

but the problem with imposing it on younger students is that it precludes their own exploration of their ability to figure things out in their own terms. It causes them to imagine that all intellectual writing must necessarily follow strict, preestablished conventions. Surely this isn't true! Surely the best writing results when a writer is able to understand and articulate his or her subjective responses to the world!

Composition theory offers teachers a fourth alternative to what I am calling the chaos in the disciplines. The only anchor, as far as I'm concerned, in a sea of disintegrating disciplines, is the student's own fund of knowledge, opinion and responses. Because there are no longer any universally accepted academic groundrules, the exploratory essay, with its focus on the writer's own thinking, is a very important form of academic discussion. A fundamental assumption of the new paradigm of composition theory, at least as I learned it from Elbow, is that students are more capable and full of ideas than they know themselves to be and that it is up to the teachers to enable them to tap the rich but unarticulated life experience that they already have. We must acknowledge and assert that we do this not only for their performance in the composition classroom but for their performance as students in all the fields they encounter after they leave us. In order for this to happen, though, we have to find a way to influence Linnette's other teachers.

I recently heard a colleague of mine complain that students in a science course for which she taught a writing section did not have time for the self-exploration of journal writing, because they had "crippling" papers to write! Journal writing, and developing the ability to tap one's own responses, is exactly what prevents those papers from crippling students! Freshman composition courses should teach students to use writing to develop an awareness of and a trust in their own thinking processes. Writing instruction that invites students to "give the teacher what he or she wants" undermines such work. Students who get nothing but directive instruction will be handicapped in their process of learning to think for themselves. I speak from experience—my own education, for the most part, taught me to deny and mistrust my own thinking. Like Linnette, I worry that I am missing something in my attitudes about teaching. After talking to people who are convinced that students who write essays that make generalizations about the world are better students, I sometimes ask myself whether what I've gotten from composition theory is illegitimate. Maybe, in answer to Linnette's question, I do have the wrong approach. Maybe I should in fact teach her to do what she expected to do when she came from high school. Maybe I should assign expository topics, teach prose models, and rest assured that I am providing a service by giving students experience in the kind of writing that will be expected from them in the rest of their college careers. But I can't do that. I've seen too many students, like Linnette, who begin college disparaging their own ideas, and come to make radical shifts in their commitment to schoolwork when they realize that their own perspective is legitimate. I wish, though, that I could do something about all those other teachers out there, in other disciplines, who refuse to believe that students have something to say for themselves. Any suggestions?

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PEER TUTORS AS POSTMODERN READERS IN A WRITING CENTER

Margaret Morrison
 University of Texas at Arlington

The bottom line for me as a writing tutor and director of a writing center is that every writer *feel free* to make her or his own meaning. This means that, in interpreting a student's writing, tutors must have a theory of reading that recognizes the dangers of a reader's appropriating the writer's text by projecting or imposing his/her own ideological programs onto the text. The effort to limit projection requires that peer tutors reading students' papers be trained to be as conscious as possible of their own programs or of what Kenneth Burke has called "terministic screens"—the systemic pictures of the world we create derived partly at least from what we value.

Thus, tutors must be trained to avoid occluding projection (a form of "blindness" Marshall Alcorn has spoken of) and to become self-reflectively conscious of their own language systems. In his "pedagogy of knowing," Paulo Freire called this process of becoming conscious of our language systems—e.g., of what, how, and why we write and read—"conscientization," which, in Freire's praxis, combines reflection and action. "Conscientization" and becoming self-reflective about one's own personal language systems is postmodern in the sense that peer tutors learn to foreground the operations of language and understand, for example, that there is no determinate meaning and no "final" closure, the end of a paper always being somewhat arbitrary. These views differ, of course, from modernist new-critical views that a paper is a self-contained product whose form is prescribed and whose meaning is determinate.

The postmodern tutors also learn that the notion of "objectivity" itself is obsolete, that interpersonal transactions and the making of meaning occur in socio-political contexts, and that much of writing and reading occurs in collaboration with others. No one, peer tutors included, most theorists now agree, can be an isolated, distanced "eye" who does not affect and is not affected by texts/persons.

Because writing centers are generally heteroglot social contexts staffed by peer tutors from across disciplines with a diversity of discourses, fortunately, a peer writer can receive a number of different readings of a single text. As a result, peer writers coming to writing centers soon learn how heterogeneous and multiplicitous discourses are in a community of writers. By helping peer writers become aware of and take pleasure in the "various competing discourses that make up their own" communities (Harris, "The Idea" 17), peer tutors and peer writers

together can help one another negotiate hierarchical gaps that might appear in collaborative classroom pedagogy.

