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On Location

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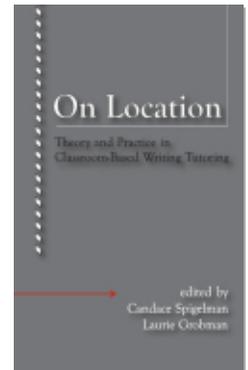
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PART TWO

Reconciling Pedagogical Complications in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring

The essays in part one highlighted collegial, institutional, interdisciplinary, and discursive connections that classroom-based writing tutoring may foster. Yet, as a hybrid genre, those same intersecting forces that provide transformative possibilities simultaneously create new hurdles for students, tutors, faculty, and administrators. In this section, our contributors describe the day-to-day operational decisions participants must address when tutoring takes place in classrooms. (We deliberately bracket issues of power and authority, which serve as the focus of part three). These decisions are often at odds with deeply entrenched alliances and beliefs about the "right" kinds of tutoring practices, which are, in turn, tied to tutors' training and the ideology surrounding that training.

As Barbara Little Liu and Holly Mandes reveal, problems can emerge when the demands of a classroom environment clash with more familiar nonintrusive tutoring approaches. In their study, tutors found that their writing "center(ed)" training did not equip them to deal with students unwilling or ill-prepared to ask for assistance. Liu and Mandes suggest that tutors take a more interventionist approach, and they turn to recent writing center theory to legitimize these alternative strategies. Steven J. Corbett likewise argues that on-location tutoring often warrants more directive tutoring techniques, which may clash or meld with traditional minimalist approaches. By modeling the communicative practices students need and desire for academic success, Corbett contends, tutors can reconfigure their roles as authoritative but not authoritarian, and, in this way inspire writing group and whole-class conversations.

A different kind of conflict can occur when tutors trained in one-to-one tutoring are asked to facilitate classroom-based peer response groups. They may, as Melissa Nicolas discovered, be unprepared to handle the immediacy of writing groups or the duality of roles expected of them as group members and simultaneously as knowledgeable peers. Nicolas suggests that tutor-training methods and writing students' training must clearly distinguish between peer response groups, writing center tutorials, and writing group tutoring.

Even if the training is on target, even if the appropriate modifications are in place, the involuntary nature of classroom-based writing assistance introduces

conflicts that go to the heart of the tutoring situation. As tutor Kelly Giger found, developing writers, in particular, may resist revising suggestions, going through the motions of the revising activities without making real changes to their essays. Giger's experience reminds us that instructional interventions usually require negotiation and diplomacy and a heavy dose of optimism.

In the classroom, conflicts between theory and practice, among theories, and even between tutors' and students' desires add additional layers of complexity to the work our tutors do. The essays in this section explore these conflicts while providing theoretical and practical strategies for overcoming them.