

FROM A SERVICE-LEARNING TO A SOCIAL-CHANGE MODEL: RADICALLY RETHINKING TUTOR EDUCATION

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Abstract

Tutor education courses that prepare students to serve as peer writing consultants often include service learning; a typical service-learning tutor education course involves sending students to tutor in local schools, usually in underserved neighborhoods. Existing writing center scholarship on service learning tends to overlook the limitations of this model. This article advances a radically different approach for tutor education where the course acts as an incubator for social change on campus. Informed by the principles advanced by the critical service learning movement, the course described here invites students to design and implement campus-based community building projects. Ultimately, this article demonstrates that a course focused on community building, rather than tutoring theory and strategies, can effectively prepare students to serve as peer writing consultants while imparting a heightened awareness of social inequities and a deep investment in the campus community.

“Anything that any center is doing is considered ‘writing center work’” (89).

—Jackie Grutsch McKinney, *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*

The first time I taught a three-credit tutor education course I included a service-learning component: tutors were prepared to provide residents with support on resumes and cover letters at the local library. I believed this partnership would benefit tutors and community alike. The tutors-in-training would learn about resumes and cover letters from career services, apply this knowledge immediately, and practice assisting writers on high-stakes projects. The local residents would benefit from feedback on their job materials in a tight market. A few weeks before our arrival, our library liaison sent out an impressive press release, but when the day came, our library liaison was not there and the librarians on duty received the students tepidly. Worse still, no one from the community showed up. The students, who arrived excited about serving the local residents, left feeling frustrated.

This moment and a few other service learning failures led me to the “critical service learning” (CSL) scholarship, which identifies the limitations of a charity approach and provides a model for socially-just community engagement. According to Tania Mitchell’s (2008) review of the literature, CSL prioritizes a “social change orientation,” seeks to create a more level

playing field, and enables students and community members to develop “authentic relationships” (50). This scholarship put my service-learning missteps into sharp focus. I presumed we knew what the community wanted, positioned the university as the expert, swooped in and out without developing any meaningful connections, and used service as an add-on to the course rather than a defining feature.

The CSL scholarship provokes a number of questions for writing centers invested in community engagement: How can service-learning oriented tutor education courses avoid the pitfalls identified by the CSL scholarship? How can tutor education courses impart the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for tutoring and promote social change? Can a tutor education course, and by extension the writing center, plant the seeds for social change? Guided by these questions and the CSL scholarship, I redesigned my three-credit tutor education course from the bottom up. This course is a radical departure from a typical tutor education course and from the typical service-learning course in that it is essentially an incubator for social change on campus.

Now, instead of teaching students about tutoring or introducing students to writing center scholarship, the primary goal of my course is to enable students to see the social inequities on our campus and to work with community members to develop and implement projects that tackle these inequities. Students in this course read articles from the field, are introduced to essential terminology (such as higher and lower order concerns), and practice some tutoring approaches (such as a task-based approach), but this material is secondary to creating social change projects. This shift responds to Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan’s call for re-envisioning tutor education by moving “away from understanding our courses as preparation for tutors to perform a job or service while in school and towards seeing such courses as a critical part of their [students’] broader educational experiences that carries implications for how they will negotiate their greater role in the worlds” (126). The tutor education course described here prepares students to be change agents in their communities, to tackle inequities and to navigate complex organizations. While tutoring theory

and practice is not the central focus, students develop essential skills for effective tutoring, such as revision strategies, rhetorical awareness, reading texts as models, working collaboratively, asking questions and identifying assumptions, and breaking larger writing projects into manageable tasks. Further, tutors can and do learn to tutor on the job and in regular professional development sessions.

To demonstrate the value of a social change model, this article provides an overview of the CSL principles, describes my process for overhauling tutor education using these principles, examines the risks and rewards of this approach, and highlights the lasting changes made by students in this course, such as the creation of a veterans' lounge and an LGBTQ living learning community. To explore the value and the pitfalls of this social change approach to tutor education, I describe two iterations of the course and draw on student reflective writing and surveys which I collected with IRB approval.

