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Twenty-first Century Writing Center Staff Education: Teaching and Learning towards Inclusive and Productive Everyday Practice
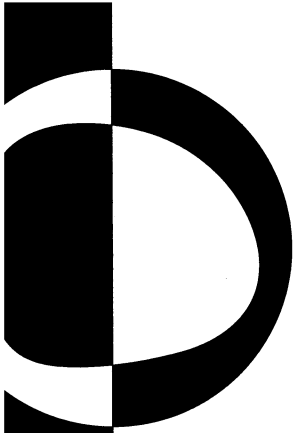
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Abstract

This study takes up questions of how to best orient staff to issues of difference, especially the question: How do writing center educators facilitate tutors' development of inclusive multi/trans–cultural, –lingual, and –literacy perspectives and practices? Results indicate that developing deliberate approaches allows us to see more clearly the possibilities for a cohesive, transformative staff education pedagogy. Some approaches supporting the transformative ethos can be characterized as follows: discussion (as a staff; in small groups; one–with–one); writing on private staff blog; reading scholarship (as a group and independently); developing resources (as a staff; in small groups; independently).

> One cannot erase long-held attitudes and deeply entrenched biases and stereotypes with the stroke of a pen—you know, go henceforth and sin linguistically no more.
> — Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin' that Talk*

In 2009, Nancy Grimm imagined the 21st-century writing center consciously (re)framed in three crucial ways: First, an orientation to English as English*es* would focus our attention on the reality *and* practical value of linguistic diversity in our centers; second, attunement to increasingly diverse discourses and modes of representation would better position us to support literacy development relevant to our times; and third, seeing students as "designing" participants in their social futures (The New London Group) would shift our ways of framing what is possible when we talk with students about how they shape their writing and learning. While Grimm argued for the importance of identifying and operating within "conscious frameworks" to engage in more effective but also socially just literacy teaching and learning, I want to slightly recast her call for new frameworks as a call for a new ethos. Ethos, it seems to me, more aptly describes and includes the transformative spirit, culture, and pedagogy that she described and I want to expand on. An underlying belief of this transformative ethos for literacy education in writing centers is that the diverse semiotic resources each of us brings to the lives we lead, to the work we try to accomplish daily, are fundamentally valuable and practically useful. A key manifestation of this belief, then, is that tutors support students—especially those who have been convinced to see their unique resources as deficient—in a critical, not passive, process of uncovering and drawing on those resources to meet in their own ways the many external demands placed on them at school, work, and in their communities. To understand and cultivate such an ethos we can begin by perceiving our work in the context of Englishes, Grimm's first recommendation, as Englishes are not only the primary means of communication in U.S. writing center work but often the focus of our attention in consultations with student writers as well. But as Geneva Smitherman's warning points out, our greatest and most exciting challenge is not only to dislodge long-held assumptions to recognize and affirm the many Englishes we are amidst, but also in order to make a serious commitment to learning how we can realize this new perspective in our practice, how we can nurture an environment where such transformative ideals can thrive and evolve.

Scholars in writing center studies, composition studies, and TESOL, among other fields, provide compelling theoretical justifications for a transformative ethos in literacy education, and we can draw

substantially from this work to imagine far more inclusive and effective writing center missions and practices. But with few illustrations of how a transformative ethos is experienced and cultivated through our most likely conduit for change—staff education—disrupting calcified ideas and enacting a transformative ethos remains a mysterious project for many. Fundamental to forwarding a transformative ethos, then, is this question: What does staff education look like in a 21st-century writing center? Specifically, how do writing center educators facilitate tutors' development of inclusive multi/trans-cultural, -lingual, and -literacy perspectives and practices?

Writing center staff education must be a primary focus of efforts to affirm in our practice the reality and value of linguistic diversity in our centers. In addition to powerful rhetorical arguments about linguistic, cultural, and epistemic justice, our scholarship needs to include powerful, rich illustrations of how we engage with our staffs in theoretically rich, principled ways of learning how to embody this agenda. Staples of staff education like role playing and seminar-like discussions of scholarship do have a place in 21st-century multi/trans-cultural, -lingual, and -literacy writing centers, but these approaches must be conceived carefully as part of larger plans that include various opportunities for sustained, interactive inquiry into complex and often charged topics. Twenty-first-century writing center staff education must unfold such that all involved have dynamic and varied opportunities to unpack assumptions, engage with new perspectives, and imagine and perform praxis.

In this article, I discuss shifting orientations to linguistic diversity that provide foundation for a transformative ethos in 21st-century writing centers and then catalogue staff education practices illustrative of this ethos, as discussed in writing center scholarship since 2000. To add to a small but hopefully growing body of descriptive scholarship exemplifying transformative writing center work, I describe the emergent pedagogy of staff education at a public liberal arts college in Bronx, NY, and illustrate how one approach, in particular—guided invitations to reflect through our staff blog—provided an opportunity well-suited to our 21st-century project. Excerpts from two tutors' blog posts demonstrate the power of what Grimm (1999) aptly called "relentless reflection" during our first semester of staff education focused on consciously re-framing linguistic diversity as a resource in our everyday practice. As Gail Y. Okawa, Thomas Fox, Lucy J. Y. Chang, Shana R. Windsor, Frank Bella Chavez, Jr., & LaGuan Hayes (2010/1991) acknowledged in "Multi-Cultural Voices: Peer Tutoring and Critical Reflection in the Writing Center," multiple voices "illustrate in a way

that the single voice of a writing center director [or coordinator] could not, the importance of critical reflection in a tutor training program" (p. 41). Like the four tutor authors of the Okawa, Fox, Chang, Windsor, Chavez, & Hayes article, the writing of two tutors in my writing center, Janice and Sandy, brings life to my discussion of reflection-rich staff education pedagogy at our institution.

A Transformative Ethos for 21st-Century Writing Centers

I spent many years looking around the center where I work, particularly at our staff, admiring obvious external markers of diversity—skin color, gender signification, accent and language use—and drawing satisfaction from this picture. Occasionally, past experiences would push me to think, if only briefly and inchoately, how pictures of inclusivity can mask experiences of exclusivity. One memory from a graduate class now ten years back that nagged at me: My peers and I had arrived to talk about Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin' that Talk*, varieties of English, and the legacy of disrespect for Black English. The professor described his own affinity for Black English, a language he grew up with, and a few of us were gripped by his and Smitherman's ideas. My two African American peers were not; they argued with strained emotion that Black English is ignorant and should not be welcomed in academic settings—one, using the very vernacular she opposed. I remember watching uncomfortably as my professor grew increasingly frustrated; I remember being surprised and offended by my peers but wondering what right I had.

Later in my graduate career, I read more that helped me see beneath the veneer of diversity and the costs of ignoring what often lies beneath for our growing numbers of multilingual students (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999, p. 3; Ferris, 2009) and many multidialectal students often mischaracterized as English monolinguals (Matsuda, 2006)[1]. My center began to look less like a model of "productive diversity" (Barron & Grimm, 2002, p. 60) as I studied world Englishes and standard language ideology and understood these concepts in more concrete ways. While I had heard—and I thought, internalized—earlier calls for liberatory writing center work (Cooper, 1994; Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999), I now recognized my own complicity in perpetuating well-intentioned but simplistic, hegemonic notions of helping (Grimm, 1999).

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1   I use the familiar terms multilingual and multidialectal without implying that languages are discrete and non-porous (Horner, Necamp, & Donahue, 2011; Canagarajah, 2013).

Despite our inclusive, affirming ideals, the tutors and I were nevertheless, in subtle but serious ways, on the front lines of helping to "manage" (Grimm, 1999, p. xii) the linguistic and cultural differences of our diverse student population. This impulse to manage differences—that is, to "help" students compartmentalize, at best, and erase, at worst, their linguistic and cultural identities, regardless of such a request—is based on several flawed premises, three of which I will take up briefly here. The first is that linguistic and cultural diversity is seen as *other* and not the norm; second is that there is one fixed norm or standard form of English students need to master in order to succeed; and third—perhaps most important for writing center work—is the misconception that using marginalized linguistic and discourse practices inhibits a person's development of facility with more dominant practices as well as their ability to influence them. Advancing a transformative ethos for writing centers requires rejecting these premises that justify managing difference.

