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Community Construction In The Basic Writing Classroom

Jennifer Nicole Collins

COMMUNITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE BASIC WRITING CLASSROOM

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Writing

By

Jennifer Nicole Collins

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed students' perceptions of community construction within the English 100 classroom and university at large as well as analyzed the instructor's role as a "tutor" and the impact this has on students' perceptions of community within the classroom. Composition theorist Kenneth Bruffee proposes that one solution for creating community for basic writers, those students least prepared for the college composition classroom, is peer tutoring. The traditional classroom has not worked for basic writers because it lacks a sense of community. The goal is to change the social context for learning and make it less hierarchical. Given the nature of English 100's institutional structure at Missouri State University, the role of the instructor is different; the course is graded pass/no pass based on a committee's evaluation of each student's end-of-semester portfolio. Because the ENG 100 instructor does not determine the grade, the institutional structure places the instructor into a different role in the class--a role that more closely resembles a tutor. Because the course better lends to a tutor model of education, this study found that this shift in the teacher's role does enhance students' perceptions of community within the classroom and the larger university but further research is necessary to analyze the larger impact of this shift in the role of the instructor.

KEYWORDS: peerness, community, hierarchy, expectations, perceptions, tutor, basic writing, peer tutoring, social context

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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INTRODUCTION

My introduction to basic writing came from serving in the role of the tutor rather than the role of the teacher. Though I would go on to become a basic writing instructor, my first experiences with basic writing students came from what I thought was a tangential role to the teacher; the teacher was there to initially teach and the tutor was there to reinforce said teaching. I was not expecting the stark difference in how my tutees approached me as a tutor as compared to when I worked with Writing 1 students within my own classroom. As a young, graduate teaching assistant, I did not know what to expect when entering the classroom. Tropes of what society portrays a college professor to be and what I had experienced during my role as a student were greatly impacting what I thought my role as a teacher was to be. Furthermore, as I learned how to work with my Writing I students I wondered how I would have to change these strategies as I became a tutor for a different group of students, specifically how my authority as a teacher would look different than my authority as a tutor.

This change in authority came from working with a different populace of students; what I could say implicitly to my Writing 1 students I would have to say explicitly to my basic writing students for it to have any authority. The students in my Writing 1 class heard my implicit suggestions as veiled directives, whereas my basic writing students struggled to understand my indirect requests the basic writing students were more likely to either resist or ignore any implicit assertion of authority or to respond passively by not interacting with either me or classmates.

What I discovered, though, is that the role of the instructor is an ever-changing role that is dependent on the needs of the individuals being taught and the collective as a whole. To be a teacher, especially one of basic writers, meant to teach from a different place of authority than I had ever experienced. What I began to notice was that my role as a teacher differed radically from my role as tutor and this difference continued to peak my curiosity when I tried to develop relationships with my tutees like those I had started to develop with my own students.

What I found was that the students enrolled in my Writing I class were more willing to seek comments and guidance than the basic writing students that I tutored—at first. The way that my students sat within the classroom, spread out as if they were their own homes, differed from the way my 100 tutees would tuck and fold themselves, and their work, into the smallest spaces possible. I felt as though I was teaching and guiding students in the same way, so I began to wonder how my designated role might be influencing these students. Further, I wondered how my role might be playing out in not only my 100 tutees' classroom, but in classrooms across campus. As my teaching relationships began to develop with my tutees, I noticed that not only did these students start to regard our relationship in a similar way to my Writing I students, but they begin to share more and work harder than students in my own class. I wondered what I had done differently, or if I had done anything at all.

From the well-observing eyes of a guiding instructor, I began to question if it was less of my physical presence in the room or even my pedagogical techniques but what I represented and, according to my first tutee Quentin, how I was the antithesis of the archetypal writing instructor. Where I thought my pedagogy or attempt at professorial

charm was what inspired and motivated students to perform, Quentin and my other English 100 students were leading me to believe that it might have little to do with me and more to do with the type of community I was attempting to foster.

My experience coming in to academia, at times, felt nothing short of an elitist club that I failed to have the credentials to enter despite coming from a good academic upbringing and having access to enough resources to survive within college. The archetypes that I had seen of professors in pop culture and that I had seen perpetuated within my own college experiences were predominately older, white males who were smartly dressed and seemed to know far more than I ever could comprehend. I do not offer this as an inconsequential aside, but as an experience that I believe is paramount to understanding the English 100 students' experience within academia; basic writers crest in to college on the fringe—they are marked as outsiders by their very existence within the system. A lack of understanding of how academia, by its very nature, excludes and removes Others from its system is a discredit to the struggles faced by basic writing students. My impetus for this study is to find what instructors can do to better include students within the discourse community as well as to analyze what perceptions students have about the discourse community that they are trying to enter and the role that the instructor plays within this lore. As the job force demands more workers with higher levels of education, the realities of not earning a college degree seem grimmer than even a generation before. My concern is that the basic writing classroom feels like a gatekeeping course that at times serves as a way to exclude and remove people from the academic discourse community.

The purpose of this study is to analyze students' perceptions of community construction within the English 100 classroom. This study will examine the instructor's role and the impact this has on students' perceptions of community within the classroom. Bruffee contends that the traditional classroom has not worked for some students because it lacks a sense of community. The solution, then, is two fold: first, to change the social context for learning and make it less hierarchical and second, to reconsider how communities are formed and how they function within the classroom. Composition theorist Kenneth Bruffee proposes that one solution for creating community is peer tutoring. Given the nature of English 100's function at Missouri State University, the role of the instructor is different; the course is graded pass/no pass based on a committee's evaluation of each student's end-of-semester portfolio. Because the ENG 100 instructor does not determine the grade, the institutional structure places the instructor into a different role in the class--a role that more closely resembles a tutor.

Because the course better lends to a tutor model of education, the larger goal of this study is to see if this shift in role from teacher to tutor does actually enhance students' perceptions of community within the classroom and the larger university, and whether a sense of "peerness" is necessary in a tutoring relationship to build a sense of community.

Chapter One explores the theory behind identity and community formation as well as the function of community within the writing classroom and the notion of peerness in tutoring. Chapter Two offers a case study of one basic writer I tutored. Chapter Three discusses the implications my case study has for the field's understanding of community formation. From these goals, it is clear to see that a shift in the instructor's

role (to tutor) enhances students' perceptions of community in the classroom and the

larger university, and peerness is necessary in a tutoring relationship to build community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars, like Bruffee, Lunsford, and Ede, have discussed the importance of developing collaborative writing environments within the classroom and the role of dialogic writing in creating collective knowledge and learning discourse community standards. This social constructivist pedagogy is widely accepted within college composition classrooms, yet the expectations that students have of these teachers when entering the classroom does not match the role that social constructionist pedagogy demands of instructors; this image that instructors hope to project is being met with student expectations that instructors are removed from students' concerns as well as any community building that might happen within the classroom.

To understand the role of the instructor within these classroom communities, it's important to consider how identity is formed for the individual within the context of the university. This provides illumination on how the individual's role influences how he or she views community as well as his or her own roles and expectations of others in the classroom.

Most modern rhetors regard identity as a descriptor that is fluid, performed, and constantly shifting. Language becomes the tool by which we construct this identity, and it is the tool others use to construct an identity for us. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera* explores this shifting identity as she grapples with her two identities constructed by her language coming in to conflict:

> "*Pocho,* cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language," I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish. But Schicano Spanish is a border

> tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolucion, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invencion o adopcion (evolution, enrichment of new rods by invention or adoption)* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un Nuevo lenguaje. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir (New language. A language that corresponds to a way of life)*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language. (1586)

This living language, two different dialects merging within the same person, is a frequent battle for many college composition students. Anzaldúa's confessions about a complicated and conflicting identity within writing is not a new concept for most writers; however, this "act of kneading, of uniting and joining" (Anzaldúa 1599) becomes the struggle for many basic writing students as they try to understand the language dialect of the university. Because students of basic writing are viewed by the academic system as Outsiders to the discourse expectations, Anzaldúa's experience as an individual with dueling language identities feels apropos to the experiences of the basic writer.

Mina Shaughnessy even argues "that a person who does not control the dominant code of literacy in a society that generates more writing than any society in history is likely to be pitched against more obstacles than are apparent to those who have already mastered that code" (13). Negotiating these dialects is imperative to the success of composition students, especially those who come in to the university who have vastly different home dialects than that of the academic discourse community. The traditional role of the composition instructor is then to guide the student to understand what dialects are appropriate in the academic arena.

