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*Review: On Location: Theory and Practice  
in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*

Candace Spigelman and Laurie Grobman, eds.  
Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2005.

by Melissa Ianetta

Writing center work is theoretically-messy business, so it should come as no surprise that shifting the tutorial scene from the center to the classroom is a similarly complicated affair. Such, at least, is my belief having now read *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring*, for whether describing a semester-long writing fellows program in a flourishing WAC environment or a single visit of writing center tutors to a Communication class, each of the essays in this volume richly describes a range of issues to consider before embarking on any form of classroom-based tutoring. Along with depicting a range of options, most of the essays use these locations either as a source of evidence to advance arguments concerning the development and implementation of classroom-based tutoring programs or as texts ripe for analysis to improve our understanding of tutoring and writing. Whether the reader is initially considering embarking on classroom-based tutoring or currently administering such a program, then, *On Location* offers a wealth of models as well as a variety of theoretical frameworks for understanding what goes on in these complex learning environments.

In their introduction, editors Spigelman and Grobman examine this theoretical richness, describing classroom-based writing tutoring as a "generic hybrid," one which draws upon the theories and practice of writing center studies, supplemental instruction programs, peer writing groups, and writing-across-the-curriculum initiatives. While classroom-based tutoring might borrow from each of these parent programs, however, it is nevertheless a distinct entity, as both the editors and many of the contributors take great pains to illustrate. Indeed, the unique nature of classroom-based tutoring is the argument that coheres the essays in this collection.

About the Author

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The editors use a tripartite arrangement that, in the volume's first and second parts, underscores the notion that there are benefits and hazards to this mode of writing instruction, and then, in its final section, reinforces the idea that such programs are fertile grounds for theoretical investigation. For example, the essays in part one, "Creating New Alliances and Connections Through Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring," are framed as the "good news" about this educational paradigm, for these essays "highligh[t] collegial, institutional, interdisciplinary, and discursive connections that classroom-based writing tutoring may foster" (85). In this section the reader finds Teagan Decker's construction of classroom tutors as writing center "emissaries," individuals who help communicate to students and faculty the benefits of writing center work; Mary Soliday's examination of the respective merits of generalist and specialist tutors; and Laurie Grobman's description of the ways in which course-based tutors can help basic writing students connect with academic discourse. Like Grobman, Jim Ottery and his co-authors are concerned with the connections fostered by tutors in a basic writing class. While Grobman examines a single tutor and her struggles to balance peerness with the authority invested in expertise, Ottery and his colleagues describe a pre-semester bridge program for incoming college freshmen, and detail the ways in which "consultants, students, and teachers constructed a model community of learners" (61). Carefully distinguishing tutoring from teaching, Ottery et al. describe the ways in which course-based tutoring helps at-risk students not just forge identities as writers but, more broadly and, perhaps, more importantly, conceive of themselves as college students. Former tutor Casey You closes this section of the collection with a discussion of the importance of trust in the peer-group dynamic.

Although the essays in section one emphasize the synergistic potential of classroom-based tutoring, *On Location* is no simple valorization of course-based tutoring. Indeed, both the authors and the editors are carefully attentive to the problems that beset such initiatives. Thus, "Reconciling Pedagogical Complications in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring," the collection's second section, argues that "forces that provide transformative possibilities simultaneously create new hurdles for students, tutors, faculty and administrators" (85). This grouping of essays, then, looks at problems that can emerge when minimalist, non-directive tutoring pedagogies popular in the writing center meet the conflicting demands of a specific discipline or classroom and offers strategies for overcoming these challenges. In this vein, Barbara Little Liu, a writing program administrator, and Holly Mandes, a former course-based tutor, describe the difficulties encountered when a tutor tries to apply writing center pedagogy in a course-based setting. Liu and Mandes' essay pairs particularly well with the

proceeding essay in the collection, in which Steve J. Corbett examines the relative merits of directive and nondirective tutoring in the classroom. Melissa Nicolas strikes a similarly cautious note in her contribution to the collection, where she reaffirms the necessity for pedagogical adjustment when moving from the writing center to course-based tutoring. Kelly Giger concludes this section with a discussion of the difficulties she encountered as a peer group leader in a basic writing class and offers a range of strategies for engaging these challenges.

