Department of English   Faculty Publications and Research

2019

Can't Fix Anyone: Confronting Our Historical Love Affair with Deficit Thinking

Mark Latta
Marian University - Indianapolis, mlatta@marian.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://mushare.marian.edu/fp_deng

Part of the Creative Writing Commons, and the English Language and Literature Commons

wln

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

Table of Contents

Editor's Note
Muriel Harris

How do the articles in this issue of *WLN* fit together, and what do they offer us?

My answer would be that there are various paths to change and growth, and the outcome often involves acknowledging difference. When Mike Mattison and Kaitlyn Zebell wondered about ways that tutors evolve, they analyzed the audio files of five tutors' conversations in their sophomore and then senior years. How is tutorial talk different after several years of tutoring? Mattison and Zebell conclude that such experience leads tutors to be more confident and more direct in their conversations with students.

MURIEL HARRIS

For Joseph Franklin, his description of starting a writing center in a British university is an account of mistakes made and lessons learned. The negative situations, while familiar to many of us, illustrate Franklin's recommendation that "we need to tell more stories" of messy situations in which we weren't always at our best. We should reflect on them because ruminating on mistakes is a valuable way to learn. In Franklin's case, it was a matter of learning about transnational differences.

Mark Latta argues against the deficit thinking inherent in Stephen North's influential "Idea" and the unintended consequences of adhering to that view, namely that it perpetuates asymmetrical power relationships. He offers instead his writing center's "Critical Collaborative Writing Process" model. Amanda McDowell's Tutors' Column recounts how she learned to recognize differences across cultures through a clash of views with a student from another culture. As she explains, sharing identity labels does not mean sharing experiences, and acknowledging this idea allows us to acknowledge differences. For McDowell, conflict can provide opportunities for growth.

And a question for you: Should a writing center director's job be a staff position or a faculty one? Please see page 29 for how to respond.

Taking Initiative: The Evolution of a Writing Tutor

Mike Mattison and Kaitlyn Zebell
Wittenburg University

MATTISON & ZEBELL

In her 2009 article "Scaffolding in the Writing Center," Isabelle Thompson called for "longitudinal studies of tutors' scaffolding behaviors," and this project looks to follow Thompson's call and examine whether or not tutors in one writing center significantly change during their time in the center. Anecdotally, the director of the Wittenberg Writing Center (Mike) would argue that the tutors sound different as seniors—more confident, more mature, more patient—but we had not before attempted to prove that claim.[1]

The data for the project is a collection of ten audio files recorded by five writing tutors—one each in their sophomore and senior years. The recordings are a requirement for employment; the tutors listen to and reflect on a session every year they are employed.[2] Such reflection gives the tutors (and the director) a chance to think about individual sessions, but the recordings also provide a chance to consider growth for the tutors overall.[3] Thus the guiding question for our research: are there differences in the types of speech and conversation habits these tutors use as sophomores and as seniors?

To begin to answer that question, we utilized Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson's taxonomy for tutor comments: direct instruction, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding. All ten of the audio files were sent to an outside transcription service—each file was close to thirty minutes, so there was a nearly equal amount of session time to compare for each tutor and for each year.[4] Once the audios were transcribed, the authors analyzed and catalogued each tutor comment into Mackiewicz and Thompson's categories.

THE BIG PICTURE

When we had a final tally, we discovered what seemed to be changes in the numbers, especially with direct instruction. We knew, though, that comparing numbers is not always as helpful

as comparing percentages, so we also calculated the difference between the types of comments in terms of percentages (table 1).

TABLE 1: Numerical and Percentage Comparison between Sophomore and Senior Semesters

	Spring 2015 Sophomore	Fall 2016 Senior	Total
Direct	294 (17.7%)	662 (32.3%)	956 (25.0%)
Cognitive	1188 (71.5%)	1210 (58.9%)	2398 (64.6%)
Motivational	137 (8.3%)	117 (5.7%)	254 (7.0%)
Other	42 (2.5%)	64 (3.1%)	106 (2.8%)
TOTAL	**1661 (100%)**	**2053 (100%)**	**3714 (100%)**

To us, there seemed to be some significant differences between the two semesters, but in order to verify our assumptions, we worked with Doug Andrews, one of the math professors on campus who teaches a statistics course. He ran a chi square test in order to determine whether the difference was due to chance.[5] He found statistical significance in the numbers (p-value of 0.000 (stat=107.8, df=3)), and, in his words, "[C]hanges of this magnitude are really, really unlikely to happen just from natural variation."

Something, then, had changed from sophomore year to senior year. If we look at the sessions in the aggregate, we could say that the tutors talked more and utilized more direct instruction and less motivational scaffolding. That might not be terribly surprising, as seniors would presumably be more knowledgeable and more willing to tell writers what to do, especially if the writers were younger. This change aligns with Mackiewicz and Thompson's findings in *Talk about Writing*, as in the successful sessions they analyzed, "instruction played a critical role" (100). In other words, these data suggest that seasoned tutors offered more direct instruction and were more direct in their conversations. The big picture argues that the tutors did evolve during their time in the center.

However, such a leap ignores that the changes found here do not hold for all five of the tutors. For example, Vicki[6] talked less in her senior year session and had a higher percentage of motivational scaffolding comments, even as she increased her direct comments; Sondra, on the other hand, talked more in her senior year, but her percentage of cognitive comments increased while the percentage of direct comments stayed relatively the same (see table 2). The big picture does not explain each individual session because of all the variables at play in a session. It is not just that a tutor is older—we also need to consider the level of writer they are

working with (first-year, sophomore, junior, senior); the assignment (lab report, narrative, literature review); the stage of the writing process (brainstorming, revising, editing); as well as a host of other concerns, such as the respective attitudes of the tutor and writer, whether or not they know each other (ours is a small campus), and whether or not the tutor is familiar with the faculty member who assigned the work.

TABLE 2: Comparison of Vicki's and Sondra's comments During their Sophomore and Senior Years

	VICKI Spring 2015	VICKI Fall 2016	SONDRA Spring 2015	SONDRA Fall 2016
Direct	52 (13%)	80 (29%)	67 (30%)	91 (31%)
Cognitive	307 (78%)	152 (56%)	116 (53%)	177 (61%)
Motivational	22 (6%)	22 (8%)	32 (15%)	15 (5%)
Other	11 (3%)	19 (7%)	5 (2%)	7 (3%)
TOTAL	**392**	**273**	**220**	**290**

Therefore, we chose to look more closely at individual sessions; particularly, we were interested in whether any tutors had two sessions that might negate some of the variables listed above. One of them did. In both of her sessions, Sondra worked with a first-year student writing an argumentative paper, and in both sessions the thesis statement was discussed. If those variables were similar, perhaps we could discover what changes Sondra made in her tutoring approach based on her experience.

