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Candace Spigelman, Laurie Grobman

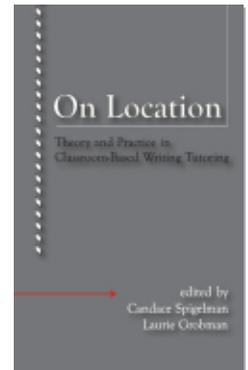Published by Utah State University Press

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3

BUILDING BRIDGES TO ACADEMIC DISCOURSE
The Peer Group Leader in Basic Writing Peer Response Groups

Laurie Grobman

David Bartholomae's landmark essays "Inventing the University" (1986) and "Writing on the Margins: The Concept of Literacy in Higher Education" (1987) locate the basic writer outside academic discourse, lacking the authority academic writers possess. This exclusion is manifested, among other ways, in peer response groups, where basic writers often shy away from critiquing substantive issues of content or organization in each other's work. Their hesitancy is understandable, given that the university has told them (by virtue of their placement in a "remedial" writing course) that they do not know how to write.

The theoretical support for peer response groups in composition is by now well known: social theories of language and learning suggest that students should construct meaning not in isolation but within the context of social interaction. Although the use of peer response groups is common practice in writing classrooms, research on peer response groups offers mixed reviews, largely because students typically lack the skills and knowledge for peer response (see Zhu 1995). Indeed, much of the research on writing groups focuses on ways to promote more effective, substantive response in students (see Zhu 1995) and on the causes and characteristics of successful and unsuccessful peer response groups (see Bishop 1988). Furthermore, a great deal of this research focuses on composition rather than basic writing students.

Nevertheless, Bartholomae's work with basic writers has led many researchers and instructors, including myself, to use peer response groups as a way to empower basic writers (Weaver 1995, 31). Basic writing pedagogy emerging from social constructivist views of writing encourages students to see their written texts as part of academic discourse, a larger conversation taking place in writing. This approach presupposes, as do I, that developmental writers can produce intelligent writing if instructors

challenge them with serious content and enable them to enter academic conversations. Peer response groups are one means through which students can potentially enter these conversations.

However, Wei Zhu notes that the opportunities for peer interaction offered by peer response groups often go unfulfilled (1995, 517). Though many factors influence peer response group efficacy and inefficacy, group members' lack of confidence in peers' expertise and members' fear of offering criticism are among the most salient characteristics of peer response group failure (Bishop 1988, 121). Clearly, these problems are more pronounced for basic writers, whose reluctance and/or inability to offer substantive critique hinders meaningful learning from knowledgeable peers. Basic writers' precarious position as outsiders in the academic community and subsequent lack of confidence in their own writing abilities lead these students to shy away from assuming any measure of authority in offering meaningful response. Basic writers tend to resist honest and authoritative critique, even in electronic classrooms that otherwise contribute to community building (see Gay 1991; Varone 1996). Indeed, Sandra Lawrence and Elizabeth Sommers (1996) conclude that many instructors doubt the value of peer response groups for inexperienced writers.

In the study under discussion, implemented in the fall of 1998, I sought to increase the efficacy of basic writing peer groups by using a *peer group leader*—a sophomore student who guides basic writers during peer response sessions—in an electronic classroom with online peer response sessions.[1] Moreover, I attempted to promote meaningful and valuable writing groups in which basic writers, like their composition counterparts, reconceptualize substantive issues in their writing, countering Joan Wauters' claim that for basic writers, "there is an excellent rationale for offering only positive reinforcement, if the goal is to encourage confidence on the part of reluctant writers" (1988, 157). Basic writers should be treated as intellectuals learning a new discourse, and peer response sessions should reflect such academic work.

