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INTRODUCTION

How many layers of meaning must be peeled back to understand a word in context? Several? Several dozen? Lawyers, translators, teachers, and tutors are in business because language is a layer-cake of meanings. Whether the words are hard-to-translate ones like *dude* (American English) or *cafune* (Brazilian Portuguese), or deceptively simple ones like *boy*, *girl*, or *what-ever*, words are only the beginning of the great chain of meaning. Arranged in columns and rows in a dictionary or thesaurus, words appear to contain only our thoughts, when in truth they do much more. Words also create a sense of belonging, exclusion, marginalization, and indifference. It is one thing to know grammar and vocabulary but quite another to know how to use language in specific, local contexts where one feels welcome and accepted. For this reason, even advanced learners of a second (or third, or more) language take the time to learn and practice nuanced meanings in that language and seek out informants—such as writing center tutors—to attain the linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural knowledge native speakers take for granted. Writing center tutors can be very helpful in this regard, but they must also strive to understand the various systems of linguistic knowledge that play out in the writing center. Such understanding calls for a new outlook among tutors and the directors who educate them.

This is a book written for writing center directors and tutors who take seriously the preparations needed to work with international multilingual students in the United States, or in any context where English is the dominant language. The book focuses on the changing face of writing centers and the implications of these changes on one-to-one interactions of tutoring. It explores this question: how can directors and tutors better

prepare for the growing number of one-to-one conferences with multilingual writers who will come to their writing centers in the future?

Opportunities for tutors and directors to focus on one-to-one interactions in tutoring do not occur often enough. Such opportunities tend to emerge in discussions about other issues, such as why a tutor feels unable to get through to a writer, how a session got derailed, when to invoke a particular policy, or why a client gave a session a low evaluation. Sometimes they arise when trying to analyze a riveting exchange that happened in the span of a few seconds. When directors do get the chance to discuss their tutors' one-to-one interactions with writers, it is important for everyone to consider what is at stake for writers, what tutors are trying to help writers accomplish, and what tutors themselves stand to gain from these interactions.

This book draws upon three main sources of ideas: (1) over two decades of experience as a writing teacher and writing center director, (2) dozens of interviews I conducted with tutors, students, instructors, and directors at seven institutions in and outside the United States, and (3) published literature in the fields of writing centers, second language acquisition, second language writing, composition, and related areas. Most of my teaching experience has been at the graduate level in the composition and TESOL (teachers of English to speakers of other languages) program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), which has attracted multilingual students and faculty from around the world for nearly four decades. It has taught me much about the intricate relationships students have with English, both here and in their home countries. These students have also been a source of talent for my writing center staff. While not as diverse as the graduate population, the peer tutors in the IUP Writing Center help reveal what motivates smart and ambitious learners. In this way, tutors are a lot like the international students who visit the writing center. They are impatient for success yet highly flexible when considering the terms on which success is offered.

Over the course of about nine months I communicated in person and via Skype and e-mail with eight directors and

forty-one tutors. Two of these interviews were conducted with my own tutors. Except where noted, actual names are used with permission. I asked the tutors—most of whom were recommended to me by their directors—to tell me about the languages they speak and had studied and the significance of these languages to them personally. I asked them where they had lived and studied and to share any language teaching and learning events that made a difference for them personally and professionally. I also asked them what they had learned from their experiences as tutors, writers, and directors that I could share with others. I asked some of the same questions of the directors, including questions about the challenges and successes they faced in preparing tutors to work with multilingual writers. The questions became prompts for wide-ranging discussions.

I do not claim to pursue a formal research design, representative sample, or methodical analysis of the interviews, which I listened to multiple times and transcribed selectively, particularly when individuals addressed a theme or key point I wanted to explore in the book, or when they raised a new idea or perspective I felt belonged in it. The book offers neither a comprehensive plan nor a method for tutor education. Instead, it offers an informed invitation for writing center directors and their tutors, especially advanced tutors, to make greater use of theory and research from the field of second-language acquisition, particularly as it relates to one-to-one interaction, academic discourse, and providing corrective feedback. This theory and research expands the number and types of tools tutors can use to help writers. It gives insights into the effectiveness of practices and suggests ways to test this effectiveness. It can also, and perhaps ultimately, aid tutors in helping multilingual students become better writers.

