

3-24-2018

Improving Intercultural Skills: Developing Communicative Flexibility and Tolerance of Ambiguity in the Writing Center

Vicki Kennell

Purdue University, vkennell@purdue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/writinglabpres>



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kennell, Vicki, "Improving Intercultural Skills: Developing Communicative Flexibility and Tolerance of Ambiguity in the Writing Center" (2018). *Purdue Writing Lab/Purdue OWL Presentations*. Paper 16.
<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/writinglabpres/16>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Improving Intercultural Skills: Developing Communicative Flexibility and Tolerance of Ambiguity in the Writing Center

Vicki R. Kennell, Ph.D.
vkennell@purdue.edu
ESL Specialist, Purdue University Writing Lab
ECWCA, March 2018, Columbus, OH

Research funding provided by the Purdue Center for Intercultural Learning, Mentorship, Assessment, & Research (CILMAR)

Overview

- Research Context
- Small Group Activities
- Research Results
- Open Discussion & Questions

Research Context

Writers	Tutors
~70% International/L2 writers	80%+ American/native English speakers
Prioritize grammar help	Up to 56% claimed a lack of knowledge of L2 grammatical issues
Need help with cultural aspects of writing	Up to 88% claimed a lack of knowledge of cultural aspects of writing
Lack experience with communication style of writing tutorials	30-40% had little experience with international students in any capacity

Tutor Concerns

- “I had to discard **initial assumptions** about their abilities.”
- “I assumed that **writing processes** . . . were fundamentally the same.”
- “It was challenging to differentiate between **writing concerns** and **language issues**.”
- “I would like more training on how to overcome **language barriers** during conferences.”

Tutor Training Evaluations

- “I **make far less assumptions** and view [L2 writers] more individually.”
- “I have been able to see more clearly how some **assignment guidelines are culturally bound.**”
- “**Clients seem more comfortable** as a result of my knowing more about their needs.”
- “These exercises have helped me **identify both patterns of error and my own assumptions** about the writers.”

Research Questions

- Does intensive training provide intercultural competence specifically or just improve tutoring ability generally?
- How much tutor improvement is due to experience over time versus to the intensive training program?
- Is the training better provided concurrent with the initial tutoring semester or subsequent to it?