In this chapter, I suggest that the peer group leader builds bridges between basic writers and academic writers. Acting as a link between basic writers' and academic communities, the peer group leader encourages basic writers to model academic discourse as they authorize themselves as participants. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky suggest we "engage students in a process whereby they discover academic discourse from the inside" (1986, 36). Peer group leaders make academic discourse's inside visible, so basic writing students do not have to invent it

blindly. At once insiders and outsiders, peer group leaders provide a vital link between writer and audience, writer and academic discourse (64). As James Gee argues, discourses are mastered by "enculturation into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse" (qtd. in Zhu 1995, 518). Straddling the fence somewhere between academic and basic writers' communities, the peer group leader provides the scaffolding and supported interaction upon and through which basic writers enter academic discourse. In so doing, peer group leaders provide what Kenneth Bruffee (1984) would call a "conversation" to model or what subscribers to the competing model of academic authority would see as a means to challenge it. Making academic discourse *visible* to students, the peer group leader assists students in their understanding and appropriation of academic literacies.[2]

BUILDING BRIDGES IN PEER COLLABORATION RESEARCH: PEER GROUP LEADERS IN BASIC WRITING

Using limited funds from an internal grant,[3] I selected Tyisha, a student I had known from my basic writing class a year earlier, as the peer group leader.[4] She was among the strongest writers in my class (and I knew she had been successful in English Composition), but more important, I felt she had characteristics that would suit the peer group leader role: leadership, integrity, maturity, and sensitivity. Tyisha, the peer group leader, attended my class during peer response sessions, joining one or two groups and guiding them through and participating in response. I instructed her to be descriptive and to pay attention to global issues of meaning, content, and organization rather than mechanical issues in students' writing. I expected Tyisha to model these responses for students as well as guide them to similar modes of critique. I also informed students that they could seek Tyisha's help outside of class through e-mail, phone calls, or face-to-face meetings.

The peer group leader thus straddled the roles of the two primary types of peer collaboration in basic writing: peer response in basic writing classrooms and peer tutorials in writing centers. In my experiences, the peer group leader acts as an intermediary between peers in a peer response group and tutors in writing center tutorials, and bringing the peer tutor *into* the peer response group draws at once from the advantages of both peer response groups and peer tutorials. Of course, there is a flip side as well, for peer group leaders have the potential to degrade the collaboration of peers in peer response groups.

Muriel Harris's widely known and respected work on the similarities and differences between peer tutorials and peer response, though now over a decade old, remains a significant contribution to the study and practice of these important collaborative methods in basic writing classrooms. Harris asserts that both writing center tutorials and peer response groups are "collaborative learning about writing" (1992a, 369) in which "one writer claims ownership and makes all final decisions" (370); moreover, the goal of the tutor and peer group members is the same: "all are working toward more effective writing abilities and heightened awareness of general writing concerns" (373).[5] Bringing peer group leaders into peer response sessions leaves these important general similarities unchanged.

It is the distinctions Harris makes, however, that interest me more in the context of peer group leaders, particularly in terms of how the peer group leader can take advantage of these distinctions and become a force in basic writers' peer response sessions and meaningful learning in collaboration with knowledgeable peers. Among the most significant of these differences is the widely accepted view that peer tutors in writing tutorials become "neither a teacher nor a peer" as they assist writers with writing issues beyond "fixing" a particular paper under consideration, while peer response readers focus on and critique a specific draft (1992a, 371). Peer tutors explain issues and problems and give instructional assistance. As Stephen North notes, the tutor's job "is to produce better writers, not just better writing" (qtd. in Harris 1992a, 372). In tutorials, tutors individualize and personalize the concerns, while in peer response groups, readers offer mutual assistance in a back-and-forth interaction that deals with general skills (373).

Peer group leaders take on both roles, neither entirely teachers nor completely peers, straddling multiple communities as they join the peer response group. In their unique role, peer group leaders can bring individualization to peer response groups since they do not have writing to be critiqued and do not seek assistance themselves. This difference from other members of the peer response group allows for an additional layer of instruction in peer response groups, beyond a focus on the writing under scrutiny to more general writing concerns, including instructional assistance on *how to respond to peers' writing*, which the tutorial lacks. Learning the nuances of critique can in and of itself lead to improved writing abilities. Thus, Harris's assertion that peer tutors' methods and concerns for uncovering writers' problems are not appropriate for peer response

groups no longer holds when we introduce peer group leaders into peer response groups. Peer group leaders can individualize response, and, more important, can lead students away from purely directive response.