Instructors need to be concerned about how identity is formed for most college composition students in the basic writing classroom. As many of these students come from varying socio-economic, racial, and education backgrounds, many students come in to the classroom with allegiance to other communities that are not always well

represented in academia. The concern then is to find a way to create a community-centered environment that balances more individualized notions of identification. This sense of community is what allows students to prosper within the classroom.

Kenneth Burke describes identification as both an act of aligning and excluding others. The sense of community comes when, "In being identified with *B, A* is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives" (Burke 1325). For students, it's essential that they perceive that they can identify with those within their community. Like Burke suggests, students, for survival, want to find an identity within this new, smaller writing community in the basic writing classroom. This sense of community is that gives students the opportunity to share and develop community knowledge that helps further their writing abilities. The important aspect of this model is establishing where the teacher should be metaphorically stationed within these communities; traditionally, the role of the teacher has been to occupy a space outside of the student community because the role of the teacher has always been external to the student communities. Any teaching role that occupied a space within the student community has usually been given to a tutor.

When students are pulled from the general student population because of test scores or GPA, there is a sense of isolation from the larger academic community; by being singled out, students are now external to the rest of the "normal" academic track. In the basic writing classroom, students are pulled from the general education track in order to receive the education that they were expected to come to the university with— they are required to enroll in classes that are not considered part of the college curriculum and do not count toward any degree; the mere fact that this course is external to the normal

education track limits its legitimacy and value within the academic community both from the perspectives of the students and some of the larger academic community. The concern here is that when students are removed from the general education track, there is potentially a change in the student's perspective of how he or she functions as a writer—by singling these students out and identifying them as not proficient enough to be academic writers, this action could be stripping away a portion of their academic identities. By pulling the student from the general population, the student is forced to recreate a new identity that is based in otherness.

The concern, then, is how can teachers equip students with the writing knowledge to enter the academic discourse community. Bartholomae, in "Inventing the University," discusses the urgency of this process by saying that "The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (589). Bartholomae situates the role of the student as a novice who has to learn the discourse conventions:

> He has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand…He must learn to speak our language. Or he must dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is 'learned' (590).

Bartholomae's concern is that the student knows how to speak "our language," situating the role of the instructor external to the students and the role of the instructor being to bring students in to the discourse community—a role that feels external to the student community as this places the teacher as the one who holds the knowledge and the students as the ones that need to be raised to this standard.

Bartholomae's solution to student voice and agency within the academic

discourse community is to encourage mimicry until students can speak from a place of

authority; through this, students should find agency and identity within the university.

While students are gaining exposure and awareness of the academic discourse

community, they are not a part of the community. This mimicry is not a replacement for

an internalized dialogue. This method might bring some students closer to mastering the

discourse community standards, but it does not address the Otherness that is created

through mimicry.

His argument in "The Tidy House" concerning basic writers is that the mere

existence of basic writing programs perpetuates basic writers. His concern is that "if our

programs produce a top and bottom that reproduces the top and bottom in the social text,

insiders and outsiders, haves and have not's, who wins and loses? This is not abstract

politics, not in the classroom" ("Tidy House" 177). Bartholomae's solution is not that

there is no need for a basic writing classroom, but that instructors do not benefit students

by keeping them out of the academic discourse community. His solution from the time he

started teaching basic writing while working on his graduate studies at Rutgers was to not

bar students from the materials of the academic discourse community—that no writing or

reading was too difficult or unattainable to basic writers. His argument is that instructors

should be concerned with the function of the basic writing program is to maintain itself

and the distinction between basic and normal writers. Bartholomae maintains that this

distinction should be a temporary one.

Bizzell's comments on basic writers in "What Happens When Basic Writers

Come to College?" mimic the concerns that Bartholomae addressesin the politics of the

classroom: "They may be defined in absolute terms by features of their writing, or in relative terms, by their placement in a given school's freshmen composition sequence, but, either way, their salient characteristic is their "outlandishness"—their appearance to many teachers and to themselves as the students who are most alien to the college community" (Bizzell 15). This awareness of outsiders and insiders becomes an instrumental factor for students forming communities within the classroom.

Bartholomae's comments on inventing the university are not uncommon to how many college composition teachers teach. According to Bartholomae, a student must speak from a place of authority before she can speak from within the university. The student "must be either equal to or more powerful than those she would address. The writing, then, must somehow transform the political and social relationships between students and teachers" (Bartholomae 594). What Bartholomae acknowledges is that a student must perceive she has the power to speak with authority. This condition, however, depends upon the student's perception of herself within the larger college writing community. While Bartholomae does recognize the inherent hierarchy within education discourages students from perceiving themselves as equal to instructors, he significantly underestimates the importance of how the students perceive the role of the instructor within the classroom community. If students feel external to the academic community and the instructor represents the potential gatekeeper to the university, what successful role can a teacher play then in fostering a community within the classroom that includes the teacher?

The traditional classroom, as Kenneth Bruffee suggests, "is a solitary life, and the vitality of the humanities lies in the talents and endeavors of each of us as individuals.

What we call discussion is more often than not an adversarial activity pitting individual against individual," (Bruffee 11). Students are expected to be self-motivating, self-learning agents and the classroom can be seen as a place void of genuine collaboration—forced group work is not the same type of collaboration as communities of students wanting to help other writers' progress. Bruffee's solution about how to better acclimate students to the college community is to set up a tutoring model that is "an alternative to the traditional classroom" and through peer tutoring, "teachers could reach students by organizing them to teach each other" (Bruffee 4).

This alternative to the traditional classroom is a response to the struggles basic writers experience within the classroom. As outlined by Alice Horning in *Teaching Writing as a Second Language*, basic writers enter the classroom already marked as other: "These students are in alien territory in college; it is, for them, a foreign land with a foreign language and foreign customs" (53). This outsider quality of their position and writing within the classroom, as she suggests, is a product of the conflict that happens during the language acquisition process as writers try to balance their native language with the language of the academic discourse community.

As students become more overwhelmed by the language acquisition process, Horning describes the barriers that students place between themselves and that process as affective filters. These filters can screen out the majority of helping input that is made by the teacher or peer tutor. Further, these filters can raise and lower depend on the students' physiological state, amplified by such things as feelings of stress or anxiety. The only way, then, a student can learn is if his/her affective filter is lowered (67). Horning stresses the importance of a lowered affective filter by saying that "….a lowered filter can make a

significant difference to students' success in learning to write academic discourse," and goes on to mention conferencing as a way of lowering their affective filters (81). The goal then of the teacher or tutor would be to guide the tutee through the language acquisition process while helping the tutee keep his or her affective filter "down." This, as Horning hints, might be successful through peer based writing strategies like a writer's conference.

Bruffee argues that "to the extent that thought is internalized conversation, then, any effort to understand how we think requires us to understand the nature of conversation; and any effort to understand conversation requires us to understand the nature of *community* life that generates and maintains conversation" (Bruffee 6). The teacher understand the nature of the student community. She must understand how peerness is created since it's more than just stepping in and saying that one is a peer. It's more than just creating these forums for conversation; it's more than just placing groups of students together and calling it a peer group. It's an awareness of how these structures function within a classroom and within the larger community. It's active decision-making on the part of the teacher because peerness is not a given; a sense of community has to be fostered and that fostering begins with the instructor.

Bruffee advocates for talking on a more equal hierarchal level about the material and learning through pooling community knowledge; practicing this conversation through "that of status equals or peers" (Bruffee 8) allows students to learn the material without the perceived repercussions of failing in front of someone who holds a higher hierarchal status within the community, like a teacher.

Bruffee takes a simplistic view of peerness by suggesting that like characteristics guarantee peerness. Peerness is more than just shared age, gender, ethnicity, or like-minded education and social interests. While these demographics can be helpful in establishing peer groups, they themselves do not guarantee peerness. Bruffee's suggestion that grouping students together, peer tutoring, requires like-minded students with social and intellectual interest only increases the odds that students could share peerness—however, it does not guarantee it. Grouping students together by this perceived like-mindedness is rampant in teacher pedagogy despite enough evidence through failed group projects and lackluster group conversations to show that peerness is more complex that similar demographics. Rather, peerness is not what the instructor sees as students' commonalities but rather what the students perceive they have in common. Peerness, like identity, must be what each party sees as a shared characteristic—it cannot be forced, but the conditions for peerness can be fostered. Further, Bruffee does not explain how a teacher could potentially achieve peerness with her students.

