Influential Fellows: A Professor and Writing Fellows Reflect On Identities, Feedback, and Communities

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Individuals who become tutors make tutoring part of their college employment plan as well as a part of their professional development as teacher education candidates. Other Fellows choose paths that also involve shaping learning, argument, and documents in psychology and law, for example. But tutors I've known come to tutoring by interest in teaching and learning and shared values; they find themselves situated in shared experiences as part of a writing center or tutoring program. In particular, tutors who identify as preservice teacher candidates begin their study of education without pragmatic, performative knowledge (Johnson, 1989), needing to create a "how to" that grows out of lived experience, to make a unity of "knowing that" and "knowing how" (Ryle 1949/2009). Tutoring can bring them this experience. No matter the Writing Fellow's major or future career, each is engaged with developing identities through the practice of tutoring, and situated learning starts with experience in tutoring programs including one that embeds peer-and near-peer tutors in beginning developmental writing classrooms like mine.

Our classes do not emphasize advanced writing skills for any particular discipline, but instead introduce students to basics of academic literacy, reading and comprehending short essays, and writing at the college level. Our first-year students come from largely traditionally under-represented rural and urban populations enrolled at a medium-sized state university in the mid-Atlantic region with a generous admissions criteria; the course is designed as a pre-requisite for freshman composition, and the in-house tutors' manual describes the Writing Fellow's role, "to bridge the gap between the students and the faculty member" (Hetherington, Mace, and Zola, n. date). I and the Writing Enrichment Fellows represented as co-

authors and co-researchers here interact as professor and tutors dedicated to assisting in the developmental writing classroom.

Our near-and-peer tutor Fellows in this program are first trained as writing center consultants to use models of student-centered inquiry, starting with asking focused questions. When reviewing content from the professor's class that embedded Fellows are required to attend, Fellows can then specifically focus on or review areas or assignments covered in classes. Attending Fellows small group tutor workshops are a standard part of my developmental writing curriculum, mandatory for ten meetings over the semester, and worth a quiz score for the class.

The Writing Fellows whose views are represented here happen to be majors in the College of Education, so as tutors and pre-service teachers who have not yet engaged in professional teaching, and as their faculty member, we acknowledge together that apprenticeship and pragmatic knowledge works both ways. Learning to work together, we wanted to reflect on how we develop in the context of the Professor-Fellow relationship and consider our identity work and communication of our content knowledge co-creates us as teachers and learners.

Teacher and learner identity is developed in the literature of social cognition and activity theory from Lave and Wenger (1991) who define identities as "long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice... identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another" (p. 53). Sutherland et al. (2010) summarize the formation of teacher identity as taking place in preservice experiences coupled with a desire to see themselves and be seen as teachers, and reliant on social memberships.

Continuing development from novice to expert is made through repeated practice. This subset of Fellows forges paths into education carrying their evolving experience, language, ideas, and identifications with them. As Ivanic (1998) explains, literacies along with identities develop in the contexts of their use (p. 70). Participation in tutoring contributes to producing and reproducing learning and identities, how a tutor sees the self, how one reports how others see them, the roles they enact as part of participation in tutoring, and reports recounted to others. All of these perceptions are given a sense of consistency by reinforcement. Reflection is a process made by "cognitive insight not just because of what happens inside their minds but [...] because of larger systems that include interrelations among minds, other people, settings, and activities" (Worthen, 2006, p. 97). In as much as Fellows aid students to learn, we faculty and Fellows have learned a great deal working with each other.

Peer-and-just near

Peer and near-peer tutors like Fellows tread a delicate boundary between drawing from authority allied with faculty and as students themselves living in a

complex of pressures and power relations and through competing discourses and practices. John Trimbur (1987) argues that "[peer tutoring] induces cognitive dissonance by asking new tutors to be two things at once, to play what appear to them to be mutually exclusive roles" (23), and Smith (2013) calls negotiating the role of near-peer "a delicate balance and apparent paradox" between tutors authorized by the institution and the host instructor to tutor -- yet holding to the status and influence of peer to communicate student-to-student. She warns that both peer mentors and instructors "need to be aware of the various social, academic, and institutional factors that may elevate, diminish, and complicate near-peer status" (37).

For Fellows, creating near-peer-mentor identity is an ongoing project as they develop their roles in and beyond writing class. Zola is a beginning her journey as teacher-candidate in the secondary classroom and situates herself as a bridge, half peer and half tutor.

