Tutor Training and Reflection on Practice

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Given the treachery of institutional politics, the urgency of projects assigned to us, the desire to expand the center with high-profile initiatives, and the attraction of meretricious educational innovations, it is good to remind ourselves that tutoring is the most important activity in a writing center. A tutor's job is neither to tell the student what to do nor to write the paper, but to negotiate what to work on and to help the writer learn the skills he or she needs to write successfully after the conference. Since such pedagogy is difficult to teach a new tutor, I wondered if reflection on practice would be effective as ongoing training. I have long been interested in reflection on practice (e.g., Bell, Reflection) and have noticed a recent enthusiasm for the idea (e.g., Bishop; Yancey). Common sense suggests that after initial training, tutors could monitor their tutoring, think about it, and make improvements as needed. I designed a series of guided reflection exercises and examined the impact. The first year I checked to see if the guided reflection changed tutors’ thinking, and the next year whether it changed another group’s tutoring practices. In the process, I had reason to reflect on my practice as a director.

Types of Tutoring, the Extent of Tutor-Centered Tutoring, and Reflection on Practice as a Solution

I want the students I hire as writing tutors to tutor in whatever ways will achieve the Center’s goals: better writers, not just better papers. The goal of each one-to-one conference is for the writer to learn something, to improve his or her process at that time or in the near future. A tutor’s job is to facilitate the change. I have adapted Thomas John Reigstad’s typology of conferencing methods. Novitiates need a more concrete, specific, and directive kind of training (Dreyfus, Dreyfus, and Athanasiou), and Reigstad’s observational study of ten professors’ tutoring, focusing on power relationships, yields a convenient typology of conferences: teacher-centered, collaborative, and student-centered. This
typology seemed to come as close to being a set of methods as the writing center field has ever had.

I have modified the typology, and in training I convey that “structured participation” (similar to Reigstad’s “collaborative”) should be the tutors’ method of first choice. In such a session, the tutor structures or manages the conference and the student does most of the writing work. Most commonly the tutor establishes a framework or outline or skeleton of questions, and the student builds on or fills in or fleshes out the structure. “Student-centered” conferencing is fine if the student knows accurately and confidently what he or she needs to learn in order to improve the paper most effectively. In this type of session, the student runs things, generally using the tutor as a resource person. “Tutor-centered” conferences, while not always inappropriate, should be avoided because students generally learn least and tutors find the method unfortunately seductive. The tutor controls the topics, the content, and the pace, does most of the work, and talks much more than the student does.

Research on writing centers suggests that tutor-centered conferencing is common. Interestingly, the first relevant study after Stephen M. North’s call for writing center research to focus on “what happens in writing tutorials” (Research 29) tried to prove that sessions could be something other than tutor-centered editing. Teri Sinclair Haas, who objected to writing centers being “perceived by many college teachers as emergency rooms for students with shattered syntax” (1), selected three of her best undergraduate writing tutors, found that they indeed tutored in a non-tutor-centered manner, and concluded that “the writing lab can support a developmental model of composing/responding/revising” (312). When Margaret Hess Seckendorf studied two series of conferences in detail, she found that both students pushed for tutor-centered sessions, but Sam, an assistant professor, was able to change his student’s conception of writing and writing conferences and avoid tutor-centered work, while Joan, a doctoral student, never confronted the student with their differing views of writing and tutoring, and tutor-centered work prevailed. Although Kevin Davis et al use Fanselowe’s scheme to analyze tutor talk, they conclude in reference to Reigstad’s typology that “all four conferences we examined were clearly tutor controlled for most of the sessions, but in three of them the direction of control was arrived at through collaborative negotiation” (49). Examining the reported conversational patterns does not allow me to say whether the conferences were tutor-centered or structured participation, but Davis et al suggest there was more tutor control than they would like to have seen.

In another study, Willa Wolcott observed seven graduate students—all experienced teachers with brief training in tutoring—conduct twelve conferences with undergraduates in her writing center. Wolcott found that all conferences closely followed the teacher-centered model
identified by Reigstad except that “the writing center tutors deliberately tried to have the students make the changes” (20). When I analyzed three randomly selected conferences for each of the eight Masters’ students tutoring in a Writing Center where tutors had received several hours of training in non-tutor-centered approaches, I found that the tutoring method employed varied with the student’s stage in the writing process. When students presented assignments or outlines, only 10% of the conferences were tutor-centered, but when students presented drafts, 71% of the sessions were tutor-centered.

