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POWER AND AUTHORITY IN PEER TUTORING

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“Power” and “authority” are not nice words, especially to writing centers, who have always advertised themselves as nurturing environments, friendly places with coffee pots and comfy couches for the weary. These words are further muted by calling students who work in writing centers peer tutors, peer writing consultants or some such formation that includes the word *peer*. The use of undergraduate peer tutors has powerfully shaped writing center practice for more than twenty years, and the idea of peership has served in center scholarship to represent writing centers as the nonhierarchical and nonthreatening collaborative environments most aspire to be. As early as 1980, Thom Hawkins, in “Intimacy and Audience: The Relationship Between Revision and the Social Dimension of Peer Tutoring,” lauded writing center work as “a reciprocal relationship between equals, a sharing in the work of the system (for example, writing papers) between two friends who trust one another” (66). Kenneth Bruffee’s model of collaborative learning (1983b), which Hawkins cites and many centers adopted, did much to shape initial constructions of the tutor as peer. Though in the middle 1980s, John Trimbur’s “Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms” called into question the notion of “peerness,” pointing to the unequal positions tutor and tutee often hold in terms of rhetorical knowledge and academic success, Trimbur recommended training tutors in nondirective questioning methods to preserve the peer relationship as much as possible and to encourage collaborative learning rather than hierarchical teaching. As Carrie Leverenz wrote of peer tutors, “it could be said that they are experts in not appearing to be experts” (2001, 54).

Two essays in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* demonstrate tutors’ difficulty in always remaining peers. As tutor Jason Palmeri (2000) put it after discussing a session in which a tutee lost confidence in him because he could not show her how to integrate source material as expected in her

discipline, “I came to realize that authority is a central part of peer tutoring” (10). Palmeri goes on to lament that once this student lost confidence in his authority, she had far less interest in their sessions. Julie Bokser (2000), a new director, concludes an essay by questioning the purpose of suppressing directive behaviors learned on the job by older tutors who have worked in corporate settings where people are more comfortable in hierarchical arrangements. Bokser issues a call “to resituate discussions about collaboration and peerness within the locus of discussions about power and authority” (9). These complaints, coming from a tutor and new director rather than the community’s “name” theoreticians or practitioners, suggest a grassroots problem that tutors face daily and that has remained problematic in center scholarship—the question of tutorial power and authority. This question has had a long and unresolved history in the writing center community, and likely will remain one of the more difficult questions as the community continues to develop. In this paper, I will attempt to sort out why writing centers have been uncomfortable with wielding power and claiming authority, how they have masked these terms in the egalitarian rhetoric of “peerness,” how centers might gain by refiguring authority as a usable descriptor in discussing tutorial work, and how tutors might be trained differently to recognize and use their power and authority without becoming authoritarian.

POWER, AUTHORITY, AND THE WRITING CENTER’S DISCONTENTS

Historical work on writing centers, such as that of Beth Boquet, Irene Clark and Dave Healy, as well as some of my own, has demonstrated that centers have long been uncomfortable with power and authority. First, as instructional sites that require funding and resources but neither generate FTE credit hours nor award grades, centers have always been (and in many cases still are) vulnerable to budget cuts and seen as expensive peripherals for remediating students considered unprepared. Furthermore, as instructional sites but not classrooms, student service units yet instructional (in contrast, say, to the health center or financial aid office), centers have been difficult to classify in the taxonomy of university entities, despite their aspirations to disciplinary status. They are neither fish nor fowl. While their ambiguity makes them hard to define, it also makes them easy to marginalize. The initial positioning of centers figures heavily in their attitudes towards the unfortunate yet unavoid-

able power relations that govern the large majority of American universities. Having felt the pressure of being on the bottom of hierarchical relationships in the university, centers have been loathe to take an authoritative position in their work, preferring a peer tutoring model that promotes a nonhierarchical relationship between tutor and student.