Participants & Methods

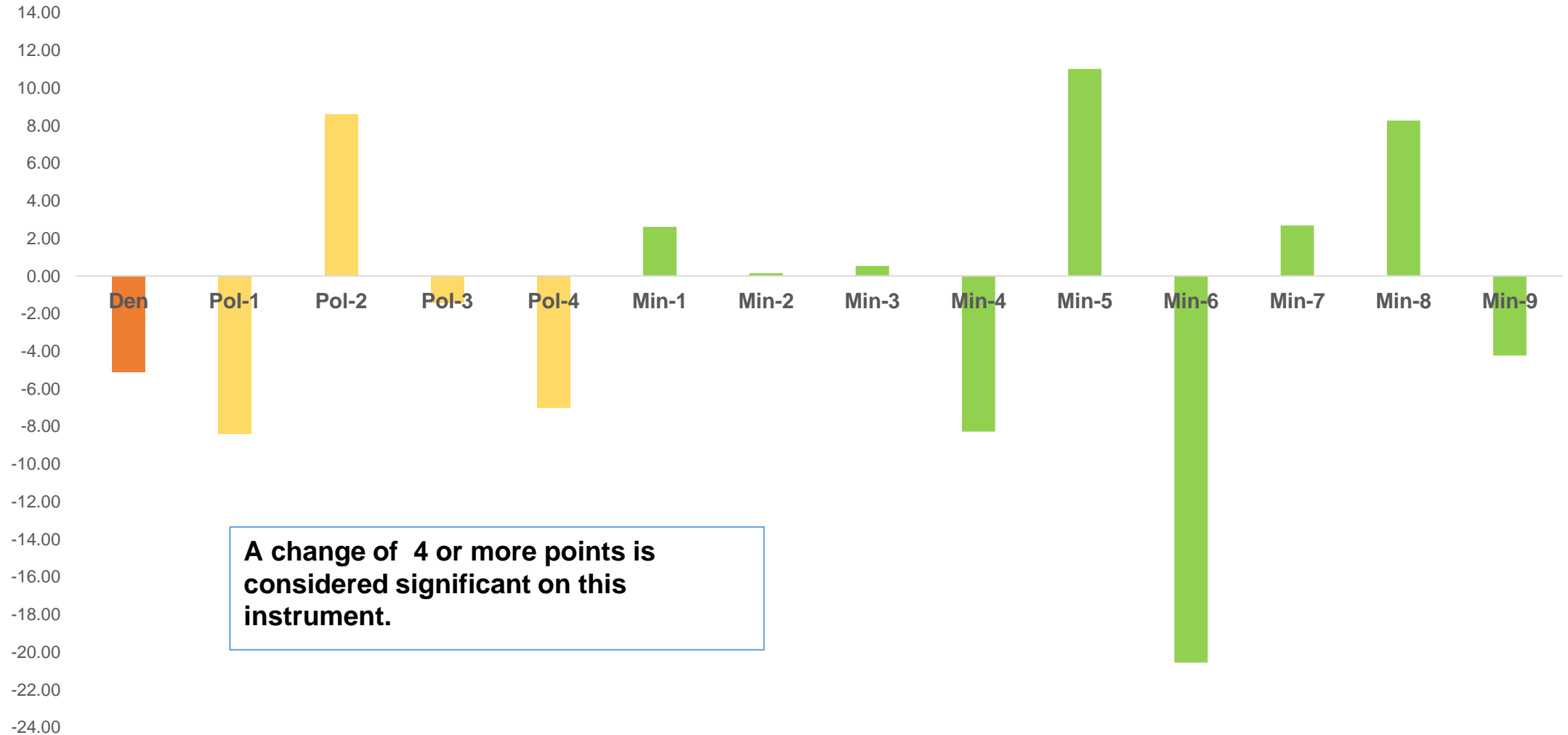
- New tutors in the Purdue Writing Lab (n=39)
- New tutors in a control group (n=13)
- Intercultural Development Inventory
- Communication Flexibility
- Tolerance of Ambiguity
- Empathy

Activities

- In groups of 3-4, pick one of the inventories in your packet.
- Discussion Questions:
 - Read over the questions, or take the inventory & score yourself.
 - How does this inventory as a whole relate to tutoring L2 writers?
 - How do the specific questions relate to tutoring L2 writers?
 - In what ways would it be helpful for tutors to know their own results?
 - Would it be useful for directors to know their tutors' results?
 - What information might the inventory provide about tutors' capabilities?
 - How might the results inform training development?