Regarding the first flawed premise, Paul Kei Matsuda (2006) is well-documented for identifying the pervasive "myth of linguistic homogeneity" and the resulting misguided practices of "containment" by our close counterparts in U.S. college composition. As a form of "managing difference," containment allows writing programs to *deal with the problem* of teaching multilingual learners in ostensibly homogenous composition classes by way of placement practices, special sections of composition, and writing center referrals (pp. 641–42). In writing centers, many are inclined—and taught—to help students respond to these containment practices and the constant pressure from faculty, among others, to present more "mainstream" writing—albeit a nebulous, moving target (Olson, 2013, p. 2). But while many of us in U.S. composition classrooms and writing centers continue to see multilingual students' differences as something other than the norm, a growing contingent argues that linguistic and cultural diversity is the norm (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011; Lippi-Green, 2011). In addition to our significant immigrant population, technology has connected previously separated people and diversified the language practices of people engaged in communicative acts across geographic and linguistic borders (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 582; Canagarajah, 2013, p. 2). And, as Rosina Lippi-Green (2011) thoroughly and meticulously shows, there has and continues to be intense language variation among U.S. English speakers (p. 38). Viewing diversity or difference this way is a fundamental and necessary shift in perspective regarding the writing and writers we see.

From a diversity-as-norm perspective, Min-Zhan Lu & Bruce Horner (2013) argue that any utterance is situated uniquely in time and space, and thus difference is "itself the norm of language use" (p. 584); with this, sociolinguists overwhelmingly agree (Lippi-Green). Thus, in opposition to the second flawed premise: There is no single norm or standard form of English that students need to master in order to succeed. Writing center and composition scholars increasingly contest the idea of a homogenous "standard" English, but its legacy remains the widespread stifling of imagination about the potential and need to highlight, invite, and teach hybrid language and discourse. Successful examples from academics like A. Suresh Canagarajah (2006), Donald McCrary (2005), and Smitherman (2000), literary figures like Junot Diaz, and political figures like President Barack Obama, have helped stretch the public imagination. And language flexibility is increasingly seen not just as an advantage in many work environments but a necessity where, for example, successful outreach to diverse populations depends on one's ability to draw on diverse language resources to communicate effectively. Still, deeply-seeded language ideology restricts much of our rhetoric and practice.

In writing centers, as in other well-meaning environments, we have long perpetuated overly simplistic ideas about language: Students can use their home language there but not here; and other languages are "great," but standard academic English is unquestionably the one students need. And, while we may express genuinely how we enjoy working with and learning from multilingual writers, when we continue to use language like "dealing with ESLs,"[2] we reveal a fundamental deficit-oriented bias towards students who do not use privileged varieties of English or certain rhetorical moves valued in U.S. academic contexts.

The deficit perspective seeds the third flawed premise: Using marginalized linguistic and discourse practices inhibits the development of facility with and influence over dominant ones. Because we work with individuals, writing center tutors are in a prime position to raise each student's awareness about how they can apply their existing knowledge and practices to the many situations and tasks they face in college. To deny students opportunities to use what they already know from previous and everyday experiences—including linguistic ones—in

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2   This is a phrase I have heard many times where I work, but it is also seen in our scholarship, most strikingly, in NCTE's *Students Right to Their Own Language* and in Tony Silva's 1997 essay, "On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers," reprinted in Matsuda, Cox, Jordan, & Ortmeier-Hooper's 2006 *Second-Language Writing in the Composition Classroom*.

the process of learning would be a grave mistake. While we may need to teach students the meta-awareness necessary to identify in others' writing—and employ in their own—a diverse array of linguistic and discourse features (Canagarajah, 2011), students *can* develop the skill to successfully integrate their unique language practices into products they intend to present to audiences in academic and professional settings. As Vershawn Young (2009) argues, when writers "color their writing with what they bring from home," when they "fuse" language choices generally characterized as standard English "with native speech habits," they help "enlarge our national vocabulary [and] multiply the range of available rhetorical styles" (pp. 64–65). Beyond the production of text, others point to the importance of a diversity-as-resource perspective for promoting and facilitating cognitive fluency and increasing engagement (Canagarajah, 2002; Bean, Eddy, Grego, Irvine, Kurtz, Matsuda, Cucchiara, Elbow, Haswell, Kennedy, & Lehner, 2003; Milson-Whyte, 2013). For example, Peter Elbow recounts such an experience with a Spanish-speaking student who needed first to think freely in Spanish to develop the rich content she aimed to convey in English (Bean, Eddy, Grego, Irvine, Kurtz, Matsuda, Cucchiara, Elbow, Haswell, Kennedy, & Lehner, 2003, p. 35). Harry Denny (2010) highlights the many languages one can hear from sessions in his center, and I can attest as well to many examples where tutors in our center have drawn on Caribbean Englishes, Korean, and Spanish, to name a few, to connect more with students, to engage in more meaningful and productive conversation.

In writing center scholarship, Nancy Effinger Wilson (2012) and Bobbi Olson (2013) elucidate productive stances for writing centers enacting diversity-as-norm and diversity-as-resource perspectives. Olson contests the management of differences, arguing that writing centers may have been too focused on institutional and professorial expectations at the expense of writers' development as individual, agentive selves, and urges us to act on our critical responsibility to help shift policies, structures, and practices that marginalize and displace students (p. 2). Drawing on Canagarajah's (2010) presentation of the rhetorical shift from a mono- to multi-lingual orientation, Olson adds to writing center vernacular new ways of understanding what is possible when we sit down with writers to draw on their own communicative strategies and discourses as they explore, learn, and create new ones.

For Wilson (2012), a monolingual to multilingual paradigm shift is possible if we imagine our centers like "local market[s] (a.k.a. *bodega, colmado, tiendita*)—able to adjust quickly and deftly to local needs" (p. 1). Such a model disrupts standard English ideology (Greenfield, 2011; Lippi-Green, 2011; Wetzl, 2011) and encourages openness to ever-shift-

ing, constructed linguistic and cultural realities. After all, she points out, "The world today resembles the environment of a panethnic and heteroglossic bodega far more than a monolingual and monocultural big box store" (Wilson, 2012, p. 2). While the bodega metaphor may be more apt in culturally diverse urban environments, Wilson's point is that in a bodega, representations of diverse cultures are simultaneously available and sought after according to the needs and desires of agentive consumers. Though diversity alone does not guarantee inclusive community life, Wilson argues that the socialization among a diverse population occurring every day in a writing center makes our spaces an "ideal ecology" for a transformative agenda (p. 2).

With any grand idea, only principled, sustained work can ensure its realization. Even in diverse writing center ecologies like my own in Bronx, NY, understanding and practicing diversity-as-norm and -resource perspectives requires cultivation, and our staff education must address this need. Aligning ideals, especially complex and highly contested ones, with everyday practice takes many experiences, persistent reflection, and lots of time. Writing tutors may be optimally positioned to support transformative literacy teaching and learning, but those of us directing and coordinating writing center work have a responsibility to help them prepare for the challenge. While we may be immersed in scholarship and conversation, our challenge is to figure out abbreviated but meaningful ways to engage with big ideas alongside tutors. And, as most of us facilitate staff education in periodic meetings throughout the semester, we have to stay mindful of the magnitude of this project and the challenge of sharing limited time with our tutors.

