to do. It’s the same in the classroom—it takes a

really powerful lecturer to get students to enter a kind of shared space, but even then it’s not the same kind of space you find in the intimacy of the tutoring session. And it *is* intimate. It’s as intimate as it is vulnerable. You’re putting parts of yourself onto paper and showing them to

strangers. But, that vulnerability is where the learning and the thinking happens. It’s where the translation is. Everybody is offering up pieces of their minds, their experiences, their lives, and together they are figuring something out. I think that kind of vulnerability is essential to what writing is, even academic writing—it is us opening ourselves up and letting others look in. The more we do it, the more comfortable we are with it, the better we become as writers.

I don’t think this could happen as naturally if not for a space like the Writing Center table, where the tutor and the tutee(s) write and share. Talk tends to skirt around issues, to touch lightly and then move on. Writing dwells on things. Writing questions and pushes. But writing also gives a lot of people anxiety, because it is writing, and writing is so often something to be judged and graded by. It becomes something that is a measure of who you are as a person. Writing at the table, then, is a middle space that takes the benefits of both: it lets us sit with something in terms we know without being judged for it.

“Upon taking their seat at the table, clicking their pens, and looking at us with serious and wide eyes, tutees are trusting us to provide them with feedback on their writing and do so, well.”



Jazmin Flores

CROSSING BARRIERS BY WRITING

Short-writes. What are short-writes? Why do we spend time on them?

I didn't put much thought into why this type of writing existed and was done at the Writing Center when I first began to tutor. For me it was just something that was required. Later I learned and understood that these short-writes also paved the way for further discussion about a student's draft.

Still it wasn't until recently that I also realized that these short-writes also establish points of connection between tutees, and between tutees and myself. I've come to think that these short-writes, which are written after we've used a lens on a draft, are only amazing because of the freedom and security that they provide tutees.

For example, it was in this semester that for the first time a student shared within the group that she disliked English and writing. I must confess that I found myself panicking and

thinking how this fact would affect our group sessions and our group dynamic. I could already see the effect with the fact that the other two students commented only on their responses and mine. I should also share that even before the student shared this information, her body language communicated her resistance to the group. She sat at an angle, turned slightly away from us, creating an invisible barrier that I didn't know how I would cross or even if I could. However, she did not shy away from writing. She used the time allotted to write long responses; it didn't matter if it was a private write, a response using a lens, or a short-write.

I have come to read these beginning moments as writing giving her a way to inhabit a safer space than the group provided at that point in time. It is the moment of writing that allowed her and the other tutees as well as myself to write down thoughts that were personal and meaningful. It's what makes sharing powerful

because we share these personal thoughts and in this moment also connect with each other; it is these connections that humanize us to each other, changing our statuses from strangers. One of the most fascinating things to witness during these starting sessions was the change in her attitude and body language from the beginning of the session to the end of it. Through the act of sharing, her cold attitude thawed and she would eventually turn toward us, destroying that invisible barrier.

A couple of sessions later I finally addressed her behavior because even though she was writing and sharing, her behavior was always cold at the beginning of each session—making the points of connection and trust only the moments after we shared. I didn't expect much but it was still disheartening not to see much of a response. I marked it off as a failed attempt.

Since I addressed the situation during a group session, we continued to move forward with our writing. During that group session, we ended up short-writing about our favorite person. I was surprised that the student used this short-write to share the reason she was closed off. Her short-write was personal, but she wrote it and she shared it.

I believe that this choice would not have been made if she hadn't written down her response first. There is something about writing

“Writing allows for private thinking in a public space.”

that allows students to lower the defenses that create barriers. I believe it has to do with the fact that when students write down their thoughts they are alone as they figure out how to respond. In that moment they have to trust their thinking when they write. In that sense, writing provides security from interruption and allows for the creation of ideas. Writing allows for private thinking in a public space. While writing all of us have the freedom to make mistakes and cross out incomplete ideas as we think them. We are able to come up with questions. We are able to see our thoughts and trust them.

In addition, writing allows us to write down personal things that relate to students' drafts. In doing so, writing helps us establish bonds because we can relate, we can understand a different point of view, or we can also learn something new. These bonds enable students to trust each other with their writing.

Now that I have this experience because of this student, now that I have seen that short-writes are more than only discussion of a specific student's draft, I will create opportunities for students' where they can be personal in their responses. Yes, they will create new ideas but they will also connect with each other and help create an environment that destroys the need for invisible barriers.





Mia Barraza-Martinez

A PAPER THAT FLOWS

I was like sick sick I mean real sick one week and some rando doctor at the health center said that yeah it's a bad head cold but also your body is stress-aggravated and you need to get some counseling

And I was worried about having to miss a whole week of work a whole week cut out of my paycheck

And I started to get the feeling I'm only doing this for the money and how pathetic and uncharacteristic of me is that like who is grad school turning me into you know?

But when I came back from like a week of feverish stupor and my students immediately filled me in on what drafts they had brought in while I was gone and one of my groups even marked me absent for the two days I missed like how hilarious was that I even showed it to my

“...and yeah my tutees do leave with drafts that flow ‘cause one tutee destroyed the dam or another tutee pointed out that the Nile runs the other way...”

other groups I'm even laughing as I write about it you know the irl of laughing out loud

And one of my walk-in appointments asked me what times I'm available and even though I guess that's not exactly okay to continuously work with the same walk-in tutor I still think it was okay and like I was actually helping someone do something and that if I get hit on my

bike crossing Cedar and Barstow at least I had helped someone enough that they were asking me to help them again

And that one of the young brown freshman in one of my groups brought

in article from Bad Feminist and said he was really into the reading for his English class and it was one of those bittersweet break-my-heart make-my-heart-soar moments thinking about brown pride and brown power and all those young brown kids that never got the chance to

read the cool shit you get to read in college not just the racist crap they make us read as kids

And also that during a ten-minute break I get to talk to another tutor about how their queer theory class is going or about their favorite anime or asking another tutor about their thesis or about when the new Kanye is coming out

And that being a full time graduate student and a teaching assistant doesn't make you the best tutor but at least I get to come to work here where I actually know what I'm doing and I'm

helping others not be so mystified by the writing process and that some great moments come up 'cause there were four heads in a group that decided that what the writer was saying was important and yeah my tutees do leave with drafts that flow 'cause one tutee destroyed the dam or another tutee pointed out that the Nile runs the other way or the other tutee assured the writer that their words have been one with the water this whole time





Zoyer Zyndel

WRITING AS AN INTERVENTION

Many people are surprised when I tell them that although I am in graduate school for Social Work now, my undergraduate degree was in English. To me it's not unusual at all. I have always maintained that the two subjects compliment each other, as there have been many occasions where my experience as a reader, writer, and responder have actually informed my practice as a beginning social worker. When it comes to working with clients who have suffered trauma or a severe level of crisis, one important priority is bringing what's in the subconscious to the surface so that it becomes conscious. When working with people who have sincerely suffered tragedy I realized they are experts at keeping everything bottled inside. I have been told that a big part of therapy involves teasing out the symptoms of mental illness and deconstructing them in the sense that you can look at each symptom and characteristic with a microscope.

I have spent time as an intern providing therapy to clients at the Department of Behavioral Health. To say that writing has proven to be a useful intervention in trauma cases is an understatement. It assists in bringing out what is hidden to the surface. Writing allows for more time to distill in words the reasons why one is depressed, angry, or feels paranoia. Writing also helps to validate one's feelings by putting them on the page and thus making them real. It can help to drain out painful feelings of animosity and shame, as well as assist in organizing one's thoughts about a trauma, their role in it, and how that experience shapes their behavior today. Writing is so powerful in therapy because it offers clients a sense of autonomy and agency over themselves. It gives them the freedom and control of articulating their story whereas during the time of the trauma they may have felt so far from in control of the situation. Writing also helps promote reflection

that is a healthy way to offer a more accurate objective view of a situation after the fact; this can also help to deter the often seen default assumption that everything is their fault.

Writing can help also give some sort of overview of feelings and understanding of the effects of therapy over time. It can be a way to track progress (when comparing writing in the first initial sessions to writing some months later). Not to mention for my clients with night terrors, writing can help them feel powerful. As an intervention I have instructed some clients to write down as much of the nightmare as they can remember, however when they get to the ending of it I ask them to write down the ending that they wish would have happened. I ask them: how would you have liked the dream to end? I think this surprises them because they never saw themselves as having a say in what happens to them even in their dreams.

Using questions to prompt writing has proven very useful in terms of gauging how relationships have affected them. I have asked many of my clients to write about how their socialization with their parents has affected them and have even asked them to write letters to people who have harmed them. I think for many of them this gives them a feeling of power and autonomy, and dare I say, for once in their life they actually feel like they have a voice and that their opinion matters.

At the Writing Center we use responding lenses to assist in increasing audience awareness on the part of the writer. These lenses also help the responder exercise their abilities in articulating their reactions as a reader. This proves useful in experiencing the paper from an audience member's point of view; the experience gained can translate and inform students or clients when they practice the role of the writer. There is a lens called More About that asks the responders to write what they would like to hear more about in a piece of writing. I used this lens during an individual therapy session with one of my clients. She was discussing her experience growing up while feeling no support from her family. She wrote in a diary about her feelings and felt comfortable enough to share her written feelings with me. In response, I wrote a More About response to what she read aloud to me. In the More About lens, I wrote "I want to hear more about your anger towards your mother. How do you think her behavior toward you when

you were a child has shaped your behavior and beliefs today?" The client really seemed to appreciate this kind of feedback, and said she had never been asked these kinds of questions before, and certainly never carried on a conversation with someone else about her family and traumas through writing. I will never forget her facial expression; it was one of sincere reflection and wonder. It was like the lens and the writing experience we shared together opened up a new world for her. It gave birth to thoughts she never had before. She maintained that the writing helped her toward experiencing revelations, and that my writing prescriptions enabled her to open up more than she would have if she did not write during our sessions.