AIM OF THIS BOOK

In most US writing centers, the assistance available for multilingual writers is not much different than it is for native speakers of English. Well intentioned and aware, writing center directors

recognize multilingual writers need more assistance than most schools provide. Twenty years ago, however, Muriel Harris and Tony Silva (1993) called into question the quantity *and* the quality of this assistance: “Tutors, who bring to their work a background of experience and knowledge in interacting effectively with native speakers of English, are not adequately equipped to deal with some additional concerns of nonnative speakers of English—the unfamiliar grammatical errors, the sometimes bewilderingly different rhetorical patterns and conventions of other languages, and the expectations that accompany ESL writers when they come to the writing center” (526). The implication that tutors are better prepared to assist the native English-speaking students—who are most like them—has not been lost on the multilingual writers on today’s campuses.

Harris and Silva suggest that tutors could “make minor accommodations in their tutoring style when working with ESL writers . . . who are used to hearing directive statements from teachers” (Harris and Silva 1993, 533) by asking fewer questions and making more open-ended requests—in other words, fewer *whys* and *hows* and more *please explains*. They write:

Tutors who work with ESL students may have to be “tellers” to some extent because they will probably need to provide cultural, rhetorical, and/or linguistic information which native speakers intuitively possess and which ESL students do not have, but need to have to complete their writing assignments effectively. That is, regardless of their level of skill in collaboration or interpersonal interaction, tutors will not be able to elicit knowledge from ESL students if the students don’t have that knowledge in the first place. (Harris and Silva 1993, 533)

If we can say ESL students are unable to draw upon knowledge they don’t have in the first place, then the same must be said of tutors themselves. And while skills needed for collaboration and interaction are a component of all teachers’ knowledge, these skills alone cannot make up for whatever tutors lack in conceptual knowledge. Tutors must be able to convey to writers, in one way or another, new information. To put it another way, when tutors are tellers, what is it that they tell? Do tutors know, and

are they prepared to explain the linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural information we want them to be able to draw upon?

Questions about tutors' qualifications have been raised from time to time in the literature of writing centers. Shamoon and Burns's (1995) article "A Critique of Pure Tutoring" challenges directors to step back from the self-imposed requirement for nondirective tutoring and consider approaches that respond more favorably to students' needs for development of their cognitive skills. Paul Kei Matsuda (2012) also asks writing center administrators to examine their assumptions, including the reliance on peer tutors instead of professional teachers with expertise in second-language instruction. He writes, "Peer tutors, who are by definition sympathetic readers but not experts in the teaching of writing or language, may not be able to meet the needs of clients who have an advanced knowledge of the subject and discipline-specific genres yet are struggling to express their ideas in the second language" (48). While the statement that tutors are merely sympathetic readers and not experts ignores the critical reading and skills that many tutors possess, Matsuda's argument suggests that peer tutors sometimes identify too closely with those they are supposed to help and remain too far removed from the knowledge and skills needed to be helpful. Matsuda points to specific tutor practices, such as focusing on global issues (content, organization, and ideas) over and above local matters (grammar, style, and mechanics). Experienced writers know that global and local issues operate on many levels at once, and good writers learn to traverse these levels with aplomb.

Preparing tutors to help writers navigate these levels is the responsibility of all directors. Most are fortunate enough to work with tutors who rank among the best and brightest students on campus, and it is in everyone's best interest to move beyond the simplistic dichotomy—identified a decade and a half ago by Susan Blau, John Hall, Sarah and Sparks (2002)—between global and local errors. In addition, tutors must be prepared to take full advantage, both for their clients and themselves, of the learning opportunities unique to the one-to-one

conference. They must be familiar with academic discourse and its variations by purpose and discipline; with errors and how to explain them; and with the struggles and rewards—both their own and others’—of learning and learning about languages.