Before proceeding further, however, I would like to say that like others who work in writing centers, I am certainly no fan of hierarchical relationships. None of us likes to feel less empowered than another in interpersonal relations, and students who enter writing centers should be made to feel as comfortable as possible, if for no other reason than basic human decency. However, to pretend that there is not a hierarchical relationship between tutor and student is a fallacy, and to engineer peer tutoring techniques that divest the tutor of power and authority is at times foolish and can even be unethical. Yet to some degree, that is what writing centers have done. Much tutor training routinely includes community-endorsed noninterventionist dictums, if not dogma, that instruct tutors to never hold the pen, never write on a student's paper, never edit a student sentence or supply language in the form of phrases or vocabulary. Irene Clark and Dave Healy, in "Are Writing Centers Ethical?" (1996), catalogue a number of examples of articles propagating these dictums, most notably Jeff Brooks's "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," a piece originally published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* (1991) and reprinted in *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (1995). Brooks's essay encapsulates nondirective pedagogy in its title, and such instruction is then justified by egalitarian notions of peership that maintain that doing otherwise would be to appropriate the student's text, to take ownership of it. In other words, except for a few notable exceptions, writing center discourse, in both published scholarship and conference talk, often represents direct instruction as a form of plunder rather than help, while adherence to nondirective principles remain the pedagogy *du jour*.

In the past few years, some center scholars have questioned notions of peership and nondirective pedagogy on ethical and political grounds, though they remain in the minority. The beginnings of this line of questioning were adumbrated in 1990 in Irene Clark's "Maintaining Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma." There Clark attempted to dislodge such dicta that the tutor never hold the pen or that the best answers to students'

questions are more questions from the tutor. Though Clark's essay appeared in the Tenth Anniversary Issue of the *Writing Center Journal*, it was essentially a lone and unjustifiably ignored voice in a community espousing nondirective pedagogy, though perhaps not being able to implement it consistently given the diverse needs of students and the complexity of tutorials. This latter point is borne out in a 1994 essay by Alice Gillam, Susan Callaway, and Katherine Hennessy Winkoff. Tellingly entitled "The Role of Authority and The Authority of Roles in Peer Writing Tutorials," Gillam et al. organize their essay with an opening review of writing center theory, demonstrating the hegemony of nondirective methods based on the tricky notion of peerness. They then move to a section on practice, showing how tutors in their center—often torn between needing to follow the party line and needing to exercise authority—struggle with role conflict, and how students are often confused by the tutors' behavior. However, published in *The Journal of Teaching Writing*, rather than in a venue more regularly read by center directors and scholars, this essay, despite its high quality, had little or no influence on the community and is not even listed in the Murphy, Law, Sherwood bibliography of 1996.

In 1995, however, the community could no longer ignore challenges to nondirective pedagogy with the publication of Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns's "A Critique of Pure Tutoring" in the *Writing Center Journal*. Aside from their wickedly subtle pun on "peer tutoring" in the title, they unapologetically attacked writing centers' seemingly unflagging allegiance to a nondirective peer model, characterizing its tenets as a "bible" in the most inflexible sense of the term. They then demonstrated how master-apprentice relationships in music and art constitute a kind of directive tutorial and are an accepted and fruitful practice, arguing that tutorials in these disciplines "are hierarchical: there is an open admission that some individuals have more knowledge and skills than others, and that the knowledge and skills are being 'handed down'" (141). Needless to say, this essay caused much gnashing of teeth and rending of garments on WCenter, the community's online discussion group. A year later, Irene Clark, this time as a co-author with David Healy, attributed the community's long commitment to nondirective peer tutoring not to a saintly sense of egalitarianism, but to writing centers' attempts to mollify faculty who suspect tutoring is a form of plagiarism. Accusing centers of having adopted a "pedagogy of self-defense" (34), Clark and Healy dare centers to stop pretending that tutors do not

do some work for students, arguing that directors must educate faculty about postmodern ideas of authorship whereby no single author is fully responsible for any text, and that what goes on in tutorials is no different than what goes on in the production of most professional writing. From a more political stance, Nancy Grimm, in *Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Post-Modern Times* (1999), has questioned the ethics of nondirective methods, contending that in adopting them centers unwittingly “protect the status quo and withhold insider knowledge, inadvertently keeping students from nonmainstream culture on the sidelines, making them guess about what the mainstream culture expects” (31).