Subsequent studies have not used Reigstad’s tripartite typology, but have found through different avenues few signs of non-tutor-centered conferences. Barbara Sherr Roswell examined forty conferences conducted by eighteen undergraduates at a small liberal arts college. Tutors were carefully selected by recommendation and extensive interview, and they were carefully trained in student-centered approaches in a three-credit course in which the favorite articles were Bruffee’s “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” and North’s “Idea of a Writing Center.” Roswell discovered that “only a small fraction of the observed conferences could be described [. . .] as ‘student-centered’” (182). Kathleen R. Hunter analyzed four conferences a basic writer had with four different tutors (three graduate and one undergraduate) in a Writing Center. Her analysis suggests a tutor-centered emphasis. Despite the variety among the four conferences, the proportion of idea units—an indication of input into the conference—was almost exactly the same for each session: two-thirds from the tutor, and one-third from the student.

Focusing on differing goals and expectations in writing conferences, Neal D. Lerner studied four graduate students who had been carefully selected but not trained for tutoring. A comparison of students’ desired help with the help they received revealed that student goals had “great stability” (248). Primarily, students wanted help with “Grammar/Usage”—69% marked it on the checklist before entering conferences—and they received such help: 62% of the conferences concerned “Grammar/Usage” (249). While a product-over-process focus does not dictate any particular method of tutoring, Lerner’s report suggests that the tutor-centered “outcome left students relatively satisfied with their Writing Center experience but left tutors with a measure of frustration over being positioned as merely proprietors in a language-level ‘fix-it’ shop” (237).

Would systematic reflection on practice help tutors conduct more sessions where students were active and learning more? Although the literature on reflection is voluminous, most of it does not address empirically the effectiveness of reflection. Some articles define (e.g., Boyd and Fales; Brookfield); others propose a research agenda (e.g., Copeland et al); others testify (e.g., Wibel); and, inevitably, some reflect on reflection (e.g., Glen, Clark, and Nicol; Gore). Proposals abound for applying
reflection to fields from teacher education (e.g., Valli) to nursing (e.g., Palmer, Burns, and Bulman) to teaching writing (e.g., Yancey). Amid the flurry of writing about reflection, relatively few empirical studies exist which would help a writing center professional decide whether reflection on practice would help new tutors. Common sense suggests that guiding tutors to reflect on their work should improve tutoring since reflective practitioners “utilize their experience as a basis for assessing and revising existing theories of action to develop more effective action strategies” (Osterman 133). Gail Y. Okawa, Thomas Fox, and four of their writing tutors testify to the success of a critical reflection program in which tutors focused on “conscious explorations of language within a society stratified by race and cultural background” (Okawa et al 12). The writing center field lacks other empirical studies substantiating the effectiveness of reflection in tutor training.

Turning to a neighboring field, teacher training, provides more empirical studies but mixed findings. For example, Judy M. Wedman and Marilyn W. Martin found that after nine weeks of intensive reflective activities, student teachers changed little: beliefs did not change, problem-solving strategies remained routine, and students “recorded more routine than reflective thought units,” but the frequency of reflective thought units did increase somewhat (37). Turning to graduate students—a source of tutors for many writing centers—Paula M. Short and James S. Rhinehart found that doctoral students in education doing extensive reflection on practice showed no statistically significant differences in reflective language from quarter to quarter, but did show a difference from fall to spring. Development was gradual even in an extensive program replete with reflection-on-practice activities.