Staff Education towards a Transformative Ethos

As 21st-century writing center scholars tease out the political implications of systemic stances towards linguistic, racial, ethnic, gender, and class diversity, even those of us who perceive ourselves to be teaching and learning in highly productive, highly diverse settings are seeing a need to pay more attention. I regularly feel at sea with the big, difficult questions raised around the ideologically-charged work of literacy teaching and tutoring—for instance, when I read Laura Greenfield & Karen Rowan's 2011 collection, *Writing Centers and the New Racism*. There, I see my own lingering assumptions represented in critiques of societal and institutional monolingual, monocultural, racist hegemonic structures and practices. I read these texts as a lifelong student of this conversation and unpack my ideas to the best of my abilities with friends and colleagues I trust. I find this to be very hard work.

Teaching and learning with our tutors about hegemonic structures and practices is even more difficult. Logistically, we are challenged to pursue this complex work through weekly or bi-weekly one- or two-hour meetings with ever-changing tutoring staffs. More fundamentally, as Rasha Diab, Thomas Ferrel, Beth Godbee, & Neil Simpkins (2012) urge us to see, anti-oppression work of any kind must be ongoing and driven by humility since *many* of us are striving to "mak[e] commitments actionable, even as our attempts recycle the same assumptions that leave us feeling stuck in the workings of ideology and whiteness" (p. 7). To even scratch the surface of this truth, we have to carefully create and support spaces for engagement as our staffs bring to the table wide-ranging experiences, values, home lives, and professional goals that will affect how individuals react to transformative efforts. As Muriel Harris (2006) rightly points out about teaching new tutors abstract notions like flexibility and engaging students as active learners, "strategic knowledge cannot be easily 'taught' merely by explaining or describing it" (p. 303), as knowledge like this is particularly "resistant to being internalized" (p. 304). If teaching tutors about setting and modifying session agendas is difficult, teaching them that "Standard English" is a myth or learning together about how we are complicit in institutionalized forms of discrimination is downright daunting.

No other area of our work is more important than the learning we do with our staffs, specifically the staff education we design, experience, and reflect on. Our best chance to see a transformative ethos embodied in our everyday practice is to facilitate opportunities for staff learning that are in sync with the difficult content of this work. But while our scholarship offers much to inform a transformative vision for literacy education, our ability to realize such a vision requires shared, sustained discussion and illustration of how staff learning fosters transformative stances towards linguistic and cultural diversity. We need to see how centers undertake staff education work that resists simplification by focusing on "scripted how-to approaches" (Bokser, 2005, p. 44) and respects the complexity of shared inquiry into questions that defy singular answers. In the next section, I catalogue the small but important body of scholarship on writing center staff education that illustrates efforts to enact transformative praxis. Because tutor education embedded in writing center staff education differs from tutor education in a semester-long course in terms of affordances of time and structure and sense of community, I only draw on discussions of classroom tutor education that exhibit a transformative ethos and have clear applications for staff education.

Collected Illustrations. In recent years, readers of *The Writing Center Journal* (*WCJ*) gained access to rich descriptions and discussions of staff and classroom tutor education through "Theory In/To Practice" articles. Sarah Nakamaru's (2010) discussion of staff education at her linguistically and culturally diverse urban institution offers a model of collaborative, research-driven pedagogy. She highlights the importance of prioritizing inquiry into the identities of student writers in a specific writing center context. Drawing from her own dissertation research into multilingual writers at the same site, Nakamaru guided tutors through staff education that engaged them in elements of qualitative case study research. She and the tutors studied profiles of two student participants in her study and discussed how the students' experiences might affect their strengths and needs as writers; then they examined the students' writing samples and discussed implications for practice. This approach allowed Nakamaru to address with tutors important concepts in TESOL through contextually relevant examples and to support tutors as they developed their abilities to make informed decisions during sessions.

Lynne Ronesi (2009) also situates tutor education in terms of learner identities at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Despite the challenge of developing a course based on U.S.-centered peer tutoring literature for a multilingual student body working in an English-medium context, Ronesi was intent on helping tutors develop "a body of local understanding that would serve [their] purposes" (p. 79). Thus tutors began her course by examining their own multilingual, multicultural identities as well as texts by multilingual, multicultural authors about the English language and about writing (p. 80). From this work, the tutors developed vocabulary and conceptual knowledge to be explored further and contextualized in the hands-on segment of the course where students engaged in activities such as session observations. Ronesi's approaches prepared students early on to situate their developing knowledge in a common vernacular that affirms multilingual, multicultural diversity.

While it appeared before *WCJ*'s "Theory In/To Practice," Julie Bokser's (2005) "Pedagogies of Belonging" offered a discussion of theory in/to practice in the context of classroom tutor education. Bokser's focus is on her struggle to educate tutors about students' complex processes of belonging (p. 43), about finding one's own place and "multiple commitments" (p. 46) in an academic culture. As this is particularly complex for students whose home cultures and languages are quite unlike what they encounter in college or university settings, Bokser contends that tutors must know how to support students' navigation of their own processes of belonging (p. 44). Like Grimm (1999), Bokser believes

conceptual, theoretical knowledge is more useful to tutors and students than "scripted how-to approaches" (p. 44). Thus, she engaged tutors in reflective writing and resource development in the form of presentations to the succeeding generation of tutors.

Most important, Bokser chronicles her realization that students in her course could wrestle with divergent views and be curious during class discussions. However, in their presentations to new tutors, they gravitated towards simplistic explanations about working with "ESL" students (pp. 56–57). She conveys her impressions of the students' development bluntly:

> As teachers/speakers to an audience of new tutors (an audience they had been members of only a few months before), they produced a monolithic consensus of factual nuggets. They student-listened with complexity, but teacher-listened simplistically, assuming new tutors would only hear a unified front of succinct, easy-to-process tips and not an array of continually shifting stances and choices. (p. 58)

Bokser's experiences highlight how difficult learning is, particularly when it is meant to lead people simultaneously towards greater understanding and ambiguity—a state of mind even experienced scholars struggle with at times. Similarly, Greenfield & Rowan (2011a) describe an in-class exercise Rowan used to engage aspiring tutors in the difficult work of putting their evolving high-minded ideals into practice in the context of conversation about language and literacy standards. When she asked students to "describe, in nonjudgmental terms, what was actually happening" in three student essays with features of African American Vernacular English (representing poor, fair, and strong essays, according to their professor), the students instead began questioning whether the writers even "belonged in college" or "were up to the task of college-level writing" (pp. 146–47). Bokser's and Rowan's accounts of tutors' experiences suggest we need to consider carefully our expectations about what shifts in perspective and action can reasonably occur over the course of only a few months, especially when so many other types of learning are happening, too.

Jean Kiedaisch & Sue Dinitz (2007) also reflect on challenges they faced addressing "difference" in their writing center course. Through various methods common to writing center courses and staff education—read and discuss texts, write reflectively, hear presentations, discuss sample papers—they initially took cues from writing center handbooks to address the topic of difference. Despite their efforts to

affirm diversity, they were troubled by tutors' reflective journals, stating: "We found that we still had tutors who didn't undertake this work with the sensitivity toward difference we expected" (p. 40). Kiedaisch & Dinitz trace their embrace of an increasingly transformative ethos as they continued to reflect and draw on new textual sources and ideas for teaching tutors. In redesigning tutor preparation, for example, they integrated readings which reflected affirmative stances towards many forms of diversity. The anecdotal evidence they provide in the form of tutors' reflective writing reveals a compelling shift in some of the tutors' attitudes about linguistic and cultural diversity after they began engaging with texts like Barron & Grimm's (2002). When tutors continued to express difficulties applying to sessions the concepts discussed in the course, Kiedaisch & Dinitz responded by drawing on Universal Design principles to offer tutors what they hoped would be more useful explanations about responding to difference.