A SMALLER PICTURE

Our examination of Sondra's sessions was influenced in part by Mackiewicz's *The Aboutness of Writing Center Talk: A Corpus-Driven and Discourse Analysis*. In that work, Mackiewicz takes two approaches: she uses corpus analysis, or quantitative measures that examine "particular words and word sequences" in a set of writing center conversations; she then complements that approach with qualitative discourse analysis, identifying "how speakers co-construct their interaction on a moment-to-moment basis" (3). To begin, we took both of Sondra's session transcripts and "cleaned" them as Mackiewicz did, removing the writer's words and any "indications of . . . nonverbal behavior and the abbreviations that marked speakers' turns" (24) like laughing or long pauses. We then utilized Anthony's AntFileConverter to convert the documents into plain text files, which we then uploaded into Anthony's AntConc 3.5.7, where we isolated specific words within the text to better understand how they were used in the conversation. As Mackiewicz

explains, AntConc can identify "word counts, most frequently occurring words, type/token ratios [and] key words" (24). The version we used can also plot out when in a session a certain word is used, using straight lines on a bar to show the relation of the word's timing to the overall session.[7]

In Mackiewicz's study, she found "five writing-related words that were key in tutors' talk" (76). The words are *sentence, paper, comma, thesis, paragraph*. In Sondra's sessions, the word she used the most frequently of these five is *thesis*, twenty-nine times over the two sessions (see fig. 1), and it is the use of this word that we find most compelling about the sessions.
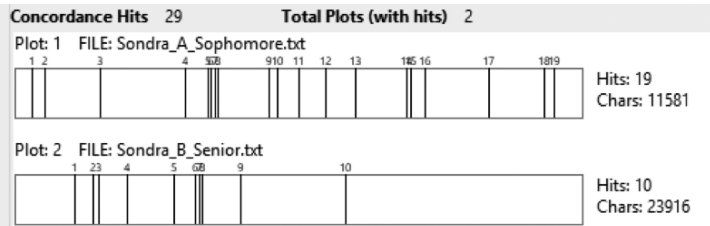

| Concordance Hits | 29 | Total Plots (with hits) | 2 |

Plot: 1   FILE: Sondra_A_Sophomore.txt
Hits: 19
Chars: 11581

Plot: 2   FILE: Sondra_B_Senior.txt
Hits: 10
Chars: 23916

FIGURE 1: Concordance plot of Sondra's use of thesis in her two sessions.

Again, we zeroed in on a tutor who had similar sessions in her sophomore and her senior years. Both times, Sondra is working with a first-year student on an argumentative essay, and both times one of the concerns is the thesis. Yet, just from the visual plotting alone, we can tell that the conversations are not the same. In the sophomore session (Plot 1), the topic of the thesis is raised early in the opening (pretextual) stage, and it is the writer who raises the issue. The thesis, she says, is her "biggest problem," and she and Sondra spend most of the rest of the session talking about the thesis and ways to write a thesis—Sondra uses the word nineteen times, and she offers several pieces of advice:

- Something that you want to do in your thesis is to sort of start broad and then funnel down. So you're kind of gonna give your reader, um, a preview of what you're talking about in your body paragraphs.

- And then you think about them, you know, I have all these ideas, what is one thought or argument or claim that I can make based off of all these ideas? And then that's your thesis.

- And then you go into your paper and do the same thing in more detail, your thesis is mirroring what you do in your paper, which is what it's supposed to do.

Yet, the writer and Sondra never seem to have a conclusive moment, and this session has more talk about what a thesis is than what the

writer's particular thesis might be. The writer never really accepts Sondra's advice and explanation and continues to remind Sondra that she struggles with crafting a thesis because she cannot wrap her brain around what classifies as a thesis statement.

In the senior session (Plot 2), there is a bit of a delay before Sondra uses the word "thesis" because it is she, and not the writer, who raises the topic. This first-year writer mentions "flow" and "citations" as her major concerns. Once they begin reading the paper, Sondra stops and asks, "Okay, so is your thesis in this paragraph?" That question elicits some doubt on the writer's part, and Sondra quickly suggests a "thesis worksheet."[8] As she tells the writer, "Okay, we have like a little worksheet that we could do really quick to help you come up with a good, like . . . a really rigid thesis." The two of them use the worksheet, and then Sondra asks if the writer "feels better" about her thesis, and the writer says she does. They finish the thesis conversation well before the halfway point of the session and move on to questions on organization. The last mention of "thesis" in the session (#10) is a reference back to the worksheet, directing the writer to remember her points and make sure her paragraphs connect with those points.

The comparison between these two sessions illustrates that Sondra is more comfortable and confident in initiating "topic episodes," which Mackiewicz and Thompson define as "talk focused on a single topic" (4), and that she has become more experienced in making those episodes productive. In this case, she utilized an outside resource. In the sophomore session, the writer initiates the thesis topic, and the two of them never move beyond that. Sondra does not seem to have the tools or the ability to move the writer past her initial concerns. In the senior session, it is Sondra who initiates the topic and then neatly brings in a resource that allows the writer to address the concern and move on.

In Mackiewicz and Thompson's collection of successful sessions, they found that "tutors launched or initiated topic episodes over five times as often as student writers," and they argue that this control "indicates tutors' roles as experts in writing, as conference managers, and as tutoring conversation facilitators—all roles that tutors must enact to generate successful conferences" (67). In her senior session, Sondra seems a much better conference manager and facilitator, and she takes on the role of writing expert by raising the question about the thesis and then offering a solution.

Granted, even though these sessions are similar in many respects, the writers were two different people, with different personalities. In the sophomore session, the writer portrays herself to be

someone who needs constant encouragement; she is doubtful of her abilities, and she expresses it often to Sondra: "I'm sorry. I get so confused." The writer, in fact, uses "sorry" five times in the session. Even when she mentions confidence, she immediately doubles back: "I think I'm good, I just ... I feel like I'm gonna stray off the topic." In the senior session, the writer was not seeking praise or comfort, but rather answers on how to perform to her fullest potential. The writer answers questions about her topic confidently, showing none of the self-deprecation of the other writer. When she is confused about something, such as a citation, she works through the difficulty with Sondra. The only "sorry" used in this session was from Sondra, who apologized when she could not make out a word on the page.

The difference between writers needs to be taken into account, but the difference was addressed by Sondra in her use of motivational scaffolding comments: they take up nearly 15% of the sophomore session and only 5% of the senior session. Sondra adjusts to the different personalities, yet in her sophomore session she does not initiate a topic episode as she does in the senior session. It seems fair to assume that the 200+ sessions she had between the sophomore and senior sessions improved her confidence to take more control over the conversation and be more efficient in her work with writers. She evolved into a more productive, successful tutor.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Just as The Carpenters sang, "We've only just begun," that is certainly the case with our question of tutor evolution. We have a tentative conclusion about Sondra's sessions, but we want to take that conclusion and go back to the other sessions and see if and how the other tutors might have initiated topic episodes and if we can chart their efficiency in those conversations. We also want to continue gathering audios each year and to make the same large-scale comparison between sophomore and senior sessions. The mix of the big and small pictures—the tutors' comments in the aggregate and their individual interactions with writers—helps us gain the most insight into our tutors' growth.

The work done on this project will be cycled into our tutor education. We will emphasize more resource use like the "Amazing Thesis Worksheet." Sondra's use of it in her session illustrates the efficiency of such resources, and we will take time educating tutors about all our handouts and encouraging them to use them. Also, in our overall numbers, we have a 7% total for motivational scaffolding comments, a number well below Mackiewicz and

Thompson's group at 22%. We need to ask what that means for our sessions with writers and if we should examine how often and in what ways we offer praise and empathy. In addition, we can utilize some of the analytical tools we have discovered from Mackiewicz's and from Mackiewicz and Thompson's works during our tutoring class. We can offer current tutors and tutors-to-be the chance to try AntConc so that they can examine sessions based on key words and word plots. Perhaps then, when they chart their use of words, direct instruction, and motivational and cognitive scaffolding, they can add to our knowledge about their overall growth as tutors.