Harris's distinction in terms of collaboration is important in this context. She argues that peer response groups are closer to collaborative writing (i.e., joint authorship) than writing tutorials, for peer response group work emphasizes informing, while writing tutorials emphasize the student's own discovery (1992a, 377). At first glance, it may seem that using a peer group leader might move the peer response group away from collaborative writing, since peer group leaders do emphasize students' own discovery. However, peer group leaders can simultaneously increase the level and quality of informative modes. Peer group leaders raise peer response beyond simple informing on specific issues, a goal of many instructors who use peer response groups, despite Harris's claim that these groups tend to be prescriptive (see Benesch 1985; Zhu 1995; Bishop 1988). Peer group leaders guide group members into larger, substantive issues and thus students' own discovery of the writing process. Moreover, unlike tutorials, peer response groups with peer group leaders also facilitate students' discovery of group processes; that is, peer group leaders guide and model peer group response and critique, so students discover not only their own writing issues but how to benefit from and contribute to peer response. In peer response work with peer group leaders, basic writing students not only attempt to critique their peers' drafts but themselves learn about the possibilities for revision in the process. Therefore, despite the potential to undermine collaboration among peers, the peer group leaders can enhance it by raising the efficacy of peer group members' informing *and* multiple layers of discovery.

In their multiple roles, peer group leaders thus provide a bridge between what Thomas Newkirk calls peers' and instructors' distinct "evaluative communities" (1984, 309). His study suggests that peer response groups may reinforce students' abilities to write for their peers but not for the academic community, and, subsequently, that "students need practice applying the criteria that they are now learning" and should thus be viewed as "apprentices, attempting to learn and apply criteria appropriate to an academic audience" (310). Newkirk argues for teachers' active role in peer response; however, I believe peer group leaders can more effectively "mak[e] the norms of that community clear and plausible—even appealing." Ideally, peer response enables students to enter academic discourse through working with knowledgeable peers, breaking

free from one evaluative community to enter another, and it empowers students who do not see themselves as academic writers. However, in practice, students' crossover is more problematic. Peer group leaders can expose students to the conventions—appealing and not so appealing—of academic discourse. Peer group leaders do not impose on students what Benesch calls the "teacher's code" but instead allow them to respond to writing issues "in their own language" (1985, 90), since peer group leaders have, in Harris's words, "a foot in each discourse community" (1992a, 380). With the use of peer group leaders, therefore, basic writers develop this language more independently of the teacher and in collaboration with peers.

Using peer group leaders in peer response groups also bridges what Tim Hacker describes as the two main approaches to peer response: the broad categories of "teacher-directed" and "modeling" (1996, 112–13). The former category includes teacher intervention in the form of worksheets (a set of heuristics for approaching an essay) and/or instructions on how to proceed, while "modeling" consists of teacher intervention prior to actual student-directed peer response sessions through teaching students how to evaluate and critique their peers' essays before peer response sessions. Using peer group leaders, however, reduces the need for teacher intervention in either instance.[6] That is, with peer group leaders, students can "model" effective response, but they do so in process, and they do not need a set of heuristics provided by the instructor. Moreover, with peer group leaders, more authentic collaboration occurs because peer response groups remain decentered. Students cannot blindly invent the language of academic discourse, but peer group leaders make its inside visible. With peer group leaders as facilitators, basic writers take on a more active role in the invention of academic discourse. Like peer tutors, peer group leaders can empower student writers who "want to have power over their environment, to be in control of what happens to them, . . . and manipulate language the way their teachers do before they will be able to play the academic game the way the insiders do" (Hawkins 1980, 64).

Harris makes the further point that students in peer tutorials typically trust peer tutors and have confidence in their skills and knowledge (1992a). Students' perception of the peer group leader is also an important component of the peer group leader's usefulness in peer response groups. For peer response to work, peer group members must have confidence in their peers' knowledge. However, for basic writers especially,

trust in peers' knowledge is suspect, mainly because they have been desig-
nated as underprepared for college writing. Peer group leaders can play a
significant role in leading basic writers to see themselves and their peers
as knowledgeable, skilled writers. Moreover, because peer group lead-
ers can pass their knowledge to basic writing students, they more evenly
distribute knowledge in the classroom. As a result, the classroom becomes
a more authentic decentered, collaborative learning environment, in
practice as well as in theory.