By no means can the teacher escape her role as the leader of the classroom, but she can use this position as leverage to promote peerness within the classroom between students and herself. By reinventing the role of the composition instructor, peerness can potentially be more achievable between student and teacher by teaching from a tutor centered model; a tutor shares her own struggles as well as explains what can be learned from them where the teacher may not make this personal connection. The tutor is there to work individually with the tutee and accepts when the tutee no longer wants the help (the agency for learning must reside with the student). If a student can perceive aspects of peerness with the instructor, whether that comes from the academic or personal arena,

collaboration may be more achievable between student-to-teacher which can then serve as a model for student-to-student interactions. While Bruffee acknowledges that peer tutoring must be based in mutual benefit, this creates a model for student interactions that is only based on people acting for individualistic reasons. When students exhibit peerness that is based on adding to the conversation, the student becomes an agent in his own learning; the continued practice can allow the student to speak from a place inside the university with agency rather than mimicking from outside. This is very similar to Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Distance (ZPD) where students can achieve a higher level of potential through the help of the experienced mentor. This is Bruffee's basis for the peer tutor; the peer tutor serves as the experienced mentor that brings the tutee to a level of potential that he or she could not otherwise achieve on his or her own. However, Vygotsky never suggests that effective collaboration and the success of moving in to a student's ZPD is based on peerness. Bruffee's argument, though, requires that the peer tutor and tutee experience peerness. Bruffee's use of Vygotsky hints that Bruffee believes peerness can be achieved by those who are seen as having more experience, like a teacher.

Bruffee's argument is structured on the concept that "Mastery of a knowledge community's normal discourse is the basic qualification for acceptance into that community" (Bruffee 9), which is not unlike the goal of the basic writing classroom; the rationale for pulling students out of the general education track is to allow them to better learn the community's normal discourse. Further, this is very similar to Bartholomae's argument that students gain mastery of the discourse community standards via mimicry— they both focus on how to bring students in to the academic discourse community.

Bartholomae's solution to Otherness is to encourage students to fake the discourse until they are insiders and internalize the knowledge whereas Bruffee argues that the knowledge can be found if students pool that knowledge together via peer tutoring.

By pulling students out of the general education track, students are able to analyze the community's standards in a more controlled, risk-free environment. In the case of pass/no pass basic writing classroom, students are given the chance to practice the written discourse outside of the community without fear of being admonished for failure. This allows for instructors to applaud failed attempts, a rarity in college academia, and reward students for trying. This opportunity for guided practice reflects the pedagogy of a tutor more than that of the traditional role of the composition instructor. The teacher strives to interact more like a tutor, which requires fostering community not only between students, but also between herself and all students. The normal composition classroom is part of the university and, therefore, does not need to establish a community out of necessity like the basic writing classroom does.

If the purpose of the basic writing classroom is to bring students' writing to the college discourse community standard and is to eventually incorporate students into the normal discourse community then community and tutor/tutee based pedagogy can help students develop a more authentic identity by becoming more proficient users of the community discourse within the composition classroom. This proficiency comes from encouraging students to learn the discourse community standards through guided practice instead of mimicry while under the guidance of the subject area expert of the teacher. The catalyst for change is the teacher's perception of what it means to be a composition

teacher, what role she serves within the classroom, and how her actions impact students'

perceptions of community, agency, and identity within the classroom.

This is where a revisionary history of the composition instructor needs to take

place. Rather than serving as the disseminator of knowledge, the instructor needs to step

in and serve as the role of the tutor. Bruffee might claim that there is not peerness

between a student and teacher, but that this is not necessarily the case. By reinventing the

role of the composition instructor based on a model of peerness, successful collaboration

is more achievable when students are invested in the progress of both themselves and the

larger collective. This is a radically different atmosphere than the traditional composition

classroom where collaboration usually only occurs for individual gain or as a forced

activity. By creating some facets of peerness between teacher and student, students are

able to develop a stronger sense of agency because they are in charge of their learning

processes.

The implications of setting up a classroom community that embraces diverging

identities while maintaining a standard of education seems like a more theoretical than

practical application. However, the dialogue that rhetoric and composition theorists have

started is one of value as many basic writers come to the classroom with conflicting

identities that can be a source of frustration for both students and teachers. John

Gumperz' research in *Discourse Strategies* exemplifies the push back some instructors

will face from students in varying discourse communities, especially those communities

that differ drastically from the academy: "Students of Afro-American speech varieties,

for example, have coined the term *dialect swamping* to describe situations where, far

from assimilating, the speech of American blacks is actually becoming more different

from that of their white neighbors" (Gumperz 39). The findings from Gumperz's research were that "The greater the amount of overlap, the more cohesive and community like the population and the sharper the social boundaries that separate it from others" (Gumperz 41).

Lisa Delpit, in "Language Diversity and Learning," mimics Gumperz concerns with the diverging dialects of the African American community and argues that there is a radical ethical implication of navigating the differences in home and academic discourse community standards: "To imply to children or adults…that it doesn't mater how you talk or how you write is to ensure their ultimate failure. I prefer to be honest with my students. Tell them that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but that there is a political power game that is also being played, and if they want to be in on that game there are certain games that they too must play" (Delpit 95). Delpit argues that there is a set code within the academic discourse that is important for students to be aware of.

Creating a sense of belonging and community within the classroom is a way for the instructor to bring diverging discourse communities in to the same writing space. Patthey-Chavez and Gergen in "Culture as an Instructional Resource in the Multiethnic Composition Classroom" explains that the balance needed between different discourse communities within the classroom is really a conversation about establishing importance to all discourse communities: "To achieve a balance of sorts, we have found it helpful first to discuss the values attached to accepted writing standards, and to follow up these discussion with informational lectures about the cultural values reflected in key college writing traditions" (Patthey-Chavez and Gergen 111). They argue very heavily for

students to have an awareness of where the discourse community expectations stem from, specifically that of the academy: "Many new writers in multiethnic basic writing classes often come from communicative traditions that differ radically from those of their new discourse communities. The essayist tradition, for example, is one shaped by Anglo values requiring explicitness and decontextualization…it requires a fictionalization of the self and of one's audience, but is otherwise marked by formality and restraint" (Patthey-Chavez and Gergen 111-12). Patthey-Chavez and Gergen's approach reflects more of a tutoring model of teaching where a tutor would try to connect the personal with the academic—that is, a tutor is focused on the individual and what he brings to each session given current circumstances, past experiences, and any influencing variables that might impact learning. It's not to say that teachers have not cared about their students but rather that community fostering and relationship building between themselves and their students has not been a main priority. By taking a tutoring pedagogy approach to teaching basic writers, teachers can connect with students and guide them in a way that gives the students more ownership in the learning process as well as instilling more of a sense of mastery of the material. Developing these relationships could also lead to a better dialogue between teacher and student about difficult conversations that plague writing classrooms like otherness and plagiarism.

The importance of understanding the purpose and function of community within the basic writing classroom has a direct effect on the students; those students who feel they have a mastery of the discourse community standards and how this knowledge can function in their writings are more than likely going to perform to a higher standard to those who do not. Rather than placing the teacher outside of the student community, the

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instructor should strive to adopt the pedagogy of a tutor, implementing language and relationship building techniques that place the focus on the individual student and encourage the student to take more ownership in the learning process.

The following study comes from my work as a basic writing tutor with a non-native student. Shifting the traditional role of a teacher to that of a tutor benefited my tutee more than the skills that I was trying to teach him. Further, as he began to bring writing from other classes than his English 100 class, I observed how his perception of community affected his sense of belonging at the university.

CASE STUDY AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The role of the teacher within the classroom as the facilitator of community construction is a complicated role that is fraught with inconsistencies and negotiations; while students want a sense of community within the classroom, they also want a clear leader within the classroom. Furthermore, trying to bring students in to this culture of college in a traditional classroom setting almost serves as an oxymoron; acculturated students already have the skill sets necessary to succeed within the discourse community and have little aversion to the classroom and the authority imposed. However, unacculturated students find themselves in what Mary Louise Pratt would call a contact zone. This might be because the classroom conflicts with their home cultures or even because the classroom can be a place of structured hierarchy where the students perceive themselves at a different authoritative place than their instructor, especially given the nature of the English 100 classroom as being a place of separation from the larger campus community. All of these careful negotiations have direct implications on basic writing students as they try to navigate the basic writing class, a class that unabashedly marks them as outsiders.