It seems possible that the tutors with whom Kiedaisch & Dinitz were working may have benefitted as well from additional, more indirect and creative opportunities to engage with the difficult process of unpacking assumptions about themselves and people "different" from them. In her brief, but illustrative column for *Praxis*, Kathleen Vacek (2012) suggests one such creative approach: integrating poetry writing into tutor education for multilingual and monolingual tutors to support development of "deeper insights" and more productive practices for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Specifically, Vacek is concerned with tutors' abilities to engage in metalinguistic talk that supports discussion about discourses and literacies students need to learn how to negotiate. She posits that while Grimm suggests multilingual tutors already have this ability (and are thus invaluable to writing centers), Canagarajah's work around an experienced multilingual Sri Lankan writer who could not explain his own negotiation of discourses suggests otherwise. Thus, Vacek argues that tutor education, even for multilingual tutors, should help tutors develop metalinguistic knowledge and more specifically, "meta-multiliteracies," the ability to talk about writing strategies as they are framed by identity and power (p. 1). To enact a differences-as-resource perspective, tutors need metalinguistic knowledge in order to support students' development of metalinguistic knowledge.

While not exclusively focused on staff education, *The Everyday Writing Center: A Community of Practice* (2007) addresses at length how we imagine and realize a transformative ethos through cultures of learning we help to create and foster. The five co-authors, Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth Boquet,

articulate the importance of engaging in a "pedagogy of becoming" (p. 59)—or in similar terms, a "pedagogy of construction"—versus one of "display" (p. 69) in all aspects of writing center work, from staff education meetings to more diffuse instances of being and becoming that are always ongoing even in the time between sessions. They discuss the value in tutor education of "slow[ing] down [our] cognitive processes [and] subject[ing] them to scrutiny" (p. 60), both of which are essential to account for in designing transformative staff education. The authors reflect, for example, that adapting Peggy McIntosh's "Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" inventory to consider myriad ways white privilege plays out systemically, every day, helped tutors begin to identify and unpack their subject positions, to make conscious some of the experiences and assumptions that inform their worldviews (p. 97). Olson (2013) describes a similar interactive use for an "outside" resource or model; she uses Canagarajah's (2010) explication of the differences between monolingual and multilingual cultures to facilitate tutors making the shift from monolingual to multilingual perspectives. And Mandy Suhr-Sytsma & Shan-Estelle Brown (2011), catalogued below, develop a heuristic for examining oppressive language as a tool others may adapt for their centers.

Characterizing a common anchor for staff learning—project-driven staff education—Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet emphasize the need for projects to involve problem-posing and for projects to "support a collective sense of purpose" (p. 83) among the staff where all are engaged in teaching and learning (p. 60). During this process, tutors should be facilitated in ways that "disrupt certainty" and allow for surprise (p. 59), and in ways that allow them to consciously attend to what they know, don't know, and didn't realize they know (p. 59). Further, project work leads to a positive form of reification as the work staffs produce is "concrete evidence of a practice that honors the mutuality of teaching and learning" (p. 63). I imagine most readers would agree insofar as staff education can and should involve collaboration and learning among everyone engaged; however, I have not yet found the degree of "mutuality" Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet advocate entirely possible amidst budget constraints, scheduling challenges (particularly on a commuter campus), and a staff of discipline-diverse tutors who have not studied writing center, composition, or education-related theory and practice. While I solicit ideas from tutors about what they might like to focus on in upcoming semesters and am alert to their ideas when we speak informally, I generally plan and develop the agendas and exercises that make up our meetings.

Suhr-Sytsma & Brown (2011) focus at length on their approaches to transformative writing center staff education in their description of a multi-year project engaging tutors in critical reflection and resource development. The authors situate their work within that of other scholars who discuss the absence of race in discussions about writers' language and literacy, pointing out that little has been discussed about how everyday language is shaped by oppressive systems. Most basically, they pose the question, "How can tutors better identify and challenge the everyday, often subtle, language of oppression in their own discourse and in that of other tutors and writers in writing centers?" (pp. 13–14). Suhr-Sytsma & Brown articulate their approaches in great detail, precisely what I argue we need to see more often. They began by grounding staff education in the experiences of tutors in their center through tutor focus groups; the discussion in these groups then informed development of a draft of their two-list heuristic—"How Language Can Perpetuate Oppression" and "How Tutors and Writers Can Challenge Oppression through Attention to Language" (p. 22)—which became a focus of discussion and revision in staff education. While the resource became a tool to identify oppression and document ideas for specific tutoring moves, the collaborative work the staff undertook to develop the resource created space for the critical, theory in/to practice thinking necessary for active, meaningful learning. The authors refer as well to a blog the tutors used to continue conversations outside of meetings (p. 41, 43), a site rich with possibilities for transformative writing center work, as they show in excerpts from their tutors and as I will show in the next section. Suhr-Sytsma & Brown believe, as I do, that while it can be useful and important to bring scholarship in to staff meetings, tutors benefit from "build[ing] knowledge through attention to their own practice" (p. 19). I would go further to say that scholarship is relatively un-useful without some kind of complementary reflective and interactive inquiry-based work.

Cataloguing existing approaches allows us to see more clearly the possibilities for a cohesive, transformative staff education pedagogy. To index, then, recurrent approaches include: situating and connecting concepts from scholarship to specific writing center contexts (Nakamaru; Ronesi; Keidaisch & Dinitz); engagement with multicultural, multilingual writing (Vacek; Ronesi; Greenfield & Rowan); problem-posing tutor resource development (Suhr-Sytsma & Brown; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet; Bokser); ongoing, shared reflection (Suhr-Sytsma & Brown; Keidaisch & Dinitz); creative exercises (Vacek; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet); remixing, or adapting

others' tools or ideas to engage in exploration of a concept or problem (Olson; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet).

Next, I hope to add to the body of work catalogued above a description of how a transformative ethos took shape through staff education in the center where I work, with a focus on how one approach—ongoing individual and shared reflection through our staff blog—provided uniquely important opportunities for working through complex, often charged, ideas.

21st Century Staff Education Close-up

When our staff fully engaged a transformative turn in 2012, I thought more carefully than ever about how to design opportunities for learning in and outside of our meetings. With the help of one tutor, in particular, who served as an important thinking partner throughout that semester and since, plans were sketched and re-sketched all semester. Ultimately, our transformation began with a focus on the first of Grimm's (2009) three frameworks—perceiving our work in a context of English*es*. Our central question—How do we recognize linguistic diversity in our centers as a reality and a resource we know how to help students marshal?—offers a positive frame; however, underlying this question is the ugly reality of linguistic intolerance.

What follows is discussion of a curriculum designed to respect the value and complexity of inquiry that resists singular answers. I have come to see the goals, objectives, and approaches mapped out for our first semester of this work as broadly applicable to 21st-century transformative writing center staff education. Figure 1 represents an evolving model of this pedagogy which begins when we pose big questions. The process continues as we recursively attend to our objectives—situate and connect, reflect, imagine and enact—through various approaches, including discussion, reading scholarship, blogging, developing resources. All of our approaches are represented in the previous catalogue, or can be mapped onto it. Below, I focus on how guided invitations to write on our private staff blog substantively supported each of our staff education objectives. Sandy and Janice's blog posts throughout the semester demonstrate the depth of thinking and reflection the blog enabled and its power as an integral approach in our transformative staff education.
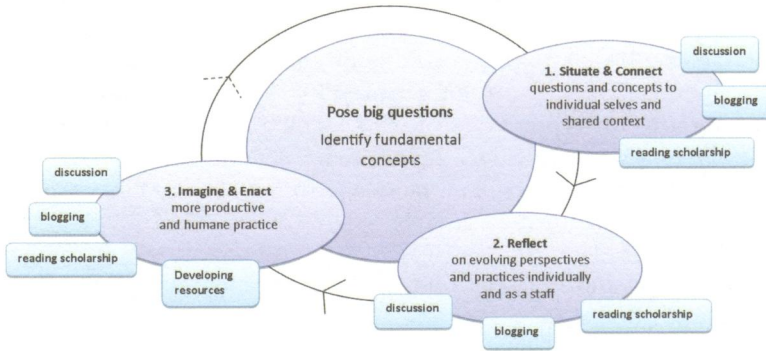
Figure 1. Model of goal, objectives, and approaches of 21ˢᵗ-century transformative writing center staff education. The approaches supporting each objective can be characterized as follows: discussion (as a staff; in small groups; one-with-one); writing on private staff blog; reading scholarship (as a group and independently); developing resources (as a staff; in small groups; independently).