Examined closely, all of this is tough talk. If centers, as Clark and Healy (1995) maintain, embraced nondirective collaborative pedagogy largely as a defense mechanism, then the dominant practices of writing centers in the last twenty-odd years have been little more than a rationalization of the frightened. If Grimm (1999) is right, then centers are not just cowards but dupes, political pawns in some larger power structure they serve unawares. And if Shamoan and Burns (1995) can be believed, centers are immature—unable to face the fact that “some individuals have more knowledge and skills than others,” something small children quickly learn. Cowardly? Gullible? Childish? Even if I am engaging in a bit of rhetorical hyperbole in representing the implications of these scholars’ positions, these are strong words. They do not describe the writing center directors I know, and I think Healy, Clark, Burns, Shamoan, and Grimm would agree. Nevertheless, their exposure of the problematics of a nondirective collaborative peer model of tutoring helps to account for the anxieties tutors such as Palmeri (2000) and Bokser (2000) articulate.

Unpacking each of these critiques uncovers the issues of power and authority beneath them, issues imbricated in the institutional position of the writing center but carrying over into the pedagogy of peer tutoring. Many accounts of writing centers in the 1970s, as Clark and Healy (1995) demonstrate, show writing centers acceding to a mission of providing grammatical instruction and drill, the fix-it-shop model. These centers were given the authority to deliver this type of instruction perceived by the public and university administrations as necessary to acculturate underprepared students admitted to the academy under open admissions programs. Simultaneously, other centers, influenced by the emerging process pedagogy in composition, began to take authority for

more than grammar, tutoring students in rhetorical matters as well and thus engaging in a power struggle with the classroom for the authority to teach students to write, an authority usually reserved for the classroom. This binary arrangement—center for grammar, classroom for rhetoric—never reached detente, as is evident in the anticlassroom rhetoric marking much writing center scholarship of subsequent decades (see Hemmeter 1990), and as remains clear in the fix-it-shop image of centers that still persists for some faculty, administrators, and many students. Rather than a division of authority or acceptance of a compromise position—e.g., both classroom and center teach writing, but just differently—a power struggle ensued that continues today. In terms of institutional positioning, the classroom held and continues to hold the stronger position, given that it generates credit hours and awards grades, the very blood of the university.

While the classroom holds the high ground, the hegemonic position afforded by institutional recognition, writing centers have functioned more like a minority party, recognized as a voice but lacking institutional power, operating pedagogically somewhat clandestinely, while simultaneously attempting to work through the system through extended services—WAC linkages being the most obvious—to increase their authority and power base within the institution. These struggles continue, and while some centers have won strong positions on their campuses, others remain struggling, and laments about marginalization, though sometimes seeming counter productive to more successful centers, still inflect the community's discourse. Still other centers, though empowered on their campuses, consciously take a subversive stance, seeing as their duty exposing students to what they perceive as the oppressive power structures of the university and society itself (Grimm 1999; Davis 1995).

Although centers vary in institutional power and authority, as well as taking different stances toward their positions, they have almost uniformly maintained their identity as nonhierarchical, friendly places where students can feel welcome. Though many teachers would argue that the same applies to their classrooms, centers have the added luxury of being positioned where they do not have to give grades. This is both an advantage and disadvantage. As mentioned, their failure to generate credit hours may make centers seem a frill to university administrators. Furthermore, students so acculturated to tangible rewards—they speak of “getting something out of a class,” “getting good grades”—may won-

der what they “get out of” going to the center, what they “get for” spending an hour of their busy week talking with someone about their writing. For many, the answer is “better grades,” an answer that writing centers have often seen as grubbing and vulgar, preferring rather to follow Stephen North’s claim that the center’s job is “to produce better writers, not better papers” (1984, 438). While this mission has satisfied writing center directors, it is unlikely too many students would accept it, though they may unwittingly become better writers through their work in the center (and thus earn better grades). Thus students sometimes come to the center expecting work to be done for them in exchange for the time they sacrifice, an attitude which further pushes centers toward a nondirective peer pedagogy.

Not having to assign grades, however, also becomes a reason to contrast the center advantageously against the classroom. Students can, it is claimed, feel relaxed and unintimidated as they might not in a teacher’s office or in class. They find creature comforts such as the three Cs of writing centers—coffee, cookies, and couches—and they interact with others supposedly like themselves—students. This is the image of the writing center as “safe house” or student sanctuary, a place beyond the competition, evaluation, and grade-grubbing that supposedly marks the classroom. Centers have taken pride in this image in presenting themselves as student advocates, while turning to it for succor when feeling the sting of marginalization (if we lack clout, at least we are nice). But when taken too far, the safe house metaphor has also contributed to an identity that is not only unrealistic, but that also has adversely affected peer tutoring. The “safe house” metaphor rests on maintaining a non-hierarchical environment at all costs, which, though imperative in the atmosphere of the center, in a tutorial can undermine the tutor and lead to dogmatic applications of nondirective peer tutoring principles. It is these principles that Shamoon and Burns (1995) castigate in their call for more directive tutoring in which the tutor takes more authority, wields more power, and is only a peer in perhaps belonging to the same age group and sharing the status of student.