Although the writing center field is not advocating and embracing reflection on practice as enthusiastically as fields such as teacher education, reflection receives long-standing, regular endorsement for writing center professionals (e.g., Gillam) and for writing center tutors (e.g., Arkin; Ashton-Jones; Hobson; Lassner; Vandenberg). But does it work with tutors? Reflection on practice is based on the assumption that changes in thinking will lead to changes in behavior. Therefore, when I introduced reflection on practice as a major element in tutor training, I wanted to find answers to two questions: Does completing a series of exercises intended to foster reflection on practice change the content and process of writing tutors’ thinking about their individual tutoring? Does completing the same guided reflection exercises change the type of tutoring tutors employ as their method of first choice?
Reflection on Practice and Changes in Thinking

All four new tutors completed a series of reflection-on-practice exercises and wrote extensive journal entries in response to each activity. Three of the tutors were undergraduates and one was a graduate student. All were female. Two majored in history, one in science, and the other in English, and none expressed firm career goals. They were hired after university-wide advertising and rigorous one-hour interviews. Before the tutors began the series of reflection-on-practice activities, they participated in preparatory tutor training (ten hours), and they tutored for six to eight hours. The initial tutor training included work on tutoring methods, the phases of the writing process, the hierarchy of concerns regarding the written product, and administration procedures. Tutors were encouraged to use structured participation as their method of first choice. They tutored approximately ten hours per week in conferences lasting from thirty to sixty minutes.

During the fall semester, the writing tutors recorded thoughts in their double-entry journals in response to reflection-on-practice activities.

- Tutors answered the following three questions in their journals:

  Thinking about your own tutoring rather than tutoring in general, what are the three most important things you know about tutoring?

  What would you like to know about tutoring?

  When you are not actually tutoring, how do you think about your tutoring?

- Each tutor observed another tutor tutoring, and then the two spent half an hour discussing similarities and differences in approaches and any other tutoring topics they wished to address.

- Each tutor audiotaped one of her conferences and listened to the tape. After I heard the tape, we discussed the session, focusing on what the tutor considered the principal strength and principal weakness (see Appendix B).

- Each tutor audiotaped one of her conferences, transcribed the introductory phase, analyzed it in light of Thomas Newkirk’s “The First Five Minutes: Setting the Agenda in a Writing Conference,” and then the tutor and I discussed the analysis.
• Each tutor received tutoring evaluations from approximately ten students and reacted to the evaluation in her journal.

• Near the end of the semester, tutors responded to the original three questions they answered about their tutoring, and they addressed an additional question: Did doing this sequence of exercises change the content and/or the process of your thinking about your tutoring?

• Each tutor reread her journal and wrote on the back of each page a response to the original journal entry.

• We met as a group to discuss changes in tutoring over the first semester.

• Several times during the term, tutors handed in their journals, and I wrote responses to their entries.

When I analyzed the journals, the salient finding was the intensely individual way each tutor responded to the guided reflection. Consequently, I will summarize the results tutor by tutor. Yvette changed the content of her thinking significantly, from seeing tutoring as a supportive Rogerian counseling endeavor to something unspecified. She never settled on and mastered another approach, and the students hesitated to see her. The process of her thinking changed from almost constant worry that “students would walk away unsatisfied with [her] help” to where “[she did] not spend a fraction of the time thinking about it.” Yvette said, “I feel I have a job to do and not everyone will be happy with my work, but at least I gave it my best shot.”

Meredith also made major changes in her thinking. When asked what she would like to learn about tutoring, Meredith initially had no idea, but by the end of the semester, she had a myriad of questions, most significantly, “Are the conferences that I think work really the ones that do, and vice versa?” She also moved from having very general reactions to conferences—“either basking or kicking myself”—to “thinking about specific elements of a conference that lead to either success or failure.” Meredith abandoned her early interest in prose style and concentrated on the higher order concerns usually requiring attention in conferences. She overcame her desire to fix a multitude of errors, and she saw the value of asking more and more questions of tutees. In one conference captured on audiotape, she asked five successive questions on a point, each query more concrete, until the student was able to see an answer; then she asked three increasingly abstract questions until he expressed a generalization which fit his paper. Meredith said her changes in thinking happened because of
experience, independent reflection, and guided reflection.

Rennel’s answers to the questions before and after the guided reflection changed little. She felt she learned some specific strategies to involve students more in the sessions, but she always felt pressured by her desire for a perfect paper and therefore continued to prefer a tutor-centered approach. She felt the exercises changed the process of her thinking a little. “In Journal Entry 1, I indicated that I thought about tutoring in terms of specific students: ‘Did Christina hand in her essay on time?’ or ‘I wonder what grade Jennifer got on her term paper.’ At the end of the exercises, I think in pretty much the same way except I also think about whether individual students have made progress or not and why.”