Writing center directors trying to ensure tutors receive the nuts-and-bolts training on a shoestring budget might see this approach as overly ambitious or worse, irrelevant. Too often though, students do not make it to the writing center because other problems loom large. They are struggling with their mental health, experiencing prejudice, or generally feeling marginalized. A social-change approach enables us to build a more equitable community, ideally providing students' more opportunities to focus on academics and building bridges between the writing center and marginalized groups.

A social-change approach to tutor education also cements writing centers' roles in the larger community engagement movement, a priority in higher education. Service learning has been identified as a "high-impact practice" by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and certificate programs, minors, and majors are emerging. Many writing centers across the country are already engaged in community work and have integrated this goal into their mission statements.¹ Writing centers are uniquely suited to community engagement work since we are not tied to a semester schedule and since writing consultants are immersed in the collaborative ethos essential to effective community involvement.

Tutor education courses that focus on social change rather than service make sense in the context of writing center scholarship. As Nancy Grimm pointed out in *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times* our work is not neutral. Heeding Grimm's call, writing centers have made efforts to create more equitable learning environments by hiring tutors from diverse backgrounds, promoting an anti-

racism agenda, and empowering tutors to question norms, such as standard English, academic discourse, and white privilege (Geller et al; Denny; Greenfield and Rowen; Godbee and Ozias). Ultimately, using tutor education courses for creating a more equitable community extends this work. A social-change oriented tutor education course is not only within the scope of writing center work but should be central to it.

Critical Service Learning Movement

Service learning emerged in the 1970s as an innovative pedagogy with several goals: to position students as active learners, to expose students to people from different backgrounds, and to produce good citizens. According to the National Youth Leadership Council, "service-learning is an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs." Over the past twenty years, service learning has undergone a shift reflected by a change in the terminology. The terms "civic engagement" or "community engagement" replaced the terms "community service" and "service learning." The word "service" imagines a community that needs fixing, with students and the universities as the saviors and the community's "needy" as the passive recipient of these services, whereas "community engagement" defines community neutrally and positions students as active participants.

Since the 1990s, scholars have been exposing the flaws of service learning, particularly its basis in the charity model. Here is a popular fable that exemplifies this problem: a father and his teenaged son spend an evening serving meals at a soup kitchen. As they walk out, the son says, "That was great. I hope to be able to take my kids here someday." The son's uncritical response, his lack of concern about food insecurity, the root problem, reveals the inadequacy of the charity approach.

The CSL scholarship shows that in addition to preserving the status quo, a charity approach can actually have a negative impact on both the community and the university's relationship with the community. According to Lori Pompa, traditional service learning reinforces power dynamics: "If I 'do for' you, 'serve' you, 'give to' you—that creates a connection in which I have the resources, the abilities, the power, and you are on the receiving end. It can be—while benign in intent—ironically disempowering to the receiver, granting further power to the giver. Without meaning to, this process replicates the 'have-have not' paradigm that underlies many social problems" (68).

Furthermore, it is difficult to work effectively with the community within the confines of a semester (see Lewis). When partnerships dissolve before anything is achieved, it tarnishes the community's view of the university. Other problematic trends include offering services students are unprepared to provide (Herzberg) and inundating community partners with more students than they can handle or with students whose primary goal is to meet course requirements. All this suggests that it is often the students or the university that are served rather than the community. Students experience the good feelings associated with service and the university gets to promote its good works.

Recent scholarship warns that service-learning courses can have a negative influence on students too. Traditional service learning has the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes among students and lead students to overlook systemic causes for social inequities (Butin). In the worst-case scenarios, such charity work can confirm negative perceptions of "the other" and lead students to blame the recipients of charity for their positions in life. This is particularly true when students are not also learning about structural inequities and have been inculcated with the narrative of the "self-made man." Additionally, a charity model can lead students to conflate community engagement with volunteerism. Ultimately, charity-based service-learning courses can actually have a negative impact on both the community and students and strain the relationship between the community and the university.

In "From Charity to Justice: The Potential of University-Community Collaboration for Social Change," Sam Marullo and Bob Edwards advance four tenets for a social change model of community engagement. First, initiatives should aim to create a more just society through sustainable change. Second, community and student outcomes should be weighed equally. One of the persistent problems with traditional service-learning is that course outcomes drive the initiatives prioritizing the students' needs above the community's. Marullo and Edwards explain that "the resources of the community should be developed and expanded as a top priority (taking precedence over the enrichment or gains experienced by the volunteers)" (901). Third, a diverse group of individuals should work together for a common goal. Finally, these partnerships should build community. The community should be involved in decision making from the beginning, the knowledge of community members must be valued, and community members must be empowered "to do as much work as its resources allow" (907). I broke down these four

principles into a chart to guide us as we embarked on justice-oriented community interventions (see table 1).