Though ours is a small study at a small center, it is one of the few to consider writing tutors and their work over time. As Thompson argued, we need more such studies. It is important, yes, to examine individual sessions, but it is just as important to examine sessions as part of a long, complex, rich process of tutor development.

◆　◆　◆　◆　◆

NOTES

1. We are grateful for the First Year Research Award (FYRA) from Wittenberg that allowed Kaitlyn to collaborate on this project.

2. The individual audio files are all accompanied by a permission form approved by our IRB office, and this particular study was separately approved # 062-201617.

3. The Wittenberg Writing Center employs between 25-30 tutors each year, about half of whom come in as sophomores and work for three years. Other tutors enter as juniors or seniors.

4. Such services usually cost $1.00 per minute, and we had approximately 650 minutes of conversation. The transcription fee was paid for by a grant from the Faculty Development Board of Wittenberg University.

5. As MacNealy explains, chi-square analysis can be used when "we are primarily interested in the frequency or occurrence of a particular trait or quality," and such analysis is "based on the difference in what is expected to occur and what occurs" (104).

6. All names have been changed.

7. These programs, along with several others, are available free from the web site given in the "Works Cited." Once loaded, each program allows you to choose files to import. AntFileConverter turns Word documents into text documents, and then AntConc takes those text files and lets you select different options: e.g. upload a file, select "key words," and the program lists all the words used in the file in order of frequency. See also research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/toon/assets/docs/AntConc_Guide.pdf for an overview.

8. Google "Amazing Thesis Worksheet" for several versions of what we use.

WORKS CITED

Anthony, Laurence. AntConc. Computer software. Vers. 3.5.7. *Laurence Anthony's Website*. 2018. 02 July 2019. www.laurenceanthony.net/software.

Anthony, Laurence. AntFileConverter. Computer software. Vers. 1.2.1. *Laurence Anthony's Website*. 2017. 02 July 2019. www.laurenceanthony.net/software.

Mackiewicz, Jo. *The Aboutness of Writing Center Talk: A Corpus-Driven and Discourse Analysis.* Routledge, 2017.

Mackiewicz, Jo, and Isabelle Kramer Thompson. T*alk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors*. Routledge, 2015.

MacNealy, Mary Sue. *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing*. Longman, 1999.

Thompson, Isabelle. "Scaffolding in the Writing Center: A Microanalysis of an Experienced Tutor's Verbal and Nonverbal Tutoring Strategies." *Written Communication*, vol. 26 no. 4, 2009, pp. 417-53.

The Transnational Underdog and Institutional Change: Stories from a U.K. Writing Center

Joseph Franklin
University of Louisville

JOSEPH FRANKLIN

I was raised in the United States as a native speaker of American English. While getting my M.A. in Composition and Rhetoric, I acquired a U.K. passport—unbeknownst to me, I'd been a U.K. citizen from birth. This citizenship made it much more likely that I could work abroad, which appealed to my global curiosity. I later got a job offer to start up and run a writing center at the University of Southampton in England on an internally-funded, two-year grant. I started with only a place in a shared office, with no space to work with students, and quickly learned about the budget hoops and how to hire folks. We held staff meetings in the corridors and tutorials in empty offices to talk with students who seemed, more or less, desperate for our help. At the time of our closing, three semesters later, we were operating on two campuses with permanent office space and a staff of seven tutors and four interns. Though I would love to discuss our approach and the measure of our success—despite eventually being shut down—this article is not about that. This article instead offers a recounting of mistakes made and lessons learned when attempting to effect institutional change as an outsider.

My role in Southampton can be narrated as a learning curve. There were early days where, despite the support I had around me, I dwelt more on the resistance. Chris Anson and Christiane Donahue caution against discussing writing programs abroad only as a lack or absence. They articulate a position that caused me much conflict, given their argument for caution and "an almost anthropological sensitivity" in how we map "our frames, our language, and our assumptions onto writing work outside the U.S." (23). On the one hand, my Composition-informed approach was new and useful to many instructors and students. It was treated like a breath of fresh air, like a great relief, especially for the students who came for workshops and tutorials. On the other hand, in my desire for sensitivity to other traditions and approaches, I struggled to find a

way to argue for changes as shared goals and not simply outsider criticism.

At first, perhaps predictably, I felt more attuned to what I found lacking. Students could rarely point to who had graded their work because feedback was anonymous for both writer and grader. Without clear rubrics or training, scores varied wildly for what seemed to be very similar work. Instructors appeared to be struggling with cumbersome software and deadlines for providing their feedback. These were some of the norms of that academic writing culture. As time went on, I began to notice that many people were hungry for some ways to fix the broken feedback loop and that they had begun to use specific terms to discuss academic writing. I loved being useful to the many students, staff, and faculty who utilized and valued the writing center. But, I truly struggled to find a productive way to share ideas when they met with resistance, especially with powerful institutional stakeholders.

My training in Composition prepared me well to speak with other Compositionists, especially those based in the U.S. What I didn't know were the often-parallel terms and concepts circulating in the U.K. context, nor did I understand how to position my knowledge as an outsider. Composition discourse *was* new and different to many, but the reaction to that difference was mixed. Many of my colleagues' eyes lit up at the idea that I maybe had a term for something they'd been observing or feeling already. Or, they were excited to hear different strategies to solve a particular issue they wanted to address. In our first conversation, my office neighbor handed me some of his grading to ask for feedback on his feedback—"What do you think about this?" he asked. I was struck by his openness to invite discussion about these practices.

Other times, when I would try to explain the Composition approach under which I was trained, I got a more dismissive response. In a staff meeting with a different department, I was asked to share some thoughts on the efficacy of peer feedback. When I shared my understanding that it can be very effective but needs to be scaffolded properly, I was told, "Well, not every university is blessed with the money that these American behemoths have to play with. There's no way we could devote that kind of time to just talk about *writing* here." In another conversation, an instructor replied to my description of Composition's approach by saying, "Well, *our* students don't need all that attention, they can just sort it out, because they're *British*." Such responses utterly confused me, and at first I was really at a loss for how to counter those assumptions.

In this early phase of my work, I felt the sting of such responses much

more acutely than the supportive traction my ideas were having with many colleagues. Anson and Donahue's call for sensitivity is important, but it didn't help me navigate the real critiques I (and many students, faculty, and staff) felt were clear and compelling. Though many people around me were open to new ideas, I kept hitting a wall when it came to convincing stakeholders with the power to make the center more sustainable. They seemed much more protectionist about what could and should change. I felt that such resistance seemed to deflect from a practical discussion and instead cast the discussion in terms of American versus British, rich versus poor, traditional versus modern. An ability to address this resistance productively, I later realized, was what *I* was lacking. Before that realization, I was wandering in a fog of ostracism and unfairness, which does not cultivate a productive approach to engaging resistance.

THE MEETING

I had been in the job for a couple of months, and the writing feedback I regularly encountered on student work was driving me crazy. It was often sparse and unproductive. After one student, while crying, showed me feedback on her draft—which went out of its way to demean the writer's intelligence while also offering zero constructive feedback—I dashed off to a meeting of program heads where I had been invited to speak on my approach and give details about the writing center. Near the end of the talk, as I took some questions, someone made a joke about how I have my work cut out for me because the students just can't write to save their lives. Please understand my response in the context of how I felt marginalized like the very students I was working with every day—students who would never be invited to speak in such a meeting.

