

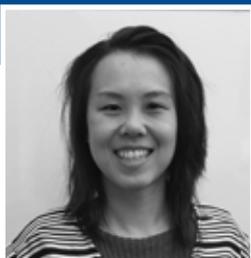
Educating and Recruiting Multilingual and Other Graduate Students for Writing Center Work

Hsing-Yin Cynthia Lin

The Ohio State University | Columbus, Ohio

Katherine DeLuca

University of Massachusetts | Dartmouth, Massachusetts



At the Ohio State University Writing Center, we have instituted an educational program, the Writing Consultant Workshop (WCW), for graduate students interested in becoming writing consultants and learning skills for working with non-native English speaking (NNES) writers. The WCW represented a new effort by our center to recruit potential graduate consultants from diverse disciplines and linguistic backgrounds to expand our staff's demographic profile.

Our first WCW was inspired by demographic shifts. We faced changes that are being experienced across the nation as many institutions of higher education encounter rising NNES student enrollments; although once only twenty percent of our clientele, currently at least fifty percent of writing center clients are NNES writers. According to the Institute of International Education's 2016 *Open Doors Report*, the number of international students in American colleges and universities reached more than "one million during the 2015-16 academic year—an increase of seven percent from the previous year," representing five percent of the total student population at U.S. institutions ("Open Doors: Fast Facts 2016"). Similarly increasing numbers of NNES students admitted to our university created an exigency for revising our writing center's tutor education and hiring priorities, prompting an expansion of our approaches to educating consultants to work with NNES writers. Although a semester-long tutoring course was offered to undergraduate students and extensive education in NNES writers' issues had been incorporated into that class, no specialized writing center tutoring course for graduate tutors existed on campus. Thus, we established the WCW as a seven-week workshop with a specialized focus on NNES writing issues for potential graduate student tutors interested in learning how to better support this growing population.

With shifting student populations, scholars in writing center studies and related fields have made recommendations for working with NNES writers. Tony Silva suggests the necessity of addressing differences between textual features of native and non-native English writing, which can range from differences in writing process, language usage, and idea development (“Toward an Understanding” 657). Similarly, Paul Matsuda, et al. argue NNES writers’ “written accent” takes more than a semester English composition course to lose (21) and therefore advocate longitudinal support for NNES students’ writing. This scholarly guidance provided the framework for our educational efforts, situating the workshop we developed within both the fields of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Writing Center Studies.

To recruit graduate students across disciplines and accommodate their busy academic schedules, we awarded participants a small stipend instead of course credit, and at the end of the WCW, we invited students to apply for tutor positions at our writing center. Each workshop was capped at 10 people because we, as facilitators, wanted to ensure we were able to mentor participants and respond to their work (e.g., discussion board, weekly journal, and final project). Although all graduate tutors receive preparation at our annual pre-term educational session as well as ongoing education throughout the school year during weekly staff meetings, consultants who completed the WCW reported that this educational program prepared them for working at our center and changed their perceptions of writing center praxes, which they previously understood as primarily proofreading and editing services. Additionally, they reported that the WCW changed their understandings of the dynamics of a tutorial, such as how Socratic questions, gestures, proximity, and power relationships are interrelated in conversations between tutors and tutees. The first WCW took place in autumn 2013. Since then, the WCWs have continued as part of our educational program and remain a preferred qualification for graduate students applying for positions at our center. We have consistently hired 3-5 of 10 participants after each workshop, and 2-3 of them are multilingual graduate students. Currently, 10 of our 21 graduate student staff went through the WCW, and 6 of these graduate consultants are multilingual tutors (graduate student tutors who did not participate in the WCW had previous writing center experience).

Over time, a few adjustments were made to the curriculum to address participants’ suggestions. For example, we reduced workshop meetings from seven to six weeks. Participants also request-

ed adding more participation in tutoring sessions to illuminate what really happens in a tutorial. Finally, a major change to the curriculum was to add three-step tutorials. Participants brought their own writing to these tutorials and experienced brainstorming, higher-order concerns (HOCs), and lower-order concerns (LOCs) sessions. A follow-up assignment for this project was a reflection paper in which participants reported on the nuances of these tutorials and the changes to their papers. In what follows, we offer an overview of the curriculum and detailed discussion of the activities. Although our pedagogies and the WCW were situated locally and contextualized within the constraints of our institution, we offer our experiences to provide others with ideas for their own educational programs.