I had another client who suffered severely from schizoaffective symptoms and it plagued her everyday functioning. She would have anxiety attacks frequently and this created a constant state of hopelessness; there were times she felt her attempts at therapy were futile. I reassured her that she was a brave and resilient individual, and that she had already impressed me with her progress thus far. It was at this time

I used Miracle Question in therapy. The Miracle Question is a question issued to clients that asks how their life would be – or what their life would look

like – if they did not have the problem or symptoms they were suffering with. While there are different varieties as to how the question is framed, I asked it in the form of a writing prompt: How would your life be different if all of your problems were erased? What would your life look like? My client wrote introspectively about what she felt her life would be like without hearing voices or experiencing regular anxiety. She said she saw herself being able to engage in social interaction without anxiety and she saw herself able to go to the grocery store alone and during the day (at that time she was only going to the grocery store at night to avoid being near large crowds). Hearing her read her writing aloud told me a lot about how imprisoned she felt by her illness, and how much she wanted to progress into state of more independence. Her writing told me how much she wanted freedom. With this particular client, her writing helped me to appreciate the feelings behind the symptoms. I commended her for her disclosure and used her ability to open up as a strength to overcome some of her identified weaknesses. This client is much more self-aware and confident today, and

“...there is something very special about writing being used as a form of healing from social oppression.”

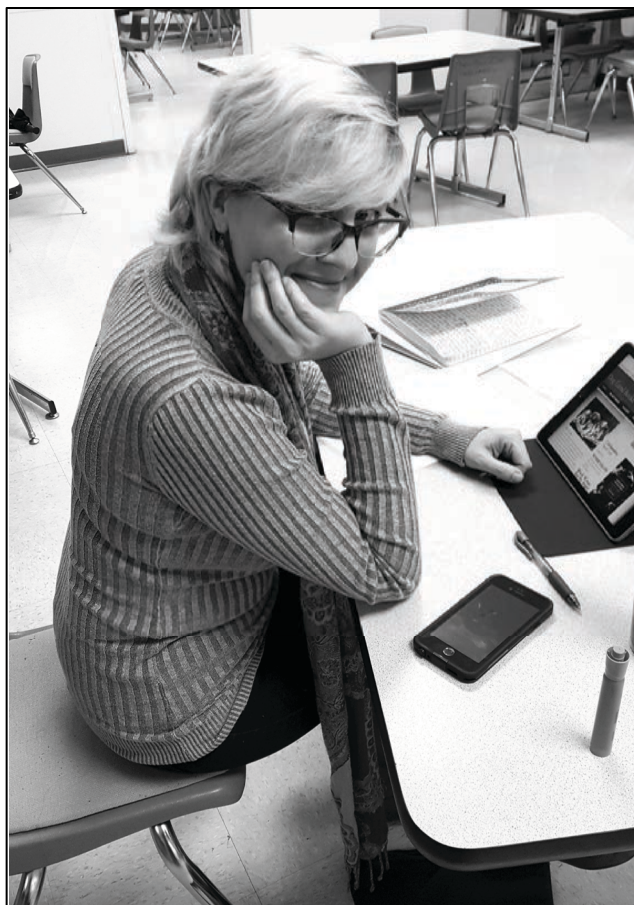
has even reported a few successful visits to the grocery store alone.

I am active in my community, specifically as an organizer in the Fresno LGBT community, and have had the benefit of seeing other members of my community use writing as a means of healing their own pain. For these people, it was necessary to record their narrative as a way to overcome and cope with the oppression they received for living as their authentic self. While I have seen writing used as a tool to assist in organizing events (through e-mail and notifications, promotion, etc.), creating grant proposals, drafting proclamations, there is something very special about writing being used as a form of healing from social oppression. With this said, I believe the promotion of writing and other forms of art is a form of intervention for those who may not have any other outlet. In the past 6 months I have spearheaded the organization of the Transgender Day of Remembrance and the Transgender Day of Visibility and in both events poetry – another form of artful writing – has surfaced as a reflection of the resilience of a community. My years as a community organizer is what influenced me to pursue a degree in social work. I still continue to identify as a writer, and feel as though my years as a tutor, English major, and writer have informed my abilities as a social worker, a therapist, and a healer. I applied for the social work program because I wanted to help people, to assist them with interventions that they may have felt not possible for them. I am happy to say that I have successfully helped those with trauma by merging two of my loves in life: writing and helping others. as human beings, as demonstrated by Meltzoff's studies among others, as well as the more complex relationship that we have to the stories we tell through writing.

Any kind of writing is about connection on some level, even academic writing. Yet writing is often talked about as if it isn't even taking place in the real world; students are even told to not use the word "I" in their papers as though it were written by some sort of disembodied spirit. But we also don't treat academic writing like it's about relating to other writers, other people. When we talk about entering into the academic conversation we are talking about relating to other writers through their work and through ours. Yet we still talk about writing as a solitary act, taking place in a vacuum. One of the most important things that the "Reply" lens teaches us is that it's okay, and even important for us to relate to each other's writing. Because our writing does contain us within it; otherwise what are we relating to when we read something? It is the words but it's not just the squiggles and lines that we put on the page by themselves. It's what we say those squiggles and lines mean which is a reflection of the writers, and in turn, a reflection of the audience.

One of the reasons why this lens is most helpful in the early stages of writing a draft is, I think, because it makes students feel more comfortable with their writing. And I think this is because it makes them feel more comfortable with themselves in an academic setting. Not to keep beating up on academia but, again, the way writing is usually taught makes students feel like the way they think and speak is not valid. That it is not as "smart" as academic thoughts and speech are supposed to be. So the students often try to write in some elevated style that they do not even understand themselves which only confuses them and thus their readers as well. We should try to make our students feel valid; like their thoughts and speech are absolutely worth writing down.





Gilliann Hensley

BRINGING THE WRITING CENTER

Pretty soon now, I'll be entering the third (and hopefully final) year of my graduate program, and I know that I'm going to have to get serious about that whole "real job" thing that family members keep badgering me about. I tell them that I'm working on being a writer, but they remind me that I'll probably need to do something on top of that — "you know, to pay the rent." Thankfully I do have a backup plan doing something that I already do — teaching university-level writing. Having the chance to teach and tutor in tandem has given me the opportunity to figure out, at least to some extent, what does and doesn't work for me when it comes to teaching. And, as it turns out, there is quite a lot that we can take with us from our time at the Writing Center that can be very useful in the writing classroom.

I'm sure that comes as no surprise, and maybe many of us are in the same shoes —

pulling both double duty as an instructor and a tutor, or maybe some of us plan on teaching later on. For this reason, I'd like to share some of what I've been able to take with me into the First Year Writing Classroom. Personally, I take with me the value of thinking-in-writing to help generate ideas for discussion, as well as to help guide that discussion. I also find the lenses incredibly useful for peer workshops as a way of guiding students in providing constructive feedback to their fellow classmates. I'm also a firm believer in making students "do something" with that feedback through reflection on what that feedback means for them and in the creation of a "plan of action" for revision.

Allow me to explain a bit further what I mean here.

*Thinking-in-Writing: Avoiding Those
"Uuuh...umm..uuuh" Moments*

If you aren't already aware, leading class discussions can be rough. You have students that don't participate, or students who feel put on the spot when called upon, and stammer for some kind of response. This is not only awkward and uncomfortable, but also a waste of precious minutes of class time. So putting them on the spot just doesn't work for me. It always seems so unproductive and doesn't really give students adequate time to think through their ideas or reactions or responses. As we know, at the Writing Center, discussion starts with writing. We read a text, such as a draft or a prompt or some kind of article, and then we write about it in some way by using lenses, or generating questions and then responding to those questions. All of that writing, of course, can lead to some very interesting discussions, and even more writing, in a very organic sort of way.

So I like to begin my class discussions of texts and concepts with writing, or perhaps have students spend time in groups writing together before coming back to discuss as a whole class. I might ask them to write a little about their own personal understanding of a reading, or to hone in on something interesting/troubling/significant, or have them try to make connections between their own lives and the readings — or any number of things, really. Basically, I try to set them up with some focused free-writes in order to get them generating some sort of response to the ideas and concepts that I want to focus on most during that class.

I've found that class discussions are a lot more productive this way, and that more students participate, that more students are actually engaged. This doesn't mean, as we know, that the students only respond with what they have written, but those written responses do help to keep the conversation moving, and very often leads to students generating questions of their own about the texts and concepts. All of this is because they have answers at the ready, to either read as is or to use as a reference for what they want to say.

