

7-2013

# 'He Just Did Not Listen to Me': Authority and Resistance in Writing Tutors' Encounters with Prior Learning

Daniel P. Kenzie  
*Purdue University*, [dkenzie@purdue.edu](mailto:dkenzie@purdue.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/writinglabgradpres>

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

---

## Recommended Citation

This presentation at the Council of Writing Program Administrators 2013 conference examines learning transfer in the writing center.

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

# “He Just Did Not Listen to Me”: Authority and Resistance in Writing Tutors’ Encounters with Prior Learning

Daniel P. Kenzie  
Purdue University  
dkenzie@purdue.edu  
CWPA 2013



# Writing Transfer

A definition: The application, creative repurposing, or transformation of knowledge/learning from one context to another

Research shows that students often experience the university as disconnected and have difficulty transferring learning between varied writing experiences (McCarthy 1985, Beaufort 2007, Driscoll 2011).



# WCs as a Site for Research

- Hageman (1995) points to WC as research site to study synchronous transfer.
- WCs may lack the methodological limitations Beaufort (2007) and Wardle (2007) attribute to interviews.
- WCs are sites for situated talk about writing.



# WCs as a Site for Instruction

- Fraizer (2010) suggests the best opportunities for “bridging” lay outside the curriculum.
- Artemeva and Fox (2010) advocate “studied practice” as students enter disciplines.
- Tutors could help writers recognize and actualize connections (Nowacek 2011).



# Research Questions

1. To what extent does students' prior knowledge affect tutorials at the Writing Lab?
2. What does it mean to tutor for transfer?
3. What are tutors' perceptions of clients' prior knowledge and its relevance to new writing tasks?
4. How promising is genre as a mediating device in tutorials?



# Data Collection and Analysis

- I observed 19 tutorials for talk about prior knowledge and genre knowledge
- After the observation period, I interviewed all three tutors about their own learning experiences and their encounters with writers' prior learning.
- This study is descriptive.



# Participants

- Erica, 23-year-old female professional writing major and business writing specialist
- Marion, 41-year-old female PhD candidate in rhetoric and composition and generalist tutor
- Claire, 23-year-old female psychology major and freshman composition specialist
- 17 anonymous tutees





# Results

- Few discussions of prior knowledge in observed tutorials; more examples emerged in interviews.
- All three tutors (but especially the undergrads) faced challenges related to authority and resistance.
- Marion: “It’s hard for me to use somebody else’s language to talk about a student’s writing.”
- Genre emerged as a promising device for navigating authority and helping writers draw connections.

*Somebody came in, and they wanted me to look at their resume. They were about to graduate and they were trying to get the perfect resume to send out to all of their jobs. They had already gone to the CCO [Center for Career Opportunities], and the CCO has very strict guidelines on what resumes are. They are between a half and three quarters of an inch margin and, you know, you can't go over this kind of font, and there's very strict guidelines of what resumes are from the CCO. And so he'd come in and he had like a three quarter inch margin all around the entire document, and he needed just a little bit more space to put—he had some research or something and he wanted one more bullet. Like, he needed just one more line. So, I'm like, "you can make your margins a little wider, you can reduce your font—instead of 11 you can make it 10.5 or something," and that would kind of scooch things up a little bit and you can fit it on there, and he was just like, "No. I absolutely cannot do that. The CCO said that I had to have between this and this, and that's just impossible." I was just like, "you know resumes aren't—they're not going to take a ruler out," and I tried to explain it to him and he just did not listen to me. He was absolutely combative. So I was just like, "I can't help you.*

*“. . .He was really concerned because he was in a technical major. It was some sort of engineering, and he was just convinced that if it was not as perfect as anybody else's, then they're just not going to look at it. Like, "we're not creative people, and there shouldn't be any room for creative design" or something, and I was just like, "well, you know, then I guess you're just going to have to live without that bullet."*

--Erica

*“. . . [S]omebody came in needing to write a complaint letter. And she was like, “I have never written a business letter, let alone a complaint letter, in my life,” so I walked her through the parts of a business letter then applied it to a complaint letter. And just kind of explained that it was a special kind of letter. And she was a little bit more comfortable thinking of it as a business letter because I likened a business letter to an e-mail that you would send to your professor. I was like, you know, when you e-mail your professor, you’re all like dear so and so and this is what my problem is, and then you request something from them. Which is pretty much how a business letter is set up, only longer, basically. So she was like, I’ll follow you from e-mail—something she was already familiar with—to a business letter and then I was like, with a business letter you can change, “this is exactly what I want, and this is what you owe me” and this is how you can change it into a complaint letter.”*

--Erica



# Implications and Future Directions

- Methodology for studying transfer talk in WCs
  - Larger and/or more targeted studies
  - Taxonomy for transfer talk
  - Description to assessment
- Tutor knowledge and methods
- Tutor education

# Works Cited

- Artemeva, Natasha, and Janna Fox. "Awareness Versus Production: Probing Students' Antecedent Genre Knowledge." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 24.4 (2010): 476-515. Print.
- Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2007. Print.
- Driscoll, Dana Lynn. "Connected, Disconnected, or Uncertain: Student Attitudes about Future Writing Contexts and Perceptions of Transfer from First Year Writing to the Disciplines." *Across the Disciplines* 8.2 (2011): n. pag. Web. 4 January 2012.
- Fraizer, Dan. "First Steps Beyond First Year: Coaching Transfer after FYC." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 33.3 (2010): 34-57. Print.
- Hageman, Julie. "Writing Centers as Sites for Writing Transfer Research." *Writing Center Perspectives*. Ed. Byron Stay, Christina Murphy, and Eric Hobson. NWCA Press, 1995. 120-127. Print.
- McCarthy, Lucille Parkinson. "A Stranger in Strange Lands: A College Student Writing across the Curriculum." *Research in the Teaching of English* 21.3 (1987): 233-265. Print.
- Nowacek, Rebecca. *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2011. Print.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 31.1-2 (2007): 65-85. Print.