"Well, in my experience, the only thing that's really abysmally written is the feedback from instructors," I said, and I shared examples, including the session I'd just had. Though others around the table sighed sympathetically, two instructors chuckled even more, and those laughs were all I really registered. I read the chuckles as smug self-righteousness and sort of snapped. I sharpened my voice and said the following, while *literally* shaking my finger: "You apparently don't care that you're hemorrhaging goodwill from your students because of your failure to teach anything of use to them and making them feel stupid. But your students are not stupid, and when they ask their friends who go to schools that DO actually teach them something, and treat them fairly, word will get out and eventually there will be no one left to come and give you a paycheck." There was a pause. No one responded. All of the air had left the room for a moment. Then, the chair of the meeting thanked me effusively

for offering my time and said I was "pushing on an open door" with my ideas. I told them I needed to leave to see some more students and walked out. I felt an immediate rush of anxiety and failure, so much that I was shaking.

I knew my behavior would be seen as that of an arrogant American coming to shake my finger at this other way of doing things, because that's exactly what I'd done. I was fixating on the conflict, and that could only produce such an outburst. This was *my* lack: I had no real transnational rhetorical literacy that could help me navigate such interactions toward better outcomes. My office neighbor cheered, "It's about bloody time someone actually spoke up in these meetings. Good on you!" He asked if I believed in what I said, and I told him I did, but not how I approached it. He replied, "Then just wait and see what happens. You took a risk by telling them the truth, and they'll either respect you for it, or they were never gonna buy in anyway."

So, I resigned myself to the consequences of my actions and embraced the honesty of what I said. I didn't speak about it with anyone else, and I went back to work. A couple of weeks later, the Dean found me in the corridor and said she heard about the meeting and believed I had some very good ideas. She asked whether I would be willing to meet with a few more people to discuss making changes. I was grateful for any possible future chances to encourage better engagement with the issues I raised. So, I joined those meetings and many more in the future across the university. I also took the opportunity to reflect deeply on what had caused my outburst so that I could refine my approach to voicing controversial perspectives. In the aftermath of that tense meeting, after the stress and conflict and honesty, I felt like I had finally arrived at the first hint of what my job *really* required.

MAKING CHANGE

I was not hired because things were working perfectly; I was hired to offer the approach I outlined in my interview to make positive changes for many stakeholders involved in student writing. My background, my approach, and my American identity made me an outsider. So, I was hired to make change as an outsider, but I was not given the authority or support to make lasting, structural changes. Navigating resistance, I eventually found out, was a central part of my position. It was so to a degree I did not expect. Being that this was transnational work, I believe I was often operating as a stand-in for my colleagues' assumptions about the United States. Their conflicted views on the U.S. became their conflicted views about me. Their conflicted history with academic writing became their conflicted interactions with me. Similarly, my limited

knowledge of other discourses, my narrow focus on resistance, and my underdog positioning clouded my ability to respond and reframe discussions. Then, just add to the mix resource scarcity and professional pressure in layers of trepidation and uncertainty and you have a recipe for miscommunication for all parties. These many layers, from the very beginning of my role, weighed on me heavily. I believe the promise of transnational work—the richness of diverse ideas, the energy of change—comes through strongest when these layers can be properly parsed.

Learning how to work with, through, and around biased assumptions required a kind of rhetorical literacy that helped me to make sense of whether the recalcitrance, or even the support, I encountered was about personal agendas, professional conduct, institutional frustration, nationalist expectations, conflicting ideologies, linguistic differences, or whatever else. That kind of literacy—interpersonal, linguistic, institutional, ideological, etc.—is certainly similar in many ways to domestic Composition work, but transnational writing work adds these extra layers of distance and imbrication wrought by the blessings and baggage of national borders. To do the work well, one must cultivate an ability to reframe discussion away from simplistic nationalist narratives and other types of resistance. If I could do the above described meeting differently, I would know to be prepared for a cynical response from some colleagues and simply ask why they felt students couldn't write. By opening up the dialogue a bit, I could then disagree and point out that I believed the students *could* write and that instructors *could* be of great help to them. Making institutional change requires conflict and engagement and frustration—there is no way around that. It's an underdog story. But the work can be so wonderful that the dog gets right into your heart.

Often, when I read articles on transnational writing studies work, the delicate balance between caution and assertion isn't present in a way that resonates with my experience. Methodologically speaking, I believe we need to tell more stories about how we build allies, adapt our methods, and make critical changes while also appreciating many different approaches. I own the mistake of my poor responses, and unpacking them seems essential to me, yet such discussions are often absent from many articles I read on transnational work. Bruce Horner raises concerns that the ways we understand difference can limit how we respond to it, and this can "preclude [a] kind of working 'with' difference" (334). Some readers might find my criticisms and mistakes as indicative of the colonial, arrogant American imposing an outsider approach. However, in my experience, the matrix of power in an institution is not so clear-cut

or linear. And the local itself is not so simple, or stable. Composition did not invent supportive feedback, or the idea of peer learning, or the writing process—though there is a flourishing discourse devoted to describing and developing ways to work with writers that I think is valuable when considered alongside local conditions. It's up to all parties to resist the easy, polarizing narratives that obscure shared goals—that's what precludes working with differences.

Engaging in the work of transnational writing program administration, according to Horner, is ideological, and we should not shy away from depicting the struggle "in the day-to-day decisions, teaching practices, and representations" of WPAs, teachers, and students (340). I share the story of my failure to remain composed in a meeting as a way to let others hopefully avoid such confrontation. It's a cautionary tale. I am grateful that after this meeting I went on to collaborate with many of those at the table in different ways. I am glad I challenged the status quo, even if I am embarrassed by my approach. Future meetings were much more productive. Navigating those ethical, rhetorical, and theoretical concerns is actually a major part of day-to-day transnational work. It is also no secret that this is a major component of all writing center work. I would like to conclude by showing how some of these concerns filtered down into day-to-day tips for doing the work.

GETTING TO WORK

First, embrace mistakes. In one of my first workshops, I spent nearly an hour on various activities designed to get students talking, writing, and reflecting about their revision practices. It turned out that "revision" in UK English more or less meant exam prep. I felt foolish and flustered, and the students were so confused; I swear I could feel the room cringe. Much like my tense meeting depicted above, this was a moment I wanted to erase, and my instinct was to see it as a frustrating lack of the "right" term and understanding. But, on reflection, I reframed the language of Composition as connected and in conversation with many other discourses. Running from such realizations is the wrong reaction. Face the mistakes and take all you can learn from them.

Second, make arguments, not enemies. Early caution in my work gave way to the fact that writing program administrators and writing center directors *are* agents of change—even, and especially, transnationally. We work to build innovative, more thoughtful pedagogies to support the development of more articulate writers, and this work will always—and rightfully—face challenges. Even resistant colleagues were most often simply hungry for help that worked, but one's approach is crucial. The simplest rhetorical move

of leading with questions can find common ground or places of specific critique in response to a shared observation, which is the better place to offer changes.

