Creating Theory: Moving Tutors to the Center

by Sue Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch

Over the years, many writers have offered theoretical constructions of writing centers. For Steve North and Muriel Harris, they are places that above all nurture the individual writer. For Ken Bruffee and those running writing fellows programs, they help writers learn academic discourse. For Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, as well as Bruffee, they are sites for collaborative learning. For Marilyn Cooper and Nancy Grimm, the postmodern writing center offers a place where students can create an identity and achieve agency within the academy. Largely left out of these constructions of writing centers are tutor voices. As Beth Boquet points out in "Tug-of-War: Snapshots of Life in the Center," "Part of the problem seems to be that, with few notable exceptions, conclusions are drawn about peer tutors, information is produced for peer tutors, but rarely are these things created by peer tutors" (18).

Similarly, Peter Vandenberg, in tracing the evolution of writing tutor pedagogies from the "newly practical" approach of Muriel Harris and Meyer and Smith to the "professional-izing" approach of Murphy and Sherwood, notes that the professionalizing approach constructs tutors as listeners to writing center theory (64), "with limited potential to engage in the discourse that governs their activities and few opportunities to construct themselves

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within it" (60). Vandenburg concludes that tutors must "write their way out [of this] sub-jugated role" (65), which he accomplishes through having his tutors first participate in a listserv discussion and then write a conference paper or article to allow collaboration "with the scholarly field that claims to inform their practice" (74).

Like Vandenberg, we encourage our tutors to engage with writing center theory as a way to invite them to become part of the scholarly conversation about writing centers. In our year-long tutoring course at the University of Vermont, tutors respond in their weekly journals to the theory they read, eventually writing a proposal for a conference presentation or a piece for a wider audience. In this article, we want to look more closely at just how our tutors interact with theory, how it shapes their tutoring, and how their voices might contribute to that theory. After re-reading the journals of nineteen tutors, sophomores to seniors and from a variety of majors, we selected three to analyze as case studies, each illustrating a different way tutors might help shape the academic conversation about writing centers: in Jill's journal, we see that tutors are well-positioned to complicate theory, based on their experience of how theory plays out in practice; in John's, we see how tutors might contribute to existing theory by considering an issue from a tutor's point of view; and in Brandon's, we see a tutor creating new theory.

Jill: Complicating Existing Theory

Jill's journal shows how tutors can make theory more accessible to other tutors, and can explore its complications by seeing how it plays out in practice. In her application to be a writing tutor, Jill, a senior English major, states that she would like to be a writer. She explains that she writes poetry, stories, and essays and keeps a journal, where she has done most of her writing since third grade. She reveals her intellectual bent: "It just seems to be easiest for me to think with a pen in my hand. So I suppose I like writing when I manage to think clearly through it." She also mentions her difficulties with writing: "I am also well aware of the sensation of being downright and flatout stuck in a rut . . . . The most valuable solution I have found to such states is talking it out with someone, my older brother or a close friend." In a journal entry on September 7, Jill describes how this same solution, talking with a peer, worked for her at Oxford, where "we were often advised to bring our papers to other students first, to clear out the mess . . . . Talking to someone like me, some-one without the gradebook or the phd, was incredibly helpful. They would help me as a friend, as someone offering advice, not as an awe-inspiring superior."

Jill, then, brings to the writing center her vision of tutoring as two equals sharing ideas in intellectual conversation. When assigned Ken Bruffee's "Peer Tutoring and the

'Conversation of Mankind'" in September, she finds a theory to explain the value of conversation as she experienced it with her brother and her peers at Oxford. Bruffee argues that "reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized" (5) and continues

> if thought is internalized conversation, then writing is internalized conversation re-externalized. Like thought, therefore, writing is temporally and functionally related to conversation. . . . The inference writing tutors and teachers should make from this line of reasoning is that our task must involve engaging students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible and that we should contrive to ensure that that conversation is similar in as many ways as possible to the way we would like them eventually to write. (7)