While I agree with Shamoon and Burns, as well as Grimm (1999) and Clark and Healy (1996), that peer tutoring has been represented by the community and translated into practice, often uncritically, as a largely nondirective egalitarian enterprise, I believe that peer tutoring should not be dismissed, but refigured in terms of the way authority and power

play themselves out depending on the players in any given tutorial, a refiguration I will now attempt.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PEERS?

Peer tutoring has been a powerful pedagogy for writing center teaching and student learning. However, when the word *peer* has been interpreted in the extreme, it has been distorted to support the kind of nondirective tutoring that understandably rankles some center scholars and practitioners. At the same time, the enshrinement of nondirective tutoring is understandable in the context of writing center history. On the one hand, as Clark and Healy (1996) argue, this pedagogy helped deflect charges of plagiarism, but on the other, I would argue that center workers were as concerned about plagiarism as teachers were, and developed nondirective pedagogy not only to deflect criticism, but also because they believed it worked. Based on questioning methods, whether designated Socratic or Rogerian, nondirective tutoring can cue students to recall knowledge they have and construct new knowledge that they do not. Anyone who has worked in writing centers knows that when nondirective tutoring clicks, it is wonderful, and its effectiveness accounts for some of the zealotry of those who endorse it but then impose it upon situations where other strategies are necessary.

An ideal peer tutorial in the nondirective mode proceeds something like this. A third-year chemistry major comes into the center with a draft of a lab report and meets with a tutor, let's say a second-year literature major and skilled writer. The two are peers in that both are students, and both are committed to being good writers:

Tutor: You seem to have your thesis at the end and the first part talks about your steps in the experiment. Is that the way you want it?

Student: Yes, we are supposed to use an inductive pattern and draw a conclusion.

Tutor: Ok, that's good. Now, on the third page you talk about mixing the chemicals and then heating them, but you don't explain why. Do you see what I mean? Could you add a transition to get the reader from one to the other?

Student: Yes, I could say how I mixed the chemicals until they got syrupy, that's how they should be, before I put them on the Bunsen burner, something like "Once the chemicals thickened to a reddish

syrupy consistency, they were placed on the Bunsen burner.” And then add some stuff about the temperature. . .

Tutor: Yes, that would really help.

This snippet illustrates nondirective peer tutoring at its best. The tutor asks questions; the student answers in ways that lead to improving the writing. The student takes responsibility for the content, which the tutor, a literature major, cannot be expected to know, justifying the placement of her thesis based on knowledge of the rhetorical structure of the lab report, and even takes a step toward becoming a better writer in supplying a concrete example of the tutor’s reference to an abstract rhetorical term—*transition*.

This tutorial not only exemplifies the effectiveness of nondirective tutoring, but Bruffian collaborative learning as well, with the tutor learning that a thesis in a lab report (though usually called something else) is more desirable as a conclusion based on induction, something he can file for future reference, just as the student can the definition of transition. Both student and tutor share authority and engage in collaborative operations to improve the text. It is important to remember that in adopting a nonhierarchical pedagogy of peer collaboration, centers were heavily influenced by Kenneth Bruffee’s work on collaborative learning (1993), which originated when he was directing the writing center at Brooklyn College. Coupling the mutual benefits to tutor and student with the theoretical underpinning of Bruffian collaborative learning, this tutorial is exactly the way writing centers would like to represent their work—effective in practice and underpinned by theory. In fact, this tutorial works so well that it becomes a myth for self-justification. Unfortunately, the myth is seductive, and directors want to believe such tutorials happen far more often than they do, use them to represent center work, and try to train tutors to approximate, if not attain, them consistently, all the time knowing at heart that such tutorials are rare, many are messier, and most are far messier.