While peer group leaders can bring the advantages of both peer
response groups and peer tutorials to their roles in peer response sessions,
they may also degrade peer response. Harris points out that because peer
tutors are more acquainted with academic discourse than the tutees, "the
further they are from being peers in a collaborative relationship" (1992a,
379). Students come to them seeking prescriptions, thereby making it
difficult for tutors to remain collaborators rather than coauthors and
frustrating both student and tutor. Certainly the potential exists as well
when we bring peer group leaders to peer response groups. Peer group
leaders, straddling both the basic writers' and academic communities, are
not completely "equal" to other peer group members. Without writing of
their own "out there" and under scrutiny, peer group leaders have less at
stake than the other peer group members. Harris makes the point that
the peer tutor's unique position as interpreter of academic jargon is in
peril if the tutor, "enamored of the jargon of the field, moves too far into
the teacher's world" (380). Clearly, this risk of coauthoring and co-opting
student writing exists with peer group leaders in peer response groups,
but can be minimized with effective training and guidance.

Relatedly, peer group leaders may interfere with what Harris identifies
as peer response groups' give-and-take process of negotiation that leads
to consensus about how the group will undertake peer response (1992a,
374). With the peer group leader's participation in peer response, the
negotiation among students will likely be less democratic, for part of the
peer group leader's role is to help guide students to specific kinds of
response. Moreover, as in tutorials, the tutor's and students' goals may
often conflict, since students want particular papers fixed while the tutor
attempts to address larger issues (374–75). Clearly, if students have the
goal of fixing a particular piece of writing in their peer response group,
they may find themselves in conflict with the peer group leader, who will
be guiding them to more global issues as well. On the other hand, since
peer response groups with peer group leaders can effectively address both

specific and general writing concerns, the conflicts between students and peer group leader are likely to be reduced.

Harris's identification of the tutor's "unique advantage of being both a nonjudgmental, non-evaluative helper—a collaborator in whom the writer can confide" (1992a, 376)—cannot be ignored when we bring the peer group leader into peer response. Arguably, the peer group leader may face difficult hurdles in getting group members to perceive him or her as nonevaluative and nonjudgmental, given the peer group leader's connection to the instructor. Instructors can make it clear to students that the peer group leader is there to offer assistance, not to evaluate or judge them. Instructors can also inform students that even though they will consult with the peer group leader throughout the semester (much like peer tutors in writing centers confer with instructors), the peer group leader will not be involved in grading the students in any way. In my class, students' participation in peer response did influence their grades to some degree, but it was my assessment of the logged transcripts of the sessions, not anything the peer group leader told me, that affected our evaluation of students' participation in this process. Thus, while I do not think I was able to completely overcome my students' association of the peer group leader with myself, I believe they did come to see her as nonevaluative, enabling her to evoke honest and authoritative response.

BUILDING BRIDGES TO ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: THE PEER GROUP LEADER IN BASIC WRITING

How well did using a peer group leader work in this particular class? What advantages and/or disadvantages did this young woman bring to basic writers' peer response groups? Since most of our response sessions occurred online, I was able to use these transcripts to monitor and assess the peer group leader's effectiveness in leading students to substantive response.[7]

In the basic writing class under study, I challenged students with difficult work, connecting content with methodology as we studied varied aspects and definitions of literacy, each assignment building off the others so that the writing assignments, as Ann Berthoff suggests, "encourage conscientization, the discovery of the mind in action" so students "learn . . . how meanings make future meanings possible, how form finds further form" (1984, 755). Moreover, class content, focused on academic literacy itself, wedded content with methodology and put discourse itself at the center of analysis. Thus, course content and methodology began the

process through which basic writers could enter academic discourse. The peer group leader helped these students make this difficult leap, as the following examples demonstrate. At the same time, however, her work illuminates some of the potential perils of peer group leaders' interventions in basic writing peer response groups.

One strength of the peer group leader was her ability to both inform and model. In the following example, Tyisha guides students away from mechanical issues, without specifically instructing them not to consider such surface features.

Stan:	yo Paul i guess you read my review
Paul:	yup
Paul:	it was good
Stan:	good content
Paul:	yes
Stan:	i found it very interesting
Paul:	but I found a lot of little mistakes
Paul:	did you catch any?
Tyisha:	I liked your paper also Stan, it was really good, Paul is there anything in his paper that you thought he could work on, besides a few spelling mistakes.