In a journal entry on September 14, Jill rearticulates Bruffee's view of tutoring as engaging students in academic conversation, even going beyond it in imagining the role of the tutor according to this view:

> I re-read Bruffee for this week as advised to do in class. This essay focuses on the theoretical side of tutoring, namely the necessity of continuing the "conversation" of mankind. He described thinking as an internalization of the world conversation and writing as a re-externalized version of this internalized message. . . . Tutors become complicated counselors listening for sounds, talking through complications, keeping the human conversation of the world and of academics accessible to everyone, even the most confused and momentarily baffled participants and sometimes even the most involved and eager participants.

In describing her sessions, Jill sees herself in this role of helping students learn how to converse within the academy, as in this journal entry on October 27:

> The first dilemma I had to confront concerned this student's inability to comprehend an academic language. . . . This particular situation reminded me of some of the readings we did at the beginning of the semester. There existed a large academic dialogue that Lora did not possess the skills to speak in. Her teacher's comments were meaningless to her. As a tutor I recognized my responsibility to explain this to her.

For Bruffee, both student and tutor benefit from peer tutoring, and both contribute equally to the session: "The tutee brings to the conversation knowledge of the subject to be written about and knowledge of the assignment. The tutor brings to the conversation knowledge of the conventions of discourse and knowledge of standard written English" (10). Months after reading Bruffee's article, Jill echoes him in her description of the tutoring relationship:

> 2/16: Last week I tutored an upper level Physical Therapy student . . . . The work this student brought in was milleniums beyond me . . . . When I initially saw this "greek" text before me, I was stunned . . . . But I was having fun too, because I kept asking what all the words meant and I was learning so many new terms . . . . There was a

fabulous balance in this session. It wasn't a student coming to a tutor for knowl-
edge, as professor-student relationships often are arranged. Instead, it was the two
of us at the writing center late on a Monday night playing with words. It was an aca-
demic conversation comprised of two sides, with equal but entirely distinct abilities
and knowledge.

For Jill, however, engaging students in academic conversation does not always come eas-
ily. She begins her final entry by noting, "Over the course of the year, I have developed an
understanding of tutoring as a conversational relationship. Not only is this the defining
concept of my technique, but it is also the basic notion contained in my difficulties." Under
the intense pressure of tutoring, Jill finds she does not always know what to say: "11/15:
Every time a student comes in, the task is completely redistributed. By making writing a
verbal action, the student has redistributed the implications of scholarly conversation.
They have found another voice with whom to talk, with whom to understand. But what hap-
pens when this other voice has nothing to say? When the voice feels inadequate?"
Similarly, Jill discovers that students are not always up to the task of contributing their half
of the conversation: "12/7: I think some of my most difficult sessions came from inarticu-
late students . . . . I view tutoring as an ongoing conversation. It would be useless and fun-
damentally pointless if I was maintaining a monologue with myself."

When Jill finds that former tutees she encounters on the first day of an English course
don't recognize her, she wonders if her tutees actually do see her as a peer, as a fellow stu-
dent: "1/26: But still the muffin eater didn't recall the hours spent with me . . . . I was afraid
for a moment that they didn't consider me a student in cahoots with them, one playing the
same challenging game. What does a student think of tutors?" Jill also worries that when
she does treat struggling students as equal partners in an academic conversation, the
resulting work may raise issues of plagiarism:

> 4/25: The two sessions I had today both exemplified a problem I have had with the
> conversational aspects of tutoring . . . . By establishing a conversational tone I have
> a natural tendency to share my own inclinations, own reactions to a work, to the
> subject matter as well as to the student's own work, and this notion disturbs me
> greatly . . . . I cannot decide how to interact in a conversational tone with full hon-
> esty without leading the student to blindly accept my ideas.