THE WRITING CONSULTANT WORKSHOP: CURRICULAR DESIGN AND ACTIVITIES

To fully engage prospective consultants with the complexity and significance of the scholarship and pedagogical theories being learned, the WCW was run similar to a graduate seminar. As graduate students from different disciplines, most WCW participants knew little about writing center praxis and TESOL, and they had varied disciplinary knowledge. The WCW was our attempt to not only educate graduate students to be potential writing consultants but also to develop their reflective and empathetic abilities as educators. Participants started from the beginning by learning the basics of composition plus writing center and writing across the curriculum theories and practices. We especially emphasized that when working with NNES students, consultants needed to be aware that NNES students can be vulnerable because of the multi-layered obstacles they are likely coping with in a new academic discourse. We used various activities, in and outside of face-to-face meetings: participants attended a two-hour weekly meeting, observed twice weekly in the writing center, maintained weekly journal entries, participated in online discussions, and completed a three-step tutorial project and a final reflective project.

First, participants were asked to complete a rigorous reading load and respond to those readings in various forums, including face-to-face discussions and online discussion threads. Participants' reflections revealed that the TESOL and writing center studies scholarship extended their knowledge about NNES writers and their learning styles. For instance, we asked participants to read "L2 Composing: Strategies and Perceptions" in Illona Leki's *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers* to introduce

them to linguistic characteristics of NNES writers. Dana Ferris' "Responding to Student Errors: Issues and Strategies" presented different types of NNES errors to participants, which included particular idiosyncratic linguistic elements such as articles and singular/plural forms. "Avoiding Appropriation" by Carol Severino suggested prioritizing and selecting passages to revise, and Severino and Elizabeth Deifell's "Empowering L2 Tutoring: A Case Study of a Second Language Writer's Vocabulary Learning" started discussions on the complexity of lexical issues for NNES writers, suggesting that talking about vocabulary in a tutorial mediates the dichotomized focuses between HOCs and LOCs (27). Building upon what they read, participants explored tutoring strategies for different error types in their observations and reviewed handouts at the center; these activities inspired some participants to discuss these approaches in their final projects, even developing new strategies for NNES sessions or materials for working with clients. With these scholarly perspectives, participants developed understandings of peer tutoring that focused on idea development before error correction even when working with NNES writers.

The WCW also enabled us to reconceive how we developed tutors' skills for working with NNES writers, challenging our initial ideas of what we mean when we say "all writers need a good reader" in our writing center, which had previously overlooked the specific needs of multilingual writers. Alongside the aforementioned readings, we also used activities to develop participants' understandings of grammar as rhetorical. We addressed the importance of rhetorical grammar, paired with discussions of scholarship by Martha Kolln and Dana Ferris, suggesting that "good reading" means helping clients address appropriate audiences for their writing at all levels—global and local, which NNES writers tend to neglect, focusing instead on language use (Silva 658).

We also advocated providing appropriate language help for NNES writers in an attempt to support clarity of their ideas. When lexical issues impede clarity, Muriel Harris and Tony Silva have defined them as global errors instead of local errors (526). Lexical issues, especially in NNES writing, often impede clarity of ideas and impact developing English proficiency by affecting NNES writers' fluency of written expression. For NNES writers, word choice affects not only sentence level meaning-making but also the flow of ideas. Therefore, we taught reverse outlining as a tutoring strategy for idea development for NNES writers, showing participants how NNES issues are more than lexical concerns.

To make connections between these scholarly principles and praxes, we introduced language resources such as Mark Davies' *Corpus of Contemporary American English*, a repository of American English texts maintained by Brigham Young University, which could be used to enhance NNES writers' vocabulary use in rhetorical contexts. We taught participants how to use resources like this one. Together with participants, we also developed approaches and strategies for integrating such resources into sessions with NNES writers, including explaining how to use resources and understand usage in context.

Although some participants were experienced graduate student teaching associates, many lacked extensive education on helping NNES writers, and fewer had received education in writing center pedagogies. Linking these fields of study for participants, Wayne Robertson's documentary, *Writing Across Borders*, provided fundamental understandings of why students with different cultural backgrounds show distinct rhetorical features and helped participants recognize that non-English rhetorical characteristics are not due to "educational deficiencies" (Silva 362). Watching and discussing the documentary enabled participants to make clear connections across the scholarship they had read and discussed, tying together the different concepts and lessons developed in readings. As most WCW participants were native English speakers and unfamiliar with TESOL research, the film enhanced their perception of students' perspectives as multilingual writers. The film initiated discussions about relevant feedback and support systems for NNES writers. NNES participants could speak to the film's resonances with their own experiences, such as receiving excessive errors marking on papers. Sharing their perspectives with fellow participants reaffirmed the film's lessons about NNES writers' experiences with firsthand accounts.