This book is a call to directors to ask more of their tutors and themselves. It seeks to answer some of the questions currently plaguing writing centers across the United States: What can directors learn about concepts and practices in the field of second-language acquisition (SLA)? How can they borrow from SLA to help tutors respond to the needs of multilingual writers? How can they lead tutors toward greater curiosity about multilingual writers and their writing? These questions are a start, but they presume we have been thinking about the answer to another question: how might tutoring change as our student populations change? One approach is to consider the many demands advanced literacy makes on all students, even graduate students with advanced levels of English proficiency, and then find ways to adapt to a changing environment.

WHICH PHONE IS IT?

Esther Dettmar is a graduate consultant in the Writers Workshop on the campus of the University of Illinois Urbana-Campaign. The morning’s first appointment was with Mei (not her name), a Chinese L1 with a master’s degree from Arizona State University. She was working on revising the draft of an abstract for a longer paper she was writing. Mei took several minutes to describe her project for her tutor: she was writing about three similar products and wanted to make sure her reader could follow which was which as she described them. Esther and Mei decided that Mei would read the paper aloud because it was about a page and a half in length, and Mei seemed ready to do so. After she had read her paper aloud, she paused to wait for feedback from her tutor.

On the surface, this seemed to be a fairly straightforward writing task and one that almost any tutor could manage. Mei was articulate, the paper was short, the problem was specific,

and the goal seemed clear: make sure three different products are clearly identified for readers. In the space of a few minutes, however, the challenges Mei faced became clear. One was linguistic: English uses a complex system of lexical links to refer to things in a text that have already been mentioned (*this, they, one*) and things that will be mentioned later (*next, a/an*). Words like *this/that, these/those*, and others interact in subtle ways to direct the reader's attention to persons, places, ideas, or objects the writer wants to bring into focus. Even advanced learners can have a hard time using lexical links to make clear, in writing, their intention to refer to one thing and not another—*this one* not *that one*, or *any one* and not *one in particular*. Cohesion—in the specialized sense used in linguistics to denote a complex system of lexical and grammatical links writers and readers use to make sense of a text—has been studied extensively (Halliday and Hasan 1976) and presents a high hurdle for language learners.

It is not hard to imagine how difficult cohesion becomes when the writer is a nonnative English speaker (NNES) and she is writing about multiple, similar objects. In Mei's case, they were three mobile phones. Two of them were fully designed and developed Nokia smart phones—one of these two was marketed to consumers by the company and the other was not—and the third was an Apple smart phone. In addition, each phone was also an example of a phenomenon in a mathematical model Mei was using as part of her larger analysis of consumer-marketing strategies. Therefore, the physical phones as well as the "phone phenomena" had to be kept distinct from one another (except when they were grouped) as the writer introduced the topic, focused it, described the products and the theoretical model, and explained the phones' relationships to the model and its components. An additional challenge Mei faced, then, was that her ideas were complex and highly analytical. They required a facility with verbal expression that was advanced by any measure.

Mei asked the consultant, "When I say 'first example' and 'second example' and so on, is it clear that Nokia has two phones and Apple has one?"

Sensing that this question was one of those that tugs at the yarn that unravels the shawl, Esther paused for a moment.

Both Esther and Mei understood that keeping the phones distinct in the reader's mind was a key focus for the session. Esther projected a measured confidence that they would reach this goal, but she could see that Mei's proficiency with English was good but not quite good enough to manage the multiple references on her own. Besides, writing an abstract can be tricky. In the longer paper she was writing, Mei could use repetition and redundancy to keep the reader on track with the various mobile phones. An abstract, however, demands conciseness. Had Mei taken her paper to a friend, it is unlikely she would have received the painstakingly close attention to reference words and conciseness that Esther provided; she might have gotten instead a few trivial corrections on her grammar. When Mei came to the writing center, she found there a consultant who knew how to navigate her way through complicated texts and how to help others do likewise. In the simple terms of writing centers, Mei had a draft and needed feedback. In the more precise terms of applied linguistics, what Mei put on the table was *output*; what she needed from her tutor was *comprehensible input* along with *negotiated interaction* and *recasting*. In the vernacular of writing centers, Mei had a draft and needed feedback.