What can Jill contribute to writing center theory given that she derives so many of her
ideas about tutoring from Bruffee? Jill's journal illustrates how a tutor can help other
tutors understand the reasons for and nature of the "conversational relationship"
described by Bruffee. When our tutors read Bruffee, many of them grasp only the idea that
conversation is fundamental to tutoring, and not his theoretical explanation of why, or of

the kinds of talk in which he thinks student and tutor should engage. Vandenberg, too, notes that "new tutors are hard pressed to relate their literal interpretation of conversation to reading and writing . . ." (69). By explaining Bruffee's theory from a tutor's point of view, in a tutor's language and with concrete images, Jill can help tutors understand that sometimes what students need from tutors is not just talk, but practice in academic conversation. And by considering the challenges as well as the exhilaration of viewing tutoring as engaging with students in academic conversation, Jill can encourage directors and tutors alike to grapple with the difficulties of putting Bruffee's theory into practice.

John: Contributing to Existing Theory

John Casey's journal shows how tutors can feel constrained by theory and can re-imagine the tutor's role in a way that contributes to existing theory. In his application to be a tutor, John, a senior English major and Latin minor, reveals that he takes himself seriously as a writer and wants to be a teacher: "I would like to be a tutor because I'm interested in teaching . . . . I'm hoping that by tutoring writing I can get some teaching experience and see if that is the career I'm really interested in" (and indeed he has gone on to enroll in a PhD program, where he currently teaches composition). But, oddly, what John emphasizes in his early journal entries is his intention not to adopt the role of teacher, and instead to relate to students as a fellow struggling writer. In the first week of school he writes: "I just need to keep in mind what the readings in Capossela keep pointing out, every student and situation is different. I'm not a teacher yet anyway . . . . I'm just a peer and struggling writer like them, looking for answers." And a few days later: ". . . one can't be too cocky. I'm a good writer, but I could be better. I struggle on some of the same things they do."

Perhaps, as John's journal entry suggests, his sense that he shouldn't view himself as a teacher comes from his early readings in the course text, Toni Lee Capossela's *Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring in Writing*. Capossela warns: "A peer consultant isn't a surrogate teacher . . . . At best, you will be only a mediocre surrogate teacher, but by building on your peer status you can become an excellent consultant" (2). This caution against acting as an authority figure was probably reinforced when John read Muriel Harris's "The Roles A Tutor Plays" (coach, commentator, and counselor), Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work," and Judith Powers' "Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer," which describes the guilt her tutors felt when the collaborative techniques they use with native-speaking writers failed with ESL students, resulting in their becoming "more direct, more didactic" in their approach (369-371).

Still, when John describes his tutoring sessions, he never mentions sharing any of his struggles or experiences as a writer but often does refer to himself as teaching: "11/4: I helped teach him how to create a paper topic in a literature class"; "2/11: I feel that I am teaching them skills, such as researching, that will help them"; "3/31: I felt wrong teaching someone older than myself." John's primary method of tutoring, as he describes his sessions in his journal, seems to be to offer suggestions: "9/16: I suggested some word changes . . . . My only other suggestion was for her to state that focus or thesis right in the introduction." "10/24: I then suggested that he try subtitling sections. I suggested that he might separate the history from the politics, at least for now, and show the connections and projected results in a concluding section." "11/7: She showed me a few problem areas in the text, I made suggestions based on her intentions for the paper. When we ran out of stuff to work on, she left."

Indeed, an awareness that he may be perceived as doing too much for the student comes up again and again in John's journal in the fall semester:

> 9/26: Finally, I was a little too dominant in the conversation, offering my ideas and opinions. She looks like a good student to me, however. She asked questions back and seemed to understand her own thoughts better from my comments. In other words, I'm not worried that she'll use my ideas.

> 10/3: The only concern I had was that I might have been a little too authoritative. She didn't see the outline that her paper was developing well, so I created one for her using the marginal glosses that she supplied. I told her she didn't have to use it, but it seemed to be the best way for her to structure together her scattered ideas.