This study came about from my time working with a non-native English 100 student. Initially, I sought to compare multiple tutoring sessions from several students, but I ultimately decided to focus on one particular student because his sense (or lack thereof) of community was the most profound. These tutoring sessions with him were the ones that stretched me to consider how my role as a tutor affected is sense of community. From the tutoring sessions, I saw that my role as a tutor and how this student was

responding differed vastly from my experience as an English 110 teacher and later as an

English 100 instructor. During the tutoring sessions, my objective was to focus on only

the assignments and concerns that he brought to the tutoring session. This did not

drastically differ from how I felt I worked individually with my own students during

office hours, but the major difference between my students and this tutee was that he was

coming to my office for my help as his tutor and not his teacher. What I could not

anticipate, however, was how that label of tutor seemed to create a different relationship

and set a different standard for how we approached and talked about writing, the

academic discourse community, and the expectations of teachers. Prior approval for this

project was obtained from the Missouri State University IRB (April 28, 2016; approval

IRB-FY2016-223, see appendix).

Student Perceptions and Expectations of the Teacher

My first interaction with Quentin was not a face-to-face meeting but through

reading his first assignment written for an English 100 class. The instructor for whom I

was tutoring assigned a small group of students to me and asked that I respond to their

literacy history papers and then conference with the students. All I had been told from the

instructor about Quentin was that he was a non-native, student athlete from Poland who

was quiet but was always in class and participated during in-class assignments.

As I worked through his paper (admittedly, that being only the second time I had

responded to a nonnative English speaker's written work) I used different colored pencils

and bracketed his shifting writer-based prose in the margins—writing, as Linda Flower

calls "to himself and for himself. It is the record and the working of his own verbal

thought" (126). I brought attention to his shifting focus between his father and his girlfriend, stringing the two together loosely by the idea of wanting to make both of them proud, and left questions like, "How could you expand on these ideas of this person motivating you to become a better writer?" and "Do you want to focus on this girl or Dad?" I also inserted the dropped articles, mostly "a" and "the", and asked for clarity with time sensitive phrases much like I would ask my own students ("Was this the same night?").

He spent little time in the paper discussing how he saw himself as a writer and spent more time telling the story of how he met his current girlfriend who was back home in Poland. Our meeting was very brief, five minutes at most, and was more focused on trying to generate ideas on where to take the paper. His instructor was holding in class conferences and had canceled class otherwise, so I waited for Quentin in the classroom with his instructor while she worked with another student. I can only imagine his surprise when he found out that it would be me, and not his instructor, going over his paper. I had not sent him my comments or any warning that I, not his instructor, was reading his paper prior to our meeting. I introduced myself as his tutor, making a conscious effort to discard my teacher identity in hopes of keeping his affective filer lower. We went over my written comments together during the conference, referencing his paper that I had written on and he quickly shoved the paper in his backpack when I signaled that we were done and I finally released his paper back to him. His perception that we were done based off of my verbal and non-verbal cues conveyed a sense of hierarchy that I was trying to avoid.

While I perceived that we were on a more peer level given the informality of our location of meeting outside class time, like a peer group might to work on a project, and my initial attempts at developing a peer relationship (outside of a traditional classroom, not being his assigned teacher), Quentin could see through the pretenses that I, as a tutor, was trying to create. The actions and role that I had created by marking on his paper and working through my written comments with Quentin as a spectator was more along the lines of the role of a teacher than tutor. By taking his paper, without his consent, I had marked on his words and ideas that he had spent time crafting in the way that a teacher would. A tutor would not have necessarily have had the opportunity or expectation to comment on the student's writing until it was brought to that tutoring session.

He offered little suggestions when I prompted for responses to my comments on his paper, and he sat hunched in on himself (a six-foot young man with long limbs gifted for the swim scholarship he was here on) and sitting on the other side of the table despite my attempt to encourage him to not pull up a student desk but sit in the chair beside me; he was placing as many physical and mental barriers between myself and his thoughts on the paper as possible.

Quentin's initial tutoring session was required for the English 100 class, and I had my doubts if I would see him again. I decided to make contact again by visiting during an in-class workday to see what progress he had made on the literacy narrative as well as the recently assigned character analysis paper. His response to me was very similar to our first meeting; he had placed his backpack between my chair and his while sitting curled up like before. Quentin offered little contributions to the brainstorming process, and resisted offering answers to an essay organizational worksheet that I had created for our

session. My assumption after our first meeting was if I used a worksheet to push his brainstorming and organizational abilities further than I had in the first session, then he would be able to utilize that strategy for later papers—mirroring Vygotsky's statement of "What a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (87). While there is validity to the idea of the more experienced individual leading the learner through the process so he can complete the task, it does not address Quentin's aversion to being tutored and taking part of the tutoring process. Vygotsky explains that zone of proximal development helps students internalize the process so that they in turn can make it a part of their skill set and then externalize the process again (90), but what Vygotsky does not anticipate is the aversion students may have to being helped or how a student is used to receiving help from an instructor.

By invading his space, his classroom and his expectations of how he was to be taught English 100, I should not have anticipated anything other than aversion to the process, yet I was hopeful that my attempt at peerness was going to be an immediate success. Following Bruffee's description of peer tutoring, I assumed that our shared intellectual interest as students and our shared desire to gain a better grasp on writing were going to be instantly unifying commonalities. However what is missing from Bruffee's discussion, and what I was not able to adjust for, is both the time that it takes to establish peerness as well as the perceptions of both partners in the peer relationship. Where I was hopeful to see Quentin as a peer, he did not see me as anything resembling a peer—the way I was handling his writing and how I was approaching him with my thoughts were too reminiscent of an instructor.

Because Quentin had been used to being taught from a hierarchal structure, a point he brings up in later tutoring sessions, my conscious decisions to enact more peer based tutoring and utilize and prioritize multiple discourses within our tutoring (as Patthey-Chavez and Gergen encourage in order to validate the student's own home dialect) might have been at a discord given the role that I could not circumvent as the teacher. This forced tutoring where I was setting the requirements for the session, including the meeting time, location, and content, varied little from his experience within a traditional classroom; where I thought I was implementing more peer based tutoring and creating a more egalitarian space just by being more personable, I was creating an environment that differed in few ways from his classroom experiences. This lends well to the idea that classroom community is not something that can be constructed by an instructor but is rather facilitated by an instructor. Community forms organically without forced constraints.

Relationships and Expectations Between Tutors, Teachers, and Students

Once Quentin was able to decide when he wanted to come in to meet with me, his demeanor and attitude towards tutoring drastically changed. Not too long after our previous meeting, Quentin sent me an email proposing a date and time to meet and asking where we could meet but suggesting my office. This differs drastically from how I assumed he would ask for my assistance given his apprehension during our tutoring session. I perceived this change in attitude not as a reflection of his confidence, but as a reflection of his perception of my role. I was no longer a responder of his writing (mimicking the role of his instructor), but I was more of a peer and translator. I would not have had a copy of his paper to prepare like an instructor would. What I had tried to rush

through a mimicry of peerness happened organically with Quentin taking control of the learning.

This second session differed radically from our first session as I was no longer the one making authoritative decisions concerning how we spent our time—Quentin decided when he wanted to meet and what he wanted to work on; my only stipulation was that it was writing and that we were making progress on whatever piece we were working on. This sense of ownership and control had a positive impact on both his demeanor and performance with the writing that he shared during this time. This further suggests that community is not something that is easily constructed by instructor-set parameters. This differs drastically from that of the larger academic community where basic writers are placed within freshman orientations, pep rallies, and introductory courses aimed to teach students how to be students; they all rely on the same principle that placing people together by similar, or perceived similar demographics, leads to community formation. Quentin suggests that there is a necessity for the student to feel as though he has agency in the community forming process. Although I assumed that by sharing commonalities and sharing situations, like times spent in tutoring sessions or talking about non-tutoring subjects was likely to create peerness, this did *not* guarantee that peerness actually occurred.

Quentin and I continued to meet on a fairly regular basis, averaging one session a week as we continued our sessions for the next two months. We would spend the first few minutes of each session discussing his swimming competitions as well as what he had done over the weekend. He would sit back in the seat, his long legs spread out and taking up more of our shared space than the weeks before. He was occupying more

physical space than I ever had occupied at my own desk, sitting in my own chair and pulling up word processing and internet windows at his leisure; had someone unknowing passed, Quentin may have looked more like the instructor than myself. His body language was a clear indication of community—he had begun to perceive our tutoring space in the way that my own ENG 110 students perceive the space of the classroom. Small talk wasn't really small talk anymore; it was catching up between peers. By this point, we had met weekly for a month, some weeks meeting multiple times in order to complete an assignment. At our fourth tutoring session, I asked him if he had anything from English 100 and he pulled out an assignment for a different class and said "I brought the assignment so you could clarify."