The cautionary tales in this section of the collection may recollect for readers Elizabeth Boquet's definitions of the writing center. As Boquet explains, such definitional questions have large implications for our understanding of the writing center:

Is the writing center...primarily a *space*, a "laundry" where work is dropped of and picked up, where students are brushed off and cleaned up? Or is it primarily a *temporality*, an interaction between people over time, in which the nature of the interaction is determined not by site, but by method? ("Our Little Secret," 464)

When Boquet's questions are considered in light of the issues raised by Liu, Mandes, Corbett and Nicholas, the center appears to be both site *and* method—a method, in that course-based tutoring appears to be an attempt to import what is essential and best about the writing center into the classroom. Course-based tutoring thus can be seen as a mode of writing instruction released from the center into the classroom. In this manner, such programs engage Boquet's notion of the "excessive" writing center:

[A]n excessive theory of the writing center operations requires us to seek out an overflow of the expected in all its forms...It does away with the script for the how-to-write-a-research-paper session...and insists on less predictable and more productive conversations which wander, circle, and return again to the point where they began. ("Our Little Secret" 478)

By attempting to exceed the physical boundaries of the writing center, then, course-based tutoring seems to answer Boquet's call in its attempt to bring "less predictable and more productive" tutoring to the more predictable—more hierarchical—classroom. And yet, in the problems they detail and the pedagogical adjustments they describe, these authors imply that the writing center is a site as well as a method. As the complications described in this volume document, when tutoring leaves the center, such activity can no longer be writing center tutoring. Rather, it must evolve to meet the new environment; it must mutate or, as Boquet argues, become "MONSTROUS" (*Noise* 32).

Not that Boquet's critical apparatus is the only framework that can be applied to these issues. Indeed, the five essays in the collection's final section, "Addressing Issues of Authority and Role Definition in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring," apply a range of theoretical lenses to course-based tutoring, yielding insights that are both abstractly provocative and immediately useful. The first two essays in this section, in particular, struck me as apt illustrations of the pragmatic and productive applications of theory. Marti Singer, Robin Breault and Jennifer Wing, for example, offer a Marxist analysis, likening course-based tutor estrangement to Marxist class alienation. Resonating particularly well with this thoughtful critique is David Martins and Thia Wolf's "Classroom-Based Tutoring and the 'Problem' of Tutor Identity: Highlighting the Shift from Writing Center to Classroom-Based Tutoring." Here, Martins and Wolf persuasively warn the reader against focusing on teacher support at tutors' expense and urge program administrators to incorporate tutors' perspectives into any assessments. As the authors rightfully note, there is often a tendency to overlook the urgency of the problems tutors face:

While writing administrators expected slow change and frequent reassertion of literacy myths, tutors' frequent confrontation with those myths created a sense of emergency; the tutors, of course, had to *do something* in classrooms tomorrow or the day after, while administrators could look forward to conversations with faculty next week or next term. (167)

As we are justly reminded here, it is all too easy to judge the success of our programs only through student advancement and faculty attitudes, thus neglecting the development of the tutors who are foundational to such work. Susan Hrach Georgecink seems to take this notion of tutors' centrality even further, provocatively arguing that "the needs of the classroom students, the interests of the writing center director, and the satisfaction of the classroom instructor must be of secondary concern" to the "tutors' own maturation as learners" (184, 183). Candace Spigelman similarly focuses on the tutors' role, detailing a specific instance of their "conflicted status" (186) in the classroom, despite her best attempts to develop a collaborative environment. In this portion of the volume, as with the other two parts of the collection, the editors have given a peer tutor the last word; here, Jennifer Corroy interrogates the rhetoric of her own writing center to see if course-based tutoring can indeed change undergraduate education and institutional writing culture as had been claimed.

In their conclusion to the collection, Grobman and Spigelman offer an insightful summary of the collection's themes and summarize the contributors' hard-won lessons. I anticipate that I—like many other readers—will find myself returning to this

chapter when developing my own course-based tutoring programs. The editors then conclude the volume with suggestions for future research. Similar to the other essays in this collection, then, this final chapter draws together theory and practice, amply demonstrating that writing-related research—like the teaching of writing itself—may be messy, but always offers its own brand of rewards.

It seems impossible to conclude this review without commenting on its contribution to the legacy of Candace Spigelman, for like her other scholarship this collection reflects the position attributed to her in a moving memorial by IWCA President Jon Olson, namely that writing classrooms and writing centers are “parallel sites, not...dominant and subordinate sites of writing” (par 9). This belief is reflected throughout *On Location*, where the relationship of the classroom to the center is presented in a mood of realistic optimism. *On Location*, then, is part of Candace Spigelman’s gift to those of us in the writing center community, a bequest that not only benefits those who knew her personally but also those of us who never met her, yet who read her scholarship and feel her loss to our field.

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