> 10/24: I kind of dominated the conversation, but the paper was due on Tuesday, and he was freaked out. It was sort of where his thoughts were heading anyway, based on what I had read.

John seems to experience a conflict between his desire to offer his "ideas and opinions" and his sense that we—the audience for his journal or the writers of theory he is reading— might disapprove. Out of this conflict comes an inspiration on John's part as to how the middle ground between teacher/authority and peer/equal might be redefined. When asked at the end of the first semester to describe his tutoring style or philosophy, John comes up with a role for the tutor that accepts an emphasis on the peer relationship, but that also fits his desire to practice teaching: the role of big brother.

> 12/8: It's not easy to say what my tutoring style is. I guess I would characterize it as a big brother. A lot of the tutees I get in my sessions are younger than me. They are also fairly new to the college experience. Therefore there are certain things that I know more about than them. Especially when I tutor students in English classes. I've done the type of papers that they come in with, and I've had some of the same

professors. Yet, a big brother while he teaches also is supportive. I don't assert superiority. I offer help and advice on their papers and in their classes, but only if they want it . . . . So I guess my tutoring style is like the interaction between a big brother and his younger siblings. It helps me to avoid the teacher trap, and still help the students.

Now John has a rationale for offering suggestions. The big brother can be unapologetic about having more knowledge and experience than his sibling; the family relationship assures that his expertise will be used with the best interests of the younger sibling at heart.

John clearly enjoys sessions where he can be the big brother, sharing his knowledge and showing students the ropes:

> 2/6: Looking back at Friday's sessions I notice some similarities between the two tutees. Both were second semester freshmen in intro classes and both of them hadn't written a paper draft yet. This was an ideal time to put my theories to the test. First of all, being at square one I had a chance to get them started not only on the assignment but on their college journey as well. This ties in with the image of the big brother. I'm almost out of UVM. I'm an adult now. These tutees are teens fresh out of high school. They probably feel a lot like I did at first, rowboat with one oar. Just rowing around in circles . . . .

> We, as good writers, should never lose sight of that inner scared freshman. Bewildered, crushed, feeling ignorant, etc. It wards off a fear of failure because it shows how you got here in the first place. It's also a great lesson in humility.

Note that what John seems to have "learned" from his tutees is an appreciation of how much he has grown since he was a first-year student. He *was* rather than *is* that person he is helping. In John's final journal entry, he comments: "4/27: Seeing writers with problems shows that I am an experienced writer. That's why I'm helping them."

On the other hand, the sessions where he can't adopt this role of big brother prove difficult for John:

> 3/31: You know, I encountered a big problem in these two sessions that I had never thought of before. What happens when you are tutoring students older than you? Both my sessions were with non-traditional students, so the relationship was odd and slightly skewed. I felt wrong teaching someone older than myself. I wasn't sure at any point in time if I was insulting their intelligence or transgressing the boundaries of our age classes. . . . This unequal age situation put me off balance. I kind of let them bully me into doing what they wanted.

In responding to theory, John critiques passages or ideas that disallow this role of guiding big brother. After reading Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring," he argues against the hypothesis that the tutor should be quiet and let the student do the work:

> 2/25: I failed the Minimalist Tutoring paradigm big time. I can't seem to keep my mouth shut. . . . I guess the problem I have with Minimalist Tutoring is that it leaves

a student like this one floundering. Talking was great, but we were getting nowhere, neither was her draft. It needed better focus, it needed a new thesis statement. She didn't see this so it became necessary to intervene and get her steered in the appropriate direction. Otherwise she could have written or talked herself into circles for hours.

And in thinking about another session, he comes up with a hypothesis that defines when and why tutors need to take a more directive role:

2/20: I just felt like I was too much in control, largely because of that article on minimalist tutoring. But you really can't just sit there and expect the student to do everything. He could have read some of his sentences until the Second Coming of Christ and never found anything wrong with them. . . . I was encouraged by the fact that as I pointed out some of these areas that were awkward and needed development, he started to notice them on his own. I could see a lightbulb going off in his head. So I stopped lecturing and left that part to him. So sometimes you need to take a more active role in directing the student. Good and excellent students flourish with minimalist tutoring. Average students do not. They need a guide to show them the trail before they can hike on their own.