The community engagement work of writing center scholars Moira Ozias, Beth Godbee, and Tiffany Rousculp stand out as justice-oriented. In "Organizing for Antiracism in Writing Centers: Principles for Enacting Social Change," Ozias and Godbee offer examples of antiracist organizing and guidelines for "planning and assessing our everyday work" (171). Drawing on the principles of participatory action research, they aim to "share power, learn together, and dismantle oppressive systems" (171). To this end, the Midwest Writing Center Association Antiracist Activism special interest group is working to create partnerships between writing centers and underfunded high schools and forge relationships with regional tribal colleges.

Like Ozias and Godbee, Rousculp complicates the narrative of writing centers "doing good work" as she describes the emergence of the Salt Lake City Community Writing Center. She is critical of the terminology of "empowerment," which positions the university as the bestowing power on "deficient beings"; instead, she contends, that the CWC staff "needed to respect [community members] for whom, what, and where they were at a particular moment" (54). Ultimately, through this work, Rousculp seeks to "challenge" and "disrupt" traditional notions of service, such as the belief "that higher education can know what a community needs or wants without entering into full and mutually beneficial partnership with that community" (55).

While the social justice ethic reverberates through our scholarship, our service learning courses typically reinforce the charity model. The typical model for a service learning peer education course is to send students to tutor in regional schools (Rousculp, "Connecting the Community"; Green; Zimmerelli). When we focus the CSL lens on service-learning tutor education, it reveals the limitations of this model, which tends to reinforce the hierarchy between town and gown and position the university as expert. This is particularly problematic when white and/or middle-class students are going into the communities of color and/or low-income areas to teach students to write in standard academic discourse. In "A Place to Begin: Service-Learning Tutor Education and Writing Center Social Justice," Lisa Zimmerelli enhances this approach by teaching students about systemic injustices and asking them to reflect on their positionality, but what if instead of enriching the traditional approach, we adopt a "social change model"? In the next section, I use CSL principles to rethink tutor education.

Throwing out the Guide Book: Iteration One of Change-Oriented Tutor Education

While I believe this approach could be adapted to any context, it is important that I describe my social location and my university: I am a straight, cisgender white woman with a middle-class upbringing, and for the past eight years, I have directed the writing center at a small public institution in western Massachusetts with approximately 5,000 students. The student body is predominantly white with a large proportion of Pell Grant recipients, first generation students, and students with learning disabilities. In 2013, our university received a grant from Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's Vision Project to support "democratic learning and civic engagement."

Our writing center is staffed by both professional and peer writing consultants. I launched the peer tutor education program in 2011 by offering a three-credit tutor education course that relied heavily on *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. In 2014, I offered my first tutor education course shaped by CSL principles, and in 2016, I offered the second iteration. To determine the effectiveness of each section, I received IRB approval to survey students at the beginning and the end of the course and to collect reflective writing throughout the course.

The first decision I made was to make community engagement the course's focus. As a result, we did not "cover" the writing center canonical texts, such as Stephen M. North's "The Idea of the Writing Center," Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Students Do All the Work," Linda K. Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns' "A Critique of Pure Tutoring," or Kenneth A. Bruffee's "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" (see *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers* and *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*). Nor did we rely on a nuts-and-bolts guide, most of which devote a chapter or two near the end of the book to working with students with learning disabilities or second language writers (see *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* and *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring*). By shifting the focus from the canonical to the community and by centering the marginalized, I seek to "work collaboratively with our tutors to re-imagine what writing center work can be" (Greenfield & Rowan 126). Rethinking tutor education through the lens of CSL enabled me to develop a course that invites tutors to work with me, with each other, and with our campus community to shape our center's identity.