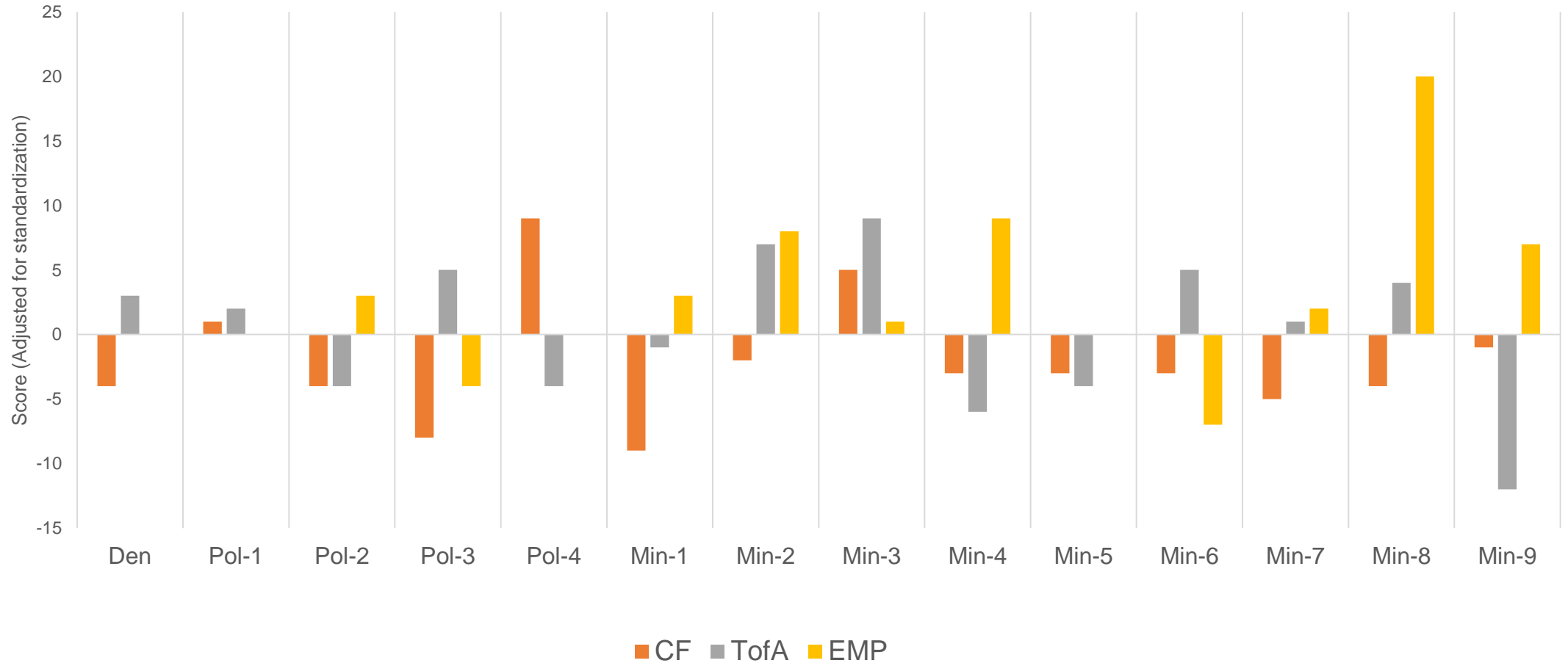
Research Results—IDI

Purdue Tutors' Individual IDI Change, Categorized by Beginning Stage



Research Results—Combined Instruments

Purdue Tutors' Change Across Instruments



Challenge vs. Support

- Tutorials may be high challenge or low challenge
 - Amount of risk
 - Potential for failure or for ambiguity
 - Need for skills that are not yet mastered
- The setting may be high support or low support
 - Tolerance of mistakes
 - High expectations coupled with cooperative atmosphere
- For a nice visual see Trainer (2014)

Open Discussion

- Does your center use anything similar to these inventories? In what way? For what purpose?
- To what extent might tutor self-awareness of their own inventory scores be helpful or detrimental?
- Are the attributes being measured by the inventories of specific importance for tutoring L2 writers, or do they apply to tutoring generally?
- How can inventory results inform tutor training? How might training be developed specifically to help tutors develop these intercultural skills?

References

- Hammer, M.R., Bennett, M.J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*, 421-443.
- Herman, J.L., Stevens, M.J., Bird, A., Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (2010). The tolerance of ambiguity scale: Toward a more refined measure of international management research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 58-65.
- Martin, M.M. & Rubin, R.B. (1994). Development of a communication flexibility measure. *Southern Communication Journal, 59:2*, 171-178.
- Spreng, R.N., McKinnon, M.C., Mar, R.A., & Levine, B. (2009). The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire: Scale development and initial validation of a factor-analytic solution to multiple empathy measures. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 91:1*, 62-71.
- Trainer, A. (2014, November 20). Herzberg's Two Factor Theory [Web log post]. Retrieved March 21, 2018, from <https://www.siliconbeachtraining.co.uk/blog/herzberg-two-factor-theory>

Questions?

Vicki R. Kennell

vkennell@purdue.edu

Thanks to Kris Acheson-Clair, Katherine Yngve, & James Holly for their help with collecting and analyzing data.