Tyisha's language effectively downplays "a few spelling mistakes" and refocuses students' attention to more substantive issues, without specifying what these should be. This exchange demonstrates Tyisha's ability to simultaneously focus on the essay under consideration while leading students to discovery.

In the next example, Tyisha successfully keeps the group focused and elicits effective critique.

Tyisha:	what can he do about that 5th paragraph
Stan:	break it up
Tyisha:	It is too big—break it up how?
Stan:	hold on i have to read it again to get that answer
Paul:	I think I could break it up at the word people
Larry:	LEHIGH IS BETTER THAN BERK
Paul:	yea yea
Tyisha:	Larry we're having a discussion
Paul:	Larry is the man
Stan:	ok i just want to get to main soooooooooo i don't really care
Stan:	but berks has more than one building and we have a guy
Paul:	that really doesn't bother me

Tyisha:	Anyways, what can we do with this para. lets get back on track
Tyisha:	just 5 more minutes
Paul:	I could break it up at the word "people"
Tyisha:	Good and from there what could he do Stan
Stan:	that is what i was just about to say
Stan:	back up the ideas in greater detail
Tyisha:	should he change the intro. sentence to that paragraph or keep it the same.
Stan:	just make sure you have good transition between the two paragraphs
Paul:	ok
Stan:	yep—change the intro.

When Larry interrupts Paul and Stan's academic conversation, Tyisha takes on a leadership role, trying to get them back on track. Although Stan momentarily gives in to Larry's disruptions, he does refocus his attention on the task. This is an important example of the peer group leader's potential role, for all too often, basic writers get off track—and stay there. Tim Hacker (1996) claims that students in writing groups tend to take on the role of teacher, but I rarely see this occur with basic writers. It is difficult for these students to get back on track on their own, perhaps because they are afraid to take on such a leadership role, questioning their own authority as writers.

Furthermore, the above exchange also illuminates the ways in which the peer group leader can simultaneously focus on a particular piece of writing and more global writing instruction. Even though Tyisha and the peer group members are discussing Paul's essay, Tyisha's comments are directed at Stan, the responder. Paul's comment, "I could break it up at the word 'people'" and Stan's comment, "That is what I was just about to say" indicate their understanding of both how to "fix" this particular paragraph and its applicability to issues of paragraphing generally.

Similarly, the following exchange also illuminates the peer group leader's ability to straddle the roles of tutor and peer, focusing on specific and general concerns.

Sara:	In some of the papers I write, I start out with a question
Tyisha:	so how does this help Joes paper
Tyisha:	what idea do you have for Joe that he could use with a question in his paper
Sara:	He could have started out with "What is Technical Literacy?"
Tyisha:	and then what could he have done in his intro to support this?

Joe:	why would I want to start with a question that I don't know the answer to?
	. . .
Sara:	Explain how many definitions it had and use each definition to start a new paragraph
Tyisha:	good point how would you answer that, you went right to the point in your starting paragraph.
	. . .
Sara:	Joe what do you say?
Joe:	The point that I am attempting to say is that I do not know the exact definitions.
Sara:	Did you try looking them up?
Joe:	no, because we are suppose to find our own.

Sara begins this exchange over Joe's introductory paragraph by pointing to her own strategy for introductions. Tyisha then pushes her to apply it to Joe's essay. Despite Joe's disagreement, Tyisha effectively guides these students to consider not only Joe's essay but a particular rhetorical strategy more generally. Sara and Joe debate the issue in academic terms, Joe responding that "looking it up" is not what academic discourse is about. Instead, Joe realizes the role he must play as a knowledge maker.

The following example demonstrates an impressive interchange of substantive ideas among Tyisha, Jennifer, and Stan that occurred fairly late in the semester. Jennifer begins by asking both her peer and the peer tutor for response:

Jennifer:	Tyisha, do you think I stay on track or do I drift off my topic? Also, do you think my thesis is okay, or more like what do you think my thesis is? Stan, give me some input. What do I need to change? Remember I did this late last night.
Stan:	well you talk about culture and beliefs and than you jump to standard english. It just needs something to blend the idea that even though a person likes to keep their beliefs that they still need standard english.
Tyisha:	Your paper is very good however, Stan can you identify Jennifers thesis, and does it go along with her paper.