Lenses are a Peer Workshop's Best Friend

As an instructor, you come to know all too well the problems that can arise from a peer workshop. Complaints from students that their

peers' comments "aren't helpful." Happy faces and exclamations of "good!" or "I like it!" Surface level editing done on grammatical errors and typos. But not a whole hell of a lot beyond that. There aren't generally a lot of comments that actually address content-related issues, mostly due to the fact that students don't really have the tools in their writerly tool kits — they don't have the language to talk about content, or they don't really know what it is that makes up good, constructive feedback (largely because they may never have received it themselves in their past writing experiences). So it's good, I think, to provide students with some kind of guidance in terms of what productive feedback can look like, and to provide students with the tools that can help them provide that feedback, as well as improve their abilities as readers and assessors of writing.

The lenses that we use at the Writing Center, as many of us well know, provide an excellent resource in terms of tools that can be used in classroom peer workshops. For my own purposes in the composition classroom, I often rely heavily on "More About," "Sayback," and "Two-Step Summary," as

“...so many of those students come to us with the mentality that writing is hard, or some kind of annoying chore that they don't particularly enjoy doing. So we try to demystify it, and to give them the tools that they need...”

these lenses are the ones that I find best align with what I want my students to be on the lookout for. When I talk to my students about their papers, they often express concerns over the "flow" of the essay, or that they don't have enough to say about the topic, or that they aren't sure if they are being clear enough (just as many of our tutees do). So these lenses give them a way to read their peer's essays for these particular issues, as well as a way to read their own essays when they are working their way through the revision process.

Even though I have mostly found those three lenses to be most beneficial to peer workshops, that doesn't mean that other lenses wouldn't work for writing classroom goals. For example, "Audience" and "Conversation Map" can help address some of the things that we want students to be aware of when they write — to whom it is that they are writing, and the way that various essays and articles and other texts are all working in conversation with one another. These are often pretty foreign concepts to students, as they've never really thought of their audience as anyone other than a teacher, and also because they've never been taught to think of writing as

something that is in conversation with other writing. For this reason, using lenses like these, I think, helps them to make connections between the things we talk about in class and the things that are actually happening within their own writing.

At the end of the semester, when students hand in their final portfolios and reflections, I find that almost every student mentions how beneficial they found the peer workshops. They comment that the feedback they received helped them to see things about their essays that they didn't think they would have seen before, or how crucial those workshops were to their revision process (and even in helping them to see the value of feedback to begin with). They might name a lens or two that they found particularly valuable, and talk about how they'll be able to take that with them into other writing situations. And, for me, that's a big win—and it really speaks to the strength of the lenses that we use at the Writing Center.

Turning Feedback into a Plan for Revision

I've often had students — both in group and in the classroom — ask “okay, but how do I use this feedback to revise my paper?” Or something along those lines. It is as if they just want you to point to things and tell them exactly what to change, and how. They don't take the time to reflect on what the feedback they have received might mean for their essay and the goals they have for that essay. But I think that making that move from feedback to reflection is a really important part of the revision process that students need to participate in, rather than being told by someone else what they need to do with the feedback. That's why, in group, I generally have us all, after we've shared our responses, spend a few minutes reflecting on what the particular lens helped us to see about the draft. I might ask something like: “What did the lens help us to see about this draft?” Or: “What do our responses show us about the draft?”

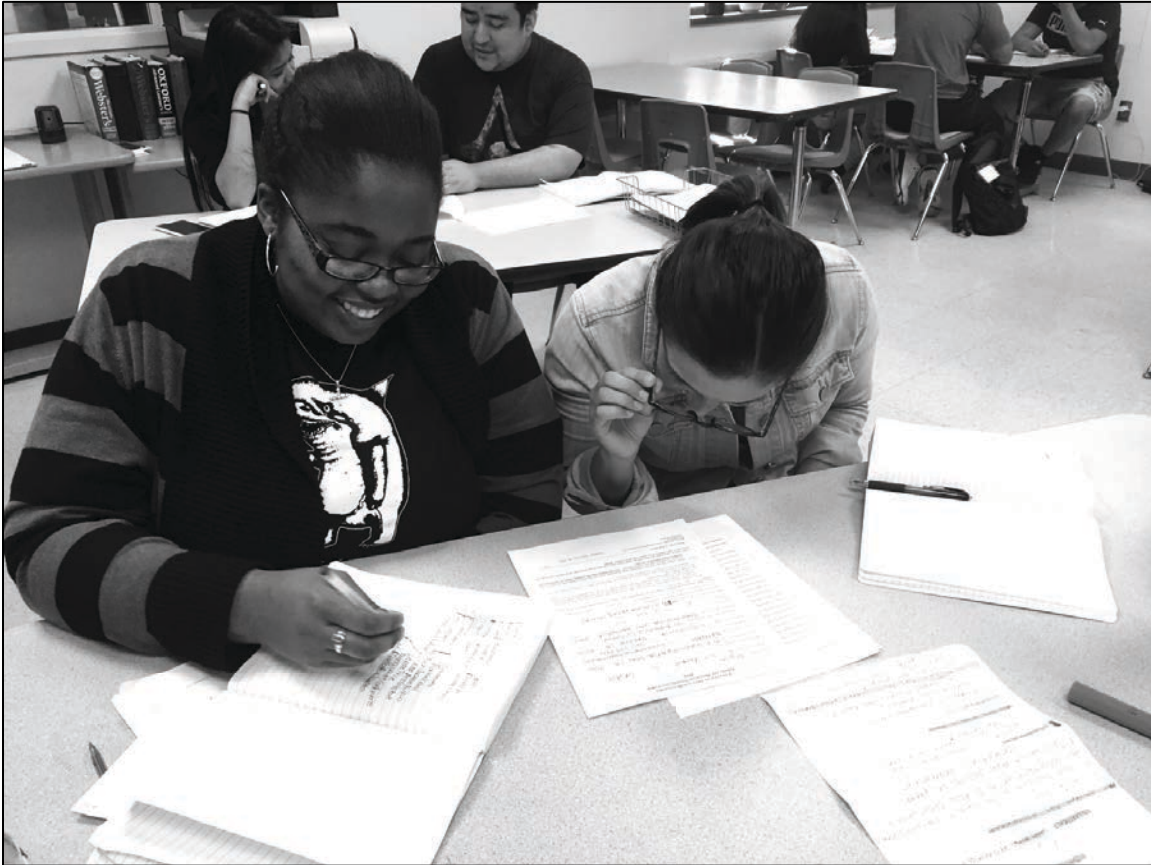
In the writing classroom, however, I take this reflection one step further. Because

student feedback must take into consideration both the lens that we might be using, plus any concerns that a student expressed on his or her author's notes, this usually results in feedback on a few different aspects of the paper. (Also, it's really hard to break students of the habit of line editing, which of course means that students are always thinking of surface-level aspects at the same time as content-level ones.) Therefore, I have them take some time to prioritize that feedback into a kind of plan of action they will take when finally revising that draft. I ask students to think about which aspects of that feedback seem more important to address and less important to address at this particular stage of their writing. I remind them that sentence structure and grammatical issues can be de-prioritized until later stages, and that content issues should take priority earlier on. This makes the feedback much more manageable for students, I think, and allows them a great deal more ownership over the production of their own texts.

Making Writing More Approachable is Valuable Everywhere

Much of what we do at the Writing Center, as I see it, is focused on making the process of writing and revision much more approachable to students — especially when so many of those students come to us with the mentality that writing is hard, or some kind of annoying chore that they don't particularly enjoy doing. So we try to demystify it, and to give them the tools that they need to help them be more successful writers (and even readers). Something similar happens in the First Year Writing classroom. We know that students have, by and large, been taught writing in a very rigid, formalistic way, and we know that this has negative affects on their abilities and flexibility as writers. So bringing Writing Center practices into the writing classroom is incredibly beneficial, not only for the students, but also for us as instructors. As tutors, we've acquired these amazing tools, so we might as well put them to good use.

“All of that writing, of course, can lead to some very interesting discussions, and even more writing, in a very organic sort of way.”



Kamilah Okafor

THE TEACHER-TUTOR TANGO

I've had the exciting yet stressful opportunity to start teaching first year academic writing this year. It has been...an experience to say the least. I felt like I must have been some kind of prepared. I had been working at the Writing Center for the past year and I learned a lot about teaching in my class, but there's always something you're not ready for, and that was teaching. I learned to pick myself up from that quickly. However one thing that has become a problem is knowing when to turn off the teacher and turn on the tutor when I come to the Writing Center. Particularly turning off the teacher lingo.

Before I became a teacher, and was just the cool Writing Center tutor, whenever my tutees would ask about help with their "thesis," I would instantly cast away that word because the word is

very discomfoting. It makes people twitch. It makes people panic. It has the same quality as the phrase "does it flow?" the meaning of which I'm still unsure. The point is I made an effort to stray away from such language during our group sessions and use the lens lingo instead because the language is more inviting without the stress.

However, becoming a teacher, I see myself returning to the lingo I strongly despised during my one on one's and groups. I hear myself in my sessions explaining subjects that happened in English 5A/5B like rhetorical analysis or textual analysis, because I am teaching those things myself. You would think this would make me a better tutor because I could help my tutees out more, but I'm starting to think that might not be the case. Even if I know the teacher lingo, being

well-rehearsed in it and well-aware of the things that most of the tutees' instructors are talking about (aka I speak "teach"), my big question is if this knowledge is helpful or problematic to being a tutor versus being a teacher?

Am I in fact no longer a tutor, but a teacher when I'm at the Writing Center? Is that even good for the tutee? They already have one teacher and that's enough stress as it is.