What contribution can John's struggles to find a role as both a peer and an authority make to writing center theory? John can add a tutor's voice to the discussion of directive vs. non-directive tutoring, supporting the view that while tutors are not *the* teacher, being *a* teacher is an appropriate and productive role for tutors. A tutor, he suggests, can be an authority (a big brother, or even a rowing instructor or wilderness guide) based on his or her being further along in the college journey and having greater experience as a writer than the tutee. Irene Lurkis Clark, in "Collaboration and Ethics in Writing Center Pedagogy," makes this same point, arguing for the efficacy of modeling, imitation, offering suggestions. Likewise, Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns, in "A Critique of Pure Tutoring," find many reasons for including directive tutoring practices in the writing center. John's practical experience supports their arguments, and his metaphors make concrete for other peer tutors what forms this directive rather than collaborative relationship might take.

Brandon: Creating New Theory

Brandon Johnson's journal shows that tutors can contribute new theory to the field. A sophomore English major active in radical campus politics, Brandon brings to his tutoring a vision from his past: "I sort of resorted to my first experiences in tutoring in this session . . . . laughing/playing with my brother or friends as we read over our papers and complain about our teachers and such stuff." Although he took a college English course while in high school and was in a first-year honors program at college, Brandon sees himself as "the

same as" the students he is tutoring, and sees establishing a fully equal relationship as fundamental to tutoring.

One method Brandon uses to establish equality is to get the student to see him as a fellow student, indeed as a friend, by identifying with whatever the student seems to be feeling and then sharing a similar experience of his own, as in this session:

> 10/27: I like to begin my session with making sure my tutee views me as a peer. Tutors, in this instance, are more like tutees than not. I struggle through papers just as she was doing now. We both want good papers, good grades, and good skills to carry with us to the next assignment we tackle. I said "How's it goin today?" She said, "fine," looking a bit lost. I explained how I was tired from working the late shift last night and a little stressed about a Japanese quiz I was taking later that day. She looked a little less lost. . . . I thought she might be a little nervous so I told her how sometimes papers make so much sense to us because we wrote them but don't make sense to the readers. I said this was a problem I dealt with in my own writing. She smiled and I was sure she wasn't nervous.

When faced with a tutee who has proven difficult for other tutors, Brandon goes beyond the story sharing to establish a peer relationship:

> 4/12: Was this the same Dave who was the much talked about student of last semester who sent many tutors screaming—he fit the MO—I had the advantage though. I recognized him from SPARC stuff. So I chatted with him for a bit and then said stuff that was along the lines of "ahh—school's rough—let's just do this" and I used obscenities to make him see me as a total "peer."

Brandon resists the role of tutor as expert/authority giving advice or suggestions, instead trying to draw the necessary material from the writer:

> 11/3: This was one of those sessions where the student comes in with no current draft and just throws up her hands saying "I give up" without the words. Experience showed me to be careful not to give too many suggestions at first for the danger of having the student feel I was going to give her the answers all session long and then having to overcome that misunderstanding. I wrote down with her her thoughts to prove to her she had the necessary beginning ideas and then had her begin her paper to prove to her she could do it . . . . I'm glad to say she left more confident.

When responding to readings on the theory of tutoring, Brandon pulls out whatever might help him construct an equal relationship and critiques what he sees as threatening it. For example, in reading Muriel Harris's "The Roles a Tutor Plays," Brandon questions the roles of commentator and counselor when they seem to work against establishing a truly equal relationship:

> 9/7: It was said that "learners need to know when they are progressing." I don't know yet how I will do this and not be condescending. . . . I thought I was not supposed to be superior and does not commentary necessitate a superior and inferior?