I knew that Quentin was taking the first year programs course, and he had mentioned in an email that he would like to bring in writing assignments from other classes to our tutoring session, but I was surprised by his choice of the word "clarity." His sense of community between us was strong enough for him to confide in me about another class. From my perspective as both a tutor and a writing instructor, I would hope that my students would come to me first for clarity before seeking other avenues of help. Similarly to Mina Shaughnessy's observation that instructors mistakenly connect errors with a lack of thinking, instructors have a notorious tendency to connect asking questions with a perceived inability or lack of investment by the student—that somehow asking questions is a sign of laziness or lack of attention given during the class time when the assignment was first given. My assumption was that Quentin would rather ask me, the tutor, for clarity because there is less of a risk associated with asking questions. He perceived my role as being the one who clarifies and translates between communities;

Quentin clearly saw the GEP (General Education Program) class as a different community of which he is not a part of. My role, that he was implying, would be to help him understand that community so that he could ultimately transition into it.

I asked Quentin why he did not seek out his instructor for clarity on the assignment and, fumbling for the words, he expressed that I was more approachable despite "she is like you, but not like you because you know, you're nice but she's nice but not like you." His word choice, "like you" but "not like you" and his repetitive use of the word "clarity" all speak to his sense of community in his GEP classroom and in our peer tutoring relationship. To indicate that his instructor and I are both teachers but we are not the same speaks to our difference within his two communities; Quentin perceived that our roles were different. To ask me to clarify his assignment meant that I was a translator to the community that he was not yet apart of—to serve as translator meant to be a pathway in to this community and provide knowledge that his teacher was either withholding or did not know to share with her students on writing and community expectations. His English 100 instructor made one of our meetings mandatory (I am not aware if there were any grade penalties for not attending a session), but when Quentin and I met for the GEP assignment, he was doing so based off of his own decision on needing help and wanting clarity.

His comment about his instructor being "like me, but not like me" was more interesting than I had originally anticipated; after asking fellow tutors, I found that the instructor was also a young, white female who has a similar educational background as well as similar future educational goals. We share similar demographics, yet the same student perceived us very differently and was reacting to our role as educators very

differently. Might this be a reflection of the relationship between student and tutor versus student and instructor? Had the roles been reversed, I believe that it would be the other instructor that Quentin went to for help instead of myself. While I want to think that Quentin enjoyed our tutoring sessions together, I know that the function of our community was to better his writing abilities—that his reason for trusting me was that I brought knowledge to the our tutoring sessions that he did not possess while at the same time he believed that we shared enough in common to consider me a peer tutor. While reflecting some of Bruffee's claims, Quentin's initial inhibitions to allowing me to help derived from his lack of trust in me as someone who could be a part of his community—I was just as much an outsider as any other teacher who had instructed him from a place of hierarchy.

Quentin perceived his instructor like he had perceived me initially—as an outsider. This may be related to how she projects her identity and authority within the classroom through written, non verbal, and verbal communications as well as the relationships she develops with her students (does she stay before or after class to work with students or does she only respond to students in a distant medium like email?). Based off of how Quentin voiced his perceptions of me, he believed that I (the tutor) would perceive questions as a function of being engaged and wanting to learn. Given the context of how we had structured our relationship, Quentin saw that the risk of asking me questions was much lower than asking the instructor of the course, regardless of the shared demographics between that of myself and the instructor. This might play out further in the classroom if students do not perceive the instructor as a member of the classroom community.

Perception Differences Between Teacher and Tutor

Trying to decipher Quentin's writing assignment prompt for the first year foundations college course could potentially be one of the most frustrating as well as enlightening experiences I had had up to this point as a tutor and teacher. His final paper would roughly be two pages of writing but was explained with a four page, methodically detailed, assignment sheet. I read the assignment sheet for the first time during our tutoring session in the graduate teaching assistants office. While I read the assignment sheet, he sat staring at his paper and kept his limbs folded and tucked within his space like he had the first few times we met. I passed the sheet around the office from teaching assistant to teaching assistant—no one could figure out what the instructor wanted. Quentin watched as we passed the sheet around and his expression went from one of frustration to that of interest—if a community of educated writing instructors could not translate the assignment, how could it be assumed that a basic writer would be able to decipher these instructions? Sharing my own frustrations with the assignment, ironically, increased the level of peerness he felt with me because I was sharing my own struggles and limits as tutor and writer.

I watched Quentin's minimal confidence plummet and I assured him that we would leave the session with some idea of where to go with the assignment, but he projected a sense of being defeated. He looked frustrated and started to fidget with the computer mouse as the other graduate assistants read through the assignment sheet and apologized for having no suggestions. Rather than his confidence increasing by seeing our struggle, he looked more lost; he fidgeted with the zippers on his shorts and pushed

himself back and forth in his chair with his heels—he was channeling his frustration into physical movements.

Rather than assume what his problems were, I asked that he explain to me what was confusing. He grabbed the paper and shook it a little: "It's all confusing! It's like I write a paper but I don't write a paper." The assignment objective was for students to look at the qualifications and potential steps required to obtain careers of their choice. But as Quentin was learning from the rubric, the instructor was not asking for a complete paper; all that was being asked for was one introductory paragraph, one body paragraph, and then two topic sentences for hypothetical body paragraphs. The format for the assignment was odd and did not allow the student to apply any heuristic for solving the problem—as I would assume, most students write full paragraphs that are combined in to a complete essay and would not guess to write only topic sentences for nonexistent paragraphs. Watching his frustration grow, I decided to end the session and asked that he come back after the weekend with a career in mind as well as having found three sources.

What I was not expecting when he came back the next week was that he had not only selected a career, found research, but had written the entire paper (disregarding that statement that the other paragraphs only needed to consist of topic sentences). I was both shocked and proud; despite being frustrated, he had worked past that adversity to write. Whether his pushing through the frustration was a reflection of his athletic training to persevere under all circumstances or not, he was determined to be done with this project. I decided that I would spend the weekend trying to break down the rubric and find a way to be able to translate this paper for Quentin to understand.

I worried about how this failure to clarify instruction would impact Quentin's self-confidence. I felt responsible for Quentin in ways that I never felt for a student; for example, if a student told me when turning in an assignment that he was lost and had to find a tutor to help, my initial reaction would be to apologize but remind the student that he should always seek help from me (the instructor) when he (the student) is confused. As the tutor, I felt like I had failed Quentin because he was leaving our session confused. The role that I created for myself as the tutor was to translate and attempt to eliminate his problems, yet as the teacher I feel like I have some responsibility to teach students about the culture of college when mistakes are made (not seeking help early enough to receive it). Might my students gain more from my role as an educator if I assumed more of the role of a tutor than the role of an instructor? As a tutor, I took the blame for the material that the student had not mastered and I went out of my way to try and re-explain it in a format that was individualized and written as if I were working with the student one-on-one. However, as the teacher I would push a portion of that blame back on the student by explaining that the student's discomfort with voicing concerns is a reflection of his or her lack of meeting *my* expectations of what it means to be part of the college community. This revelation is paramount to understanding how a revisionary history of the composition instructor could change how a student potentially performs in the composition classroom. If the instructor assumes the role of tutor, the responsibility of mastering the material could fall more evenly on both student and teacher. If the instructor is part of the community, she can become aware of the struggles of the student and make more individualized choices on how to better help the student.

Quentin's actions were a reflection of the perception of his accountability; where I assumed he would dismiss the assignment as a waste of time because he was frustrated, Quentin came back with a full draft of the assignment. He believed that despite having an ineffective rubric to complete the assignment that it was his responsibility as a student (his perception of what his role was) to complete the assignment anyway. My perception of the assignment, one that was riddled with problems and not reflective of real academic writing, was that the responsibility of completing the assignment was not on the student but on me as the tutor to find any way possible to guide my tutee through it.

Before we ended our session, I tried walking through the rubric again, his frustration returning almost immediately. I read portions of the rubric out loud and paraphrased other portions; I was holding back my own frustration with my language choice used to explain assignment objectives ("Well...I can see why you're frustrated, but maybe there is a reason why the assignment is structured this way" and "Right, this is too much for someone to do at one time—have you considered talking to your teacher about this?"). Her written assignment objectives came in the form of aggressive, almost attacking comments that suggested that the student was dishonest ("Note: If you list a book as a source, you better list the pages you actually read—I know you didn't read an entire book for the purposes of this 2-page paper."), ignorant ("Vagueness=Poor writing"), and lazy ("Excessive errors will result in a lower grade—details matter!"; "Check for plagiarism—I don't accept 'It was an accident' excuses"). This style of writing, while well intended to help students understand the importance and tone of academic writing, conveys distrust and suspicion of students and well as reemphasizes that they are not part of the community of knowledgeable peers. When the student

perceives this distrust, the student may internalize a multitude of horrible self-perceptions like lazy, uncaring, or deceitful.