What I want to know is if there is in fact a way to marry the two genres. Doing the teacher-tutor tango, is it at all possible?

At first, it seemed impossible.

I remember one time when I was teaching my students about the dreaded synthesis, I thought to myself, "Hey, Synthesis is kinda like Conversation Map." Your sources need to talk to each other. So, I thought that introducing the "Tutor Me" to my students would cross over well. After all, ideally, I thought all my Writing Center knowledge would come in handy. One time I explained to my students that sources should be treated like entering a coffee shop and talking with each other. On the surface it looked like it made sense to them, but then I read their papers.

And in their papers, I found my students saying over and over "Well if 'So and So' were in a coffee shop..." and the color just drained from my face. It was a metaphor! I wanted to explain this to them, but the damage was done. It was in this moment I felt like there was no way teaching and tutoring could tango to the same song.

However, I did not want to give up. There had to be a way to incorporate my Writing Center lingo with my teacher lingo and have an effective class. So, I tried once more.

I started with one of my more dreaded teacher terms: "Thesis." My students freak out about thesis. I freak out about thesis. How can we stop freaking out about thesis? It was when I

did a little more research on thesis that I realized that thesis is similar to Sayback. Sayback is asking "what do hear me saying overall?" and thesis asks about your paper's focus. So, I changed the lingo in my class. I told my students to think about thesis in the most basic form, "what are they trying to say overall in their essay?" This helped them to write out what they want their peers to get out of their essay and it was then I told them, "This is what a thesis is." It was then, the concept of the thesis was less stressful. I had found a way to make the two identities, teacher and tutor, work together.

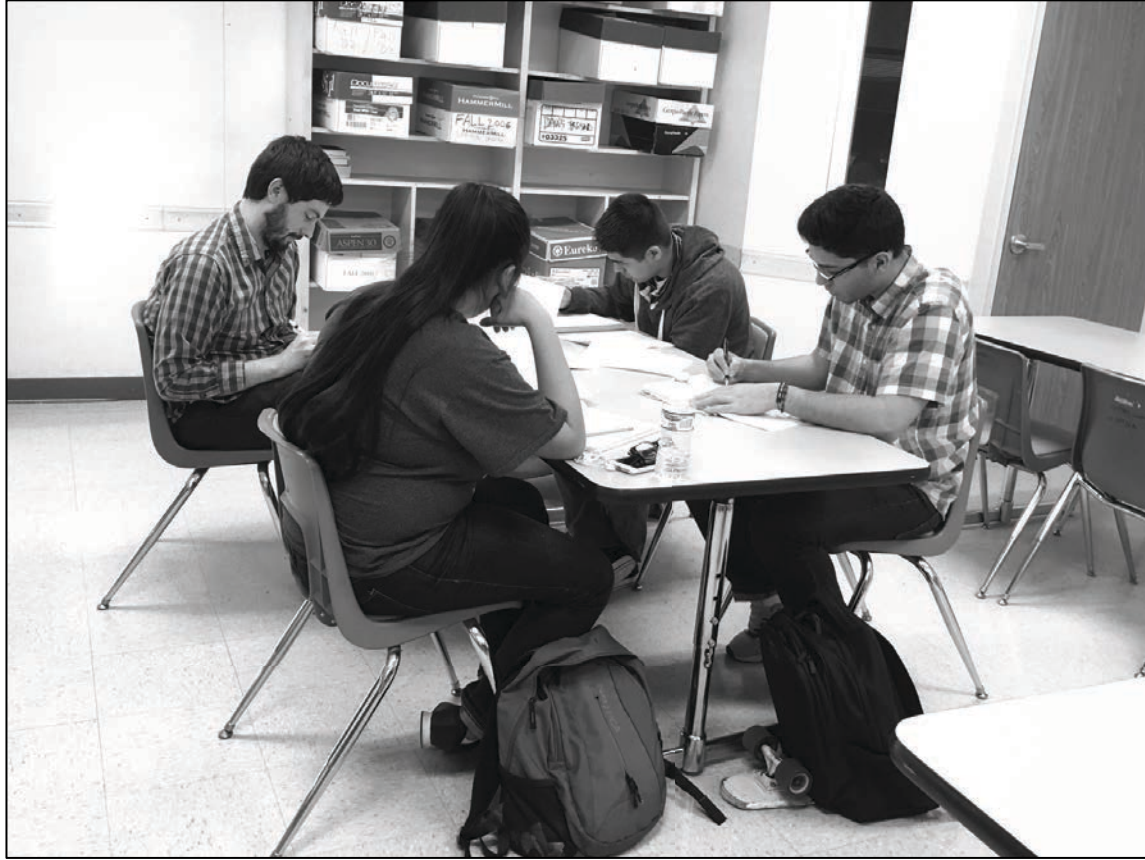
I tried this again with my students' first drafts. I had them write only four pages of their eight page paper and bring it to class. I turned my class into a Writing Center session and taught them "More About." I even helped them understand the concept by thinking about what would they want to hear more about from a friend's trip to Ireland if all they said was, "It was fine." This created lively discussion and we created a communal list on the whiteboard.

Then, we put the More About lens to the test and the students applied the lens to each other's drafts. My students seemed real confident in their usage of the lens and I saw them writing a lot on their "More About's" and when I asked them how it went, they told me how useful the lens was to their feedback. In the end, I explained how using More About is useful in a persuasive essay because to persuade someone, a person needs to ask the question what they would like to hear more about to be persuaded. It went over well. This was another success in the molding of teaching and tutoring lingo.

In the end, the teacher tutor tango is possible. There's going to be a lot of missteps. I'm still learning how to incorporate my teaching to assist in the Writing Center. But I am seeing improvement. The teacher tutor tango is a tricky dance, but the success is worth the trials.

"The teacher tutor tango is a tricky dance, but the success is worth the trials."





Kevin Jensen

IF ONLY I COULD HAVE SMALL GROUP SESSIONS WITH ALL OF MY STUDENTS

So this semester I had a group that was pretty different from any group I've had before. I started teaching English 5A/B last semester and this semester two of my tutees are actually my students. At first, I wasn't sure about this, mostly because working with these two particular students hadn't been the easiest part of my first semester teaching. But then I thought that I didn't want to make them feel like I didn't want to work with them, but also that this could possibly be a really good experience. Or a really bad one, but either way, it wasn't going to be a mediocre, lukewarm experience. And the semester's only halfway through at this point, but so far, I'm really glad that I ended up with two of my students as two of my tutees. I mean, I wish that I could do this with all of my students;

I wish that this was the way writing classes could be taught, in general.

These two guys are actually very different students, very different people, it seems to me, even though they are close friends who have known each other since middle school or something like that. One of them, we'll call him Richard, is the kind of dude who thinks that any subject is capable of being argued about. Even scientific facts, but that's a whole other story. I remember on the first day of class last semester, he said that one of the things he didn't like about writing in high school was that his teachers always wanted him to use sources, whereas he felt that his personal experience was more than enough to write about. And he seemed to think that here in college, if he didn't want to use sources, he wouldn't need to. I tried to disabuse

him of that notion real quick, but it took a lot longer for him to fully understand *why* it is important, and sometimes necessary, to use sources in academic writing.

One of the things we worked on in the group together was their first writing project, a rhetorical analysis, which required a few outside sources. When he brought in his first draft, he had not really incorporated any of those sources and if I remember correctly he hadn't even started doing the research. I believe we did a "More About" lens for the draft, and what ended up coming out of our conversation was that all of the things we wanted to hear more about essentially required him to go and do research about some of the different ideas he was bringing up. A couple of weeks later he brought in the second draft of the paper and he had incorporated several sources but still hadn't really made connections between the sources and his argument, or between the sources. So we did the "Conversation Map" lens to see if we could imagine an actual conversation between all of the different voices speaking in the paper. The next time I saw this paper was when he turned it in to me; he had clearly worked much harder on the research side of things than last semester.

The other student, we'll call him Pedro, is the kind of student who is just taking an English class because he has to. In this way, he actually reminds me a lot of myself when I first started college. The only difference being that I actually enjoyed my English class(es), I was probably an awful student in my math and science-related classes. Which is why part of me empathizes with him while another part of me gets really

frustrated. Last semester, he did the bare minimum amount of work, and in one particular case, not even that. For one of the papers we wrote in 5A, the students had the option of choosing 2 of the articles that we read in class; and one of the articles Pedro chose was all about the objectification of women in our society. The problem was that he was completely unwilling to try to see things from the author's perspective. It was more than just disagreeing with the author; it was clear from the paper that he had not actually taken the time to understand what the author was saying. And when he and I talked about this, he nodded his head, but was clearly not interested in revising his paper to show that he did understand the author's points.

"I think this should be how writing classes are always run. If I had the time to work with all of my students in small groups outside of class, I feel like so much more good work could get done."

But working with him this semester in the Writing Center as well as in the classroom, his growth as a writer has been really significant. This guy has really surprised me, because he usually doesn't *seem* to be engaged when we're in the group, but when he brings in his revisions, it is obvious that he's been taking a lot of our feedback into account. I have been beyond pleased with how much improvement both of these guys have shown this semester. I think that, ideally, this should be how writing classes are always run. If I had the time to work with all of my students in small groups outside of class, I feel like so much more good work could get done. Only so much can be accomplished with 25 people in a classroom for 50 minutes or however long it might be, and this extra time to help a couple of my students has proved to be a lot of help, to me and to them, I think.