Goal: Pose big questions and identify fundamental concepts. In our center, it seemed we could most productively consider linguistic intolerance by considering its opposite in a writing center setting: learning to help students marshal their linguistic resources to think and produce texts more effectively. To do this, we began with a focus on three key concepts: intercultural competence, standard English ideology, and linguistic diversity-as-resource.

Objective one: Situate and connect questions and concepts to our individual selves and shared context. Early on, we needed to address the relevance of our question for our center as well as for ourselves. Our staff, like any, is diverse in experience; we are also diverse in race, ethnicity, language, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, academic credentials, etc. I could predict that each person would respond to this transformative project in unique ways, and indeed, starkly contrasting responses emerged in our first staff discussion—from basic confusion about the question being posed (notably, by two tutors I would not have expected) to somewhat suspicious interest in unpacking ideas about language and hegemony, to excitement at the prospect of taking on a provocative question. Each person understood the relevance of our central question differently, and each needed opportunities to think about the question from personal experience.

Two semesters earlier, I set up a private staff blog to provide a space for us to continue informal and staff education conversations that always felt cut short by time constraints. I wanted the blog to support a different kind of focused consideration of tutoring experiences, ideas, and questions than is possible amidst fluid, more dynamic real-time discussion (Naydan, 2013, p. 4). And I wanted the blog to encourage ongoing reflection and communication within closer proximity of our actual tutoring sessions. It seemed more important than ever to promote use of this space. Below is the first invitation I posted on the blog during the first semester of our transformative turn, followed by Sandy's and Janice's responses.

Blog Invitation 1

During last Friday's meeting, we began to consider practical ways we can work from the position that multilingual students' diverse linguistic backgrounds can be seen as resources to their learning English, not problems to overcome. One way we can think about this is to think about the utility of our own diverse linguistic resources. Hence, this first exercise:

Part 1. Describe your use or understanding of a particular variety of English. The variety may be distinct grammatically or in vocabulary or both. For example, think of a variety you use among a certain group of people, in a certain place, etc. Give examples. Consider: how is it useful that you know/use/understand this variety?

Part 2. Come up with ten words or phrases that you use with this group/in this setting. (For example, my list for friends I go to school with might be: honey badger; Wha?; hashtag; stop!; this is not okay; anarcosyndacalist.)

Janice:

In light of our last cohort discussion on linguistic diversity, I thought about the two varieties of English that I use. Academic English is very similar to Standard English, yet it is regarded as another dialect and is rarely spoken or written outside of academia, with all of its various disciplines. That is, for example, as a college student who declared English literature as my major, I had to learn how to communicate, in speech as well as in writing, using a dialect with its own specialized vocabulary and literary conventions. Within each

literature course, professors and my fellow students wrote analytical essays and engaged in intellectual discussions, about, for instance, point of recognition, tone, structure, protagonist, antagonist, literary criticism. Even though I tried discussing that kind of stuff with family and friends, they discouraged me by rudely changing the subject.

While taking a linguistics course, the class and I had to learn a common dialect in which just about everyone was expected to understand and appropriately utilize terms that apply to grammar usage, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and orthology. Although I just love a good conversation about sentence construction, word bases, affixes, and various linguistic principles, I rarely do so outside of Lehman.

The main point to be made about academic English is that …even though I'm a writing tutor whose first and only language is English, I realized I'm multidialectal. And being able to alternate between Standard English and the academic variety is an asset, especially when it comes to my working with multilingual learners…[I use] another variety of English that is esoteric and used only in my home among my immediate family members…Here are some examples of phrases and vocabulary we use to communicate: underthesoda, smarterthanpick, purple green dog collar in Riverdale park, like Vanna White don't hurt the cat, crocodile tears, see you later alligator, Bingo!, Stop playing the monkey, lickadesplit, lazy lima bean, and spinards. It's too bad I hardly ever get to use them in my tutoring sessions.

Sandy:

Janice's examples of language used by her family bring to mind "code language" shared with my twin sister. Most of the phrases we use come from Hitchcock movies. For example, we use "crisscross," from Strangers on a Train or from Vertigo, "The gentleman seems to know what he wants." Invariably, we use these phrases to convey irony, but what they really do is solidify a bond between us. I don't know if I would call these phrases and other words we use again and again as a dialect or not; however, thinking about this kind of verbal bonding reminds me how rich and varied everybody's unique experience with language is. I think most everyone plays with language, and this suggests a strength and suppleness that can be teased out of students who express a lack of confidence.

> Another thought I had about language use came when I was talking with Sarah about moving comfortably from one dialect to another given the requirements of a social or other context, when I mentioned there were times when the transition wasn't comfortable at all. For example, when a person exerts power, whether I like it or approve of it, the language I use changes dramatically, and many times my confidence plummets. I might even become tongue-tied. I wonder how this feeling of relative powerlessness affects the learners we meet in the ACE.

In these first posts of the semester, Janice and Sandy complicate their statuses as "standard English" users. Calling up language they have shared exclusively with certain groups or people, they reflect on other sides of their linguistic selves. While pleasure is present in both of their accounts, a sense of loss is, too. Janice expresses loss for the metaphorical language she uses at home but not in her tutoring sessions—as well as the academic language she enjoys in school but that is unwelcome by friends and family outside. Sandy reveals feeling tongue-tied and powerless at times, despite her flexibility with language. She poignantly recognizes the sometimes-crushing weight of asymmetrical power relations and the challenge faced by speakers of (more) subordinated groups as they "produce meaning and forms that seemingly iterate or deviate from a perceived norm" (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 586).

Both Janice and Sandy connect language with identity and community, and both acknowledge the value of linguistic flexibility. By identifying concrete ways language is interpersonal and thus flexible, they are primed to imagine, seek out, and respond to students' potential for language flexibility, too—and to consider why students may fear or resist deploying language flexibility in school contexts. I do not want to imply whether or not Janice and Sandy already held these insights about language; rather, I want to point out that the act of bringing this knowledge to the surface in the course of our staff education work was significant because it provided a way for each person to orient thoughtfully to our big question about students' language resources.

These blog posts, along with those of other staff members, profoundly influenced the shape and direction of our collective work. Other tutors realized they had something to write after reading them; I repeatedly drew on posts for guidance in facilitating our next conversation; and reading some of them aloud as a staff sparked serious conversation during subsequent meetings.

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As we worked to develop our linguistic diversity-as-resource praxis, we read together Grimm's (2009) article on new theoretical frameworks for 21st-century writing centers as a point of reference and considered our key concepts—standard English ideology, linguistic diversity-as-resource, and intercultural competence—in the context of our center. Since the influence and consequences of standard English ideology vary in terms of the populations most affected, we needed to situate and connect the prevalence and everyday impact of this ideology specifically to our institution's diverse Spanish-speaking population and large number of international Korean nursing students seeking long-term employment in the U.S. The practical ways we could imagine supporting students to harness their diverse linguistic resources could be understood most usefully in terms of patterns we see among our particular student population's prior and current language experiences. Becoming more aware of Englishes is a useful but huge task; discussing the prevalence of Englishes informed by particular cultures meaningfully foregrounded staff conversations. Even the potential utility of a concept like intercultural competence needed to be contextualized within our own reorientation efforts. Ideas about intercultural competence are influenced by immediate and foreseeable personal and professional exigencies; what tutors at Lehman in Bronx, NY, might think about this concept may be substantively different from what tutors in another environment—even one as close as a neighboring New York City borough—may think.