Ideally, if trained in "conscientization" and the necessity of heterogeneity, peer tutors and writers might become ethnographers of one another's language use, "researching the ways in which language acquisition constitutes socially specific patterns of talking, knowing and being" (Goleman 133), looking for those "subtle [culturally specific] signals" that lead to "odd misfires" (Feehan 18) in communication, all the while also teaching one another how to become critically conscious of their language use. The peer tutors and writers might, thereby, find ways to move among the conflicting languages with which people conceptualize the world.

Let me review and scrutinize for a moment two of the generally accepted tutoring techniques that are supposed to help peer tutors in writing centers avoid the kind and degree of projection that could discourage heterogeneity in writing/reading: (1) in a tutoring (or conferencing) situation, open-ended questioning prompts students to speak freely about a pending writing project or project in progress; (2) if, like traditional psychoanalytic therapists, the tutor/teacher is an active listener who prods the writer to talk about his/her ongoing writing project but who stays in the background (Brooke's "Subject Supposed to Know," 680), the "objective" tutor/teacher will not really influence that writer's making of meaning—and, essentially, the writer will be left to his/her own devices.

Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith, among others, teach tutors to become critically conscious by training them to use "open-ended questioning": the technique is supposed to help the tutor and the writer focus attention on the writer's text itself. Tutors attempt not to occlude the text or direct or control the "content of [the peer writer's] response" (33) to the tutor's questions. The idea is that the writer will be forced back upon herself to explore freely any topics related to the text-in-progress (without the tutor's "writing" or appropriating the text). "Open-ended questions spur a writer to think independently. They also invite him to talk and write more extensively. A tutor's careless phrasing can restrict not only what the writer discusses but also how much he says" (34). Training in this open-ended questioning seems to help some tutors remember to reflect or mirror what the student says as nearly as possible and not limit the exchange with the writer to yes/no answers that restrict exploration of the writer's subject.

But the method suggests some of the difficulties tutors can run into, too. For example, as the saying goes, the one who asks the questions controls the conversation; psychoanalytic relationships are a case in point. If true, *peer* collaboration or the dialogic exchange of ideas does *not* occur as if between friends of roughly equal ranking, the tendency would be for the tutors to turn into little teachers or authorities. If, however, tutors are conscious of the workings of power relationships (Foucault's "force relations," 92) and work at maintaining a non-hierarchical/non-authoritarian collaboration, both peer writers and tutors can build bridges among discourse communities.

As I have indicated, however, potential dangers do lurk beneath "open-ended questioning," a technique that curiously resembles Donald Murray's conferencing technique of "non-directive feedback." In his conferences, Murray usually asks the student to tell him about the paper, what she likes and does not like, and what she might do to overcome the paper's problems—and that's about it. Robert Brooke claims that Murray makes this work in getting students to revise effectively because a kind of psychoanalytic transference develops that prompts the student

to write. "When the teacher only asks open-ended questions," Brooke maintains,

the writer has to respond by putting words into the teacher's mouth, by anticipating what the teacher would say if she were answering the question. The writer thus responds out of her developing sense of what the authorities "who know" about texts are likely to say about hers: she responds to her projected ideas of what the teacher wants. Non-directive feedback helps facilitate this process of projection and response. (681)

Brooke goes on to liken this non-directive teaching—in which the teacher remains aloof so that transference can occur—to the relationship between the Freudian/Lacanian analysand and analyst. In the latter relationship, the analyst strives for an apparently "objective" and "scientific" relationship with the analysand: the analyst remains aloof and distanced in order to maintain the separation between the subject and the object of focus and scrutiny so that the analyst can help the analysand work through the implications of transference. The analysand, then, projects her personal script—all her conceptual baggage that make up her "undecidable" selves—onto the "Subject Supposed to Know," much as Murray's student projects his conceptual baggage onto Murray then writes the perceived compositions in a paper. The teacher teaches as a kind of movie screen for "imaginary projections," while the student articulates the unconscious until she "produces, not merely repeats, language" (Davis, "Pedagogy" 749).

This is the theory at least. If one looks closely, however, the theory that a subject can be separated from an object not only reflects a patriarchal, hierarchical, master/slave ideology but assumes that selves are autonomous or, like the Cartesian subject, decidable and fixed. In this master/slave scenario, the analysand or the student is subsumed in someone else's (the analyst's or teacher's) "controlled" situation (Murray manipulating the scene in his office). The analysand and the student delude themselves into thinking that the teacher/analyst is a repository of decidable and absolute (already formed) knowledge the student needs to go after. And the analyst/teacher deludes him or herself into thinking that s/he is being objective, when, in the masterly position, s/he is really exercising and imposing power and, thus, probably oppressing the student/analysand.