The CSL scholarship taught me that if we wanted to accomplish anything within the semester, I needed to either forge connections with an organization in

advance or limit our involvement to the campus. I decided against prearranging partnerships as I worried that students would be disengaged if they didn't choose the cause. Additionally, when the cause or community partners are chosen in advance, students do not gain the experience of identifying a social issue, initiating a community partnership, or creating a plan for improving the community. As a result, I limited the terrain by selecting potential community partners and defining our campus as our community. Originally, I had planned to have the class vote to work with one group, either multilingual students or veterans and military, but while the majority of the students voted to work with multilingual students, a group of four students in the class of ten were committed to working with the veterans on campus. So, I abandoned my plan and decided to allow these students to pursue the partnership that they were most invested in.

Initially, I worried that limiting our work to the campus would not really "count" as community engagement but working to improve the campus community made sense for a number of reasons. First, the campus is the students' community and it is a community with social inequities that students are affected by and have the agency to tackle. Second, remaining on campus removes the logistical challenges that often plague service-learning courses, particularly for students who work, as most of our students do. Third, working on campus enabled students to practice initiating partnerships and projects. In most service-learning courses students do not have this opportunity to identify a problem that matters to them and develop a method for tackling that problem. Finally, because the campus is a learning environment, there is room for students to make mistakes and learn from them. Essentially, when we allow ourselves to acknowledge that our campuses are communities, we avoid the problems associated with traditional service learning and empower our students to practice the skills necessary for community building.

How would students initiate these partnerships? In "Community Centered Service Learning: Moving from Doing For to Doing With," Kelly Ward and Lisa Wolf-Wendel explain that "'doing for' is typically aligned with a charity perspective and emphasizes the position of privilege of campuses in relationship to their local communities, whereas a 'doing with' perspective of service emphasizes collaboration and mutuality" (767). To do this "with" the community, we took a participatory planning approach that focused on our community partners' assets and the institution's existing limitations.

A participatory approach involves all stakeholders in the planning process (Rabinowitz).² Not only is a

participatory approach the most just, but it is more likely to work because everyone is invited to contribute their ideas from the beginning. The benefits are many: “a participatory process provides community ownership and support of the intervention; information about community history, politics, and past mistakes; and respect and a voice for everyone” (Rabinowitz). Of course, the level of participation will vary depending on the community and the intervention.

Following the participatory approach, the next step was for students to make contact. One group of students attended the veterans’ club meetings, and after several meetings, they identified a project together: advocating for a veterans’ lounge. It was more difficult to make contact with international students: we organized a pizza party but no one showed. This was discouraging, but it was also a good lesson. We needed to accommodate their schedules and consider they might prefer meeting one-on-one. The students emailed the international students individually and invited them for coffee. To forge these connections, the students needed to listen closely to the concerns and values of their partners, an important skill for a writing consultant.

Once they uncovered the ways in which our university was not supporting multilingual students and veterans, students developed the following projects:

- A proposal for a “veterans’ sanctuary”: four students co-wrote this proposal with the veterans’ club calling for the creation of a “Veterans’ Sanctuary.” According to a survey of club members, most had transferred from community colleges with lounges and felt less welcome at our university; they sit in their cars in between classes to avoid crowds; and they long for camaraderie and sanctuary. The proposal drew on results from a survey, research on the challenges veterans face in higher education, and a list of peer institutions with veterans’ lounges.
- A proposal for a mentor program for international students: three students co-wrote this proposal drawing on interviews with international students, discussions with the International Programs Office, and descriptions of similar programs at other institutions.
- A workshop for subject-area tutors to improve their ability to work with multilingual students: three students designed this workshop that involved viewing the documentary, *Writing Across Borders*, leading a discussion, and

working collaboratively to create a tutoring tips handout.

The projects came to fruition but the process of making meaningful partnerships was time consuming and uncertain. When the group working with multilingual students was having trouble making contact, one student asked nervously, “What is the back-up plan here?” Another student felt wary of defining the major project for the semester; she wanted a typical writing assignment designed by the professor. Two other students worried that they were not learning enough about how to tutor; one stated that she was afraid we had “lost our way.” In this first iteration, I too worried that the students might not be learning essential tutoring skills and that the projects would flop, but the projects did not flop and according to surveys conducted at the end of their first semester of tutoring, all eight tutors indicated that they felt prepared to work in the center.³ As one student wrote, “working on the projects helped us to become better community members and tutors.” In fact, being lost proved to be an essential part of the process as it enabled the students to develop mutual partnerships, problem solve, and take charge of their learning. Students and their community partners became architects of the course. As the students developed and pursued their projects with the community, the classroom became a studio. In each class, students identified their writing, research, or revising tasks.