Tyisha directs Jennifer and Stan to consider a particular problem in Jennifer's essay, the lack of a clear thesis/focus, specifically responding to Jennifer's request for help but in the process guiding Stan to respond. The discussion continues:

Stan: well i think it can be improved upon. I really did not understand what the article was going to be about when I read it.

Jennifer: I think I am still talking about Standard English. I throw in culture and beliefs because that is why people stray from Standard English, it is so they can keep close to their culture.

Tyisha: Okay, so then how does all this information tie in to Rachel Jones facing disadvantages—what do you think Stan.

Jennifer: I don't understand. Didn't I introduce my thesis in the opening? I thought I made it clear what I was talking about, but I could be wrong.

Tyisha: Your thesis should be in the introductory paragraph last sentence before you get into you supporting paragraphs.

Jennifer: I used Rachel Jones because I like how she expresses that people are faced with disadvantages without speaking Standard English.

Tyisha presses Stan to help Jennifer with this problem of purpose and simultaneously propels Jennifer into thoughtful consideration of her rhetorical choices. Even though Jennifer notes, as a writer questioning her own authority, that "I could be wrong," she continues to explain the reasoning behind her own understanding of her thesis and its placement in the essay. Tyisha's presence has helped this basic writer gain confidence in her own and her peer's knowledge and writing. The conversation concludes this way:

Stan: try adding something like this; Standard english pulls from cultural independence. Some people feel that without there cultural distinction they will be lost. For a person to truly accelerate in our society they must have a little of both. Cultural diversity is not acceptable in todays world and for a person to not understand or use standard english they will be lost.

Jennifer: so, she was my spark for this paper. I am responding and giving my idea of her views.

     . . .

Tyisha: It's good you used Jones however, what is your thesis, is it that last sentence, because if so then you could talk about the things SHE FACED, I think it could be the second and third sentences combined, how do you feel Stan?

Stan: well I write what I think it should be

Jennifer: Thanks Stan, I like that response you gave me previously. I wrote it down because I like it a lot.

Tyisha's membership in the academic community is evidenced by her more nuanced reading of Rachel Jones' essay, "What's Wrong With Black English?" (1992) and her clearer sense of incorporating textual references effectively in her own writing. She prods Jennifer into a deeper reading in a way that both models and guides Jennifer and Stan in the conventions of academic discourse. Benesch argues that peer response is often disconnected—that is, utterances are left suspended, other comments are raised, and an emerging conversation rarely materializes (1985, 93). With the aid of Tyisha, we see a substantive conversation emerge (temporarily interrupted by the lag time inherent in online synchronous conversations), because Tyisha enables them to "enter *imperfectly* into peer group conversations" (93; emphasis added), as Stan's misstatement that "Cultural diversity is not acceptable," indicates. Indeed, Stan's rewriting of Jennifer's introductory paragraph (which shows his own sense of authority as a knowledgeable peer) illuminates the perils of peer response generally. Other experiences with peer group leaders have demonstrated to me that peer group leaders can lessen the impact of such difficulties, although Tyisha did not "catch" it this time.

The above examples and analysis point to the strengths of peer group leaders in basic writers' peer response, but there were some pitfalls as well. Mainly, these occurred when Tyisha became overly prescriptive, as the following two examples demonstrate:

Stan: overall the paper was good. Some things that need to be worked on is unity. Also what is that delta 9 stuff about? Is that the code for the tetrahydrocannabinal?

Stan: is that the code for the tetrahydrocannabinal

Paul: yea

Tyisha: define cannabis in your paper so your reader knows what it is.

Paul: ok

. . . .

Tyisha: what can Joe do to make his first sentence sound interesting?

Tom: Joe could tell the reader what his point of view is

Tyisha: yes or he could also do what

Tyisha: where are you Joe

Tom: he could state what the controversy is

Joe: I don't want to include my opinion in the beginning because I was writing from a non-bias point of viewpoint

Tyisha: Tom, do you think you would pick up an article like Joe's why or why not?

. . .

Tom:	I would because in reading the first sentence I want to know what the controversy is

. . .

Tyisha:	Joe your paper is good, just work on making the introductory sentence sound appealing to the reader, by having a sentence like, As I looked into the subject of cultural diversity, I noticed how it was such a controversial topic.