Furthermore, to pretend this tutorial is exemplary is not only to ignore its rarity but to misread Bruffee somewhat. While certainly he placed much faith in students’ ability to learn from one another, his sense of collaboration included the assumption that the tutor had some authority. Discussing training tutors at Brooklyn under Bruffee’s supervision, Marcia Silver (1978) argues “probably the single most important condition for teaching writing is the willingness on the part of the student writer to accept criticism and grow as a result of it” (435). This is tough love, not the egalitarian, nonhierarchical presentation of tutor

and student as “two friends” cited in Hawkins (1980) at the outset of this essay. The tutor is expected to criticize, and the student is expected have a skin tough enough to put the criticism to good use. However, blind adherence to a nonhierarchical ethic of peer tutoring treats the student as if he or she is a high-strung child, and can also lead to inefficiency if the tutor refuses to take authority when necessary.

Witness this tutorial in which the tutor will not deviate from nondirective principles. This time the tutor is a journalism major minoring in theater; the student, an undeclared freshman writing a review of a campus production for an introduction to theater class:

Tutor: After reading through your paper, I am wondering why you spent the first page writing about you and your friends on the way to the theater.

Student: I don't know. That's what happened. We met in town, then drove to campus, and had a hard time finding a parking space, like I said.

Tutor: Do you think that is important for the reader to know?

Student: Well, I thought I would put it in to get started and I thought it was neat the way we got lucky and got a space just when we thought we'd be late. I wanted to start with something interesting, and I thought the play was really serious, heavy.

Tutor: It is interesting, but how do you see it relating to the play?

Student: I don't know. Should I take it out?

Tutor: That's up to you. What do you think?

Here the tutor continues nondirective questioning to a fault in the name of preserving the peer relationship. It is obvious that the student lacks knowledge of the conventions of a play review, but instead of taking authority for teaching him, the tutor coyly “wonders” about the way the student opens the paper. No one can implicate this tutorial for plagiarism, and the tutor certainly maintains a nonhierarchical peer relationship with the student, but it is doubtful that anything other than adherence to principle has been achieved. If the student does cut the superfluous introduction, it is likely the cut will be more the influence of the tutor's doubts about it than from a writerly decision by the student.

Compare a second version of the same tutorial, in which the tutor draws upon his knowledge in journalism and theater, takes some authority for the text, and exercises some power in directing the student

- Tutor:* After reading your paper, I see you have a long part about getting to the theater. Have you ever written a play review before?
- Student:* No. I put that in because I thought it was interesting the way we got the parking space at the last minute. I wanted to start with something interesting before doing all the stuff on the play, which I thought was really serious, heavy.
- Tutor:* Yes, it is good to start with something interesting, but did your teacher explain anything about how to write the review?
- Student:* No, we just have that little sheet I gave you saying we had to write the review, how many pages, and when the play is on.
- Tutor:* Well, in a play review, you might have a short introduction, but you should start as close to the play as possible because your purpose is to help the reader decide if they want to see the play or not. You need to cut the part about getting to the theater and start with the sentence where you say "*Oleanna* is a play that will make people think." That is a short direct sentence, and it previews what follows.

Clearly, the tutor here takes more authority, is more responsible for the shape the paper will take. In addition, the tutor uses her authority—familiarity with the conventions of play reviews and the rhetorical need to consider audience—to provide instruction that will be useful to the student in completing the paper as well as others in the future. Strict adherents to nondirective methods might argue that the tutor is appropriating the student's paper in directly telling him to cut the long introduction, or wielding too much power over a student who seems to have little himself in terms of this assignment. Although beneath the surface of the first exchanges there may be a slight bit of contentiousness on the tutor's part and defensiveness on the student's, the tutor does not belittle or exclude the student, but uses her authority to transmit knowledge and power to direct the student for the purpose of helping him complete the task. Undoubtedly there is not the sharing of authority seen in the tutorial on the chemistry lab report, where the student is much more knowledgeable, but nevertheless there is a sharing of the work as the student, though lacking authority, remains attentive and explains his motivations to the tutor.

Tutorials, then, I would argue, depend on authority and power, authority about the nature of the writing and the power to proceed from or resist what that authority says. Either tutor and student must share authority, producing a pleasant but rare collaborative peer situation as in the tutorial on the lab report, or one or the other must have it,

and in writing centers the one with it is more often the tutor, as is the case in the second tutorial on the play review. Writing centers should not be ashamed of this fact. Of course, there are caveats. In some tutorials, authority may be lacking on both parts, because every tutor cannot be expert in all types of writing. Or power can be misdirected. For example, the student writing the theater review has the power to resist the tutor and not cut the irrelevant introduction. Or the tutor may wield power without authority, misleading the student, as is evident in the following excerpt, again with a literature major tutoring a chemistry student, this one less able, on a lab report:

Tutor: You seem to have your thesis at the end and the paper talks about your steps in the experiment. Is that the way you want it?