When Bruffee discusses the relationship between peer tutors and tutees, he describes the goal of the education system to be that of creating knowledge communities, "a community of knowledgeable peers" (9). While this has good intentions, Bruffee does not account for the innate differences that students quickly pick up between themselves and other students as well as their teachers. In the case of Quentin, the relationship between the instructor and student was not one based on peerness because he perceived her as belonging to a different community than he belonged to. From his perspective, they were not 'a community of knowledgeable peers'." Quentin perceived her as a gatekeeper who was blocking his ability to become part of the college community. The more this role is stratified (that is, the more hierarchal the instructor distances herself from her students), the more likely the student is to perceive the instructor as someone external from the community.

I asked Quentin how he felt about the assignment, what he was feeling in the moment, and he sighed heavily and buried his head in to his hands. "It is frustrating and I am confused—I don't want to feel, I need to write." His response to the writing was to shut down, raise his affective filter, and just finish the writing. My assumption is that it was not too unlike his athletic training; Quentin wanted to keep this assignment goal-oriented and work towards achieving this goal like an athlete may set a goal for a new personal record. My attempt to get him to talk about his emotion was in hopes of sharing that writing is a messy and emotion driven process.

Quentin's reaction to the instructor (her blunt, unemotional and standoffish assignment objectives) was to raise his affective filter, which resulted in his lack of motivation to complete the assignment. His perception of the instructor was in direct contrast to his initial expectations of both her role in the classroom as well as the course. His experience in ENG100 was impacting how he perceived the instructor and the purpose of the college preparation course. As he explained to me, "In 100, the assignments are not this complicated. Our assignments are easy to understand." Comparing an assignment sheet from his basic writing course to that of the GEP course, he noticed a radical difference in tone. In the basic writing course, the assignment sheet shifted the responsibility of purpose from the student (GEP: "Explore different resources...") to the literal assignment (ENG100: "This writing assignments asks you to write….").

The GEP assignment commands the student to do something while the basic writing assignment is *asking* the student to do something—even though the student knows there is no actual choice. The use of commands continues through the GEP assignment ("Write an introduction", "Write one body paragraph" "Bring your completed MLA Research paper…") while the ENG100 assignment shifts to a walk through tutorial ("Start by thinking about…") to writer-based questions ("To assist you in getting started, consider the following questions") that only the student has the authority to answer, as all students' answers will vary.

Where Quentin succeeded, and my assumption would be that other students do as well, was when the prompt relied on more question based direction rather than direct commands. Already feeling marginalized as a nonnative speaker (he told me on multiple

occasions that he wanted to "sound good" and "craft beautiful sentences"—he gestured with his hand like a director commanding a crescendo), he responded to the GEP instructor's authority by shutting down and deflecting the command.

On the way out of our second session with this paper, he told me that he "would be happy if he got a 20/100." This was a shocking attitude change coming from the student who was scheduling his own appointments with me, sprawled out in his rolling chair and displaying more confidence with each session. His comments did not meet the expectations that he had earlier set for himself. This was a student who wanted nothing more than to be a master of the language and a member of the college community, yet his new expectations were drastically lower than any he had previously set for himself.

I pushed Quentin to email his instructor with our questions because I hoped it would be a positive experience to see that his instructor was invested in his success and wanted to help clarify his problems. He asked me to read over the email before sending it. While his email had syntactical issues like missing "to be" verbs and incorrect articles ("Will the two topic sentences after a body paragraph need to have paragraph written eventually or you want me to write whole MLA Paper?), the higher order concerns like organization and purpose were clear to a reader with familiarity with the topic. He was both polite and detailed with his questions, listing them in a numeric list as to keep his thoughts separate.

I did not see the need to correct the email for syntax, especially since all of the questions were contextually based within the only project the students were working on in the class. Quentin sat with his chin on the desk, hitting the refresh button on the email account as I tried to walk him through what his first steps should be for revising the paper

to meet the assignment requirements. He was more focused on receiving a response from his instructor than receiving the response from me. While he respected my authority on the subject matter, I did not hold the same authority as his instructor did.

Mastery of Material or Desire for Approval

We were running against a time deadline with needing to get work done on the essay before Quentin had to leave for swim practice. He was frustrated, sighing and refreshing the email nearly constantly, and I decided that trying to take a more traditional tutoring approach to writing this paper was not going to get him through the paper; his affective filter was so high and he had resigned the idea of passing, let along doing well, on the assignment. He mumbled something under his breath and I asked if he could repeat what he had said; Quentin cracked a smile and shook his head and I asked again ("Come on, you can say anything to me"). He looked down at his shoes and then back up at me and with a hushed voice asked, "Is this what…is this what you would call bullshit?"

It was all I could do to not laugh, but I nodded a little and smiled. Like Patthey-Chavez and Gergen, my goal in this moment was to connect the academic with the personal; it was imperative to recognize and validate his frustration as a way of teaching how discourse communities collide with each other and how we can develop an awareness of where the discourse community expectations stem from. Through his frustration, he was beginning to realize that the expectations from this instructor were not rooted within the larger academic discourse community but the particular rules set by this particular instructor. The nod was my attempt at being diplomatic yet honest about the political power game that was being played by his instructor. His emotional response

shifted from closed off back to the more relaxed student I was starting to get to know. I decided that the best way to get this student through the assignment would be to break it up sentence-by-sentence, requirement-by-requirement, and spoon-feed him the paper. He knew this was not real writing (prompting the bullshit comment) and he was so mad knowing that he did not understand how this paper was supposed to function that I was scared his perception of his abilities would diminish and potentially impact the progress we had been making in English 100. I told him that by the time he would be out of practice, I would email him a packet of worksheets to help him write the project sentence by sentence. This piecemeal writing was not effective to Quentin's learning as he was learning how to write through prescriptive assignments and worksheets that addressed surface level concerns rather than the higher order concerns of the writing genres the instructor was trying to introduce to the course. Whether the assignments were ineffective given their synecdochic treatment of writing is less concerning that the instructor's role within the classroom. Had the instructor better positioned herself within the classroom as a member of the community and fostered community creation between all groups of students (basic and non basic writers; native and non native speakers), Quentin may not have had as many issues with the assignment as he did given his fear of approaching the instructor.

The instructor's tone and word choice when crafting the assignment had a drastic impact on how the student viewed both the assignment and his ability to achieve the goals of said assignment. This is incredibly enlightening given the implications of this observation; while it's no surprise that tone and word choice impact the way an audience reads a text, it's worth noting that the assignment prompts that took a more

conversational and tutor tone felt more manageable and easier to navigate than the assignments that embodied the traditional teacher tone. Quentin's frustration came not only from the assignment, but from the lack of guidance from the instructor. It's difficult to pin point what the instructor's objectives might have been by keeping the assignment prompts and rubrics devoid of encouragement or guidance, but what was clear was the negative impact this had on the student's willingness to complete the assignment and his perception of his success at the task.

The Implications of Impeding Student Community Formation

In one of our final sessions, Quentin and I worked on one of his piecemeal assignments from GEP where he was to write only the first half of the research paper, covering basic skills like the introduction, contextualization, and main points supported by research. In the session as we were working through his writing, I found that the writing was more cohesive and syntactically correct than Quentin's first drafts usually were. Not only this, but he was not bragging about how much effort he had placed in to the work. It was not long in to the session that Quentin leaned over and said, "I feel bad—I want to tell you but do you promise not to tell?" I had a suspicion what he was going to tell me, so it came as no shock that he said that he had "cheated with help from another student." He explained that he had done the assignment but, being so frustrated with the lack of clarity on the part of the instructor, he had another student, a native English speaker, outside of class proof the paper and make the changes to make it sound more like a native speaker.

While the ethicality of this situation is questionable, I was more interested in how this high achieving, determined student felt like the only way he could succeed within the

classroom was to have someone strip his paper of his own identity and whitewash it with something more suitable to what the teacher defined as academic. He went on to say that this wasn't the first time he had considered getting external help from a native student to remove his syntactical issues, and that this was something that was frequently discussed in the group of nonnative speakers that sat in the back of the classroom during the class. All five of them sat together in the back of the classroom, an organic development of community among peers. These students had bonded together and created their own community within the classroom; they had become agents of their own learning by pooling together their knowledge of the situation (regardless if this was the lesson the instructor had planned for the class). This organic community formation resulted out of necessity to survive within the classroom—the like-minded had sought out each other to create a community to navigate the course. Unfortunately, this was a direct result of lack of community fostering on behalf of the instructor. Because these students did not feel a sense of community within the larger classroom, they felt compelled to break off in to a smaller community for survival purposes. This felt incredibly alarming due to what extremes these students felt they had to go to and what they felt they needed to jeopardize in order to be accepted as a member of her community. It's impossible to say whether this problem could have been circumvented by the instructor embracing her students' desire for supportive communities of peers, but perhaps Quentin and these other non native students might have not felt that they were outsiders within the classroom structure.