Selena Edin

OBSERVING OBSERVATIONS: WHAT I LEARNED AS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST IN THE WRITING CENTER

When I was younger, one of my favorite pastimes was people watching. Whether it was sitting in the parking lot while my mom shopped for groceries or hanging out on the front lawn, I would quietly observe my surroundings with a particular interest in any people that passed by. Sometimes I would make up stories about them or give them names, but mostly I just liked to absorb all their movements and details and other nuances. It was just so intriguing to me to see the diversity of people in their day-to-day activities. Little did I know then that I would later be able to academically and professionally observe people in college.

I have learned how to observe in two very different ways here at Fresno State. The first way was in the Writing Center, fulfilling assignments as both a tutor and supervisor by writing out a play-by-play of the tutoring sessions. The second way I learned a little later when I began to dive

into my Anthropology major, taking notes on social interactions, street layouts, and old photographs. Both ways require me to sit just enough out of the way to notice everything happening without disrupting those happenings. But what I actually focus on and take note of differs depending on the discipline.

For the fall 2015 semester, I embarked on a project that allowed me to combine my interests in Anthropology and the Writing Center. Research projects in Anthropology are called ethnographies, and are guided by inductive studies into the customs and experiences of a specific “culture” or group of people. I was interested in ethnographically studying the experiences of the students attending the Writing Center. It was during this research that I realized just how different the observation methods were between the two disciplines. And while their objectives may be different, I now can’t help but

wonder if maybe the two methods could learn something from the other.

Here at the Writing Center, our observations are all about entering into a conversation with other tutors about tutoring. Thus, we use one of our very own response lenses to do that: Play-by-Play. We find another tutor, whether in a group or at the one-on-one table, and record our reactions, feelings, and thoughts as their session unfolds. The language of these notes is often full sentences, utilizing “I” statements such as “I feel” and “I think.” It is a subjective method of note taking, where the details of the session are filtered through the observer’s own feelings, experiences, and predictions. And afterward, it allows for a conversation to happen based on how the observer reacted.

Anthropology requires a different method, one that can be considered a lot more objective. The focus during an Anthropology observation is on sensory details: the “whats” and the “wheres” and even the “whos” and “whens.” We basically have to approach whatever we’re observing as if it’s the first time we have ever encountered it. And while our notes during the observation are often shorthand, we write them as if they’d be used to explain the situation to someone who had never encountered it, either. This style of note taking, one that I’d used several times already, ended up being trickier to use at the Writing Center, a place I had worked in for almost three years. It was easy to overlook a lot of the surroundings and what was happening, because they were things I had seen countless times before. But as one of my professors once told me, “Anthropology is all about making the strange familiar, and making the familiar strange.” Thus, I had to pay extra attention and not take any detail for granted. For the sake of my research, I had to make this familiar place seem strange.

If there are any similarities, they are subtle. During a Play-by-Play, you might observe a student rolling their eyes, or notice there are lots of papers on the table. But these details would be woven into the observer’s personal reaction (“I feel surprised that the student would openly roll her eyes like that” or “I’m concerned about the noise level in this room.”). During an Anthropology observation, you might make a connection to something you’ve seen before, or predict what will happen next. But these personal reactions would be separated within the notes by

brackets and only used for reference during future analysis (“Student A rolls eyes [I think she is frustrated with the tutor]” or “Tutor says OK to use phone [I’m confused, is this allowed?]”). Overall, because each discipline aims for a different goal with their observations, their methodology is different. The Writing Center aims to converse with its tutors about their experiences in order to help them grow; Anthropologists aim to capture a moment in time in order to better understand what a certain environment is like.

However, I don’t believe these two methods are exclusive to the other. I think certain aspects could be carried over in certain situations, if not to improve the method itself, then at least to show a different perspective. The Writing Center, specifically, could benefit from a more literal form of observation. I’ve often heard the directors say they don’t want their observations to be evaluative or an assessment of tutor performance. But with a response like Play-by-Play, it can come across as if it is, which puts the observer in a tight spot trying to navigate between their honest reactions and their need to

be non-evaluative. Perhaps more literal, descriptive note taking could be worked in, to simply show what is happening in that session. It could also allow other tutors, supervisors,

and directors to give their Play-by-Play based on the descriptive notes, bringing them into the conversation without having to all observe at the same time.

I have also heard the tutors express feelings of being overwhelmed when going into a Play-by-Play observation. What do I react to? What will be relevant to have a conversation about? Anthropology-style note taking could take away some of that worry, while opening the doors for possibility. You can start the observation looking at everything possible, from what is happening in the session, to how things look, to body language, to the room’s environment, to the conversations, and et cetera. Eventually, themes or commonalities might pop out at you, or you might find something particularly interesting or meaningful, and then you can start making choices about what to focus the rest of your notes on. But you may never have found that focus had you not explored the seemingly ordinary, obvious, or irrelevant details first. In fact, this is very much like the Writing Center’s philosophy on freewriting. You don’t worry

“Here at the Writing Center, our observations are all about entering into a conversation with other tutors about tutoring.”

about focus or significance while “in the moment” because it could limit you from exploring other possibilities. And sometimes you don’t know what’s important until you write a bunch of unimportant things first.

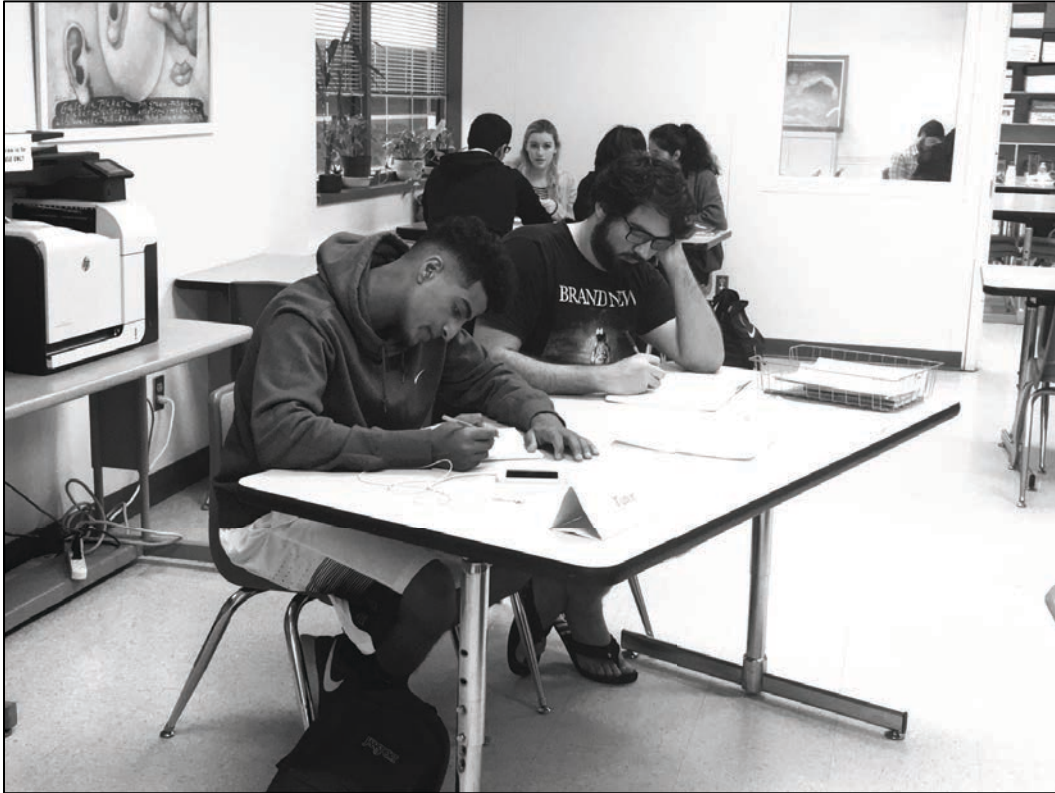
But these examples are not to say that Play-by-Play or any other subjective-based notes are not valuable. By expressing our reactions, we create a conversation. In Play-by-Play, it is not only what happens in the observed session that has importance, but also your feelings as an observer. It gives you space to assess why you react in a certain way. Is it because you had a similar experience? Because you expected something else to happen? Because you hadn’t thought about how to handle that particular situation before? All of these reactions and reasons will then form the basis for any conversation you have with the tutor you observed. Anthropology could benefit from shifting their observation methods in this way, allowing the observer to have more of a voice in their in research and to create a deeper conversation between them and the people they are studying.

With my research project, I was able to utilize Anthropology note-taking in an environment where I had previously only done

Play-by-Plays. Doing so not only made me more aware that there were differences, but how those differences can shape the outcome of my observations. Before, the observations I did in the Writing Center allowed me to share my thoughts and experiences with other tutors, but limited the scope of what could be included in that conversation to only my own, personal reactions. When I observed using Anthropology methods, I was able to pick up on student body language and certain verbal cues that led me to assess levels of comfort and engagement, all things that probably wouldn’t have been able to come up in a Play-by-Play. However, I did lose my voice as a tutor in this project, and was not able to include (or even explore) why I found these things interesting.

So it’s a trade-off, and I think outside of more controlled studies like the one I did, some exciting things could happen from mixing the two methods together, in one way or another. Whether it’s combining literal descriptions and personal reactions in one set of notes, observing literally first and then reacting to those notes, or some other unique combination, I believe both the Writing Center and the field of Anthropology could only benefit from considering such different perspectives.