Third, re-frame to writing. I found the best success when arguing not about what works in the United States, but about what I have learned about writing from my studies and experience. It is necessary to deflect such categorizations. If I think of writing as a cultural and practical thread in the fabric of any institution, I can feel authoritative in my role of changing any different context as long as I navigate with negotiation. Approach a meeting by first asking what colleagues are seeing and what different outcomes they are hoping to achieve. Then, ground the conversation in knowledge about how writers might work best as demonstrated through research and experience. Lastly, collaboratively and creatively plan new practices to take the work a step forward.

My extra citizenship gave me better access to the interesting puzzle of similarity and difference that is transnational work. What on some levels feels so locally contextualized, and therefore distant, in another light is quite global, and therefore close. Languages, disciplines, curricula, histories, and pedagogical approaches clothe the constantly shifting interactions of institutional work. Transnational work invites a kind of resistance couched in phrases like *this isn't how we do things*, but isn't that always what one hears when they want to make change? Often, what looks like an opaque misunderstanding is, in another light, a shared goal being expressed differently. The writing center community needs more messy accounts of learning what productive engagement with difference might look like. Narratives of institutional navigation should be more visible to develop strategies for change that connect across contexts.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

WORKS CITED

Anson, Chris M., and Christiane Donahue. "Deconstructing 'Writing Program Administration' in an International Context." Martins, pp. 21-47.

Horner, Bruce. "Afterword." Martins, pp.332-41.

Martins, David S., editor. *Transnational Writing Program Administration*. Utah State UP, 2015.

Can't Fix Anyone: Confronting Our Historical Love Affair with Deficit Thinking

Mark Latta
Marian University

The incorporation of critical theories and emancipatory practices within writing center scholarship has opened up new possibilities for how we approach and theorize our work. However, in the midst of this wokefulness, there is still a need to attend to Stephen North's "Idea of a Writing Center," that it is "our job to produce better writers, not better writing" (438), and the entrenchment of The Idea within the writing center grand narrative (Grutsch McKinney). North's essay generated significant impact when initially published in 1984, and its influence persists. A recent Google search revealed the phrase or some variation of it is used on hundreds of writing center websites, and North's article is commonly found on course reading lists.

MARK LATTA

The Idea persists, in part, because of what it provides: a clear description of what a writing center does conveyed in a way that elicits an "immediate attachment made through emotion" (Mattison 5). There are multiple mindsets about The Idea. Some treat it as gospel. Others cannot wait to move beyond it. There are also those represented by Mike Mattison's essay, "Heading East, Leaving North," who feel some uneasiness with the lore but are understandably cautious in letting go.

For those who approach writing center work through the lens of critical theory, there is a desire to move beyond The Idea and onto more student-centered, asset-oriented, and culturally relevant frameworks of practice (Geller et al.; Ladson-Billings; Paris). Despite this, The Idea remains a fixture within the dominant narrative of writing center practices. I argue the staying power of The Idea should cause concern because of its relationship to and replication of *deficit thinking* (Valencia). Additionally, I believe we must recognize our collective and historical reliance upon deficit thinking orientations and attend to the unintended consequences that may have emerged from these origins. Finally, while others in the field may be thinking in similar ways, we need to shift this conversation

toward concrete models that demonstrate what might lie beyond The Idea.

I approach this essay through a perspective similar to that of Harry Denny, John Nordlof, and Lori Salem, who challenge the "claim of neutrality" (72) within writing center practices and claim our "long history of teaching ourselves to speak the language of universality and neutrality" (73) has rendered the needs and realities of working-class students invisible. Just as the language of universality and neutrality has allowed us to overlook and erase particular needs and perspectives, The Idea has encouraged a sense of neutrality that is neither universal nor value neutral (Taylor and Hughes) while simultaneously obscuring other ways of thinking about the nature of our work.

It is within this critical turn that my work is situated. In the lineage of the many scholars who are more fully attending to the ways in which writing centers are complicit in replicating or maintaining asymmetrical power relationships, I suggest that The Idea should be subjected to a critical critique. When examined this way, troubling underlying assumptions are revealed about the ways The Idea encourages writing centers to view writers primarily as individuals in need of continued interventions as well as the way this view is positioned as universal and neutral. While The Idea emerged from a holistic concern for writers and a desire to see writing centers as something more than "fix-it shops" (North, "Idea"; Harris), it may have only altered the target of what is to be fixed: instead of grammar, we fix writers. Rather than attending to the gifts, assets, and natural abilities of writers, The Idea encourages us to find ways to continually make them better and to address the deficits we assume must exist. I hope to challenge the normative and universal power of The Idea by calling attention to the undercurrents of deficit thinking and unexamined power relationships within it.

UNDERSTANDING DEFICIT THINKING

Deficit thinking was conceptualized by education researcher and critical race theorist Richard Valencia as a perspective "to explicate school failure among economically disadvantaged minority students" (2). Valencia argues that perceived individual student deficits such as "limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn [or] immoral behavior" (2) are overutilized as the defacto rationale for failure while the institutional role in student success and failure is often ignored or diminished. As opposed to resource pedagogies (Paris) that encourage the use of student home and community literacies within formal learning environments, deficit approaches consider

"the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome" (93).

In our rush to generate "arguments for writing centers (and writing center pedagogies) not connected to remedial students" (Denny, Nordlof, and Salem 72), we sought out concepts that provided universal appeal. The Idea helped accomplish this. After all, who wouldn't want to become a better writer through a collaborative model based on reader feedback? However, this approach fails to consider its underlying assumptions. Namely, it assumes that every student can be made better without recognizing that better is narrowly defined through the lens of white, middle-class markers that have become the basis for and are replicated by academic discourse (Gee; Grimm; Young). The Idea is treated as neutral and innocuous without questioning what is meant or implied by *better*. Better for whom, and in what way?

When we say "our job is to produce better writers, not better writing," what do the writers we work with hear? This statement connects the identity of the student who struggles in written academic discourse to "internal deficits or deficiencies" (Valencia 2) and makes clear that the cultural and class-based markers within their writing are viewed as problems in need of remedies. It is this identity link that situates The Idea as a stance primarily concerned with seeing and uncovering problems instead of discovering internal and cultural strengths: a better-intended, kinder, and gentler way of seeing people by what they lack rather than what they have.

Valencia utilizes deficit thinking as a lens that clarifies the entrenched systemic inequalities for students of color as well as the tendency to position communities of color and lower socioeconomic status as culturally deficient (Yosso). There is value in applying this critical critique toward our work in writing centers, particularly in identifying barriers to student success that are structural, or external, rather than situated internally within the student (Grimm). However, considering the deep entrenchment of "making better writers," how often are we examining structural barriers as opposed to focusing on the individual writer? Despite our best intentions and laudable efforts to incorporate more collaborative approaches, the weight of The Idea often encourages us to situate writers through a deficit perspective that asks, "What is wrong with the student?" or, "What do we need to give to the student?" rather than, "How might the learning environment, the way of teaching, the assignment, or the culture of schooling conflict with the student's forms of cultural and community knowledge?"

The Idea contains an underlying message: the writer needs to be fixed, and it is our job—as the location and provider of knowledge—to provide that remedy. The Idea situates a deficiency within an individual: an individual lacks something. Like all forms of deficit thinking, The Idea tends to reduce our imagination of education to what Paulo Freire refers to as the "banking concept" (72): that education is simply knowledge passively "deposited" into the learner's mind. It is this elimination of other possibilities of how we might approach our work that we must also confront. Even though The Idea has been consistently challenged, alternatives remain undertheorized.