Student: I don't know. Why? This is chemistry. I thought thesis sentences were for English papers.

Tutor: No, most papers have a thesis and usually it comes at the beginning.

Student: You mean the part where I say the chemicals turned into a clear gel when heated to a certain temperature.

Tutor: Yes, can you put that in the first paragraph so the reader knows what you found?

Student: Ok, I get it now.

This tutorial goes immediately astray because the tutor lacks authority, in that he misdirects the student based on his own experience of placing the thesis sentence first, something generally not done in lab reports. The student, though somewhat suspicious, does not wield power to resist, because the institution of the writing center and the position of authority it awards the tutor cows him into acting on the tutor's misleading advice. The only benefit of the nondirective technique here is that it somewhat preserves the environment of the center as "safe house", because the tutor's question gently raises the possibility of moving the thesis rather than directly telling the student about the (mis)perceived thesis problem. Yet in the end, the "safe house" is not safe at all because the non-directive method is worthless without some authoritative knowledge on the structure of lab reports. Nor would directive tutoring work in this case, because without the knowledge of the conventions of the lab report, the tutor would be unable to help—to direct—the student about the placement of the thesis.

In this case, the tutor, lacking knowledge, lacks power and authority beyond that conferred by being the tutor—a situation analogous to that which Palmeri (2000) describes when he cannot show the student how to cite sources in her discipline. Granted, the tutorials above are invented, but I would argue that similar tutorials happen regularly. Invented or not, they illustrate the wide variety of tutorials that occur in writing centers every day, a variety conditioned by the degree of power and authority brought into the tutorial by tutor, student, and assignment. All of these tutorials demonstrate that no matter what techniques are used, both parties (ideally) or one (more commonly) must have some knowledge at hand, must occupy the position of power and authority in a hierarchical relationship. In the first tutorial on the lab report, the student fortuitously had the knowledge and only needed it to be drawn out by the tutor's cues; thus the tutorial worked exceedingly well. In the second, neither knew the conventions of the lab report, and the tutorial went awry because knowledge was not available. In the tutorials on the play review, the first tutor had the knowledge but chose to withhold it in the name of egalitarianism, thus abusing power and authority, while the second exercised them responsibly to instruct the student. I realize here that I am seeming to treat knowledge as an entity, a thing, rather than something constructed, as is readily accepted in postmodern thought, but in many tutorials the knowledge, for student and tutor, *is* something to be retrieved or transmitted. Though the conventions of the lab report and the play review are constructions in that they are agreed upon by writers and readers of such pieces, for the tutor and student the conventions are fixed and transmittable knowledge, because neither has the authority or power to change them without negative consequences in the situation offered by the assignment and tutorial.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TUTOR TRAINING

Writing center professionals like to point out that every tutorial is different, and the samples discussed illustrate that claim. What they do not like to point out is that very often one tutorial is better than another despite efforts to train tutors. In the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *The Writing Center Journal*, longtime writing center scholars and practitioners Lil Brannon and Stephen North claim that “if we are honest, we know the quality of the work is uneven” (2000, 11). This is a rare admission, given the protective and defensive stance writing center scholars usually

take regarding peer tutors. The party line runs something like this. Tutors are effective because they are peers trained to be nondirective. In this sense, their authority comes from not having any. If they know more than the students, they use nondirective questioning to ensure that they don't end up doing students' work for them. If they know less than the students, they again rely on nondirective questioning to draw out the student's knowledge of the subject. Nondirective tutoring thus becomes the antidote for having too much authority, or too little.

Certainly tutors should continue to be trained to maintain a comfortable environment for students, treating them with kindness, understanding, and respect. Though raising the spectres of power and authority in this essay, my purpose is not to turn the writing center into just another impersonal office on campus. Students must face enough of those already, and, as much as possible, writing centers should maintain the atmosphere of the safe house. At the same time, tutors need to learn that the center is not the local coffee house, and tutorials just a chat about a paper or assignment. In short, a nonhierarchical environment does not depend on blind commitment to nondirective tutoring methods. Instead, tutors should be taught to recognize where the power and authority lie in any given tutorial, when and to what degree they have them, when and to what degree the student has them, and when and to what degree they are absent in any given tutorial.