There are probably a number of reasons why instances such as these occurred, beginning with Harris's identification of the peer tutor's tendency to become "enamored of" their more authoritative role (1992a, 380). There were times when I observed Tyisha reveling in her role as more knowledgeable, and why not? She was a former basic writer, and her work as a peer group leader by its very nature indicated how far she had come. At the same time, like peer tutors, Tyisha was still very much a part of her peers' community, only one year ahead of them in school, as her comments from various peer response sessions reveal: "What can Paul do to make his paper more personal to his audience?"; "Maybe in your intro you could mention that there are bad effects of weed"; "Let's flip to Paul's [essay]"; and "You're a nut Paul." In the first comment, Tyisha uses academic terminology ("audience"), though somewhat awkwardly. In the second sentence, her use of the word "weed," rather than the more formal "marijuana" (as I would call it), discloses her ties to the basic writers' community. The final two comments also reveal her connection as peer with the basic writers in my class.

I also believe that Tyisha was genuinely concerned about the writers in my class, and she wanted to help them improve their essays and get good grades, perhaps losing sight of her alternate roles. Her impulse to jump in with ways to "fix" their essays may have been a result of this concern. Moreover, there were times when she probably became frustrated with students in her group, as she prodded and pushed them to areas they did not want to go.

Relatedly, Harris's identification of the conflict over objectives of tutor and tutee may also explain some of the difficulties I experienced with the peer group leader. In the impressive exchange between Tyisha, Stan, and Jennifer previously discussed (I reproduce it below), there are also some signs of discontent.

Stan:	Try adding something like this; Standard english pulls from cultural independence. Some people feel that without there

cultural distinction they will be lost. For a person to truly
accelerate in our society they must have a little of both.
Cultural diversity is not acceptable in todays world and for a
person to not understand or use standard english they will be
lost.

Jennifer: Also, she was my spark for this paper. I am responding and giv-
ing my idea of her views.

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Tyisha: It's good you used Jones however, what is your thesis, is it that
last sentence, because if so then you could talk about the things
SHE FACED, I think it could be the second and third sentences
combined, how do you feel Stan?

Stan: Well I write what I think it should be.

Jennifer: Thanks Stan, I like that response you gave me previously. I
wrote it down because I like it a lot.

The transcript itself shows less of the conflict than did Tyisha's com-
ments to me after class. In Tyisha's view, Jennifer was defensive, reject-
ing Tyisha's input and guidance. The dialogue above highlights two of
Harris's points. First, it is possible that Jennifer saw Tyisha as judgmental,
since Jennifer clearly felt strongly about her essay. The fact that the peer
group leader does not have writing to be mutually critiqued alters the
dynamic of peer collaboration and may have led Jennifer to feel defensive
about her writing. Second, I think it is conceivable that Jennifer wanted
what Stan gave her: a more direct answer to her questions about the
thesis. Indeed, Stan rewrites the paragraph for her. Tyisha, on the other
hand, prods Jennifer into making the discovery for herself, which may
have been frustrating for Jennifer. Moreover, Tyisha's use of capital letters
when she wrote "you could talk about the things SHE FACED" may have
been offensive to Jennifer, although I think Tyisha meant only to empha-
size the point she was trying to get across. Jennifer's "thank you" to Stan at
the end of the discussion, absent one to Tyisha, may be further evidence
of the conflict Tyisha sensed.

PEER GROUP LEADERS AND BEYOND

Five years after this initial study and subsequent projects with peer group
leaders in my classes, I remain confident of the potential for peer group
leaders to aid basic writers' appropriation of academic discourse. I am
grateful to my colleague, Candace Spigelman, for spearheading a more
formal writing fellows program at our college, thereby intensifying tutors'

training and enabling instructors to take advantage of in-class tutoring in myriad ways as appropriate to each instructional situation. In my spring 2004 Basic Writing class, I used successfully writing fellows in one-to-one "troubleshooting" roles during drafting and revising workshops throughout the semester. As a committed basic writing teacher, I am especially excited by the many configurations of classroom-based writing tutoring discussed in this volume; the good work being done by administrators, faculty, tutors, and students in institutions across the country and at various levels of writing instruction bodes well for basic writing students everywhere.