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On Location

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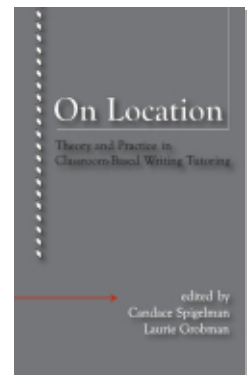
Published by Utah State University Press

Spigelman, Candace and Laurie Grobman.

On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring.

Utah State University Press, 2005.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/9287.



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PART THREE

Addressing Issues of Authority and Role Definition in Classroom-based Writing Tutoring

Perhaps even more than practical concerns, for those involved in classroom-based writing tutoring, issues of authority and role definition reveal the colliding theoretical perspectives emerging out of this hybrid instructional genre. In various ways, the essays in this section expose the rich and complex theoretical undergirding of on-location tutoring projects. Oppositions like tutoring sovereignty versus institutional dependence, nonintrusive versus directive tutoring methods, traditional process-oriented strategies versus writing group pragmatics, tutors as peers versus tutors as specialists, and tutors as students versus tutors as “teachers” appear again and again in the many configurations discussed in these chapters. We see that, among participants, inherent contradictions in viewpoints may not be easily resolved or reconciled; at the same time, our contributors demonstrate the potential for on-location tutoring to intervene in traditional institutional power structures.

Marti Singer, Robin Breault, and Jennifer Wing look closely at communicative and material conditions in a peer tutoring program attached to their institution’s WAC program. Telling stories of tutors and classrooms, the authors infuse their critique with Marxist perspectives relating to authority and privilege and discuss their ongoing efforts to successfully manage power issues through consultant training and faculty workshops. Lack of authority is likewise the subject of David Martins and Thia Wolf’s work on a “Partnership Program” that sends writing center tutors into classes across the disciplines. They describe the clash between tutors’ training in writing center literacy theory and teachers’ adherence to a skills-based writing paradigm. Tensions and conflicts arise when classroom tutors lose authority and flexibility with regard to pedagogical approaches. Taking their lead from the tutors, Martins and Wolf argue for a more complex position of shared authority required in the classroom-based setting.

Conflicts in authority also result when a writing center administrator, even for very good reasons, appropriates control of tutor activities in the classroom setting. Discussing her writing center’s tutor-led classroom workshops, Susan Georgecink critiques her efforts with respect to Andrea Lunsford’s notions of authority. She argues, finally, that if tutors are to assume successful mentoring roles in classrooms,

they must not be asked to perform as “marionettes,” merely enacting the program administrator’s script. In a study of her efforts to democratize tutors’ and teachers’ roles, Candace Spigelman confirms that institutional hierarchies perpetuate traditional role definitions. In her project, education majors enrolled in a peer tutoring seminar and led weekly peer group sessions with students in basic writing. Spigelman examines tutors’ positionings within classroom peer writing groups, their group members’ constructions of their authority, and their conflicted status in the seminar class. She illustrates that in these democratic classroom settings, power was repeatedly resisted, negotiated, and recentered.

Finally, Jennifer Corroy argues that small inroads and local conversations can produce positive large-scale changes in attitudes toward writing and the authority of writing instruction, as they did at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Corroy discovers the positive impact of a writing fellows program on traditional faculty and institutional notions of literacy.