Dawn wrote, “Doing the reflection-on-practice exercises changed the content of my thinking about my tutoring a great deal.” After trying Socratic tutoring, Dawn realized, “as a direct result of reflection,” that she preferred a more directive approach. The problem with non-tutor-centered methods is this: the questions may create better papers, but the students “feel they have fixed the papers themselves, and all the tutor did was ask questions.” Therefore, students are less likely to return to the Center for help, and thus less likely to develop better writing habits. An observing tutor noted that Dawn “tend[ed] to do most of the work instead of letting the student do it.” Two of the three things Dawn thought most important about tutoring did not change. For the third, Dawn replaced the importance of patience with the necessity for confidence. Dawn felt most confident editing. She could not think of anything in particular she wanted to know about tutoring. In reply to “How do you think about your tutoring?” Dawn initially said that she thought critically, but at the end of the semester, she said that she got “a good feeling” knowing that she helped someone, and that her thinking process was “really rather scattered.”

Although each tutor’s reaction to the guided reflection on practice was unique, there was enough change in both content and process of thinking to warrant studying the next year’s tutors to see whether their tutoring changed after reflection on practice.

**Reflection on Practice and Changes in Tutoring**

The new tutors went through the same hiring and training procedures as the previous year’s tutors. The three tutors, all female undergraduates, majored in Linguistics, Political Science, and English. One hoped to become a teacher, and the other two did not state firm career goals.

After the tutors had tutored independently for about eight hours and just before the guided reflection began, three conferences were randomly selected for each tutor, students were asked to sign consent
forms, and the conferences were audiotaped. At the end of the semester, the procedure was repeated. I trained two research assistants to analyze the sessions (see the form in Appendix A). Each research assistant analyzed and categorized each conference. This involved two related processes. First, conferences were analyzed by identifying the major phases and subroutines, the type and number of questions asked by both tutor and student, the content of talk about writing, the stage of the writing process, the tutor roles, and the amount of time each person talked. These data do not lead directly to categorizing a conference but rather act as a check against, and a guide for, the second process which is matching the conference with one of the extended definitions of tutor-centered, structured participation, and student-centered conferences. If a conference switched type part way through, it received both designations. I listened to every tape, read all the completed forms, and checked on specifics such as the number of questions asked, to make sure that the conferences were being coded accurately.

The type of conference conducted by the tutors changed little as a result of the reflection-on-practice exercises (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutors and Conference</th>
<th>Before Reflection Exercises</th>
<th>After Reflection Exercises</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sybil #1</td>
<td>Student-centered</td>
<td>Student-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sybil #2</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sybil #3</td>
<td>Student-centered and Tutor-centered</td>
<td>Tutor-centered and Structured participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethel #1</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
<td>Structured participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethel #2</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethel #3</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadene #1</td>
<td>Tutor-centered</td>
<td>Student-centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadene #2</td>
<td>Tutor-centered and Student-centered</td>
<td>Student-centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadene #3</td>
<td>Student-centered</td>
<td>Student-centered</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sybil continued her pattern of alternating between taking over the conference and offering expert advice and letting the student run the conference and offering expert advice. Her three early conferences were almost identical types to her later three. Sybil’s first conference after the reflection-on-practice exercises illustrates a fairly typical tutor-centered session for her and for the other tutors. When the first-year student requested the editing of her geography paper, Sybil tried to get the student to read aloud, but the student refused, saying that she had already read it aloud and was not very good at it. Sybil began the body of the conference reading the essay aloud:

*Sybil:* “‘Super Natural.’ ‘Splendor Sine Occasu.’ ‘Unfailing Splendor.’” However it is said, British Columbia is one of the most unique places in the world. Through the relationships between people, environment, the patterns people form and the changes that occur to the landscape, these sayings can also be applied to a smaller region in British Columbia, which is also unique in its own ways; the Central Okanagan.” OK, you said here “the relationships between people, environment, the patterns people form”—I would say “the environment” /Ya/ because, like, it’s a noun. “Which is also unique in it’s own ways”—OK, do you know the difference between it’s and its?

*Student:* [Mumbles]

*Sybil:* Pardon me? Which one is this?

*Student:* It is.