After the pause, Mei and Esther talked more about what Mei was trying to say and the difficulty of keeping the three phones and their corresponding phone phenomena separate and distinct. They jumped to one of the places where confusion arose and worked on it. Before going on, Esther raised her head, took a breath, and said, "Let's go back to the top and read line by line, and when I don't understand which product you are referring to, we'll stop and work on it, okay?" Mei nodded.

As agreed, they started in. For the first few places where they stopped, Esther either explained her confusion or Mei preempted discussion with an explanation, sometimes lasting minutes. Esther listened intently while keeping an eye on keywords in the text and ignoring others that did not interfere with comprehension. They went back and forth until there was clarity,

as Mei typed away on her keyboard. Seeing that this approach was working, Esther formalized the process: “Again, I’m going to say now in my own words what I think you just said, and that way I’ll know, myself, if I understand what you’re saying.” Mei then either nodded agreement to Esther’s understanding or corrected or clarified it until Esther understood and could state her understanding clearly. Then Mei typed, usually an abbreviated form or phrase to help her remember when she went back later and made the changes on her own. They were deep into the minutiae of phones and phone phenomena.

Usually, after running her fingers through her hair to help her concentrate, Esther verbalized her own attempts to understand Mei’s text: “So Nokia’s first phone is what you mean here when you say ‘this phone’ or later over here when you say ‘the phone.’ Is that right?” or she would say, “And ‘this’ refers to the previous attempt, I think?” If Mei agreed with Esther, she typed in the change, using Esther’s words or her own. Esther didn’t let the conference become sidetracked with other matters. When a resolution seemed to be close at hand, Esther would say, “Let’s move on.”

Several things stand out in this thoughtful and productive tutoring session. First, Mei began learning English in school in China from an early age, earned a college degree in China, and is now an advanced international student with five years in the United States. She is working on her doctorate in business administration. Mei speaks English fluently, but says she comes to the Writers Workshop for help with her academic English. Had Mei been writing in her native Chinese and without the strict demands that conciseness puts on every word, the reference problem would still have been tricky, but it is something she could have managed on her own. For a nonnative speaker, however, navigating English’s reference system can feel like getting lost in an M. C. Escher drawing, full of twists, turns, and never-ending loops. Possessing advanced literacy in both her native language and English means that some aspects of English will still be difficult for her. Even with repeated exposure and effort, proficiency with these aspects may never be fully

acquired, and tutors are often the writer's only hope of finding the words and phrases that make success in writing possible.

Second, the session unfolds as an example of tutoring and learning in the *zone of proximal development*, or the idea that people learn new things by building upon what they already know with help from a more capable partner. To facilitate this learning, teachers and tutors assume that something people can learn to do with assistance or cooperatively with others, they can then eventually do on their own. In this case, the consultant used the teaching and learning technique of *scaffolding* to shape the language Mei needed. With a native English speaker (NES) scaffolding is still essential, but Esther would have relied more heavily on the client's intuitions about words "sounding right." Mei's English was very good, but she did not have the same intuitions as a native speaker, and the standard for accuracy in her writing was very high. Sometimes the consultant filled in thoughts or words to confirm her meaning or she probed Mei's words for clarity, and sometimes she moved the session along to the next line or problem, each time helping Mei to do as much of the work as she could. They frequently tested the link between words and meaning by reading, listening, speaking, and writing. What is not so apparent are the precise ways in which the consultant worked cooperatively with Mei by using various pragmatic devices to question, suggest, doubt, affirm, and so on. Like any good tutor, Esther brought curiosity, energy, and attentiveness to the conference, but these were combined with both her tacit and explicit knowledge of cohesive ties, how texts work to create meaning, and how to interact with Mei through a modified conversation. Mei is bright and motivated, and writers like her need tutors who are able to work at an advanced level. By the end of the session, Mei felt a clear sense of accomplishment. "She's really good," Mei said appreciatively.