Zola: *I have been able to explore my own role as a peer tutor as well as my career choice of future teacher through small group tutoring. Seeing the same writers regularly, I can build on writing concepts we discussed the week before, and the improvement of the students I work with the most is evident, and that consistency rewards a tutor in a way one seldom experiences in the writing center.*

One challenge that comes with this dual role of peer and tutor though is equally fulfilling the needs of both students and professor. I have found it best to balance these roles. I identify as half peer and half tutor to bridge the gap between the students and faculty, so that I can assist both parties and be someone both can confide in. Through group sessions with students, I understood what material they had a grasp on as well as what they "weren't getting." I could then report these student strengths and difficulties to the professor so she might adjust the class schedule.

By contrast, Beck, a graduating senior, is readying for her first year of a teaching career. She sees herself as "90% expert and 10% peer," having more difficulty presenting as peer and more as just "near":

Beck: *As an undergraduate tutor, I see myself as taking many roles or the wearer of many hats if you will. I most frequently wear the hat of "near peer," being similar in age to the students that I tutor, and having just been in their situation (first year at college, often the first time away from home) only a short time ago. However, I've come to learn that my mentees tended to view me as the "expert" due to my two or three years of education to their freshman status. The construct of "class year" seemed to differentiate me from my tutees with each passing year.*

The more "experienced" I was, the more I felt as though I was losing even the "near peer" role that Smith speaks to. I often felt myself accommodating for losing my peer status by going out of my way to know what was impacting the freshman class so that I could relate to them a little better. Another issue that threatened the "near peer" relationship was my chosen career path, to teach. While I was excited to put some of my fresh teaching methods and theories into practice, my tutees already seemed to think of me as the teacher during our sessions. Often I had to remind them that they were leading our discussions, and I was merely facilitating and giving them feedback when I saw fitting. These were the two major social and academic aspects that I felt I was most accounting for with my students.

This transition from bridge peer to graduating senior tutor that these Fellows describe may be facilitated by their relationship to faculty and the mutual community of tutor-learners in the writing center. And after working together for a semester, before learning to better collaborate, I had no idea how divergent my Fellow's views were in the way they felt toward tutoring our developing writers, their needs and struggles.

A Faculty Learning Curve:

One of the ways feedback may be most important is how Fellows support the self-efficacy of developing writers, and that includes feedback on what the Instructor can do to contribute to that self-efficacy. Corbet refers to two classroom based peer tutoring models proposed by Brufee, the monitoring or the collaborative model (58). In monitoring, the tutor stands as proxy for faculty and intervenes directly, compromising a tutor's peer status. In the collaborative model, the tutor guides and supports the student as a bridge between two knowledges, in Brufee's words, between "knowledge communities they already belong to and the knowledge communities they aspire to join" (qtd. in Corbett 58). Again, these memberships are a balance to be negotiated and achieved.

As supervising faculty of four Fellows each semester, I informally surveyed other professors of developing writers who utilized Fellows in our writing classrooms. Just as Hall and Hughes (2011) speak of "helicopter faculty," my Fellows report that some faculty restrict the Fellows' role with instructional agendas that offer less flexibility for Fellows' contributions. Perhaps they may be reluctant to share autonomy or authority with Fellows. Certainly a professor's management style is reflected in how tutors fit into the classroom; Pavlovic (2014) summarizes findings that a manager's leadership style affects tutor job satisfaction in the relationship between faculty and tutors. Pavlovic finds that leadership styles that function most effectively are those that show a balance between task focus and team focus in creating tutor satisfaction. Most faculty reported relationships in balance

like these. Only one exception was reported to me. A relationship with one Fellow stood out to another instructor as so troublesome that the instructor felt she had taken on another developing freshman in a formal boss-employee relationship, not guiding a near-peer student leader. In that one case, faculty described an inexperienced, distracted Fellow who needed much direct supervision to engage actively in class and group. Apparently this Fellow needed a piloted "helicopter." Again only a minority of professors reported difficulties in working with individual Fellows in their sections.