We could do the work of identifying characteristics of our shared context largely by sifting through our experiences together in group discussions and through our blog. My second invitation to post on the blog follows, along with excerpts from Janice's post linking Grimm's ideas to the concept of intercultural competence and Sandy's post on a memorable session.

> **Blog Invitation 2**
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> Last week, we began reading Nancy Grimm's piece, "New Conceptual Frameworks for Writing Center Work." As you'll recall, she describes in broad strokes three WC models, each of which she has seen operating in the same writing center and each of which has "operat[ed] under different assumptions about students, about language, about literacies, and about learning" (p. 14). Take a look back at those last few paragraphs on pages 14–16 to refresh your memories about the different values at play in these three versions of the same center. At the end of that section, Grimm argues for

the importance of explicitly acknowledging our "unconscious conceptual models" and "replac[ing them] with conscious ones." That is, she recommends we spend time taking stock of our own assumptions about students, language, literacies, and learning so that we can more effectively and justly engage with student writers.

This semester's work—of helping multidialectal and multilingual students to identify and use their own linguistic resources and of understanding the shared responsibility of communication, especially in tutoring—is informed by Grimm's argument.

To that end, I'd like for us to spend some time this week trying to identify where we position ourselves in terms of intercultural competence. The model of intercultural competence that I gave you outlines how "attitudes" and sufficient "knowledge and comprehension" allow us to continuously develop interculturally competent mindsets and practices ("internal" and "external outcomes"). Each of you will likely interpret this model somewhat differently, and so I'd like you all to use downtime this week (when/ if students don't show up) to study and reflect on it. Pick an area of the model to respond to in terms of how you assess your own competencies. Post your thoughts here and we'll use them to support discussion at this Friday's meeting.

Feel free to read ahead in the Grimm piece…we'll continue to work with it, too.

Janice:

As I reflect on my experience in our very own writing center, I question if my attitudes and practice as a tutor coincide with Grimm's new conscious conceptual frameworks that guided the work of her ideal 21st century writing center. I found that the answer is relevant to continual development of intercultural competence. Based on the intercultural competence diagram, I'm on the right track when it comes to my awareness that a large percentage of students visiting our writing center are multidialectal and multilingual and whose cultural backgrounds may differ from mine. This same awareness has fostered within me the kind of behavior indicated in the attitude box of the diagram: "respect for other cultures—openness, the key to withholding judgment, and curiosity and discovery, which leads to tolerating ambiguity" in

intercultural situations. I love this term, intercultural competence. It is what the main character Jake in the movie Avatar had to learn before he could truly "see" (in the sense of deeply understanding) another entity from a different world other than his own.

Sandy:

As a newcomer to ACE, I still feel as if I am hitting the ground running, and as such I cannot predict nor can I wager the trajectory or value of a given fifty-minute session. (As a newcomer I suppose I want to try.) In critical ways it remains difficult or just outright elusive to respond to questions about intercultural competence. I will try to explain why.

Perhaps every A.C.E. interaction reflects unconscious drives despite "conscious" intentions on my part to project knowledge, expertise, and empathy, i.e, "a semblance of control." What I have so far observed, however, is that learning is bi-directional, and I believe that this is the true value of the learning experience.

For example, I worked with a student today who wanted to submit a scholarship application to the New York Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Although I could read with her her essay statement, I could not legitimately "oversee" her statement, which was an authentic appeal for fairness and acknowledgement, and put simply, a chance. It was absolutely, emphatically HER essay: no amount of my "editing" or input could change that. Working with her to ensure the document met the requirements of standard English was a fairly straightforward effort, but the essence of the experience transcended "mastery" or competence or "my expertise": it was genuine and spontaneous for both of us to come up with a statement that would convey HER desires. It was a layered experience and very much of the moment, and although "skills" were part of this experience, there was much more going on. I guess this is very much a familiar experience for others, and I would like to hear not only that it happens but how its having happened informs the work that we do.

I used Darla Deardorf's (2006) process model of developing inter-cultural competence (see Appendix) to anchor our conversation because it offered a way for everyone on staff to understand a practical need for our work around linguistic diversity. The model was meant to be a tool that each of us could use to reflect on our own evolving competencies. What I appreciate most about Janice's post is that she brings to life this

concept of intercultural competence through the protagonist in *Avatar*. References to art and culture like this one are so useful, as they have the potential to stick in our minds in ways that academic explanations may not. For us, the blog supports this kind of creative, metaphorical thinking to an extent that group discussion may not.

While I remember Janice telling me that she liked thinking about this model, some said the visual was confusing and some seemed apathetic towards it. Without the blog posts, the range of reactions to this diagram might have been reduced simply in my memory to "this did not work well." Instead, the blog provided artifacts I could visit and revisit, allowing me to rely on more than my selective memory to examine the effects of this particular element of our work on individual tutors.

While Sandy says she cannot explicitly address the concept of intercultural competence, the idea prompts her to reflect on a kind of readiness and openness to engage in the uniqueness of a moment as a student worked to craft an "authentic appeal for fairness and acknowledgement." Sandy reveals her evolving disposition toward cultural and linguistic diversity, which Canagarajah (2013) describes as:

> an awareness of language as constituting diverse norms; a willingness to negotiate with diversity in social interactions; attitudes such as openness to difference, patience to co-construct meaning, and acceptance of negotiated outcomes in interactions; and the ability to learn through practice and critical self-reflection. (p. 5)

Without reflection on concrete manifestations of the high-minded ideals we were talking about during our staff meetings, our efforts to work towards a fuller realization of our transformative project would not have been as productive.

Objective two: Reflect on evolving ideas about our questions and concepts. Throughout the semester, our ideas about language and flexibility and marshaling underappreciated resources evolved, and the blog provided a space for thinking and recording moments in time. I often projected posts during staff meetings so that we could read and reflect on them together. I invited tutors to read, refer to, or reflect further on what they had written since our last meeting. The tutors' writing consistently provided a more engaging way to spark conversation than any other approach I might have taken. Below is an invitation posted later during that fall 2012 semester and some of Sandy's and Janice's thoughts at the time, contextualized by experiences they shared with students.

Blog Invitation 3

If you have 5 or 10....

Earlier in the semester, we reflected on, wrote about, and discussed our own linguistic flexibility. I hoped that doing so would help us imagine how to support students' ability to tap into their linguistic resources and flexibility or just to help them build confidence in their ability to use language strategically.

Take 5 or 10 minutes to write about how our discussions of linguistic diversity-as-resource have impacted your sessions this semester or even just your reflections about sessions. Post your thoughts here, if you like. Rambling welcome.

Sandy:

I do wonder if at times I am repressing rather than supporting students' linguistic diversity. Actually, I know that at times I am, in part because I have developed an understanding of what professors expect in language and feel bound to help students produce that language; furthermore, I can SEE that the expectation is for standard English usage and other "norms" and conventions—the instructions, or proscriptions if you will, are right there on the assignment sheet written by the professor. Of course there are other ways of being flexible with language and tapping into a student's own rich but "non-standard" resources...that is another sort of flexibility to encourage.

For example, I have a student who grew up in New York speaking Mandarin and English. Yesterday she showed me a few peer reviews of her work with typical criticisms about verb tense, i.e., she does not use verb tenses consistently, she "shifts." She knows that the tense of the verb has no real meaning or relevance for her and she just doesn't notice the shifting. (Nor, she said, could she easily edit for it.) However, she is aware that using verb tenses "correctly" is a marker of proficiency and moreover expected, so she asked that we work on using tenses correctly…

There are moments though when she asserts her own voice in other ways and for me anyway, it just really works. Here I refer to the rich, personal voice we tapped into ourselves earlier in this conversation when we cited examples of the language we share with family or community/discourse community.