A third thing that stands out in this session is the way in which the consultant employs the technique of *recasting*. Upon hearing and reading a phrase in Mei's text that was unclear, Esther stopped and either inquired further of Mei or recast what she had heard in a way that suggested rewording and made the

referent clearer. Recasting can be a valuable technique when writers are unable to make a correction on their own because they do not recognize the error. For example, in other contexts, a tutor might recast when a student writes “Apple market’s share falls one percent.” The tutor would then read it aloud as “Apple’s market share falls one percent?” by inserting and stressing the correct form, repeating *apple* to indicate a problem, and raising the intonation to ask for confirmation—“Is this what you intended to say, and do you understand and accept the change?” Recasting is achieved by pairing implicit negative feedback (interrupting) with implicit positive feedback (providing the correct form) (Byrd, 2005). Esther’s recast frames her feedback as a check on her own understanding while at the same time giving feedback to the writer that something is wrong and suggesting an alternative. Recasting is one of many techniques, and tutors should use it judiciously, but when used appropriately it can be the only way to make progress in a tutoring session.

A great variety of papers make their way to the writing center, and many are at least as complex as Mei’s and are often longer. Tutors as thoughtful and adept as Esther are treasures. But from micro to macro levels, the conference between Esther and Mei hints at the challenges we face when we think and talk about one-to-one tutoring with multilingual writers. For example, does Esther need to be able to explain the cohesive structure of a text in order to help Mei use clear references, or is it enough that Esther is familiar with how an abstract is supposed to sound? Does Mei rely too much on Esther when Esther speaks and Mei types, or is this the best way for Mei to learn new forms of the language and produce writing acceptable to her professor? Would it have helped Esther to know something about Chinese, Mei’s L1, or is it better to conduct the conference entirely in English?

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

We expect tutors to figure out what writers are able to learn on their own and what requires help, as well as what kind of help

is needed and where to begin. Tutors are supposed to be able to confirm that writers are making progress and know what to do when they haven't. We expect tutors to describe papers, structures, and sessions and to consult with us about problems as they arise. At other levels, the sociocultural and interpersonal, we want tutors to bring to all sessions a genuine interest in and curiosity about the writers and their writing: Who are they and where do they come from? What do they want to write about? How can I learn something about their first languages and schooling to better understand the interferences that may be occurring? These questions imply an intricate understanding of the challenges NNES students face, particularly when their tutors lack the understanding and the tools needed to develop it.

A number of writing center scholars such as Frankie Condon (2012), Harry Denny (2010), Nancy Grimm (1999), Greenfield and Rowan (2011), Michelle Cox et al. (2011), and others have recognized that raising tutors' awareness, especially awareness of writers' identities, is a key first step for working with diverse populations of students. Grimm, for example, observes that tutors cannot be expected, initially, to have the vocabulary, self-awareness, or confidence to engage with writers to the degree we would like. For Grimm, directors play an important role in giving tutors the opportunity to see themselves, as well as their clients, "as raced, classed, gendered, and multiply situated" selves because mainstream, white, Western (mostly) tutors need help in recognizing that such notions as responsible tutor, good student, and good writing cannot be taken as natural or normal; these concepts are institutionally defined and constructed. To look beyond them, tutors must be encouraged by directors and other educators to imagine their own identities, and others', differently.