*Sybil:* So the apostrophe is taking the place of the i. So there’s no apostrophe there [she makes the change]. And the semi-colon there—you have “Which is also unique in its own ways—semi-colon—the Central Okanagan.” A semi-colon separates two sentences, basically, that could be joined /Ya/ and “the Central Okanagan” isn’t a sentence. I think just a comma would be just fine.

In this excerpt, Sybil tackles three errors, the first and third in a tutor-centered fashion and the it’s versus its topic in an interactive manner involving the student. In the forty-four minute conference, Sybil addressed fifty errors, forty-one in a tutor-centered manner, and nine involving the student in finding the correct answer. They dealt with articles, it’s versus its, semi-colons, format, deleting words, adding words, awkward sentences, unnecessary repetition, typos, apostrophes with
dates, spelling, usage, commas, abbreviations, than versus then, style, organization, possessives, and spacing. Although it's versus its and semicolons both came up three times, Sybil made all the changes. She talked 70% of the time, the student spoke 20%, and 10% was silence.

Ethel maintained a consistent tutor-centered approach except for a structured participation session in her second set of conferences. In this structured participation session, a first-year composition student brought in his graded paper with comments about poor referencing, and he was quite passive, yet Ethel got him involved. She asked eighteen closed, nine open, and four probe-and-prompt questions in a twenty-five-minute session. When the student did not handle the open-ended questions well, Ethel switched to modeling where she found the plagiarism, demonstrated how it should be referenced, and then asked the student to find and fix the next example.

Nadene made the most change in her tutoring method of first choice, but not because of the reflection-on-practice exercises. Early in the semester, she tried to conduct tutor-centered conferences but often ran into difficulty because she was not knowledgeable enough to maintain her role as expert. For example, in the second audiotaped conference, the student presented a very rough draft, was uncertain about what was needed for a Natural Resources paper, and had a series of worries to discuss. Nadene asked fifteen closed and six open questions mainly to gather information, and then she tried to provide the answers in a tutor-centered manner. The student, however, slowly realized that the tutor, who had never taken a science course, was giving vague, unhelpful answers, so the student took over the conference and asked a series of ten closed questions looking for specifics. By the end of the semester, Nadene had decided to let most students run the conferences, even though that sometimes put her in the uncomfortable position of being grilled for answers she did not have.

**Knowledge that Fosters Doubt**

Ten hours of reflection-on-practice exercises do not necessarily change tutors' thinking in ways writing center directors might regard as positive. Of the four tutors, one changed her thinking to include perspicacious evaluations of conferences, dedication to working on higher order concerns, and belief in engaging students through questioning. However, another tutor made little substantial change, one abandoned her view of tutoring as counseling but never found a coherent replacement, and another tutor reasoned that efficiently and accurately editing students' papers was best for her and for the students. Nor did the reflection-on-practice exercises seem to make major changes in tutoring. Two tutors had two of their three conferences at the end of the semester identical in type to their conferences near the first of the semester. The third tutor changed
from an even mix of tutor- and student-centered to entirely student-centered, but neither she nor I attributed the change to the reflection-on-practice exercises.

These conclusions are cautionary. Although a negative publication bias exists which says that readers only want and only benefit from positive reports, we also benefit from learning what does not work well. Although the current study was not designed to locate causes of inertia, I did work closely with each tutor for an academic year, and informed but speculative explanations of the results will help identify implications for theory and practice. Possibly a day’s initial training and one hour per week ongoing training is simply inadequate (Vandenberg). Possibly tutors need concerted help developing a professional philosophy of tutoring (Mullin), for whenever tutoring actions are non-routine, they arise from decisions informed by a philosophy. Possibly no change in tutoring method was detected simply because most tutors cannot change that fast (e.g., Hill-ocks; Ritchie and Wilson). Possibly, when tutors do not want to make a career out of teaching writing one-to-one, they may have ample motivation to show up for work and keep a journal, but not the kind of motivation to voluntarily undergo the uncertainty and pain of changing a comfortable tutoring method for a professionally more desirable method. Summoning such motivation is particularly difficult for tutors when they work in the Center only a few hours per week.