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She had written a creative piece that I found sweet, arch, fresh, ironic, full of color. Actually, it was all about color. There's this dull town that needs some color...Her work was handed back with the comment that she had used the word "town" 29 times—her professor had actually written 28 and then written a nine over the eight. She was counting! I found that annoying if not downright absurd, but I understood the point that the overall effect had not achieved the desired "tone."

We worked on finding other ways to say town. We talked about sometimes using the proper name she had chosen: Monochrome. That was one way to change it up. We could use adverbs, e.g., "here" or "there." We could just excise "in this town" from many sentences; the context was clear. We could find synonyms; we could find nouns. At one point I, dully, supplied the word dullness as a way of attempting to describe the state of being as another option. The student, however, came up with her own, much better way of describing a dull town: DEAD ZONE. I thought that was great! This was very much her voice, and she was problem-solving.

For Sandy, the professor demanding "standard English" from students remains a significant influence on her sessions. I think this is true for most or all of us. Given the relative influence tutors have over institutionalized oppression, I think two things are most important: 1) Sandy's increasing awareness and reflection on the power dynamics at play in this scenario—a dynamic many of us have long accepted as "the way it is"—and 2) her developing ideas about the many ways in which writers can be linguistically flexible and creative. She is increasingly alert to the possibility of facilitating different kinds of creative, distinct play with language, so even when there is a need (perceived or real) to help a student use some language feature in conventional ways—tenses, in this case—the focus is not on this issue alone. The importance of conventional use, then, does not overshadow the importance of the writer's growing ability to make choices.

Like Sandy, Janice connects her examples and analysis here to earlier conversations, keeping all of us on staff mindful of where we have been:

Janice:

I benefited from our latest cohort discussion on the concept of linguistic flexibility that is necessary for working with our large

population of students who speak various versions of English and who also come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The kinds of benefits that I'm speaking of involve my conscious decision to replace my previous assumption that Anglo-American English is the superior center in which all other varieties revolve in an inferior course—with the assumption that each variety is just as linguistically valuable and significant as the other, as indicated in Grimm's piece about the work of the ideal 21st century writing center. Another benefit concerns my awareness of the fact that I have learned to speak and write multiple versions of English and never really thought, before our cohort discussion on the matter, this was an asset that afforded me the use of linguistic flexibility to support students learning standard or academic English. This kind of awareness came in handy in a recent session with a student who spoke and wrote a variety of English he had learned early on in his country of Guinea. Even though he communicated in English, I found myself often misunderstanding what he was saying. Fortunately, it dawned on me later that he must have had trouble understanding me too…Previous to our linguistic lessons, I would not have gone beyond my frustration and placed the responsibility of communication on the student based on my erroneous assumption that his version of English is an enormous hindrance in the way of his learning to write the standard kind. But on that day, during that session with that particular student, the moment I thought about respecting his version of English, his educational background, and his rich international experiences, I became curious and started encouraging him to talk about what he had learned about writing in his country…

This post highlights (and provides an accessible record of) why Janice is such an important influence on our staff: She is publicly self-reflective and always mindful of connecting her experiences directly to the material we have been studying. Here, she acknowledges the significant impact that a shift in her perspective had on the communicative experience she shares with a student. While some tutors were understandably struggling to imagine big, dynamic ways to enact the ideals we were discussing—and, understandably, coming up short—Janice calls attention to a small but fundamental move she made to set up more inclusive and humane conditions for the conversation she was having with this student. Though I often feel that Janice overstates her shortcomings as we journey through whatever we are learning at a given time, I also

believe her willingness to discuss and question her own intentions and practices encourages others to be similarly open.

Objective three: Imagine and enact more productive and humane praxis. Our semester's project was to learn, along with students, how to draw more consciously on the depth of their language experiences in order to think and produce effective writing for the range of tasks and audiences they will face. As illustrated above, though, we had to do some unpacking first—through our readings and discussions and through the blog. By the end of the semester, the tutors were ready to pool their collective experiences and ideas to develop a working list of strategies we could apply in our tutoring sessions based on all that we had discovered about our own and others' linguistic flexibility. This "last" phase of our work—developing a resource to reflect our more productive and humane praxis—began with an invitation on the blog. It follows, along with Janice's and Sandy's posts.

Blog Invitation 4

In preparation for our final cohort meeting...

Before we meet on Friday, please begin thinking about what you might include in a resource entitled, "Operationalizing the Concept of Linguistic Diversity-as-Resource." (This title can change.) We spoke about creating this as a way of documenting ideas we have developed from our conversations this semester. One example is, "Be on the lookout for opportune moments to discuss/encourage creative, non-standard uses of language." This will be a resource for all of us as well as future tutors, of course. It may be something we want to share with faculty, too.

Similarly, I'd like to create a resource for students that explains ways they can think about using their own diverse linguistic backgrounds to their advantage. It would be similar to the tutor resource but obviously directed at an audience of bi- and multilingual students. Every title I come up with is ridiculously long, so maybe we can spend some time thinking about this, too, when we meet.

Please add your ideas here over the course of this week so that Friday is productive and we can leave the meeting having created a solid draft that I can finalize in December.

Janice:

"Operationalizing the Concept of Linguistic Diversity as a Resource"

- Be on the lookout for windows of opportunities where students initiate information about their place of origin, educational/cultural/and linguistic backgrounds: Why?
- Be on the lookout for your own unconscious cultural beliefs that may influence the way you perceive the level of the way students learn, speak, write, or dress: Why?
- Be on the lookout for students who seem hesitant or embarrassed about expressing their thoughts, opinions, or confusion, for fear of being judged on the basis of their particular variety of English perceived as non-standard: Why?
- Be aware of opportunities when you and the student can exchange cultural aspects involving vocabulary, life or cultural experiences, beliefs, and so on: Why relative to supporting students?
- Remember that communication is a "shared responsibility" or that it is the responsibility of both tutor/teacher and the student to try to find ways to understand each other.

Sandy:

One of Janice's "BOLO" comments creates a perfect opportunity for me to include an observation. I am referring to "Be on the lookout for windows of opportunities where students initiate information about their place of origin, educational/cultural and linguistic backgrounds."

This week within one session a Palestinian student took the initiative TWICE to convey information about her culture and language. First, in response to my asking her where she was from originally (Ramallah), she drew a map with no boundaries and no distinctions between the West Bank and Gaza. When I asked her about "geography," she insisted the space was one shared space. This was good—let's say striking—information for me about perspective. Second, her ESL paper, "The Story of My Life," essentially mapped a journey of her language learning. In it she writes that once she learned English she felt that she "belonged" in this culture. She talked about how difficult it was, of course, and in our conversation I mentioned how few Americans learn Arabic. She took this opportunity to show me a Google keyboard of the Arabic alphabet. Her face lit up as she explained some features of the alphabet and

> then she began sounding out the alphabet. Sometimes I have felt her
> discomfort and struggle, but here she seemed stimulated and at ease.
> I saw another side of her and witnessed her agency.

I am struck that Janice included *why* at the end of each of her suggestions for how we might put into practice the concept of linguistic diversity-as-resource. I see her posing a genuine question she is wrestling with, but more than that, I see her repetition of *why* as a subtle challenge to the rest of us. I see her pushing us to continue thinking and talking about the *why* so that we are keeping the assumptions and perspectives we have been unpacking all semester present, bubbling up in our consciousness and not being pushed back down simply because we might now have some concrete practices to try. Sandy not only picks up on one of Janice's recommendations to "be on the lookout," narrating evocatively how she responded to an important opportunity a student presented to share information about herself, but she also addresses why it was significant: because through this moment, the student exhibited her agency in a way that Sandy presumably had not yet seen.