When they can do so, they can proceed using techniques—nondirective or directive—based on their position in the tutorial. As in the tutorial on the play review, the tutor should know to take the lead and be more directive when tutoring an inexperienced freshman in an introductory theater course. To shackle such a tutor by training him or her only in nondirective methods, in the name of maintaining a nonhierarchical peer relationship, is to shortchange the student lucky enough to be paired with him or her, a point Bokser implies when she chafes against the training in nondirective methods that would have her suppress assertive behaviors that would help the student. At the same time non-directive methods should be maintained for situations in which the tutor does not have authority, and needs to draw it from the student. When such is the case, a question such as “Do you want your thesis last?” becomes a real question, and not a ploy to push the student to move it where the tutor thinks it belongs. Similarly, when tutors lack authority in one area—organizational conventions for a particular type of discourse,

for instance—they should feel free to move the tutorial in a direction in which they feel more authoritative. The tutor who tells the chemistry student to move the thesis to the beginning would have been better off to direct the student to ask the instructor about the organization and then perhaps move to matters of style and even grammar, raising questions about wordy constructions, vague pronoun references and the like. Unfortunately, writing center orthodoxy would train him or her to reserve those areas for last, or to shun a tutorial that works primarily at the sentence level as the demeaning stuff of the fix-it shop, rather than value it as a service to the student based on the authority available in the tutorial.

In an unpublished study of students' and tutors' perceptions of directiveness, Irene Clark found that tutors view their tutorials as less directive than students do in terms of contributing ideas, making corrections, and the degree and influence of conversation. She attributes this result partly to the tutor training "that had emphasized the importance of allowing students as much opportunity as possible to develop their own ideas, urging consultants to guide and suggest rather than lead" (n.d., 16). While such training is necessary, to a degree, it contributed to tutor views or tutorials that countered those of the students, even if one considers that students may have, conversely, overestimated the contributions of the tutor. It is troublesome that tutors feel the need to see themselves as less directive than they likely are, for given the challenges and complexity of tutoring, tutors should not be made to feel inadequate when they cannot live up to an orthodoxy of nondirective pedagogy, whatever reasons, pedagogical or political, may underlie it.

While presenting a fully developed method of tutor training is beyond the scope of this paper, I would like to offer a few possibilities. The watchword in tutor training should not be nondirective peership, but flexibility. Tutors should learn to shift between directive and nondirective methods as needed, and develop some sense of a sliding scale.

- More student knowledge, less tutor knowledge = more nondirective methods.
- Less student knowledge, more tutor knowledge = more directive methods.

As it stands, this scale is admittedly reductive. It would also have to account for what educationists call "the affective domain," that is, the various personality traits of tutors and students. Timid students, despite

a lot of knowledge, might require both nondirective and directive methods, nondirective questioning to draw forth what they know, directive prodding to make them take responsibility for the text. Likewise, less knowledgeable but gregarious students might benefit from nondirective questions to question a hasty but wrongheaded enthusiasm, or directive warnings when they are stubbornly blundering into moves that could result in a disastrous response to the assignment.

Clark's study further lends credence to a more flexible approach. In addition to suggesting that training influenced tutors to perceive their sessions as more nondirective than they might have been, Clark found that students who rated themselves as "good" writers viewed tutorials as less directive, while students who rated themselves as "adequate" or "poor" writers saw the sessions as more directive. I would maintain that there is a good chance that these perceptions were accurate, that more able students needed less direction than the less able. It's common sense. However, whether out of political timidity or an excessive commitment to egalitarian principles, writing centers have not wanted to admit it—until recently.