Despite the fact that only one of the three projects completed in this class is related to tutoring, each project provided students with the skills and knowledge essential to tutor. Each group of students connected with peers from different backgrounds, worked collaboratively, learned to use models to write in an unfamiliar genre, engaged in a variety of research techniques, and practiced writing for a real audience for a genuine purpose. Throughout the process, they reflected on their work and identified the kind of help they needed. I devoted time in class to teaching them to provide effective feedback to each other. Furthermore, they were all required to use the writing center to improve their projects and reflect on their experience in a session.

There was one major issue with this iteration: I unintentionally reinforced a charity dynamic by selecting two groups to which none of the students belonged. There were no veterans, international, or multilingual students in the class. That this can be problematic is revealed by one student’s reflection when asked about the benefits of the participatory approach:

we fostered a partnership with the group who is being affected (veterans), we figured out what they need most is...we were able to put into words why it matters to them so much, we gave them a voice in the campus community, we became invested in the issue as well and we began to care about getting a veterans' lounge also and realize our veterans' importance to the campus.

While I value this students' recognition that the veteran and military students actually improve our campus, her claim that "we gave them a voice" bristles. With distance from this course, I realize that I missed an opportunity to discuss what it means to speak for others. This is an especially valuable discussion to have among future writing center consultants who might feel compelled to let their own ideas overtake their clients'.

Letting Go Even More: Iteration Two

My goals for the second iteration of the course included the following: recruit more students of color (the previous section was predominantly white and didn't match the demographics of our campus), spend more time in class teaching about systemic inequities, provide students more opportunity to reflect on their positionality, and allow students more freedom in choosing their projects.

I managed to recruit a more diverse group for the second iteration of the course: of the thirteen students in this section, there was one black student, one biracial student who is black and white, two Latinx students, and nine white students. One student had a physical disability, one student identified as gay and another student openly discussed her PTSD and anxiety and others discussed their depression diagnoses. This group better reflected the demographics of the campus community with one exception. Each time I taught the course the majority of the students identified as female suggesting that I should actively recruit men, transgender and gender non-conforming students. That said, the projects implemented in this course will demonstrate that a classroom filled with students who are marginalized in different ways enabled us to see social inequities that otherwise would have likely remained invisible.

So that students could identify inequities on campus, I assigned articles about racism, sexism, homophobia/heteronormativity, classism, ableism, and transphobia. In this new iteration, only three out of the 52 articles in our reader were directly about writing center work. While we shared a few common readings, including Vershawn Ashanti Young's "Should Writers Use Their Own English?," students selected readings

based on their interests. They identified key concepts from these articles and wrote summaries to ensure that they internalized the readings and to practice rearticulating others' ideas—one of the building blocks of academic and civic discourse.

Next, drawing on the articles and their experiences, we made lists to identify issues across campus related to mental health, LGBTQ, gender identity, (dis)ability, and race. The fact that students in this section have been marginalized in different ways throughout their lives enabled them to quickly make a list of issues. From there, I asked students to rate their preferred issue and then form groups. Each group had at least one student who had been affected by the oppression that they intended to fight. To give students an opportunity to partner with existing organizations, I invited student activists to class to talk about their work, including the president of the Black Student Union and the leadership of the Active Minds Club, a national nonprofit organization aimed at "raising mental health awareness among college students."

To ensure that the students were internalizing the principles of participatory planning, I asked them to work together to identify guiding principles. Once the projects started, students wrote weekly progress reports reflecting on their achievements and struggles. This reflective writing enabled me to prioritize process above product and it provided me a window into the challenges they faced. Over the course of the semester, four specific challenges emerged. To recognize that these are problems inherent in this kind of work, I will name each one: the "you're just doing this for class" challenge, the ally challenge, the avoiding race problem, and the self-care concern.

The "you're just doing this for class" challenge is likely to crop up when students partner with clubs. Two students from this section, a gay cisgender white man and a straight cisgender white woman, met with the Queer Student Alliance (QSA) and were received skeptically. Neither of these students had been part of these clubs, which consisted primarily of women of color and gender fluid individuals. The students from my class suggested two possible projects: create more gender-neutral bathrooms or launch a campaign to raise awareness of transgender rights. Club members were worried my students were just doing this work for a grade.