From this final blog prompt, the tutors posted their ideas—reiterated each other's claims and recounted relevant anecdotes—and I compiled their ideas into a document that we worked on in our final meeting for the semester. The document was arranged with methods or approaches on one side and examples on the other. In small groups, tutors filled in additional examples or anecdotes, and they wrote down questions about some of the methods listed. Discussing our list and anecdotes as a group, we continued to wrestle with both theory and practice, and we reflected on our semester together. The resource was dense with possibility and not something we could complete that day. In fact, unlike much of our resource development work, this particular resource never materialized. But as a result of our collaborative efforts all semester, culminating in our work on this resource, we developed new perspectives and ideas that influenced our next semester's work: developing more effective practices for facilitating multilingual writers specifically in their engagement with diverse disciplinary genres. And, a semester after that, the effects were apparent in a collaborative revision of our staff values and best practices document.

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The blog offered a vital thinking space for tutors to situate and connect to our central inquiry that semester, to reflect on our evolving ideas, and to begin to imagine new praxis. Writing tutors are often drawn to our centers because of an affinity for language and writing.

It only makes sense to make sure we are tapping into their gifts—even when, like so many of us, they require regular prodding to put their thoughts to the "page." So while conversations in our staff meetings are always engaging, the tutors' writing on our blog continues to provide access to much richer and more varied perspectives that provoke and cultivate our ongoing work together. The blog did not, and does not, serve the same purpose for everyone on staff. It provides one space, one mode for our collective efforts. It works on deep levels for some, provides something to think about for others, and is a record we can all turn to if and when we want to.

Life of an Ethos

To embody a transformative ethos is to invest in cultivating increasingly inclusive, humane, productive, and creative writing center spaces and practices for students and tutors, alike. To abandon practices of management and containment, we can begin by making small shifts that can yield enduring effects. We can stop using the word "appropriate" to describe the linguistic and rhetorical choices writers make when a *discussion* about audience and other possible choices is in order. We can think about and treat "standard English" not as a monolithic and all-powerful entity but as dynamic varieties of Englishes characterized by patterns we can point out and discuss with students as they make choices about their own work, as they "fashion an English that bears the burden of their experiences" (Lu, 2010, p. 47). We must, as Janice advised, be on the lookout for opportunities to encourage students to talk about and draw on their unique language and literacy resources to inform new thinking, reading, and writing experiences and develop new work.

To make even small shifts, though, requires time, reflection, and careful attention to the ways that everyday, small acts relate to our philosophical stances. We need to support this gradual process fully, consciously, and continuously through staff education, as is evident in Suhr-Sytsma & Brown's (2011) work and as I have shown here. This semester I have been describing marked an important shift in our collective thinking about linguistic diversity, but as the staff continues to change, we have to find new ways to engage in this project. I introduce new tutors to our blog and to the genesis of our current orientation to students' linguistic experiences by providing time in their initial weeks of acclimation to poke around on our blog and read through past posts. Each semester, we take on big questions, situate and connect key concepts to ourselves and our staff, reflect on our ideas and practices, imagine and enact new practices. We do this by talking to one another

in large and small groups, reading scholarship, blogging in our private, shared digital space, and developing resources that require collaborative inquiry, decision-making, and writing.

The question we took up in the fall of 2012 is a question we are still trying to answer, but in different ways. New tutors now enter a community with a history and evolving ways of thinking about students' linguistic and cultural experiences as resources to draw on. Of course, the conditions around us have not changed in parallel, and students whose differences have been and are being managed and contained still come to see us. Additionally, however, the orientation to linguistic diversity is never the only area of our philosophy and practice to which we need to attend. Thus we engage in new iterations of our Fall 2012 question about linguistic diversity—questions like, What practices can we engage in to help multilingual learners draw on their languages, literacies, and experiences to develop agency in their generation of diverse disciplinary genres?

As we work to recast linguistic diversity as a dynamic resource that students can draw on as they think and write rhetorically effective academic prose, I agree more and more with Wilson (2012) that writing centers are ideal spaces to support the "bottom-up cosmopolitanism" (p. 2) of a 21st-century transformative ethos. I acknowledge, like Grimm (2011) and Greenfield (2011), that a focus on individuals can obscure institutionalized oppression; my focus on inclusive writing center literacy instruction in staff education is not meant to discount the dire need for systemic change. However, even without institutional support, I have seen that tutors can learn to seek out opportunities to help individual students marshal their linguistic resources both to think and represent their thoughts in text. Unlike the limits I see and feel first-hand of sustained individualized attention through classroom instruction, writing center tutors can tailor support as readers and thinking partners *at each meeting* to the unique backgrounds, characteristics, and goals of the individuals with whom they work. Over time, as students produce increasingly effective and creative academic prose with support from tutors, they contribute to "[re]framing the public imagination" (Adler-Kassner, 2008, p. 59)—disrupting simplified, antiquated ideas about language and texts that do far more to stifle than promote the agency, habits, and skills students need to succeed on their own terms.

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Each tutor embodies our evolving transformative ethos uniquely. While we are all in various ways and to varying degrees "on the lookout" for opportunities to see and act more humanely and more inclusively, we

are surely missing opportunities, too. However whole-heartedly any one of us believes in embodying a transformative ethos, our biases are deeply embedded and difficult to unearth; they are difficult to study critically and even more difficult to abandon. Further, while we continue to learn more about the *why* and *how* of linguistic diversity-as-resource in the writing center, we are still working in a web of conflicting institutional pressures and trying to craft our stances on linguistic diversity for other audiences.

Despite these challenges, we increasingly question long-held ideas and "rules" about language and writing; we question what we have been taught and what students we meet are being taught. We have developed ways to productively encourage students to question assignment purposes and guidelines and ways we can support students as they make choices about the work they produce. These are the humble but hopeful signs of our slow but steady evolution towards more inclusive and humane practice. The work continues.

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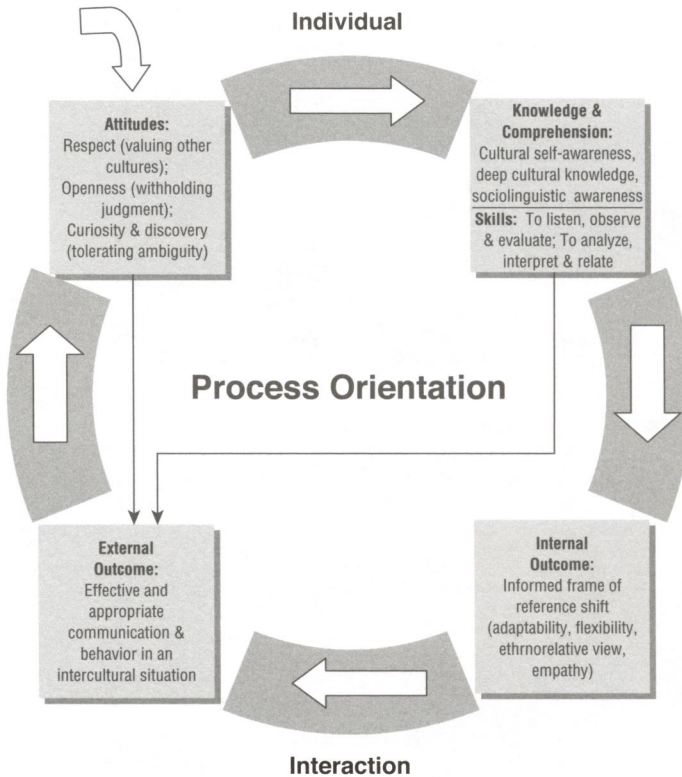
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Appendix

Individual

Attitudes:
Respect (valuing other cultures);
Openness (withholding judgment);
Curiosity & discovery (tolerating ambiguity)

Knowledge & Comprehension:
Cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness
Skills: To listen, observe & evaluate; To analyze, interpret & relate

Process Orientation

External Outcome:
Effective and appropriate communication & behavior in an intercultural situation

Internal Outcome:
Informed frame of reference shift (adaptability, flexibility, ethrnorelative view, empathy)

Interaction

Note: From "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student out-come of internationalization" by D.K. Deardorff, 2006, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *10*(3), p. 256.