Kyle Hoover

THE STRUGGLE AT THE TABLE: CLASHING PEDAGOGES, STRESSED-OUT STUDENTS

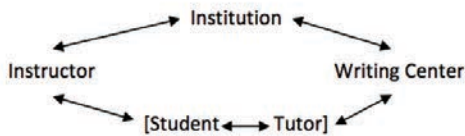
I've been thinking about a discussion we had in our class for the Writing Center at the beginning of the semester about different pressures and expectations coming from different places while tutoring. It was an important discussion, because we feel these pressures every time we work, whether we are aware of them or not, whether we feel them negatively or not. They influence the way we tutor, how engaged we are, the attitude about writing we offer and model for the student who comes to us for help.

Even after four years of writing tutoring experience and two years of writing teaching experience, I still feel an unsettling combination of pressures; like I'm being pushed in different directions, when I start a tutoring session. In my mind, I've got my Writing Center training and

my own personal pedagogy telling me to get right into a response lens and start writing and giving feedback to the student. However, I've also got what the student is telling me they need. Sometimes, I also have what the student is telling me their teacher told them they need, which, when there, is a presence that looms heavy on the tutoring session. So, part of the pressure and the struggle in that session is figuring out what I can do with the student that will satisfy everybody. I want so badly for students to walk away with something they recognize as helpful, but sometimes what they want, what their teacher wants, and what I want are irreconcilable. A teacher sends their student in for grammar help because they're an English-learner, but once I read that student's essay what I want to give them is feedback with their ideas. I

have questions of things I want to hear more about, or I'm not totally sure what they are saying in their draft. But the teacher doesn't care about that, and the student probably wants what will get them the better grade on that assignment.

I see these pressures I feel as the effect of different, perhaps clashing, contrasting, pedagogies intersecting at the site of the tutoring table. The most immediate is usually the pedagogy of the instructor who assigned the writing the student brings in, filtered to the table through the student. There is also our personal pedagogy, which is caught up in ourselves as students of writing and as tutors of writing. As tutors, we are vectors of the Writing Center's pedagogy, which is filtered through the tools we use when tutoring and how we use them. Beyond all of those, there is institutional pedagogy, filtered through on the side of the instructor in the form of learning outcomes, writing requirements, etc., and filtered through the side of the Writing Center in a material need for effectiveness (data, pass rates, etc.). These all intersect at the tutoring table. Maybe it would look something like this:



Perhaps not as hierarchical or trickle-downy, but dialogic. Regardless, the tutor and the student try to negotiate these pedagogies together, with the tutor as the more experienced role. This is part of what we mean when we say that we have to translate student language about writing into our language—translating, conveying our pedagogy in ways that show through practice.

The intersection of all of these can be frustrating, but I think that's one of the things that make the tutoring job so different from teaching, that it involves this complex layering of institutional pressures. Of course, each of these other positions, like teachers and administrators, has its own web of institutions and pressures, but I think in terms of interaction with the student, and the close-to-equal position we try to take with the student is special to tutoring. We must filter through all these institutional pressures, but we don't wield as much power as those other positions. We work as a point of contact between differing pedagogies for the student, and part of our job, I think, is to help them figure out how to work through those, just as we have to do for ourselves as tutors and as students.





Megan Bronson

PROCESS-BASED TUTORING FOR A PRODUCT-BASED WORLD

The way we look at writing has got to change. In our writing center it is no secret that we live in a product based writing world. What I mean when I say that is that students write to receive marks and scores. They do not write to explore ideas or critically evaluate things. Much writing is conducted in a cookie cutter fashion that hinders writers. At the Fresno State Writing Center, we are focused on creating tools that will help tutees see writing as a process, rather than an input based product. We facilitate small group tutoring and one on one sessions that dive into ideas and content rather than structure and format. We are distancing ourselves from those cookie cutter five paragraph essay forms, and making the priority about content over structure.

The LSAT's website has a breakdown of sentences on how to study for the standardized writing portion of the exam. The LSAT is the standardized test that students applying for law school have to take.

This is what our future lawyers are preparing for. To insert information in a fill in the blank fashion. Doesn't seem like much right? It even says at the bottom that practicing this formula a few times will help you be "all set" for the exam. These kinds of cookie cutter standards rely on formulas to write papers, and it is not just limited to the LSAT. This is just one example of the expectations that standardized exams. Releasing students into academia and the job market without basic evaluation and critical

thinking skills is detrimental to a society that prides itself on innovation.

Students need to be able to do more than just punch in basic information into a formula. But they also need to be able to pass these exams. In order for the rules of the game to be changed, we must play the game. Students have to be able to pass these tests and succeed in these fields in order to change the way we look at standardized testing.

It has come to our attention that evaluating and critically discussing information is no longer the focal point of these exams. The focus has become strategic writing formulas reminiscent of some shamwow solve everything bullshit. The focus of these exams is to score well. Not to write well. You can see that through the GRE. I created a word cloud of the 127 page GRE writing workbook. Word clouds are similar to lexical fields, they compile the most used words in a text, and then size the words based on how many time it was repeated.

One of the largest, and therefore most prevalent words to keep in mind when studying for the GRE is the word “score.” There are other words that you would expect to see on this kind of lexical field. Like “response” and “analyze.” But on par with those concepts is the word score. Why? Because the goal of the GRE is to create a gradable product, not to discuss a concept. Papers have to be written so that they are easily gradable. The focus of these exams is therefore not on the student's capabilities as a writer, but their capabilities to form to easily consumable content. We are not in fact performing to our best abilities. We are forming to what graders are

“The focus has become strategic writing formulas reminiscent of some shamwow solve everything bullshit.”

capable of when they have hundreds of papers to sift through.

When the focus of writing is not to develop discussion or conversation about pertinent topics, but rather about regurgitating formulaic structures for a high score, we have reached a low point in teaching and facilitating writing.

If students are taught methods of critical thinking, then high scores will come as a byproduct of good content.

There are ways to teach and tutor writing that encourages students to explore ideas while on a time constraint, like when students are asked to “perform” their writing skills for a standardized test. These methods that we teach our tutees are simple inquires that once learned,

become habits that help facilitate fruitful writing processes in every situation.

One way that I have developed a method of tutees coming in for test tutoring is to use our lenses.

I ask them to bring in a prompt, and we work up a mind map together. Then we freewrite (usually a Reply) about each branch on our word map. The entire session is an exchange of writing and ideas. After we have done some freewriting, I have us do a Sayback. It gives us the opportunity to direct our freewrites and gain focus. Usually that is our whole session, but tutees walk out of our center with these tools, that when repeated, become habits.

The reality is that these tutees are training for tests that have a different agenda than what we are trying to foster at the Writing Center. But with our help and tools, tutees can have these writing habits ingrained in their mind when they sit down to take these tests. We are fostering writing growth even against all odds.





Sean Kinneen

ON CREATING A LENS

Last semester, Kirk decided to start a publication group to help some of us in getting our writing out there in the world. I joined, thinking it might provide me with some motivation to submit the poems I don't hate too much to a few prestigious magazines. And though I did end up doing just that, I think I learned something much more important, something which has absolutely nothing to do with the actual process of publishing a poem. (Though, I guess, in a way, it *is* part of the process.) Kirk and I came up with a new lens to make something visible the other lenses we already have, don't.

Here's how it happened: one morning, I brought five poems, ones I felt more or less comfortable with sending out, to the workshop.

“We decided it might be cool if we ordered poems based on what they reveal about the speaker, sort of like an onion...”

When you submit a batch of poems to a magazine you usually upload them as one document onto a file sharing program called Submittable. Only the people at the magazine and you can see them. But the thing is, those people at the magazine read them in the order you send them in, and so Kirk and I started writing/talking about the context surrounding a poem, what's included and what is left out, and

what the reader learns about the “speaker” from each poem.

We decided it might be cool if we ordered poems based on what they reveal about the speaker, sort of like an onion, assuming the speaker of each poem was the same, and in order to facilitate a discussion of what poems of mine revealed what about their speaker, we came up with a lens. It has no name.

But, basically, you read a poem, and then start off a sentence, “It reveals about the speaker that...” and keep going, much like the other lenses we use. We did that for each poem and had a conversation about what is revealed where, what the reader needs to know from one poem in order to understand the emotional heft of another.

The poems, or any set of texts you’re trying to put together in a meaningful order, don’t have to be related in any obvious way.

I think the thing that really struck me the most, though, was how you could come up with a lens *as you needed it*. That had never really occurred to me before. And I think it’s one thing I will take with me when I leave the Writing Center. We now have the power and the expertise to recognize there is a need for some specific way to respond to something and to craft a lens which might fulfill that need. Then you can revise and test it, much like “Play by Play” and “Audience,” and, who knows, bring it to another writing center, or a classroom, or small workshop, like that publication workshop.

A former student of mine often comes to see me for a 1-on-1 appointment to talk about poetry. Once, she came concerned about “ending poems,” saying she’d been told she ends them badly, that she either goes “too far” or “not far



enough.” I thought, *maybe we can come up with a lens together*. So, we looked up a poem on Poetryfoundation. Here it is in full:

Booker T. and W.E.B.

By Dudley Randall

“It seems to me,” said Booker T.,
“It shows a mighty lot of cheek
To study chemistry and Greek
When Mister Charlie needs a hand
To hoe the cotton on his land,
And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,
Why stick your nose inside a book?”