The ramifications of what Quentin shared with me were profound. Much of Quentin's frustrations with his writing was the result of the instructor's choices, or lack

there of, to become a part of the student community. What I can imagine, given what Quentin had described, is that she was more concerned with covering the material rather than checking in to see how her pedagogy was impacting her students. By no means is this meant to say that Quentin's instructor was a bad teacher; the commentary presented is more of a reflection on the implications of relying too heavily on what has been classically defined as the role of the teacher. If we have come to identify college professors as uncaring, removed, and unwavering in their approach to teaching (as is perpetuated in cultural representations of clichéd professors in film and television), what should we then expect basic writers to anticipate our responses or expectations to be within the classroom? The role of the tutor, however, is not one as fraught with negative connotations or conflicting roles. Rather, the tutor is there for one purpose: to better the student.

While this feels intuitive in theory, it's more complex in practice. Placing the student first is a surrendering of some perceived standards of what the role of the instructor is supposed to achieve—teaching students discipline or discourse community standards by instilling a sense of hierarchy. Instead, the role of the instructor becomes a role that more closely resembles a tutor. By reducing the traditional hierarchy, this new role has the potential to create a more peer-like relationship that may lower students' affective filters and increase a sense of community.

This study illuminates the need for the instructor to foster community building within her classroom and to place herself within this student community rather than hierarchically above it. By creating environments that foster community building, the teacher is there to show the positive impacts of community knowledge and collaboration.

Especially given the nature of the basic writing classroom, there is more to gain by

uniting a group of outsiders, as marked by the larger academic community, rather than

letting them continue to think that they are not welcome or a part of said community.

CONCLUSIONS

The Role of the Classroom Community

Had Quentin felt like he was both a part of the classroom community and held an identity within it, he might have experienced less aversion to the writing assignments. As Kenneth Burke suggests, we utilize identity as a way to navigate changing social situations. If a student can identify with the instructor as well as the larger classroom community, there is a larger sense of ownership and identity within the community. Quentin's aversion was twofold: first, he did not see himself as a proficient speaker of English given his experience with English as a second language.

This is not to say that nonnative speakers would do best to not work with other non-native speakers in the writing classroom. Rather, the student should choose to be a part of the group rather than being forced in to a seemingly artificial community constructed by the instructor based on demographics. By allowing the student to be the active decider of community formation within the classroom, this gives a sense of ownership in the community and the collaboration process. This reconsideration of community requires that the instructor relinquish this aspect of authority in the classroom by allowing students to navigate who they work well and do not work well with. While this statement feels simplistic, the side effects of keeping that chokehold on a classroom can be seen within the conversations I had with Quentin in our tutoring sessions. He saw himself as an outsider because he was never grouped with native speakers—the groupings were always the nonnative students and everyone else. The instructor did not assign these students to a nonnative group, but her actions prompted students to form

their own groups. What they shared as students was a sense of being an outsider; the classroom had become an adversarial activity pitting individual against individual and the path to success required these students to group together. Quentin's comments on being an outsider within the classroom community that surfaced had a profound reflection on how Quentin saw himself within the community; he saw himself positioned as someone outside the bounds of what the class was meant to be as an introduction and welcome to the university community. The physical location of the group of nonnative speakers as being in the back of the classroom lends support to the interpretation that Quentin did not see himself as someone who fit within the classroom community.

While some might argue that it's impossible for an instructor to adequately create a sense of community within the classroom for every student, this would be counter to what both this study and the literature suggests an appropriate role for the instructor would be. Rather than continuing to assume that community is something that can be planned and implemented, perhaps it is the role of the instructor to serve as a community facilitator and create environments where community formation can take place with the instructor apart of said community. The way the instructor distanced herself from Quentin and the other nonnative students automatically alienated her from their community. Had she taken a more active role in integrating these smaller pocket communities within the classroom, Quentin and his community might not have felt as compelled to find ways to cheat her system.

Given the literature, one could argue that a solution to a non native student's feelings of alienation within the classroom would be to pair the student with a peer tutor—creating Bruffee's peer tutoring model amongst like-minded peers. However, this

seems to ignore the hurtles that students bring in to the classroom. It disregards that the non native speaker is not going to feel like-minded or equal in ability to the native speaker. As a student moves in to a community and feels as though the rest of the community is better at the task at hand, outsider students will become more submissive and passive with contributing knowledge, input, or suggestions. This seems to be a pervading classroom management narrative as it relies on the notion that like-mindedness only requires a similarity in arbitrary demographics—that is that because students are students, they are like-minded. Quentin could sense that he was behind in abilities compared to the rest his GEP class as most students in the class were in English 110 and not English 100. The organic grouping of the nonnative students in the back of the classroom could have been a sign for the teacher to work to foster ways for this outsider community to reenter the larger classroom community. The role of the instructor should be to identify when these smaller communities are breaking away from the larger classroom community and to anticipate *why* this might be happening. The role of the teacher has traditionally been to guide the large collective through the material and accept the academic causalities that may occur along the way; the tutor, though, is there to pull each student along and connect the personal with the academic in hopes to merge the conflicting discourse community standards.

This is furthered by the traditional role of the instructor sitting as the philosopher king at the top of the classroom hierarchy. This becomes more troubling if we consider Kenneth Burke's comments on consubstantiality and the need for identification. As students try to find that consubstantiality, Burke suggests that there is a need to be able to speak and utilize the same language as "symbol-using animals." Therefore, these students

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perceive their inability to be consubstantial with the nonnative speakers, and the divide becomes even more distinct between those who are native and those who are not.

The role of the instructor, then, is to move past trying to create community through active grouping of students and instead helping facilitate a more organic community formation. The traditional way of looking at a classroom community has been by very basic commonalities—a common meeting time, location, purpose, and agents. These are shared demographics that create an artificial community because all members are subjected to these standards just by agreeing to play a part within the classroom. It's artificial because there is no depth to community from just the structure alone. Merely placing people within a community does not guarantee they will feel a sense of community within that place. However, this is a common approach for community building within the university. Freshman placed in pep rallies and freshman-only dorms or introduction to the university courses are thought to be community and identity forming experiences. This artificial grouping based off of one demographic marker does not equate to an organic community; just as teachers do not go in to the classroom expecting all members of the classroom community to bond with each other, it seems counterintuitive to assume that placing freshman in these artificial communities lends to their development of larger community awareness or belonging.

Successful communities are those that have a sense of immediate purpose or a sense of long-term permanency—just as Gumperz suggested with dialect swamping, when there is a sense of immediate purpose to further the individual, the culture, or the agenda, the community seems to have more deep and permanent roots. This is the pitfall that many basic writing, and general education course, instructors face—what purpose is

there to a community that's function is a holding tank prior to what students consider to be the "real" classes? This lack of permanency within the artificial community structure does not seem to lend itself well to organic community construction; rather, it could encourage a more self-centered approach to learning where students are more concerned with individual success and recognition within the classroom rather than the potential benefits gained from collaborative effort and relationship building within a classroom.

The Role of the Instructor in the Classroom

The larger implication of Quentin's tutoring sessions and the conflict he experienced within the classroom raises the question of how can teachers better structure the classroom to be a more community-based environment. Community is not an inherent structure within the classroom; many classrooms and universities operate under the notion that placing students with very limited shared demographics creates an automatic community within the given structure. This practice would lend well to the argument that all freshman should work well together when partnered in groups because they are, after all, freshman and that is a bonding identifier. Like Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera,* identity is both shifting and comprises of both circumstance and choice. By forcing students in to set groupings, we are emblazing them with identities that are their circumstances but not their choices. Like Quentin felt relegated to the "non native group" in the classroom, these choices (or lack of choices by the instructor) limit how students feel they can navigate and succeed within a course.

This is not to suggest that tracks like "right to fail" are necessarily in the best interest of the student because it allows he or she to avoid identities like "basic writer."

It's about understanding the weighty implication of isolating students in to the basic

writing community, as Bartholomae in "The Tidy House" warned, and training teachers

how to take that identity and turn it in to an opportunity for community development.