Additionally, we encouraged participants to learn by listening to NNES writers and prioritizing their needs and interests through activities that focused on NNES writers' perspectives and experiences. Participants paired their reading and learning with observing and being tutored in the center, foundational educational practices in Writing Center Studies, which enabled them to connect directly with NNES writers. Weekly journals and online discussions engaged participants in ongoing reflection, from personal experiences in observations to experiences getting tutored, and also acted as a space in which they learned from and responded to each other beyond our weekly scheduled meetings. The ongoing conversation and learning stimulated connections between

readings, in-class discussions, observations, and tutorials. Adding to these practices, we asked that participants use these activities as opportunities to listen to and connect with NNES writers, as well as practice the skills and lessons described in readings. Given the number of NNES clientele at our center, participants were often able to observe and co-tutor NNES writers. When concluding their sessions, participants were asked to debrief with tutors and clients, gaining insights on experiences and preferences from both sides of the session, especially learning from and listening to NNES clients and consultants. This meant creating opportunities and inviting our NNES participants to use other languages when connecting with consultants and clients in our writing center, approaching the tutorials as multilingual. For example, sessions may occur primarily in a language other than English while discussing English writing, and other sessions may switch back and forth between English and other languages to enable precision when addressing lexical issues.

Another focus of the WCW was to help participants develop skills for working with other issues that arise in tutorials with NNES clients. Participants spoke from their diverse experiences as individuals, including as NNES writers, and as members of different world cultures, to explore the power dynamics at play in tutorials. This entailed creating space for all participants to share their own literacy experiences and practices—which they did through both in-person discussions and online conversations—and making a special effort to listen to and learn from the experience of our NNES participants who were NNES writers themselves (usually 3-4 of 10 WCW participants). Their experiences, within the writing center and beyond, frequently complicated the scholarship, observations, and pedagogical practices we were engaging in, offering layers of perspective that enhanced participants' learning. For example, NNES participants discussed how their own experiences as teachers of English in other countries and cultures influenced their perspectives within the writing center; others reported how their personal struggles with academic writing in English made them feel uniquely—and sometimes uncomfortably—situated when acting as tutors.

Following readings, meetings, observations, and mock tutorial practices, participants concluded the WCW by writing a research proposal. Participants could choose a topic for the proposal, which could either call for an action in the writing center or discuss a topic that occurred in workshop conversations. Participants proposed to research the differences in the tutoring approaches

by generalist tutors versus tutors with specialized subject training; distinctions between graduate tutors working with graduate student writers versus undergraduate tutors working with the same population; different tutoring styles for native and NNES tutors; and tutoring resource development.

CONCLUSION: MAKING PEDAGOGICAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES

The WCW created opportunities for us to take a more expansive approach to our writing center's hiring and education. By instituting the new educational practices, we were more able to recruit potential tutors from various disciplines, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds. The WCW, in short, enriched our tutoring pool with new specializations, skill sets, and world experiences.

We assessed the WCW's impact in a few key ways. First, we asked for direct feedback from participants. The WCW's participants reported they found the workshop a helpful means of preparing to enter the writing center as tutors. Additionally, we found that after going through the WCW, participants were more prepared to effectively interview for positions in the writing center. For example, participants who applied for a position were able to better articulate not only the writing center's mission but also how they could contribute as tutors following their workshop participation. Finally, through client feedback from end-of-tutorial surveys, we discovered that clients responded very favorably to graduate student tutors who had undergone the WCW educational program.

Based on our experiences with and assessment of the WCW's outcomes, we have identified some key benefits from the changes made to our writing center's practices. Our writing center developed strategies to attract, educate, and hire NNES writers and tutors. We have created a writing center culture that values multilingual writing as beneficial to all tutors and clients in our writing center. Although NNES writers may particularly benefit from having other multilingual writers working as tutors, we believe having multilingual writers in the writing center both as clients and consultants can benefit all writers in the center. Rafoth, for example, suggests that hiring experienced NNES writers could challenge a so-called *native speaker fallacy*, a retrieved term from Robert Phillipson representing the misconception that a native speaker is inherently better suited to teach than a non-native speaker, whether educated to do so or not (Phillipson 193). Developing such a writing center culture has created learning opportunities for clients, who can address lexical issues more precisely by en-

gaging in multilingual sessions, but also for graduate and undergraduate consultants—both native English writers and NNES writers—who have the opportunity to learn from each other about writing and language from multicultural perspectives.

Finally, writing center scholarship continues to refine approaches to collaborative learning in tutorials and to reexamine its effectiveness for NNES writers' needs (Rafoth 23). Our writing center has remained adaptive and responsive to local needs and to our institutional demographics, and we continue to develop tutor education programs that address these needs. Since we began the WCW, we have found it a useful opportunity for educating graduate students to work as tutors, and it has continued in our writing center with ongoing curricular adaptations that reflect the needs of tutors and clients alike.



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