By developing and demonstrating awareness of the formation and reformation of their identity, writing center tutors, no matter how awkwardly they do this, can encourage the creation of transitional space where they can play with and challenge cultural expectations, reimagining social futures. (Grimm 1999, 76)

Writing centers serve students from many backgrounds, disciplines, academic levels, and abilities. In many cases, multilingual writers have significantly more grammatical knowledge of English, worldly experience, and advanced literacy in their native language than their native English-speaking tutors do. As tutors achieve the kind of greater sociocultural awareness that Grimm and others call for, how do we want them to work with these writers in the writing conference? For example, there can be no doubt we want tutors who can recognize diverse student populations and the consequences that privilege and marginalization can have for students' writing. We want tutors who understand and can identify with culturally and linguistically diverse populations of writers. But we also want tutors who possess the kind of strategic knowledge for helping second-language writers that the field of SLA has made us aware of. Do we know what this strategic knowledge is and have we tried to teach it to our tutors? Have we taught them, for example, how to gain a sense of what writers know and can accomplish on their own versus only with help? Do directors know enough about the structures of English to be able to recognize and discuss forms and functions at the level of phrases, clauses, and larger pieces of discourse? And do tutors know who they can turn to as a source for acquiring the knowledge and skills they are expected to possess but don't yet have?

Questions like these go to the heart of scholarly, professional, and personal responsibilities. In this book, I aim to provoke directors and tutors to reflect on these questions, share them with one another, and use examples from the real-life tutoring sessions provided as a guide in their own attempts at improving writing center curricula. In each chapter, I pick out a different aspect—and consequently a different challenge—of a tutoring session that might be improved. In the first chapter, I offer snapshots of writing centers in various places around the world in order to show their growing diversity. I introduce multilingual writers who bring high expectations to the writing center for what they will be able to accomplish in the relatively brief time of a writing conference. Their high expectations stem from

their intimate knowledge of the tremendous challenge posed by learning advanced literacy in English, their second (or third, or more) language, and the challenges posed by English vocabulary, syntax, collocations, and cultural references. At the same time, tutors' knowledge and skills to help them meet these challenges are often less than optimal.

The second chapter shows how tutorial conversations can be made more instructive by negotiating the interaction and taking advantage of opportunities created by miscommunication. I discuss the choices tutors must make when deciding whether to simply tell the student the correct answer or help them get there on their own. I bring up the tendency students have to request native English-speaking tutors and the perceived superiority that represents. I also discuss the importance of listening in tutor-student interaction and how listening relates to the ways NNES students learn English. The process of learning a first language can be different from learning a second, and the way in which one learns a new language plays an important role in the writing center. I consider the effect of miscommunication on language learning and relay the importance of tutors' familiarity with concepts of language acquisition in order to understand what the student may be going through. Knowing more about language learning is a key step for developing more effective tutorial interactions.

Chapter 3 delves more specifically into academic writing and its many nuances. The skills required to be verbally proficient in general only increase as students move into academia, and sometimes NNES students do not have the lexicon required to handle the thousands of different words in an academic text. I discuss the challenges multilingual students face in meeting the demands instructors make on their academic writing and whether the expectations are appropriate for these students. Too often, work on writing is sidetracked by students' struggles to meet the formatting requirements teachers place on their assignments. Consequently, students rely on tools, such as translators, to help them expand their vocabularies and write papers their teachers won't rip to shreds. Tutors must understand the

increased challenges multilingual students have when writing an academic paper and they must be able to help their students scale the language barrier and be successful writers.

In chapter 4, I take up the idea of corrective feedback, specifically the differences between helpful feedback and feedback that hinders successful writing. While sometimes correcting every error is necessary and useful, in certain situations it is more helpful to focus on serious transgressions while leaving trivial ones for students to discover on their own. I discuss the ways in which tutors can bring attention to these errors and how that attention can impact how much or how little the information is retained for further use. Tutors must encourage students to notice their own mistakes and then discuss them in a way that leads the students to know how to fix them.