In retrospect, I can see that I set these two students up for this conflict. While we devoted time to internalizing the principles of participatory planning and practicing active listening, I also asked the students to begin to identify problems and solutions. For some groups, this worked out because they were able to launch their own initiatives. For this group, it created

complications because they arrived eager to share their ideas when they attended their first QSA meeting. We discussed why the members of QSA might feel frustrated. These students have been working on these issues for as many as four years and it was aggravating to have two new faces propose ideas. Furthermore, students of color, women, and gender fluid individuals have likely all experienced others taking credit for their ideas. To create a better working partnership, I suggested that they invite the president of QSA to our class to work on the proposal. She accepted the invitation and her name is on the proposal as a contributor. In the future, if students are working with existing clubs, I will insist that they attend at minimum two meetings to listen and ask questions. Of course, this emphasis on listening and questioning transfers directly to tutoring.

Another issue that emerged with this group was the ally problem. The student who is gay reported experiencing both homophobia and heteronormative assumptions on campus. The straight woman in the group made a conscious decision to let him take the lead in meeting with the QSA but felt uncomfortable with that choice: "I'm concerned it will come off as I'm not doing as much work or putting in as much effort as [my partner] when I let him take the lead on talking to people since he's gay and I'm straight." In the future I need to ensure that students who are part of a marginalized group are not left to do the heavy lifting by teaching students how to be effective allies.

The question of how to be an ally also cropped up in the group working to raise awareness of racial microaggressions. The one white male cisgender straight student in this group emailed me to ask if he could/should be doing this work as a white man. I sent him a link to the website of anti-racist activist Tim Wise, so that he could see that there is room for white men to actively resist racism. This student, a regional planning major, plotted the microaggressions the students collected via a survey onto a digital campus map. This visual was extremely powerful as it demonstrated the pervasiveness of these racial microaggressions, countering the narrative that our campus is inclusive. Once the course was over, the three women continued to work on the project. The white male decided not to be a writing consultant and was only minimally involved in the project after the course ended. Despite this, he did find value in the course and has begun to acknowledge and resist his prejudices. He explains, "As an aspiring urban planner, both my classes and personal interests have brought me to many public meetings where I listen to predominantly white planners discuss their plans for predominantly black or Hispanic communities. Before

the class, I would've dismissed many of the communities' concerns because they didn't sound intellectual or may have spoken broken English."

Another conflict, this one emerging within the microaggressions group, could be called the "let's avoid race" problem, a problem that is well documented in the critical race scholarship. Two of the students in the group (a black woman and a mixed race woman) were intent on focusing on raising awareness of racial microaggressions whereas two others (a white man and a mixed race woman) wanted to focus cultural microaggressions. To address this shift from racial to cultural, I emailed the group to ask why and explain that conversations about race often shift to focus on class or ethnicity, and I attached "My Class Didn't Trump My Race: Using Oppression to Face Privilege" by Robin J. DiAngelo and "Difficult Stories" by Ann M. Green. Each of these articles identifies the tendency of white people to sidestep conversations about race. The group returned to racial microaggressions, but they needed a nudge from me, the person with the most power, so that the concerns of the people with the least power, the women of color in the group, were not minimized.

While this intervention was effective, I see now that I did not adequately support the women of color in this group. These women were gathering racist statements that had been uttered all over our campus, and while I praised them regularly for their work on the project, I did not effectively acknowledge or mitigate their emotional labor. This oversight is something I will need to attend to in future iterations of this course.

These complex interactions well prepare students for difficult sessions and the projects that emerged have helped to level the playing field on our campus. Ultimately, the tutors-in-training partnered with the Counseling Center, the QSA, the Active Minds club, Residential Life, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the Black Student Union to design and implement the following projects:

- A proposal for an LGBTQ-friendly living and learning community written by two students.
- A multimodal project, designed by four students, aimed at raising awareness of racial microaggressions on our campus: an event, a Tumblr page, and an interactive map of our campus that indicates where racial microaggressions were uttered.
- An event called "Tell Me About Your Day" based on an initiative at MIT designed to destigmatize mental health issues and normalize conversations among peers about

the challenges of college life. Three students worked on this project.