Fellows report similar variation in their experience with faculty. At different times there have been Fellows working with as many as three different cooperating faculty members over three semesters, which led to the mixed experiences for Fellows. Our Fellows have a great deal to say about that balance and their job satisfaction:

> ***Zola****: Each faculty member ultimately determines what Fellows should do in their classes and group sessions with students, and there is often some confusion when paired with a faculty member for the first time regarding the faculty's expectations of the Fellows. Sometimes, faculty members are not aware in how much say they have in the role of the Fellow, which creates further confusion. There were communication struggles because of a lack of understanding on both the parts of the Fellows and the faculty members.*
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> *With a previous faculty member, I was not supposed to participate in class but simply sit in the front of the room and model good student behaviors. At sessions, I needed to do exactly what my faculty member wanted me to do. When I started working with Dr. Gilman, it took some time to understand how to participate in the class and run group sessions. With Dr. Gilman, I found that she expected her Fellows to sit in the back of the room to have students sit closer to the front, to facilitate group work, and communicate student understanding or [clarify] confusion in class. She gave me more freedom to conduct sessions and allow students to work on any assignment they needed writing help with rather than one particular assignment. Considering the styles of both faculty, I benefitted from clear communication of expectations for classroom and session roles. Though some of the classroom and session expectations were not immediately apparent during my first semester with Dr. Gilman, roles were clarified the following semester. The sooner the faculty expresses the role and duties of the Fellow, the better.*

As Zola pointed out, at the beginning I was not aware of how the professor was to set the duties of the Fellow, to understand that Fellows adapted to the teaching styles of each professor. It took me a semester to understand what Fellows

needed to be successful, to alter my curriculum and mine their valuable feedback. I became more responsible as a pedagogue when I learned to be a little less open-ended in my expectations and instead supply practice steps to better scaffold my curriculum. I became more active soliciting Fellows' feedback immediately after classes because I found their perspective invaluable, monitoring the comments and body language of students in the classroom and sharing their reflections from tutoring sessions. With their help, I become more of a partner in my students' learning.

My lack of understanding in that first semester was the result of my lack of communication with my Fellows and the program. I was asked if I would participate with the Writing Fellows program and I chose to integrate Fellows into my classrooms, yet I had no prior clarification of responsibilities when they were first placed. Much like our developing student writers who are wary to respond to questions when I check for understanding in class, I did not know what I did not know. It took a semester of trial and error to fill these gaps in my understanding. And for my Fellows, their role is frequently to follow the leaders' dance moves backwards in heels, like Rodgers to Astaire, and follow the cues that I failed to give early on.

I did not understand that Fellows' curricular choices were largely up to me. That insight might have appeared obvious to some instructors, but I did not understand Fellows' training. Because of the imbalance of power implicit in the relationship of professor to tutor, Fellows were cautious in their counsel to me. For example, I discovered that Fellows had nothing for students to work with during their first week of group sessions; both Fellows and students were idle and frustrated. I did not understand that I needed to provide preliminary materials such as readings or problem-solving practice when no essay draft was due and give small group student meetings a focus. Because so many students in this writing class are first-generation college learners, I also learned to provide Fellows with relevant, journalistic articles on college expectations, college writing standards, and what to expect from professors, giving both Fellows and students starting points to discuss expectations of engagement, attitude, and competence in college and writing in particular. I paid greater attention to Fellows and student needs, supplying Fellows with handouts and answer keys to debrief quizzes and advance preparation assignments. As faculty, I required a learning curve to make the most of my Fellows' connection with students.

Significantly, I had to become more transparent in my own processes to let my Fellows into that process, and this transparency made all the difference to successful experience with Fellows. Fellows felt more comfortable sharing with what students were saying in sessions about my lesson delivery and presentation of material, and what students struggled with in class that they would not share openly

when I solicited questions in class. When the professor respects the role of Fellows, Fellows have a greater voice, and honest feedback is easier to give.

Together with my Fellows, in our small weekly meetings, we too constituted a community of practice. I asked for and listened to critique of my practice, a need to concentrate on areas where they reported student concerns. I re-acquainted myself with earlier difficulties I had had in composing academic text, in practicing skills I had long taken for granted. In that way our meetings and informal talks after class became a social learning practice that changed my teaching and identity, bonding more trustfully in an instructional partnership.

Smith (2012) includes relaying student concerns and providing supportive or critical feedback as valuable to a peer mentor beyond work with student tutees (42). And just the way that students may share truth with their Fellow, I can ask for truthful feedback not in the way that I might receive it when evaluated each semester by my department chair or by faculty peers, but in the moment of how it comes across to a Fellow, a student in the process of developing both identity and instructional chops in that third space of tutor, not-quite-peer yet not-instructor.