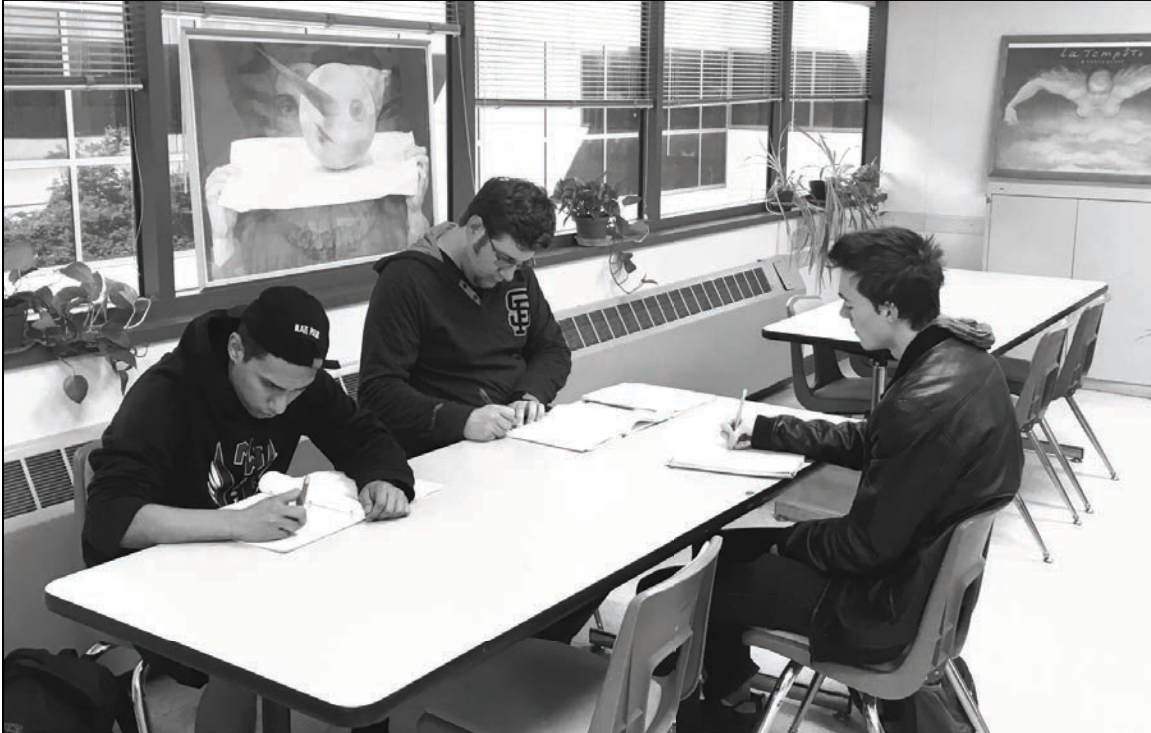
“I don’t agree,” said W.E.B.,
“If I should have the drive to seek
Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,
I’ll do it. Charles and Miss can look
Another place for hand or cook.
Some men rejoice in skill of hand,
And some in cultivating land,
But there are others who maintain
The right to cultivate the brain.”

“It seems to me,” said Booker T.,
“That all you folks have missed the boat
Who shout about the right to vote,
And spend vain days and sleepless nights
In uproar over civil rights.
Just keep your mouths shut, do not grouse,
But work, and save, and buy a house.”

“I don’t agree,” said W.E.B.,
“For what can property avail
If dignity and justice fail.
Unless you help to make the laws,
They’ll steal your house with trumped-up clause.
A rope’s as tight, a fire as hot,
No matter how much cash you’ve got.
Speak soft, and try your little plan,
But as for me, I’ll be a man.”

“It seems to me,” said Booker T.—
“I don’t agree,”
Said W.E.B.

We did a Sayback on it, just to get a sense of what it was about, before we did a lens I sort of came up with on the spot: “How else could the writer have ended this poem?” or something like that. I wanted to make visible what the writer was trying to say with the ending, why they might have decided to end it there. I liked the conversation we had after that. And I think it could be used for any piece of writing.



Matthew Kenerly

BUILDING THE WRITING CENTER #BRAND

Once upon a time, I spent a few years studying entrepreneurship, so the one thing that's stuck out to me in the past year is that it takes a lot of legwork for a writing center to expand its footprint within the university in which it exists. Discussions about outreach, expansion and other improvements outside of the center's core processes appeal to me. I've done a lot of thinking about the brand – the “Writing Center at Fresno State” brand, to be specific – and what the next step looks like after 35 years of refinement and success. How do you turn a valuable resource into an invaluable resource on the campus landscape?

1. Let the results speak for themselves.

We give spiels to writing classes at the beginning of each semester, and part of our pitch depends on anecdotal evidence that scaffolds abstract concepts, our feedback “lenses”, with examples the average writer can understand. What's mentioned less often is the fact that those abstract concepts get concrete results. If I told

you that the campus's Office of Institutional Effectiveness has data to argue the Writing Center improves graduation rates and grades within English 10 classes, at a minimum, wouldn't that sound like a tremendous selling point?

It's a relatively new revelation, but it didn't surprise me at all when our director, Dr. Magda Gilewicz, told us about it. Every decision a student makes comes with an opportunity cost, and when they recognize that *not* joining a small writing group could mean a difference in achievement, it affects how they make this particular choice. In addition, teachers often speak to that progress, too, which they've seen first-hand and stands, in my opinion, as a more substantial endorsement than anyone within the center could offer.

I can't speak for anyone's experience but my own, but I suspect that I changed more than a few skeptical minds when I spoke of *product* rather than *process*. Granted, our “product” is a

“process”, but we have the entire semester to lay that groundwork. First impressions and dividends matter, especially when the commitment to be here demands two hours a week. It didn’t surprise me when I heard we registered more students this spring than we had in eight years, and I have the utmost confidence we can improve upon that number.

2. *Express the utility.*

We’ve undergone a concerted effort in the past couple semesters to overhaul our aging base of sample essays, requesting permission from our students to use their work in the future. The question in the meantime becomes how we illustrate the lenses’ use in different disciplines. It’s one thing to say these tools are handy for any discipline, and another to show it.

One thing that comes to mind, which we haven’t discussed just yet, are the examples in our handbook. It is, after all, an expressly public document, a testament to other writing centers of what we do every day, but the examples of each lens are somewhat limited in scope. Considering the wealth of essays I’ve looked at in my seven semesters as a tutor – drafts about diseases I couldn’t pronounce, poems and short stories, Picasso masterpieces, *Between the World and Me*, the Mexican-American War, the campus meat lab – I think a hard look at how to reflect that diversity of work in our primary text would be worth the effort.

3. *Always stay hungry, always put the process out there.*

For as long as I’ve been here, it still isn’t uncommon for students, after working with them for 50 minutes in a one-on-one session to exclaim something like, “I had no idea you guys existed!” No surprise, then, that I’ve been most enthusiastic about the fact that, while the majority of our efforts are still concentrated about getting people into the small groups within the first week of the semester or so, we’ve taken

strides to increase our profile across campus throughout the semester.

Like writing, however, our outreach practices have been a process with differing levels of success. When some of our tutors spent afternoon hours at the Henry Madden Library to assist with research inquiries and idea generation, the response from students was largely positive. On the other hand, our first official “write-in”, a joint effort between the Writing Center and the librarians, was undertaken within a short window of time and did not generate the turnout that we’d hoped (the bright side, at least, is that there plenty of cookies for all who were there).

Our assistant director, Kirk Stone, has found an unexpectedly enthusiastic response in his talks with varying disciplines and groups: Criminology, biology, and so on. There is no comprehensive Writing Across the Curriculum program at Fresno State, so the feedback is telling.

“...I like the potential for self-promotion because it forces us to think about how we can express what we do and what we believe in the most concise way possible.”

We’ve started to give more attention to our Facebook page and I, along with two other tutors (Megan Bronson and Gilliann Hensley) started a Twitter account to connect with other departments and programs across the campus. This development is still in its early stages, but I like the potential for self-promotion because it forces us to think about how we can express what we do and what we believe in the most concise way possible. Easily digestible messages could spur greater interest among future students.

These are all new steps for everyone here, but it’s exciting to think of the potential that lies within them. We’ve always been a space that fosters ambition – much of our centerpiece process, after all, was developed in-house long before I began working here – and to finally see it reflected outward is something that, if I’m being honest, is something for which I’ve waited a few years now. Our campus’s overall dictum is to “Be Bold”, and I would put myself and my peers up against anyone else in that regard.



Alex Porraz

NOW I KNOW

Being in college has challenged me to examine the idea of identity over and over again. This started as a simple English literature assignment in which I would look at a particular character and try to figure out what makes them who they are. After doing that a few times, I realized just how enjoyable I found it to be. As a result, it seems I have now become obsessed with the idea of identity. Not just about the identity of fictional characters, but my own identity and the identities of those around me. We go to college in an effort to better ourselves and our lives; I would argue that we also go to college for the sake of finding our true identity. A great teacher and personal mentor of mine once said that our identity always changes, and yet our core will always remain the same. I was encouraged from that point to explore and discover that core within myself. The core that

holds the true essence of my own identity seems so difficult to find. I do not know if I will ever find it, but I do know that I am a lot closer to it thanks to my experiences at this university.