The power of students and contextual factors may also explain the lack of change. Far from being collaborative peers or voluntary learners thirsting for knowledge, many students coming to the writing center exert an enormous pressure on tutors to do their work for them, in particular, to edit their papers. The community college students in Joyce Neff Magotto’s study were “clear and candid about their personal purpose for writing college papers—to persuade an instructor to give them a good grade” (90). They saw writing as either busywork or a threat to their self-esteem. “Students further complicate[d] their position by representing writing as a rule-bound, monolithic system of right and wrong” (99). While students see themselves as not knowing this esoteric system, they know that tutors excel at it. The university students in Lerner’s study “often [brought] powerful product-oriented concerns to the interaction” (226) with the tutors. “The tension between some of the tutors’ process-oriented goals and some of the students’ product-oriented goals challenged a developmental outcome and often resulted in sessions focused upon correcting texts” (237). Students carry the weight of society’s, the institution’s, and the professor’s conceptions of writing, as well as their own agenda to get the service they want from an operation which is supposed to be offering a service for students. Against this weight, the tutor—a student with institutional sanction of some sort—must be strong to conduct the kind of tutoring advocated in our tutor training.
Finally, some patterns of tutor knowledge make profitable reflection unlikely. George Hillocks develops this argument in relation to college composition teachers. If I apply the seven aspects of teacher knowledge to tutoring and create an extreme scenario—a not uncommon scenario according to Hillocks’ research—I create a tutor portrait as follows. The tutor has an objectivist rather than constructivist philosophy and thus favors techniques such as lecturing the student and foci such as correct English. The tutor operates with a common theory-in-use: “If I explain it, the student will understand and do it.” So once something is explained, there is no need to check whether the student has learned it. Goals for conferences are constructed idiosyncratically rather than from careful examination of theory and practice. Thus goals, such as “be friendly” or “feel comfortable” or “please the student” or “make a better writer,” all seem equally good possibilities. The tutor, probably without realizing it, has low expectations of students, assuming that they only want their papers edited and cannot be persuaded to work at becoming better writers. Having received little excellent instruction and having studied little pedagogy, the tutor’s natural method is explication. Lacking knowledge in rhetoric and composition research and theory, the tutor draws on little professional expertise. Being new to the job and engaged in one-to-one conversation, the tutor is largely unaware of the societal, institutional, and professorial influences impinging on the tutoring. The chances are slim of a semester’s reflection on practice changing such a person’s tutoring significantly.

The foregoing conclusions and speculations have led me to doubt the value of short, “practical” (Vandenberg) training and to question the value of structured reflection-on-practice exercises in my context. While our tutors respond positively to the reflection-on-practice program and said unanimously last semester that it should remain part of tutor training, the modest training program generally does not foster tutoring that will meet my goal of “a better writer, not just a better paper.” A three-credit tutor training course may be the answer, although Roswell’s study of graduates of such a course cautions us against leaping to the conclusion that it would be sufficient. Any such course will want to include some kind of reflection on practice, that is, will want tutors to monitor their practice and to learn systematically from experience. The current study foregrounds the difficulties of effectively incorporating reflection into tutor training. I found that it is difficult to use guided reflection to foster more reflective thinking by tutors and to change basic tutoring approaches. Although I have confidence in this finding for my Center, I realize the limitations when generalization is attempted from a unique location, unique initial training program, unique students, and a small number of tutors. Nonetheless, sound generalization is possible if the study is treated as a case and the validity rests not with tight controls, a huge sample, or
statistical procedures but with the care with which the researcher compares the context, results, and conclusions with his or her unique situation. Because the writing center field is relatively young and empirical research rather scarce, we need local, empirical studies to test our key assumptions, and we need to share the results, whether inspirational or cautionary.

**APPENDIX A**

**Conference Analysis Form**

Tutor______________________________

Conference date and time_____________

**MAJOR PHASES**

1. What are the major phases of the conference?
   a) What words signal the move from phase to phase?
   b) Who initiates the move to each phase?
   c) How long does each phase last?

**SUBPHASE ROUTINES**

1. How does the conference proceed? That is, what are the recurring activity patterns by which the tutor and student move through the conference?