Furthermore, because Fellows are not my age and do not wield power or privilege, they have an opportunity to build trust with a greater number of students than a professor could. I needed to ask my Fellows what my freshman students are thinking, feeling, and fearing on the page and off. It is the peer's "lack of authority and freedom from supervisory responsibilities" (Smith 35) that renders beneficial results for tutees, writes Smith, to ask questions of a near-peer, a student a little farther along who will not judge them, who does not grade them, who has been through the same learning curve and at same institution, who can be that "guide on the side," a role I aspire to, but because of age and power differential, I cannot fulfill.

Learning curves: Fellows in Tutor communities

Because learning does not occur in isolation, Fellows share more widely in another feedback community, other Fellows and tutors in training and practice. As Harris (1989) described, individuals occupy a place in multiple discourse communities, and in the case of Fellows, they occupy more than the two communities which might appear exclusive, as neither student nor professor. Fellows belong to peer groups where they can share experiences with each other, perhaps complaining about a session that didn't go as planned, venting sometimes, or sharing a technique success with each other in hopes that what worked for one tutor-Fellow will work for others. This mutually beneficial community addresses shared experience, not necessarily expertise.

Last, the Fellows community is made up of valued alumni tutors who became Fellows and who give current Fellows helpful hints, tricks, and information

for working with faculty members and students before they step away from their roles as Fellow or graduate. Learning communities and collaborative effort set up Fellows for vocations in many ways as teachers as well as learners by modeling the role of collaborative cohorts and teams.

Relationship Building Makes and Models Agency

Learning and writing are as much affective as cognitive as Beach (1989) has shown, and McLeod (1987) reminds us that even in learning mathematics, the most rational of subject matter, there is no separation between the affective and cognitive domains as we learn. Feeling-thinking contributes to our sense of self as identities are born in action and reflection. Beck reflects on this learning and growing teacher identity:

I found that I enjoyed being a Fellow even more than I enjoyed being a writing center tutor because it allowed me to forge stronger bonds with the students and get to know their writing better. Because I was able to see them more regularly and consistently, I was also able to see their growth and see to the end of an assignment, which is what I found frustrating as a Consultant. Students would often come to the Writing Center at the very end of an assignment, once they were thoroughly frustrated and close to giving up, and while I would help them to the best of my abilities, I often didn't know the outcome.

As a Fellow, I was able to really encourage students to start their assignments earlier, and we were able to work with their strengths and work on overcoming their weaknesses because I was able to know their strengths and weaknesses. Being able to help students on their specific needs made Fellowing feel more successful than being a typical Writing Center Consultant.

Fellows build a community of learners with our writing students and with each other as well as with their faculty partners, adapting, and learning. They are honing their own communication skills, organizational skills, leadership skills, self-awareness of their learning, reflection, ethics, and critique. They are indeed agents of change by relationships they build (Haviland, 2008). As peer and near-peers, they are constructing social and intellectual identities in their practice as tutors and learners. I believe that Fellows model and communicate this sense of growth, of agency, persistence, and self-regulation in a safe, almost routine setting outside of the classroom with lower stakes, lowering anxiety about writing as well as college-level learning for our students. In small group settings, Fellows instruct in agency, persistence, and self-regulation as much as they instruct essay development, sentence structure, or citation format. And as modeling and practice constitutes this consulting process, developing students are continuously building beliefs about themselves. As participating faculty, I take part in those communities of learning too. My Fellows and I share responsibilities, and I hope that I am building a sense

of equality in our shared task and shared values, breaking down some of the hierarchy of professor and tutor that creates separation and alienation that make silence too convenient and truth harder to speak.

Good and honest communication with a balance of structure and open-endedness in direction can make the most of the relationship between Fellow-tutor and professor, reducing the power differential between us. For our students, first-year, first-generation developing writers from non-traditional populations have few models from which to learn or to with whom to empathize in navigating their first year adjusting to a novel university environment. My Fellows and I see their reluctance to seek help and irregular attendance. Fellows report that being from a slightly older cohort, familiar with college expectations and emergent independence can positively affect both tutees' development as successful college students (Dvorak, Bruce, and Lutkewitte, 2012) and contribute to improvement in writing skills by the student's consistency; resilience cannot be forced, only supported. First-year students in the communities of learning created by Fellows often shared their frustrations and crises, "To be an ally for the student…without undermining faculty," writes Zola. I would emphasize something similar to professors as well: partnership, empathy, effortful attempt at equality, and active listening for learning.

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