Clark's NWCA study, coupled with the earlier sporadic efforts cited above and more recent voices, indicates that centers are beginning to be more courageous in describing their work. In a recent case study of a complex tutorial between a male Ph.D. student tutor and a female student in first-year composition, Jane Cogie (2001) demonstrates how, from session to session and moment to moment, tutorial methods shift from directive to nondirective and, as a result, so does the authority of the participants. When Ken, the tutor, in a directive move, tells Janelle, the student, that she seems to be critiquing a "stereotype," the term turns up in her revision as an organizing principle and point of focus, greatly expanded. Similarly, when he *tells* her that interviews are a valid method of research, she is able to expand the paper significantly. Ken's moves here are directive, yet Janelle's use of his directives makes them her own. We have here not plagiarism, but teaching and learning. Cogie concludes:

The point here is that given the dual need for guidance and authority in most students, any strategy involves risk. Fostering student authority is not a matter of following a single approach and avoiding another. The authority of students may grow from moves as diverse as asking them tough questions, providing summaries or terms to help them conceptualize points and build

confidence, and helping them negotiate assignment demands, gain the necessary situated knowledge, or try out aspects of the writing process. (47)

Fortunately, I think the kind of tutoring I am calling for and Cogie describes has been going on for a long time in many centers, without being widely acknowledged. While centers have always valued and elicited students' input, they have also had the good sense to place student needs before orthodoxy. I turn for evidence here to Mickey Harris's recent professional memoir, delivered as the Exemplar's address at the CCC 2000 and subsequently published in CCC (2001). On the one hand, in discussing the early days of her center at Purdue, Harris describes a very safe house, happily recounting tales of tutors dragging in old sofas, decorating the lab, and raising funds to buy pizzas. She relates ways in which she trained tutors not to dominate tutorials. On the other hand, she speaks of finding "crevices where the conversation permits [her] to adopt a mentor role" (436), and her summary of what went on in her lab shows a sensible mixture of nondirective and directive methods that drew upon the students' authority without stifling the tutors'.

When students had no idea how to begin an assignment—or even what it was asking for—we addressed that with questions and suggestions for strategies, and we learned how to help writers acquire the strategic knowledge they needed to achieve goals such as how to add more content or organize what they had written. . . . We supplied information they didn't have (answering such questions as "So what goes in an introduction?" "What is my instructor telling me to do here?" "How do I cite this in MLA format?" "What goes in a personal statement for this application?") and tried to re-explain whatever parts of our explanations they didn't get. (432)

Here it is evident that Harris's staff is exercising their power and authority ("suggestions," "supplied information," "answering questions"). At the same time, Harris states how "some deep personal discomfort with rules and power structures led [her] to revel in creating and strengthening the guidelines for a non-hierarchical place like our Writing Lab" (435). This is not to say Harris is not practicing what she preaches, or that she contradicts herself, but rather to show how she maintained the safe house atmosphere without divesting her staff of the power and authority needed to serve students.

I suspect many other centers were doing the same, but just not talking about it. This may have been partly, as Clark and Healy (1996) charge, out of fears of being seen as contributing to some faculty's notions of plagiarism, or out of an overly simplified notion of peership and a misreading of collaborative learning theory as always egalitarian learning. Whatever the reason, nondirective, nonhierarchical methods not only have held sway, but also given rise to the dogmatic dicta that disturb commentators such as Shamoan and Burns (1995). This would be relatively harmless, a group of writing center directors keeping "our little secret," as Beth Boquet (1999) has called it, that sometimes tutors do more than ask questions, sometimes they do write on students' papers, sometimes they do question the quality of assignments they see—in other words, sometimes they wield power and exercise authority. The problem, rather, is that when tutors are trained as if this does not happen, or hear the same espoused and nodded at approvingly at writing center conferences, they feel guilty or deficient for failing to live up to the doctrine—Bokser (2000) and Palmeri (2000) are cases in point and very likely not alone.

All this is not to say centers should become authoritative, dictating to students what they should do or not do, but if they are to confront and negotiate the inevitable presence of power and authority, like their tutors, they will need to take responsibility for what they know and do not know. They will need to educate faculty in the ways in which directive tutoring is not plagiarism, but help. They will also need to take authority for what some faculty expect of them—help in grammatical and stylistic matters—without worrying that they will be stereotyped as fix-it shops or grammar garages. Finally, they will need to continue to educate faculty about what they don't know, and encourage faculty to clarify their expectations and provide students with instruction in the way of disciplinary convention, even if only in the form of copies of successful papers from past students furnished to the center. Power and authority are not nice words, but they don't have to be bad ones, either, when the actions they represent are addressed honestly and responsibly. Writing centers can ill afford to pretend power and authority do not exist, given the important responsibility they have for helping students achieve their own authority as writers in a power laden environment such as the university.