MOVING BEYOND DEFICIT THINKING AND THE IDEA: ASSETS, GIFTS, AND FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Critiques of The Idea are not new. Concerns abound within the literature: it has crowded out other ways of thinking (Boquet and Lerner), it assumes a universalism in approaching individual writers (Grimm), or it essentializes writing center work through a "romantic idealization" (North, "Revisiting" 9) of collaborative learning. Yet, The Idea persists. Perhaps what is needed is not just additional critique or theorizing but, rather, discussion and examination of models that attempt to replace The Idea.

If The Idea risks emerging from a core of deficit thinking, then what does one do in response to this realization? And how might that response look when implemented? What might it mean to intentionally resist deficit thinking and attend to the ways in which the writing center master narrative has emerged from this space? What might it look like if, instead of deficits, we were motivated and directed by student assets and gifts? If we are to move beyond The Idea, we need to build models that showcase what this transformation toward a resource approach—an asset and gift orientation—might look like.

The Marian University Writing Center attempted to generate one possible model through careful attention to the ways we approach our work. Ours is not *the* way but, rather, *a* way. At the heart of our approach is the intentional development of a stance—a way of thinking and seeing—through which we orient our practices. We begin with recognition that all that we do is influenced and guided by the stance through which we approach our work. Moving beyond deeply entrenched and dominant modes of deficit thinking requires constant reflexivity (Pillow) and self-interrogation. If we hope to attend to the structural barriers to student success, we must learn to see these barriers. Therefore, our stance attends to the development of critical consciousness by situating peer

tutoring as a collaborative, humanizing, and participatory endeavor that "seek[s] to honor the multiple forms of knowledge, creativity, and solidarity that arise from marginalized experiences" (Campano et al. 6-7).

To develop this stance, training and enculturation are based upon an assemblage of frameworks that develop critical consciousness and frame collaborative learning around resource, or asset-oriented, perspectives. Within our training course, peer tutors are immersed in the theories of critical literacy (Perry) so they may learn to intentionally interrogate and expose asymmetrical power relationships. We also incorporate the concept of *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al.), an understanding that each writer we work with carries within them "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills" (133). These collaborative, resource-oriented approaches are motivated by a desire to uncover each writer's unique funds of knowledge so that we may engage in an authentic discussion of the writer's personal and cultural knowledges as well as the institution's goals, expectations, and forms of power over individual writers. Finally, our stance is augmented by deep examinations of theoretical concepts related to power, identity, privilege, and collaboration: culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings), critical race theory (Bell), critical service learning (Mitchell), and the gift inquiry of desire-based frameworks (Tuck).

What does this stance look like when put into practice? When one of our peer tutors sits down with a writer, the main objective is relational and collaborative. We attempt to discover writers' various cultural, family, and community forms of knowledge (their funds of knowledge) so we may connect these funds to the task at hand. Additionally, we strive to use each interaction as an opportunity to model our stance and help develop the writer's critical consciousness.

From the writer's perspective, this process may present itself at first as typical conversation starters ("How are you?" "What brings you into the center today?"), but as we linger more deliberately using an appreciative inquiry approach (Chilisa) rather than shifting attention toward the text, the conversation often takes on a sense of realness and relevance. We are more attentive to the ways institutions tend to overlook the legitimacy of various cultural and individual forms of knowledge and work to center conversations on these marginalized perspectives. Before looking over a draft together, peer tutors will ask questions such as,

> "Which activities would you rather be doing right now? Why?"

"What would you rather be writing about?"

"What frustrates you about this assignment? Tell me more."

"Tell me about a time when writing or reading made you feel happy."

"Has reading or writing been used to belittle or embarrass you?"

"What do you wish your professor knew about you?"

We use this collaborative space to openly explore the strengths, assets, and frustrations of the writer. We do this to activate the writer's background knowledge and experience so that these funds of knowledge become the basis for the rhetorical inquiry at hand. We refer to the enactment and embodiment of this stance as the *critical collaborative writing process* (Latta and Wilder; see fig. 1), a recursive endeavor of mutual appreciation and collaborative knowledge generation.

This model reminds us to remain attentive and appreciative of the writer and writer's knowledge as well as the text. Rather than assuming what constitutes making writers better, we apply our stance and the critical collaborative process to listen to how writers might define "better" and then implement a variety of directive and non-directive approaches to work toward that mutually determined goal. The critical collaborative writing process attempts to connect ideas of improvement to specific situations, cultural contexts, and an informed decision-making process of the writer.

FIGURE 1. Critical Collaborative Writing Process (Latta, Mark and Aaron Wilder.

Critical Collaborative Writing Process. Marian University, Aug. 2017, www.marian.
edu/docs/default-source/about-marian-documents/educational-resources/writing-
process-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=0. Accessed 19 February 2019.)

Ours is just one example of what might come after The Idea. Certainly, there are others. I recognize that the Idea builds upon and interacts with many existing practices commonly adopted within many writing centers. While there is more that can be said about the development and enactment of our stance, I hope this brief examination shines a light on its features of intentionally interrogating deficit thinking, focusing on reflexivity and appreciation, and embodying a stance informed by critical theory and humanizing inquiry. By building upon frameworks that accentuate resources, gifts, and strengths of writers, the Marian University Writing Center attempts to confront its history with deficit thinking. We recognize that we cannot fix anyone. Instead, we try to listen and share in the labor of humanizing collaboration.

Resource and gift-oriented approaches to the collaborative support of student writing are not new, but their operationalization seems under-represented within writing center literature. Perhaps it is time for us to change that and build models of practice that more intentionally move beyond The Idea as they demonstrate asset-based approaches such as those found within *The Everyday Writing Center* (Geller et al.) and Grutsch McKinney's *Peripheral Visions.* To build these models, we must first ask ourselves: is the stance through which we approach our work one that prefers to see deficits or one that prefers to recognize strengths? Once we begin to ask this question, perhaps then we may more effectively generate new practices that challenge deficit-based thinking.

❖   ❖   ❖   ❖   ❖

WORKS CITED

Bell, Derrick. *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism.* Basic Books, 1992.

Boquet, Elizabeth, and Neal Lerner. "Reconsiderations: After 'The Idea of a Writing Center'." *College English,* vol. 71, no. 2, 2008, pp. 170–89.

Campano, Gerald, et al. *Partnering with Immigrant Communities: Action Through Literacy*. Teachers College P, 2016.

Chilisa, Bagele. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Sage, 2012.

Denny, Harry, John Nordlof, and Lori Salem. "'Tell Me Exactly What It Was That I Was Doing That Was Bad': Understanding the Needs and Expectations of Working-Class Students in Writing Centers." *The Writing Center Journal,* vol. 37, no. 1, 2018, pp. 67–98.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 1970.

Gee, James Paul. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. 3rd ed.,

Routledge, 2008.

Geller, Anne Ellen, et al. *The Everyday Writing Center*. Utah State UP, 2007.

Grimm, Nancy. "Retheorizing Writing Center Work to Transform a System of Advantage Based on Race." *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Change*, edited by Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan, UP of Colorado, 2011, pp. 75-100.