Had the instructor made more of an effort to actively engage students in creating a larger

community rather than remain solely in those pocket communities that formed out of

survival purposes, Quentin might not have been placed into a situation where he felt both

unsupported and alienated within the classroom.

The Practical Application of Teacher as Tutor

One practical approach to tutor pedagogy rather than traditional teacher pedagogy

is to implement more tutoring strategies like conferencing, Socratic-method lectures, and

hands-off tutoring in to in-class student interactions. The emphasis of a tutoring

pedagogy must be on the relationships students build with the teacher that serve as a

foundation for later learning moments. What was successful in regards to working with

Quentin was when I spent more time responding to him as a tutee rather than I

traditionally would one of my students. This meant giving up control of when and where

we would meet based off of my comfort preferences or how to respond to his writing.

This negotiating and forfeiting some control over the out of class teaching

situations is an important aspect to address within this style of pedagogy. Granted, it may

be difficult to make accommodations where all students feel truly comfortable (or even

an impossible task as some students' comfort level might be not to show up at all).

However, this gesture of accommodation is widely received as a good will attempt to

place the students' needs higher than that of the professor's needs. With some stipulations

(setting meeting time choices and optional locations on campus), this allows students to have some agency in the choice of receiving help from someone who they know holds more institutional power than themselves; this small sacrifice is a nonverbal affirmation to the student that his or her level of comfort in a conferencing or tutoring scenario is valid. When Quentin began to set the meeting times and locations, his demeanor and progress during our time together improved. Horning's observations that no amount of excellent input can get past a high affective filter resonated with my decisions to let that sense of control shift from my choices to Quentin's.

The out of class learning opportunities like conferences and tutoring sessions are already reflected in the pedagogy used by many composition instructors. The larger commitment to tutoring pedagogy must come during class time. The tutor pedagogy is a careful negotiation of commanding a classroom with authority without becoming the only voice of authority. The tutor is there to be the like-minded peer or the subject area expert but not to become the only source of knowledge in the partnership. A traditional teacher pedagogy at times relies, not completely but heavily, on a banking pedagogy as outlined by Paulo Freire where the teacher is depositing knowledge in to her students in a one-way fashion. A tutor based, social-constructivist pedagogy will see knowledge as a dialogue amongst all learners and will strive to keep the dialogue open between all participants through Bruffee's dialogue and consensus. This comes as little surprise to most writing instructors as a social constructivist model of teaching is considered more standard within academia, yet our written prompts and actions do not always reflect this style of teaching. Quentin's instructor utilized very hierarchical and accusatory word choices on her writing assignment sheets that further alienated herself from Quentin and his community. She

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was furthering that hierarchy by placing the blame on students before they ever picked up their pencils as writers.

The most controversial aspect of a tutor pedagogy is how community can be created within the classroom and the role of the instructor within said community. While the actions of the university suggest that community is any grouping of individuals, this does not equate to peerness. There is no innate peerness from basic demographics of shared space. Further, peerness and community cannot be forcefully created; it is an organic, actively negotiating process where the community members must see participation in the community as a consensual and opportunistic act. There have to be opportunities and potential gain for all members of the community for peerness to take place. This process of identification, as Burke outlines, happens when A can identify with B and there is a sense of shared self between the two. This is less likely to happen when community is a forced act. It would be foolish to say that peerness *cannot* happen in these forced communities but that is it less likely. Grouping all freshmen together or all women together does not inherently equal a community. It may increase the likelihood of peerness to happen, but it does not guarantee it.

A focus of this pedagogy has to be establishing a difference between what it means to foster community or attempt to "create" it. Simply, community cannot be created. There is no amount of willing and grouping that can guarantee community. Rather, it is the role of the teacher to be a facilitator and to create opportunities for peerness to happen; this could include small group work and discussion, student led large group discussions, and student focused tutoring sessions or office hours with a hands off tutoring method.

The role of the instructor in fostering community is then to be more like a tutor. The hierarchy that comes with the role of the teacher is hard to circumvent; further, this hierarchy can have irreversible results when not carefully addressed by the instructor. A tutor and teacher can both instruct, but what differs is how they go about meeting this objective. A tutor is going to avoid the hierarchal language and approaches to teaching while placing the focus on the individual student. By bringing herself to a level closer to her students, by placing both the focus and responsibility of learning on the student, a teacher will instruct from a place of lowered hierarchy and with students with lower affective filters.

After working with Quentin, I was inspired to try this leveling of hierarchy within my own English 100 classroom by teaching from a peer tutor pedagogy. From the beginning, I portrayed my role as one closer to a tutor, calling myself a writing coach more than a teacher. Much of the time spent in class was modeling my own thinking or writing skills in front of the class on the board, asking how this related to their own strategies and adding this collective knowledge to my subject area expertise. Much of class time was also spent in small groups doing group writing with myself stepping in to ask guiding questions and pushing the group to that Zone of Proximal Distance—by using those prompting questions, students would be pooling their knowledge together to come to their own conclusions with my guidance to get them there. This became obvious when I would step in to work one-on-one with students and found students to be more receptive and more vocal about both their struggles and triumphs. Memorably, after approaching one student to step in and see where she might need help, she waved me away and snapped her headphones back in while saying, "I got this, I got this!" Where this might

have been read as a comment of defiance or noncompliance from the view of a teacher, from the lens of a tutor it is one of ownership from a place of empowerment. Later, she stayed after to run over the outline with me along with her own first steps for drafting the paper—unprompted and self motivated. As a basic writer, this is everything we hope for this population of students; we want to see them self-motivated and passionate about their own progress within the classroom. By fostering a sense of community through valuing student-knowledge, creating moments of peer tutoring amongst students as well as between myself and students one-on-one, there was a sense of leveled hierarchy within the classroom where more peerness was happening amongst students.

What the institution fails to question is if there really is a space for the basic writing student within the normal writing classroom. Like Quentin's feelings of inadequacy in the GEP classroom compared to his English 110 counterparts, current pedagogical choices tend to ignore the comfort of the student as a valid variable that influences instructional approaches; simply put, pedagogy should take in to consideration the needs and levels of all students, not the perceived level that the class as a whole should be at. The reintegration process of the basic writer in to the normal university track should be one that instructors treat as a delicate operation. Having been marked as an outsider the basic writing student faces many internal conflicts about ability and place within a non-basic writing classroom; basic writing courses, by their very nature, perpetuate a sense of otherness that may be hard for some students to rid. The role of the instructor must resemble that of the tutor; a tutor will connect the personal struggle of feeling like an outsider and the need to find community within the classroom with the academic goals of the classroom. Instructors can help establish a place in the classroom

for basic writing students by working to foster community; she would see the visual signs of students pulling away or isolating themselves from the larger community and she would hear the word choice that students utilize to signal that they feel uncomfortable our outlandish within the classroom.

The implication of a tutor-based pedagogy expands further than just the single classroom—it's an empowerment of students who have had academic identities stripped from them as they enter the basic writing classroom. Further research should evaluate in detail tutor-based pedagogical strategies that can effectively lower students' affective filters in order to develop more peer-like relationships between students and teachers. While the teacher can never fully escape her role as the teacher, further research should consider what specific traits unilaterally project a role of peer. The observations made in this study are merely a starting point for a much larger conversation that should happen at universities. It's intuitive that the focus of any pedagogy should be placed on the students, but until the actions of both instructors and the larger academic community shift towards rewriting the role of the instructor, the emphasis in the classroom will still remain on utilizing hierarchy rather than peerness to establish discourse community norms.

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APPENDIX

Informed Consent to Participate in Student Interviews

I am currently writing a thesis, with the working title of "**COMMUNITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE BASIC WRITING CLASSROOM**." For this thesis, I would like to discuss my experience as a composition instructor in the ENG 100 classroom and as a tutor for ENG 100 students not enrolled in my section of ENG 100.

The purpose of this study is to analyze student's perceptions of community construction within the English 100 classroom and university at large.

The following is a consent form that allows me to use our classroom/tutoring experiences as data within my thesis.

Could I quote directly from some of your papers or any conversations that we might have had either in class, during tutoring sessions, after class, or through email communications?

                                                                        Yes   No

If so, would you like me to refer to you by name or by a pseudonym? _____

I will not include any information related to grades and/or discussion of grades. However, I may mention gender, level (freshman/sophomore/junior/senior), and whether you are a native or non-native speaker of English.

Your consent is completely voluntary and will not in any way impact your grade in this course or your performance concerning the portfolio committee. Participation in this study will not impact your ability to receive tutoring.

                              _____
                              Signature and date

                              _____
                              Instructor signature and date

IRB Approval

IRB #: IRB-FY2016-223
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Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

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