Perhaps my fascination with the idea of identity stems from the fact that I feel as if I have never belonged to any particular culture or group in my life. Truly, the closest I have ever felt to belonging is working at the Writing Center with my fellow tutors. Not being able to identify with any particular group I have encountered has been as much liberating, as it has been confusing. I feel free to explore and search for my own identity, but it is like trying to define something that has never been defined before. I could go into some really complicated literary theory concepts here, but for purposes of the length of this particular piece I shall refrain. Returning to my original topic, I feel like this confusion I feel

over my own identity is what makes this a particularly fascinating topic for myself, and it is one that I will undoubtedly spend years attempting to understand.

It is my argument that we, as college students, go to college to discover our true identity. What is it that we want to do with our lives? What is it that we love to do? Where does that passionate fire of ambition burn? Am I getting too poetic? Well, all of these questions are questions that have answers even if we do not know them yet. The challenge is getting those answers, and that is why I chose to go to college. Each of these questions adds a component to our overall identity, and we have to reveal it to ourselves, piece by piece, as we find it. For example, I never knew that I really liked American Romantic literature, but I knew it as soon as I read it. This discovery led me to one of the greatest breakthroughs in my quest to find my own identity. Is that everything about me and my own identity? No, of course not, but it is a component to my overall identity that I am slowly beginning to understand. I discovered that while in a college classroom, and for that I believe we all have revelations of our own that occur from time to time while being in this place.

There was a time when I began to feel like everything that I read became a part of me as if I was living 1,001 lives, and it further added to my confusion and complexity of this idea of identity. In an effort to get some clarity, I emailed my most inspirational professor who told me that they believed identity to be fluid and always

changing. Remaining the same person for the entirety of your life discourages personal growth, they told me, and this made a great deal of sense. Finally, my professor said that they believed we all have a core identity that never changes, and this made me realize that perhaps that is what I have been seeking all this time. I know it is there, but to bring it out and unearth it is the challenge that I am sure I am not alone in facing. So, I do things like go to college and pursue a career that I am interested in. It is a slow but satisfying process, and there are few feelings

better than a moment when you discover something that you can identify with.

However, I feel like this wonderful place of learning is only the start to my search for my personal

identity. The truth is we are all unique individuals that inhabit this world, and I still crave to see more of it. While great progress has been made, I still have questions with answers that await somewhere out there in the unexplored regions of the world. As I said before, I do not know if I will ever find all the answers I seek, but I know I will never stop looking until I have them. I came into college at the young age of 18 years, and I will leave it (for the time being) at the wiser age of 26 years. I came in to college as a very lost and confused individual, and now I will leave it with a goal in my mind that will lead me to my ultimate goal of discovering the core to my identity. That is what I feel is the true purpose of this place, and it may not be evident on the surface, but it will be revealed piece by piece until it is wholly revealed.

“Truly, the closest I have ever felt to belonging is working at the Writing Center with my fellow tutors.”





Monica Limon

LET'S WORK ON OUR WRITING MUSCLES!

Students come into my group with various degrees of strength of their 'writing muscles'. Some come ready to 'flex it' and showcase their writing abilities; others (the overwhelming majority) are fearful because they consider themselves to be 'weak' writers. A student's confidence level in writing makes itself known in the very first week we begin classes. In the first two days of the group sessions, where we devote time to building rapport, I always make sure to ask the short-write questions—'what do you write?' followed by 'how often do you write?' I ask these two questions because I've noticed a trend amongst my tutees over the course of the two semesters I've been tutoring groups at the Writing Center. I've noticed there are a small percentage of tutees who do writing out of an academic setting, such as with journaling and creative writing. Tutees who

actively write recreationally seem more comfortable with the writing process and their capabilities. Alternatively, tutees that did not venture into non-academic writing were more antagonistic towards the writing process and displayed lower confidence over their writing capabilities. In sum, the more a tutee wrote collectively within and outside an academic setting, the more comfortable they overall were with writing. There appears to be a correlation between the level of writing and comfort. Having made this observation, I began to wonder how or why this pattern may have surfaced and reflected upon my personal experience as a writer to provide clarity into these situations.

As a wee lassie in my undergraduate years at Fresno State as an English Literature major, I bounced between semesters of less writing (when focusing on General Education

Requirements) and more writing (when focusing on my core courses). The semesters I wrote less caused my writing to consequently suffer in the following semester. The struggle was born out of the lack of writing practice, negatively affecting my confidence and abilities as a writer. As the semester would progress and I presumably was forced to write more, I would regain composure and reacquaint myself with writing. My experience paralleled many of my tutees and confirmed the trend I had noticed-- a larger quantity of writing overall improved the quality of the writer and their writing. After this rather intriguing consensus, I began to see how sharing my personal experience could help bridge the gap between tutor and tutee. Many tutees come into the group with the presumption that we tutors are 'writing gods' who have not and do not struggle with writing. But how to make this information available without droning on about my personal struggles- with a metaphor of course! Thus, the 'writing muscle' was born! What better example of an activity we can all relate to! Exercise is definitely, like writing, something we theoretically have to (or should) do for our well-being that gets easier with practice- though it isn't always so easy and goes through periods of intense activity and latency. I could not think upon a more natural pair!

You may be asking yourself at this point— 'what do you mean by writing muscle' and 'where can I find it'. To answer your premeditated sets of inquires; the writing muscle is something we all possess. The writing muscle

“We, the tutors are the supplements—the “writing protein,” that facilitate your exercise and help in both healing and regaining muscle mass.”

is metaphorical, with no 'actual' physical presence, though I like to associate it with the mind. It is a muscle we start to develop in elementary school as tender kindergartners into our lifetime as writers. The strength of our writing muscle depends on the type of exercise we do. I've come to realize, the exercises assigned to most of us before college to be "good for our writing" have weakened our writing muscles! We were asked to do too much of the same set after set, resulting in loss of interest, mass, and growth; much to the same affect too much of the same exercise can cause muscle dystrophy and bore us. How to strengthen a writing muscle that has been overworked and leaned out after all of these years? More exercise of course! But, not the same exercises prescribed to you--no, you

need exercises that renew your interest in writing and simultaneously help build strength. Getting back on track is easier than one may imagine. The first step begins by enrolling in the 1 unit, group session course—the Writing Center is the "writing gym". The second step is doing the exercises, such as with the private writes, lenses, and short writes. We, the tutors are the supplements—the "writing protein", that facilitate your exercise and help in both healing and regaining muscle mass. At the end of the sessions, tutees reemerge transformed, more comfortable with writing and about themselves as writers than ever before. And you know why that is? Because, here at the Writing Center we help student's writing muscles get swell.





Nou Her

RAISINS

“What if I just want to know more about raisins?” a tutee, a group member, (let’s call him Jack) said in response when I told him he didn’t need to know what the prompt of the draft before him was to give feedback. We were reading a draft of another group member (let’s call her Alice), where she wrote about the California drought and agriculture.

Alice had asked for the “More About” feedback on her draft. I had always thought it was a simple lens, a simple “After reading this, I want to hear more about...” but when Jack insisted on wanting to know the prompt before he gave his more about, I realized some misunderstanding about the lens was happening.

Jack wrote and read his more abouts, but it didn’t include raisins.

That was in my first semester of tutoring at the writing center. Since then, Jack hasn’t been the only tutee that wanted to know what the assignment of a fellow group member’s writing was. “Is this supposed to be a persuasive paper?” “Are you supposed to take a side?” “Can you use

your own experience?” “What were you supposed to do?” “What were you supposed to do?” When tutees realized this paper is supposed to persuade them, I hear responses like “I want to hear more about this because then I would be more convinced.”

More about isn’t a lens that requires readers to know if the paper before them is supposed to be a persuasive paper or an informative paper or a certain *type* of paper; it doesn’t require us as

readers to know what the end goal of a writer is; it only requires us to be honest about what we as readers really did want to hear more about, even if it

is ‘just’ raisins. Having knowledge on what a paper is supposed to be alters that honesty in tiny bits that although tiny, is still altered.

“What if I just want to know more about raisins?”

What’s wrong with wanting to know more about raisins? If that’s what you wanted to know more about after reading someone’s paper about the California drought and agriculture, then what’s wrong with that? Where does this doubt come from?

“The writer will decide if raisins matter or not, if raisins will make the paper persuasive or not.”

“What if I just want to know more about raisins?”

Does it come from not trusting in yourself as a reader? Does it come from thinking raisins will not help the writing, the writer? Does it come from thinking raisins is a non-persuasive topic?

“What if I just want to know more about raisins?”

As a tutor, there are moments where I often find myself feeling like I will make or break a tutee’s grade on their assignment and there are times when tutees themselves also feel this way and maybe that’s why we are afraid of mentioning raisins, even if we really really really want to know more about raisins.

I have, by not mentioning raisins, just undermined myself as a responder. Raisins are not important to the writing and therefore my

interest in raisins is not important. But it is. Raisins was one of things that I was genuinely interested in but instead of being honest about it, I’ve compromised my own interests as a reader in exchange for a response I *think* will benefit the writer based on the prompt.

It’s selfish to withhold the desire to know about raisins. It’s disingenuous, to the writer and to ourselves.

“What if I just want to know more about raisins?”

Then say it. The writer gets the final say. The writer will decide if raisins matter or not, if raisins will make the paper persuasive or not. But if you don’t ever bring it up, raisins may never cross the writer’s mind until years and years later.



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