**TUTOR QUESTIONS**

1. How frequently does the tutor ask each of the following kinds of questions?
   a) Rhetorical (calling for no answer)
   b) Closed (calling for yes/no answers, or short, succinct responses)
   c) Open (calling for broadly inclusive statements, assertions, or narrations)
   d) Probe and prompt (asking for additional detail)
   e) Leading (answering itself and leading the respondent to parrot information already known)
TUTEE QUESTIONS
1. How frequently does the tutee ask each of the following kinds of questions?
   a) Rhetorical
   b) Closed
   c) Open
   d) Probe and prompt
   e) Leading

CONTENT OF TALK ABOUT WRITING
1. Which of the following emphases is most pronounced?
   a) Rhetorical (the focus is on audience, purpose, voice, and/or tone)
   b) Intellectual (the focus is on the thesis of the composition and/or the writer's elaboration and qualification of this focus)
   c) Syntactical (the focus is on grammar, mechanics, and/or style)
   d) Writing process (the focus is on the steps or phases of the writing process)
   e) Other:

2. Within the dominant emphasis, what are the main topics of conversation?

STAGE OF THE WRITING PROCESS
1. What stage was the writer at?
   a) Assignment only
   b) Notes
   c) Outline
   d) Very rough draft
   e) Fairly polished draft
   f) Straight rewrite; grader has not commented
   g) Rewrite; grader has commented
   h) General consultation about writing

TUTOR ROLES
1. Which of these terms best describes the role or roles you feel the tutor played during the conference?
   ___ Appropriator—one who takes ownership of the student's paper and does the work on it.
   ___ Collaborator—one who works with the student as if the project belonged equally to both parties.
   ___ Controller of conference content—one who controls the
content of the conference, who decides what gets talked about and what gets said about it.

___ Editor—one who makes corrections on the paper, either silently or aloud by explaining each correction.

___ Listener—an attentive audience.

___ Manager—controls the organization, direction, and pace of the conference (as opposed to the content).

___ Modeler—one who demonstrates a skill or technique, usually has the student try it, and usually gives feedback on the performance.

___ Negotiator—one who negotiates conference content and organization. One who consults on decisions, such as changes in direction or topic.

___ Questioner—one who asks questions in order to identify the problem(s). One who asks a series of questions to help clients think through a problem and find viable answers for themselves.

___ Reader/Responder—an observant audience who responds to the composition or topic either as a unique individual or as a more general audience.

___ Resource person—one who answers the student’s questions: the student asks, the tutor answers.

___ Other:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

TIMES
  a) Total conference time__________
  b) Tutor talk (%) ____________
  c) Tutee talk (%) ____________
  d) Silence (extended) (%) ____________

CONFERENCE TYPE
  1. What type of conference was this?
     a) Tutor-centered
     b) Structured participation
     c) Student-centered

Please explain your choice. If you cannot determine that the conference fits one of these categories, please write “other” and explain.
I combined several definitions and models of reflection to create the following series of questions to help tutors reflect on their tutoring and to benefit from the reflection.

**Reflection on Practice: Questions to Address in Conference with Tutors**

**Strength**
- What was a major strength of the conference?
- Why did you do what you did? (That is, what assumptions or principles formed the basis of what you did?) What effect did your actions have?
- How did you feel about the event? What effect did this reaction have?
- What plan will you make to do this in other conferences?
- How will you evaluate how you continue to do it?

**Weakness**
- What would you like to focus on to improve?
- Why did you do what you did? (That is, what assumptions or principles formed the basis of what you did?) What effect did your actions have?
- How did you feel about the event? What effect did this reaction have?
- What change would you like to make?
- What plan will you make to try the solution?
- How will you evaluate the impact of the action?

*This theoretically sound series of questions was too structured to use comfortably with my tutors. Consequently, with the theory still in mind, I simplified the planned questions to these:*

- What was the major strength of the conference?
- What will you do to ensure that you keep doing that?
- What was the major weakness of the conference?
• What could you do to improve?
• What will you do to ensure that you try that?

Notes

1 In an effort to ensure that this article had relevance beyond the Center at the University of Northern British Columbia, I consulted four colleagues in diverse locations: Elizabeth Lee, Baton Rouge Community College, Louisiana; Barbara Jensen, Modesto Junior College, California; Virginia Ryan, Memorial University of Newfoundland; and Barbara Christian, University of Guelph, Ontario. I thank them for their comments on earlier drafts.

2 The tutors’ names are pseudonyms.

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