Grutsch McKinney, Jackie. *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*. Utah State UP, 2013.

Harris, Muriel. "SLATE (Support for Learning and Teaching English) Statement: The Concept of a Writing Center." International Writing Centers Association, 1998, writingcenters.org/writing-center-concept-by-muriel-harris. Accessed 13 Feb. 2019.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: A.k.a. the Remix." *Harvard Educational Review,* vol. 84, no.1, 2014, pp. 74–84.

Mattison, Mike. "Heading East, Leaving North." *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship,* vol. 42, no. 3–4, 2017, pp. 2–6.

Mitchell, Tania. "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* Spring, 2008, pp. 50-65.

Moll, Luis, et al. "Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms." *Theory into Practice,* vol. 31, no. 2, 1992, pp. 132–41.

North, Stephen. "The Idea of Writing Center." *College English,* vol. 46, no. 5, 1984, pp. 433–46.

North, Stephen. "Revisiting the Idea of a Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal,* vol. 15, no. 1, 1994, pp. 7–19.

Paris, Django. "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice." *Educational Researcher,* vol. 41, no. 3, 2012, pp. 93–97.

Perry, Kristen. "What Is Literacy? A Critical Overview of Sociocultural Perspectives." *Journal of Language & Literacy Education,* vol. 8, no. 1, 2012, pp. 50–71.

Pillow, Wanda S. "Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2003, pp. 175–96, doi:10.1080 /0951839032000060635.

Taylor, Carol, and Christina Hughes, editors. *Posthuman Research Practices in Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Tuck, Eve. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Education Review,* vol. 79, no. 3, 2009, pp. 409-28.

Valencia, Richard. "Conceptualizing the Notion of Deficit Thinking." *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*, edited by Richard Valencia, Routledge, 1997, pp. 1–12.

Yosso, Tara J. "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth." *Race Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2005, pp. 69–91.

Young, Vershawn Ashanti. "Should Writers Use They Own English?" *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies,* vol. 12, no. 1, 2010, pp.110–18.

Tutors' Column: "Sexism, Conflict, and Cultural Differences: What One Terrible Session Taught Me about the Assumptions I Bring to Tutoring"

Amanda McDowell
Oregon State University

I am usually adept at avoiding conflict at the writing center. I hedge my speech with phrases like, "To play the Devil's advocate..." and "Have you considered..." when I flatly disagree with a writer. When debates among staff about politics, social issues, religion, or, heaven forbid, grammar, reach a pitch I am uncomfortable with, I fade out. Above all, I speak cautiously, weighing the impact of my ideas, the connotations of my words, and the reactions of my audience. And yet, conflict still becomes necessary, or even inevitable, at times. The following experience, which pitted my understanding of gender against that of a writer, remains one of the most bewildering yet instructive interactions I've had in nearly four years of tutoring. It taught me broadly about a conflict's tendency to reveal the assumptions we make, and more specifically, about my own tendency to assume that other women have experienced life as I have.

In Spring 2015, I clashed with an international student who attempted to build a paper on the stereotype that women are inferior in math and science. Her primary argument, that the U.S. could better serve students by increasing its gender-segregated educational options, was legitimate and compelling. However, her leading sub-claim—that girls in coed schools become discouraged because they compare their achievements to those of boys, who are supposed to have inherently greater capacities for math and science—was both unsubstantiated and blatantly sexist.

As both a woman and a former high school math tutor, I felt personally degraded by her stereotyping. However, I was more concerned about the wider consequences of her statement. In their article "Theory in/to Practice: Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center," Mandy Suhr-Sytsma and Shan-Estelle Brown argue that the use of stereotypes to support a claim "can reflect as well as support oppressive systems" (13, 16). In other words, a student's language, though limited in its circulation,

can both indicate and reproduce inequality if allowed to go unchallenged. This student's paper both proved the presence of a patriarchal system and supported that system by promoting a false image that restricts women's educational and career opportunities. According to researchers Carolin Schuster and Sarah E. Martiny, stereotyping—which can deter women from entering traditionally male arenas such as math- and science-based classes and careers— contributes to the gender gap in STEM fields (40).

The stakes of the session, therefore, were unusually high, meaning that deciding how to approach the student was unusually important. I could ignore her stereotype use, forestalling conflict but also making myself complicit in injustice, or I could respectfully challenge her stereotype use, risking an angry reaction. I deliberated for only a moment before choosing the latter of the two options. Drawing attention to the inequality of women, I decided, was more important than avoiding a potential argument. Unfortunately, the conversation that followed didn't go as smoothly as I had hoped it would; a half-hour of discussing the damaging effects of stereotyping, the expectations of her American target audience, and the lack of scholarly evidence for her belief about women, left us both on the verge of tears. By the time we parted, we had neither managed to find common ground nor created a more convincing paper. In other words, the session seemed to be, in all ways, a failure. Even discussions with a more senior staff member and several fellow tutors couldn't explain why, despite using every strategy I knew for remaining non-combative, I had caused more harm than good.

After two years of intermittent reflection, I am finally beginning to understand what happened. My thinking was sparked by reading Ilona Leki's *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*, which considers how, to American educators, ELL students' uninterrogated assumptions seem particularly obvious and egregious only because they are different than the uninterrogated assumptions that the educators themselves make (66). I started examining the encounter for evidence of assumptions I had missed and, to my surprise, found that I was just as guilty as the student was of harboring preconceived ideas, though mine were less obvious in a liberal university context. In the process of challenging her assumption about women, I had unintentionally called on one of my own, which I learned from the subculture in which I was raised. I had assumed that, as a woman, she would share my frustration with gender-based discrimination and, therefore, my empathy for other women who experienced it. However, that incorrect assumption created confusion and frustration, instead of commonality.

My own experience of patriarchy had taught me to see every woman as an ally against sexism. I grew up in a subculture which enforced a strict, if somewhat nebulous, ideal of femininity. Being properly feminine meant wearing my hair long as well as picking out clothing, shoes, nail polish, and makeup that were "modest." (Modesty was a hazy idea that some days meant avoiding the color red, which was associated with prostitutes, and other days meant wearing shoes with low heels to avoid attracting male attention.) Being feminine also meant learning to "respect" my father (in other words, never questioning his actions, no matter how illogical, unjust, or destructive they were). Thus, I faced obstacles that I had neither the permission nor the language to publicly express, and by the time I was a teenager, I had learned to rely on a network of female support that so many women are familiar with. I learned that, by virtue of a shared experience of sexism, nearly every woman is a member of that network, and so, is bound to provide solidarity and support, especially in response to gender-based discrimination.

Because that student was a woman from a similarly patriarchal system, I assumed she was part of that network, obligated to sympathize with experiences of sexism. When she failed to respond to the argument that stereotyping hurts women, I was confused. She had broken a covenant, it seemed, betraying both me and women in general. I now understand, however, that she may have never agreed to that covenant. Being from a different country, she may not have been familiar with the network I was accustomed to, let alone its expectations for solidarity. In fact, I shouldn't have assumed she was familiar with any of those ideas, and by doing so, I made an already difficult session considerably more difficult.