- A revision of the Counseling Center website so that it is warm and welcoming rather than cold and clinical. Three students completed this project.

It is worth reiterating that at least one of the students in each of these groups was directly affected by the problems they chose to tackle.

Each of these projects had an impact on our campus. While some launched conversations, others led to sustainable institutional changes. The microaggressions project culminated with a discussion on campus attended by 20 people and a map of microaggressions on campus that has been distributed to the campus and is now on display in our center. One student continued to lead workshops educating the community about microaggressions. The TMayD project also led to an event attended by 20 people and has become an official club on campus. The LGBTQ Living Learning community was launched in the fall of 2017 housing 45 students. The Counseling Center website now includes interviews with the staff conducted by the students. Additionally, members from the microaggressions, TMayD, and LGBTQ living learning community groups presented their projects at the Northeast Writing Center Association conference and an undergraduate research conference on campus.

The Value of a Social-Change Model for Tutor Education

Ultimately, a social-change tutor education model not only provides students with a sense of agency and responsibility to their community, but it also changes their relationship to writing. They learn to write for a real purpose and a real audience. Students left this course with heightened genre awareness and a strong understanding of rhetorical context. To complete these projects students worked in a variety of genres. They designed and conducted surveys, wrote interview questions, applied for IRB approval, designed publicity materials including posters and social media campaigns, wrote professional emails, created budgets, wrote notes to prepare for meetings with stakeholders or to speak in front of large audiences, wrote business proposals, and designed posters for a conference.

Tutors armed with genre awareness are better prepared to tutor. In “Addressing Genre in the Writing Center,” Irene L. Clark makes a convincing case for discussing genre in all sessions. Tutors with an understanding of genre can better support students in a

number of ways: they can help students examine the expectations of particular genre, explain why particular choices seem inappropriate, cue previous knowledge of a genre (for example, didn’t you write an annotated bibliography before in English 101?), help students understand why a particular writing assignment may be challenging (i.e. you have never written a lab report before so you are learning the expectations of the genre), and support students in purposefully subverting generic expectations (Savini; Gordon; Walker).

Furthermore, it is useful for writing consultants to be able to read texts as models. Reading texts as models requires that students and tutors consciously shift gears as they are accustomed to reading for content. When tutors are working with students in unfamiliar disciplines and genres, they can act as co-investigators with the tutees, not only searching for resources together (such as “how to write a lab report”) but also by examining mentor texts together (Savini; Gordon).

These excerpts from two students’ meta-reflections suggest that this work did in fact heighten their awareness of rhetorical context:

I have also really learned the importance of knowing and understanding our genre and audience for the piece of writing we are doing. Before this class, I mostly had two audiences either the teacher or the teacher would have us write as if the reader was unfamiliar with the texts... I better understand the nuances that are involved when writing to different audiences and how much work it can be to get it right for that audience.

Working on this project helped me to develop rhetorical flexibility through forming the questions for the surveys we distributed. When the questions were being written, we tried our best to take our audience into consideration. Knowing that students would be taking the surveys, we wanted to make sure that it was not too lengthy or difficult to understand. Since there are many who do not know what racial microaggressions are, we also made sure to include a definition that participants could use as a reference. Therefore, we made sure to use language as well as a structure that would appeal to college students.

This meta-awareness positions them well to help their peers develop rhetorical flexibility.

In addition to regularly reflecting on rhetorical context, the tutors in this course learned how to break larger projects into manageable tasks and how to perform tasks that will help with revision. Our writing center takes a task-based approach, which is to say that in addition to helping students take longer assignments

and break them into smaller tasks, in almost every session consultants ask tutees to complete some sort of writing or revision task.⁴ For example, a student who comes in asking if their argument is clear will be asked to write their argument in one-two complete sentences while the writing consultant reads the paper. A student who comes in asking for help with organization will be asked to write a reverse outline.

Students also developed a genuine appreciation of revision. One student wrote, “I have lost count of how many times we have revised [the proposal] so it can be just right for the people we are giving it to. It is a lot of work but this course has helped me to appreciate all the work that goes into writing.” Many students, especially students who have received As on first drafts, see revision as a hoop to jump through, as this reflection suggests: “Before this class I never revised my work, I was always able to get by with doing things just once.” With each round of feedback from me, the writing center, their classmates, and their community partners, the students revised their work. These students developed faith in revision, an important quality in writing consultants.