I conclude by discussing the ways we as educators, directors, and mentors can help prepare our tutors—and ourselves—to work with multilingual students in the writing center. Chapter 5 introduces some of the research on what tutors should know in order to best serve their students. It considers the ongoing debate on how involved tutors should be in their students' writing and whether university policies against helping them at the sentence level prevent multilingual writers from learning the idiosyncrasies of English and what their native teachers expect from them. I close by emphasizing the importance of working with the faculty and other members of the university to help students succeed in the best way possible. By helping educators to understand the issues facing multilingual writers today, we can overcome language barriers and usher students into the globalized world prepared for whatever it may bring.

CONCLUSION

Some of the criticisms made of writing center tutors—such as that they lack sufficient expertise in second-language writing—can and have been made of instructors who teach second-language students in their writing courses. The criticisms are often misplaced. Admission policies, placement mechanisms,

and resources all factor in to what students need and how well we can respond to these needs. But sometimes the criticisms are accurate and make a larger point. United States colleges and universities operate in a culture that idealizes Standard American English; tutors and the faculty members who teach them are usually English focused and lack preparation for teaching second-language writers and writing. As Paul Matsuda (2006) has observed, “Writing programs in U.S. higher education—as well as the intellectual field of composition studies, which has grown out of that particular historical and institutional context—have been based on the assumption of English monolingualism as the norm” (637).

The culture of *monolingualism* grows among racial and cultural stereotypes on the hard clay of ignorance and isolation. Over decades, the assumptions of English monolingualism were convenient for academic leaders who devoted few curricular resources to multilingual learners, including courses in language, culture, linguistics, and rhetoric taught by specialists. Writing center directors and other leaders have made progress in addressing some of the problems associated with monolingualism and have welcomed other languages and cultures to the writing center (Babcock and Thonus 2012; Condon 2012; CCCC 2009; Denny 2010; Greenfield and Rowan 2011). Yet there is still a long way to go. The next steps will require directors to open the doors wider, inform and advocate, and develop a praxis of tutor education that draws knowledge from the fields of second-language writing and applied linguistics.

At stake in these discussions are the hopes of writers like Rico, who was born in Venezuela and came to the United States when he was fifteen. His yearning for education is the sort that makes teachers and tutors want to connect with him. He smiled broadly when he told me, “The best way [for an L2 writer] to get help is to write whatever they want and then have the tutor go over it and explain every mistake. Grammar is the most important thing. You need to know why that word goes there or why that sentence is right. That’s what we need.” Rico says “grammar” and “mistake,” but if pressed he might mean

any number of things, like rhetorical choices, transitions, cohesive ties, clarifying devices, colloquialisms, collocations, and other features that only writing teachers know the names for. What comes through loud and clear as he talks, though, is the desire for more instruction, more “going over,” and more explaining.

It would be easy enough to dismiss such requests as admirable but unrealistic: what writing center has the resources to satisfy such a hunger for learning? Yet in Rico’s recorded interview, one hears the stress he places on “go over it” and “explain,” and it seems clear that he is not so much asking for unlimited tutoring as telling how hard he himself is prepared to work at learning English. A. Suresh Canagarajah (2006b) notes that diversity demands more, not less, from minority students: “They have to not only master the dominant varieties of English, but also know how to bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways” (598). Gaining these rhetorical strategies requires tutors who can look at writing such as Rico’s, analyze its strengths and weaknesses, and help the writer to zero in on the next steps they need to take, not merely affirming their efforts or offering boilerplate advice.

Whether or not tutoring sessions such as this are typical or even possible is for readers to judge, but in the professional conversation and scholarly research of writing centers, there is a dearth of discussion about them. To respond to writers like Rico, tutors must bring a fair amount of knowledge and experience to the table, and much of this knowledge is rarely taught or available to tutors. Directors are nonetheless an important source of this knowledge, or at least they are the first point of contact for tutors. Both directors and tutors have a responsibility to expand the knowledge base for themselves and others because writing centers are part of the hope and inspiration that public higher education holds out to everyone. I hope members of the writing center community will see in this book an optimism about the future of writing centers as well as a call to invigorate the preparation of tutors and directors for the multilingual futures that await us all.