It was said we need to look at the student as a person. I, again, say we should also make
certain that the student sees us as a person—not a counselor. I guess I have a lot to
learn.

And Brandon responds to Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring" with two lists; he likes sugges-
tions that position the student as an equal and takes issue with statements that do not:

2/23: Stuff I liked a lot and/or learned:

—telling the students that their work "deserve[s] the same kind of close attention we
usually reserve for literary texts"

—importance of body language: "get the student physically closer to her paper than you
are"; borrow student's body language when they are uncooperative.

Stuff I took issue with:

—"Most students simply do not have the skill, experience, or talent to write the

perfect paper." I think this is a dangerous assumption. I like to view the students I
tutor as just needing the WILL and a few pointers

—I think telling a student "I can't tell you that" is WAY TOO confrontational. We should
be a team, not a superior/inferior.

At the end of the semester, Brandon has a session that exemplifies the techniques he has
evolved for tutoring as a "buddy," techniques that help him avoid taking a position of
authority or positioning the student as someone with a "problem" or "in need":

5/1: R—— was perhaps the perfect candidate to end up the year with. R—— first came in
talking a little slowly and looking around nervously but that's not too tough to deal
with, I simply shot the bull with him a bit. When we finally sit down he flips his
paper over to me and says something like "yeah if you can just fix the grammar
that'd be great." If I had said "No, we don't do that" it would have broken down our
"peer" relationship. It would have turned me into the authority of the session, into
the "smart guy" who would let the "dumb guy" in on as many secrets as I decided he
deserved. I would rather be a buddy, a peer. I said "Why don't you just start reading
your paper and we'll take it from there."

As he troubled through his text he began to make the same mistake over and over. What
he would say would be great, would be grammatically correct, but it just wasn't what
he wrote. I thought he might have a learning disability so I tried to figure out how I
might ask him. . . . But then I thought—What would be the purpose of getting him to
admit he has a documented problem? This poor guy has probably been reminded
he's not the best writer by numerous bad grades on papers—as he told me in intros .
. . .

I had taught him a comma rule twice and had demonstrated it and now when he came to
it again in his paper he was stuck. Was I really supposed to sit here saying "Yeah you
can't remember." No—after a little while I said something like "I'm sorry this rule's
a little tricky for me. I mean we spent like 2 weeks on it in my classes. Let me try to

explain it again." Suddenly I was the one in the hot seat and not him. He felt relieved and as I explained it a third time, this time using a radical new—more picturey—method, I accepted responsibility for the session. It wasn't his fault for not learning; it was mine. He wasn't the dumb one, I was.

By the way: he finally got it.

Brandon was apparently so inspired by this session that it prompted him to write an article on his theory of peer tutoring. We found Brandon's article, entitled "True Play" (a reference to Nancy Welch's article "Playing with Reality: Writing Centers After the Mirror Stage"), tucked into his final portfolio, without any explanation. As the following excerpts suggest, he argues that establishing a peer relationship based on common struggles is essential to creating successful tutoring sessions:

> It is not that R—-'s session went superbly or that I feel like I am a tutor with nothing more to learn—but I do believe the praise this student gave me was in part the result of some conscious choices I made throughout the session: choices designed to make him feel like a peer . . . . It is really hard to be a peer tutor; it is sort of like being a short basketball player. I fear we too often slip into just being tutors.

> We, in class, make statements like "then I suggested to her" or "after that, I had him" or even "she wanted to do X but I told her we don't do that here". . . . All of these comments, I believe, demonstrate the possible drifting from a "peer" mentality . . . . It is by being a peer, by being a person they can identify with as having the same struggles as them, that we can reach them, convince them that we understand their difficulties, and also convince them that they can probably be better writers than they expect.

> So how is this first magic step achieved? How do we "get them to let us help them" you ask? Well, I guess the first step is to stop calling them "them" . . . . Everything we say and do, how we act and how we react can either build us up as peers or bring our students down as "those in need." Only after we associate ourselves as peers can we gain access into a relationship with our students—albeit but an hour long— that can allow us to inspire them towards success . . . .