These students learned how the writing center works by using it, a requirement of the course. Here is a representative excerpt from the end of the semester reflective writing:

I have learned that they [writing tutors] do not operate just by giving feedback, but by asking where the writer thinks there may be problems and what the writer would like to focus on. They focus on the higher-level problems first, such as content and organization, and then work their way down to smaller problems. They give students skills that will not only help them with the current project, but with projects in the future.

This excerpt reveals the student’s internalization of essential writing center approaches, such as prioritizing higher-order concerns, working to support writers as they improve rather than fix the writing at hand, and ensuring that students maintain ownership of their projects.

Of course, being an effective writing consultant requires more than an understanding of the writing process, it requires emotional intelligence, empathy, and courage. To design their projects, students in this course needed to embrace uncomfortable work, to sit with uncertainty, to take risks, to act as leaders, to really listen, to be aware of their emotional responses to challenging interactions, to engage with students from different backgrounds, and to solve problems collaboratively. As a result of their projects, they developed a strong sense of agency and responsibility to our community. Important tutoring knowledge and

skills do not go by the wayside, but tutors receive this knowledge as they need it. The students who completed the social change version of tutor preparation have a strong foundation, which is reinforced by regular professional development sessions.

Conclusion

In using the CSL principles to revise tutor education and in teaching two separate iterations of this course, I’ve developed additional principles. First, if we want students to conceptualize their own projects and work in an environment where we can focus on the process of community building, then it makes sense to define the campus as the community. This possibility tends to be overlooked in the CSL scholarship. Second, process is as important as product. Some of the projects might not be realized but what is most important is that we adhere to the process of participatory planning and focus on building strong relationships. These principles make this approach applicable in any three-credit tutor education program but it doesn’t make this work neat.

In *Noise from the Writing Center*, Beth Boquet urges that instead of “training our tutors” to be “institutionally competent tutors who help to produce institutionally competent writers,” we could adopt a “higher-risk/higher-yield model for writing center work” (81). Although I am guided by a set of principles, I am nervous each time I prepare to teach this course because it is a high-risk model for writing center work. Boquet draws an analogy between improvisation and tutoring, noting that “the most interesting improvisations work because they are always on the verge of dissonance. They are always just about to fail. They are risky. But when they work well, they are also really, really fun. They leave you wide eyed” (76). This course requires that we improvise our way through the semester and as a result, each time I wonder, will students find projects that motivate them? Will they or will I say something offensive? Will I guide them effectively in the height of the semester’s busyness? Each time I teach this course it is teetering on the edge of failure and there are plenty of difficult moments. These difficult moments allow them to practice and me to model the self-reflective and collaborative approach I want them to adopt as tutors. That the work is gratifying has been demonstrated by the fact that 13 out of the 21 students enrolled in both sections continued to work on their projects after the semester ended.

Notes

1. For example, The University of Delaware “contributes to the local community through writing-related community service.” St. John’s University dedicates an entire paragraph of its mission to its commitment to the community.
2. The Community Toolbox, an online resource associated with the University of Kansas that aims to help “people build healthier communities and bring about the changes they envision”, provides resources for participatory planning.
3. Two of the students enrolled in the class did not become peer writing consultants.
4. See Rutger’s The Task for an example: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/attachments/article/425/The%20Task-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Tutors.pdf>

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Appendix

Table 1: Charity versus justice-oriented approach

Charity model of service learning in the university	Justice model of community engagement/community building
Prioritizes student learning goals above community interests	Prioritizes community interests above student learning goals
Positions community members as needy recipients of help	Builds on expertise, experience, and interests of marginalized groups
Positions students/university as experts/saviors	Emphasizes working side by side with people from diverse backgrounds and develop authentic relationships
Preserves status quo	Challenges status quo and works toward a more just society
Determined/designed by the university "experts"	Involves all stakeholders in decision making as much as possible from the beginning and values community knowledge.
Often involves unsustainable/swoop in/swoop out projects	Develops sustainable partnerships
Focuses on problems in the community.	Builds on assets rather than focusing on deficits.