Had I not botched that encounter, it might have taken me years (dare I say decades?) to realize that I assumed sharing an identity label meant sharing experiences. And making that assumption is dangerous because it fails to recognize meaningful differences, including nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, and so forth. In the tutoring situation, I failed to recognize that spending our lives in different countries with different political, economic, social, and religious structures might have meant that the student and I experienced femininity differently. This is an insensitive mistake that I don't plan to make with other people. In future conversations, I will tread more deliberately, asking more questions about how the student and her culture view womanhood before I conclude that our lives have been similar. If she and I don't share a definition of womanhood, I will also be careful to rely on tutoring strategies that are less bound to my culture. For example, rather than appealing to shared experience, I may appeal

to ethos by probing for non-experiential evidence of her assertion, by directing her to literature that discusses gender as a construct, or by introducing her to accounts of successful women in STEM. Hopefully that will seem less presumptuous than my typical appeal to pathos.

To learn this lesson, though, I needed the conflict that session provided. It was the conflict that illuminated my "default," allowing me to interact intentionally, and hopefully, with greater empathy and flexibility in the future. That is not to say, however, that I've learned to like conflict, but rather that I respect it more than I once did, understanding that, while it's uncomfortable, it can also provide opportunities for growth.

◆　◆　◆　◆　◆

WORKS CITED

Leki, Ilona. *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*. Boynton/Cook, 1992.

Schuster, Carolin, and Sarah E. Martiny. "Not Feeling Good in STEM: Effects of Stereotype Activation and Anticipated Affect on Women's Career Aspirations." *Sex Roles*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2017, pp. 40–55.

Suhr-Sytsma, Mandy, and Shan-Estelle Brown. "Theory in/to Practice: Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center." *The Writing Center Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2011, pp. 13–49.

RESOURCES FOR WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

Are you interested in writing for publication or already drafting an essay? If so, read on:

The *WLN* Associate Editors, Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julie Prebel, have been developing webinars that offer useful information and advice for authors writing for publication in *WLN*. Previous webinars are available on the WLN website: (wlnjournal. org/resources.php):

- *"Introduction to Publishing in* WLN*"*
- *"WCA as Hero: A Scholar's Journey to Publication"*
- *"Finding Ideas For Scholarship in Everyday Writing Center Work"*

The newest webinar held on Oct. 25, 2019, for tutors interested in writing essays for the *WLN*'s Tutors' Column, will soon be uploaded to this site.

In addition, a 2019 book from Utah State UP promises useful reading for authors: *Explanation Points: Publishing in Rhetoric and Composition*, edited by John R. Gallagher and Danielle Nicole DeVoss. (paperback, $39.95). The book is a compendium of 77 short essays ordered into sections on getting started, getting feedback, identifying audiences and finding presses, navigating reviewers, and moving on.

WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR: FACULTY OR STAFF

Should a writing center director's job be a staff position or a faculty one? **WHY?** Recently, someone needed a short, convincing answer for their Dean who is developing a job description for a new director. If you have a short response (maybe 100-150 words, assuming the Dean has limited time), please send it to me: harrism@purdue.edu. The Dean would love numbers or some sort of data, but is that possible? I'll include some useful answers in a future issue of *WLN*.

Conference Announcements

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION
March 5-7, 2020
Indianapolis, IN
Marion University
"Critical Literacies, Humanizing Connections"

Proposal deadline: Dec. 15, 2019. Conference chair: Mark Latta: mlatta@marion.edu; conference website: www.marian.edu/ecwca2020

EUROPEAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION
July 8-11, 2020
Graz, Austria
Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz
"Writing Centers as Spaces of Empowerment"

Conference Chair: Doris Pany: schreibzentrum@uni-graz.at; conference website: europeanwritingcenters.eu/conference.html.

MID-ATLANTIC WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION
March 6-7, 2020
Towson, MD
Towson University
"Decolonizing Writing Center Practice: A New Vision for a New Decade"

Conference Chairs: Carmen Meza (cmeza@towson.edu) and Mairin Barney; conference website: mawca.org/2020-conference. Proposal deadline: Dec. 16, 2019

MIDWEST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION
March 12-14, 2020
Cedar Rapids, IA
"Creating Common Ground: Crosstalk and Community in the Writing Center"
Keynote: Carol Severino

For further information, contact Ben Thiel: bthiel@mtmercy.edu; website: midwestwritingcenters.org/conference/2020/.

SOUTH CENTRAL CENTERS ASSOCIATION
March 12-14, 2020
Stillwater, OK
Oklahoma State University
"Mindfulness of Difference and the Need for Transformative Listening in Writing Center Work"
Keynote: Romeo Garcia

Deadline for proposals: Dec. 6, 2019. Conference chair: Anna Sicari: anna.sicari@okstate.edu; conference website: scwca.net.

GET INVOLVED WITH *WLN*

Interested in serving as a reviewer? Contact Karen Gabrielle Johnson (KGJohnson@ship.edu), Ted Roggenbuck (troggenb@bloomu.edu), and Lee Ann Glowzenski (laglowzenski@gmail.com).

Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the Blog (photos welcomed)? Contact Anna Sophia Habib (ahabib@gmu.edu).

Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice? Contact Muriel Harris (harrism@purdue.edu).

Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to *WLN*? Check the guidelines on the website: (wlnjournal.org/submit.php).

WLN MENTORS NEEDED

The *WLN* mentor match program is intended to bring writers working on articles for *WLN* together with experienced mentors who know a thing or two about writing center work and publishing. Mentors give feedback to writers submitting to *WLN* to help them develop articles for publication. Mentors actively engage in goal-setting with the mentee. Mentors also work with writers who may be interested in writing but aren't sure what to write about or where to begin. In other words, a *WLN* mentor does much the same work as tutors in a writing center. If you would like to be a *WLN* mentor, please fill out the online application form at: bit.ly/WLNMentorApp. E-mail questions to Chris LeCluyse at: clecluyse@westminstercollege.edu.

Conference Calendar

November 2, 2019: Michigan Writing Centers Association, in Mount Pleasant, MI
Contact: Daniel Lawson: lawso3d@cmich.edu; conference website: www.miwca.org/2019conference.

February 20-22, 2020: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Birmingham, AL
Contact: Jaclyn Wells: wellsj@uab.edu; conference website: southeasternwritingcenter.wildapricot. org/2020swcacfp.

March 5-7, 2020: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Indianapolis, IN
Contact: Mark Latta: mlatta@marian.edu; conference website: marian.edu/ecwcca2020.

March 6-7, 2020: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Towson, MD
Contact: Carmen Meza: cmeza@towson.edu; conference website: mawca.org/2020-conference.

March 12-14, 2020: Midwest Writing Center Association, in Cedar Rapids, IA
Contact: Ben Thiel: bthiel@mtmercy.edu and Kristin Risley: risleyk@uwstout.edu; conference website: midwestwritingcenters.org/conference/2020/.

March 12-14, 2020: South Central Writing Center Association, in Stillwater, OK
Contact: Anna Sicari: anna.sicari@okstate.edu; conference website: scwca.net.

March 13-14, 2020: Secondary School Writing Centers Association, in Arlington, VA
Contact: sswca.board@gmail.com; conference website: sswca.org/sswca-conference/call-for-proposals/.

July 8-11, 2020: European Writing Centers Association, in Graz, Austria
Contact: Doris Pany: schreibzentrum@uni-graz.at; conference website: europeanwritingcenters.eu/conference.html.

WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

WLN

A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC.

52 Riley Road #380
Celebration, FL 34747

f wlnjournal

b WLNjournal