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

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

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Overview

• Research Context
• Small Group Activities
• Research Results
• Open Discussion & Questions
## Research Context

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

• “I had to discard initial assumptions about their abilities.”

• “I assumed that writing processes . . . were fundamentally the same.”

• “It was challenging to differentiate between writing concerns and language issues.”

• “I would like more training on how to overcome language barriers during conferences.”
Tutor Training Evaluations

• “I make far less assumptions and view [L2 writers] more individually.”

• “I have been able to see more clearly how some assignment guidelines are culturally bound.”

• “Clients seem more comfortable as a result of my knowing more about their needs.”

• “These exercises have helped me identify both patterns of error and my own assumptions about the writers.”
Research Questions

• Does intensive training provide intercultural competence specifically or just improve tutoring ability generally?

• How much tutor improvement is due to experience over time versus to the intensive training program?

• Is the training better provided concurrent with the initial tutoring semester or subsequent to it?
Participants & Methods

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

• In groups of 3-4, pick one of the inventories in your packet.
• Discussion Questions:
  – Read over the questions, or take the inventory & score yourself.
  – How does this inventory as a whole relate to tutoring L2 writers?
  – How do the specific questions relate to tutoring L2 writers?
  – In what ways would it be helpful for tutors to know their own results?
  – Would it be useful for directors to know their tutors’ results?
  – What information might the inventory provide about tutors’ capabilities?
  – How might the results inform training development?
A change of 4 or more points is considered significant on this instrument.
Research Results—Combined Instruments

Purdue Tutors' Change Across Instruments

Score (Adjusted for standardization)

Den Pol-1 Pol-2 Pol-3 Pol-4 Min-1 Min-2 Min-3 Min-4 Min-5 Min-6 Min-7 Min-8 Min-9

CF TofA EMP
Challenge vs. Support

- Tutorials may be high challenge or low challenge
  - Amount of risk
  - Potential for failure or for ambiguity
  - Need for skills that are not yet mastered

- The setting may be high support or low support
  - Tolerance of mistakes
  - High expectations coupled with cooperative atmosphere

- For a nice visual see Trainer (2014)
Open Discussion

• Does your center use anything similar to these inventories? In what way? For what purpose?

• To what extent might tutor self-awareness of their own inventory scores be helpful or detrimental?

• Are the attributes being measured by the inventories of specific importance for tutoring L2 writers, or do they apply to tutoring generally?

• How can inventory results inform tutor training? How might training be developed specifically to help tutors develop these intercultural skills?
References


Questions?

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