In Fall 2001, Brandon shared his ideas with a larger writing center community. He gave a talk, "True Play: Establishing Peer Relationships in the Writing Center," at the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, where writing center theorists were in the audience, questioning and debating his theory.

Conclusion

What did we learn about how students' interactions with theory shape their tutoring? We were struck by the reverse relationship: by the degree to which tutors' initial visions of the writing center shape their interactions with theory. Each tutor brought to the writing cen-

ter a unique vision of tutoring, shaped by past experiences as a writer and with other writ-ers, by career goals, personality, values, socio-economic status, politics. This vision was apparent (in retrospect) in each tutor's application and early journal entries. It informed their reading of writing center theory and their approach to tutoring, and became the basis for developing a more elaborated theory. By the end of the year, each tutor had become con-sciously aware of tutoring within this individually constructed theoretical framework; each articulated her or his theory in more detail and described sessions in terms of it.

So for Jill, John, and Brandon, interacting with theory accomplished more than allowing them to become part of the conversation of writing center professionals. It was through their interactions with theory that the three created their identities as tutors: Jill as the fel-low scholar, helping students learn how to engage in academic discourse through intellec-tual conversation; John as the big brother to less experienced students, offering them his expertise as a talented writer and successful senior; and Brandon as the buddy, playfully commiserating with fellow students whom he sees as, like him, struggling with writing, with school, with life. Reflecting on practice and theory, then, led our tutors to identity con-struction, much as Kathleen Blake Yancey discovered when she had tutors engage in a vari-ety of types of discourse using the frames of reflection, practice, and theory:

> Put another way, working through both these frames concurrently—reporting and reflecting—what did the tutors learn? To take their own sense of what a tutor is, to add that to what the theory of the course told them, and to combine those with their experience to create their own theorized practice. Try again: Speaking rhetorically, such writing, such reflection is an act of invention, or perhaps several acts: invent-ing practice, in the course of which the tutors invent themselves. (192)

In inventing themselves through reflecting on theory and practice, these tutors not only drew from theory but also came up with ideas that can contribute to it: by examining how theory plays out in practice, thus complicating that theory; by offering concrete images of possible roles and relationships that can be constructed in a tutoring session, thereby mak-ing theory more accessible to tutors; and by addressing questions central to writing center theory, such as the appropriateness of directive tutoring, and what it means to be a "peer" tutor. All three tutors can contribute to the latter conversation, begun most notably by John Trimbur in his 1987 *Writing Center Journal* article, "'Peer Tutoring': A Contradiction in Terms?" Perhaps the best answers to this question come from those who actually are peer tutors. Jill, John, and Brandon all struggle with defining their role as both peer and tutor, and end up defining the term "peer" in a way that matches their vision. For Jill, tutor and student are intellectual peers, though they bring different knowledge to the conversation. For John, students are peers because they are what he has been—novice student and writer—

and he can pass on the knowledge and experience he has acquired through four years. For Brandon, a tutor is a fellow struggling student; Brandon realizes that this peer relationship doesn't just happen, but must be created by the tutor as the session unfolds.

In the past, we did what Beth Boquet suggests happens far too often—we gave our tutors theory generated by others. Now, having looked more closely at their journals, we realize how capable they are of building their own theory, and we can find ways to make use of their theories in our ongoing work with tutors. Most important, we realize that including tutors in the construction of writing center theory is not just something we should do for their benefit, so that, in Vandenberg's terms, they can "write their way out [of their] subjugated role." Rather, we see how writing center theory can be enriched by including tutor voices and perspectives. As the folks at the boundary of theory and practice, tutors are well-positioned to explore the connections between them, to tease out the subtleties, the complications, the assumptions, the omissions in our theory and our practice, and to see how one might shed light on the other.

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