Like Barthes's "readerly text," which strives to hold "everything . . . together" in a determined, determinate package (a closed text with nothing to tease out), the analyst/non-directive teacher/tutor, then, seems really to proffer syntagmatic coherence while concealing or effacing the fact that s/he is really controlling the play of meaning and encouraging the production of a particular reality through dominant signifying practices. As Barthes suggests, the godlike author (or also analyst/teacher) of this text (or relationship) manages it, however unconsciously, and may, in fact, fear and suppress illogicality and contradiction. Meanwhile, the priestly, passive (hoodwinked) reader (student/analysand) deciphers/consumes the writing/product of the godlike author (or the analyst's/teacher's concealed program) (174). In other words, both analyst/teacher or tutor and analysand/student are deluding themselves—not very healthy, especially if "conscientization," learning, and the construction-destruction-reconstruction of knowledge are the goals.

Something insidious may indeed lurk beneath the relationship Brooke describes and Murray and many traditional analysts act out. For one thing, many language theorists now are suggesting that autonomy and unity of self (as well as determinate meaning)

are largely illusory linguistic constructs: the decideable Cartesian subject viewing a discrete, coherent world. The suggestion now is that texts and selves are not autonomous or substantial ("standing" on something underneath, a foundation or a fixed reference, in Burke's analysis, *Grammar*, Part One, Chapter II) but are differential, decentered, full of multiple meanings, irreducibly plural, inconsistent, contradictory, and, hence, unpredictable and intractable. That is, subjects and texts are not totalizations but are undecideable, involved in a dynamic, intertextual process, all closure (resolution, consensus, identity . . .) being arbitrary and momentary.

From this point of view, the reader is always participating in the writing of the text, and the writer's text (and self/selves) always consists of an intertextual patchwork of other texts.

"The more plural the text," Roland Barthes writes in *S/Z*, the less it is written before I read it; I do not make it undergo a predicative operation, consequent upon its being, an operation known as *reading*, and I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, one which will subsequently deal with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. This "I" which approaches the text is already a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost). (10)

This suggests that the self (tutor/analyst/student/analysand) cannot set itself apart as a whole, self-contained thing because it is a dynamic amalgam of "other selves, voices, experiences" (Harris, "The Plural" 161). "It" is a network "woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages . . . which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony" (Barthes, "From Work" 160, in Harris 161), a stereophony that is not politically innocent but is specific to gender, race, and class and is impacted by them. The more densely layered, rich, and indeterminate the language of this plural text or "I" is, Barthes and Harris seem to claim, the "fuller" one's sense of "it" is.

This profoundly social self (or text) depends on others for its very existence and richness: "languages," Mikhail Bakhtin notes, are juxtaposed, "contradict one another" and are "interrelated dialogically," living, struggling, and evolving "in an environment of social heteroglossia" (292). Selves cannot hope for discrete existences, for "[t]he word in language is half someone else's," Bakhtin continues.

It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that a speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (293-294)

From this perspective, reading and writing can never be "pure" activities—i.e., without distortions, gaps, revisions, and what Harold Bloom calls "misprisions." Reading is composing (Donahue and Quandahl 641). Readers transform texts by "selecting and reordering elements of [them] in new connections of one's own making" (643). Meaning cannot represent a normative ideal, as E. D. Hirsch suggests it must; meaning cannot be self-identical or the same and exactly reproducible, for it is impossible for the self seeing and interpreting (whether peer

tutor or writer, analyst or analysand) to see and interpret without involving herself in that rhetorical process.

With this assumption in mind, who or what determines interpretation? the reader? the text? or both?

If peer tutors review reader-response theory, on the one hand, they will find that David Bleich, Norman Holland, and Stanley Fish seem to agree that the reader controls interpretation, that the words on the page constrain the reader only trivially; the reader is ultimately independent; the subject/object distinction is collapsed entirely. The tutors will find that Michael Riffaterre, Georges Poulet, and Wolfgang Iser, on the other hand, to a lesser or greater degree seem to suggest that the text's features at least prompt certain responses even though the reader plays a role in creating the work's meaning.

Theorists like Burke, Jonathan Cullers, and Marshall Alcorn generally negotiate the ground between the reader/text theoretical poles. They seem to suggest that the "prevailing stories of reading," as Patrocínio Schweikart puts it, "generally vacillate between [these poles]. In fact, those who stress the subjectivity of the reader as against the objectivity of the text ultimately portray the text as determining the responses of the reader" (37). From this viewpoint, to an uncertain degree, the keywords and syntax of the text manipulate even the projective/creative reader, who is finding and filling gaps according to her own interpretative strategies. And as the reader reads, both the reader and the text are revised.

Burke, for instance, as Warnock notes, discusses "'margins of overlap' that allow for writer and reader to coincide." In positing a reading theory, Burke, according to Warnock's reading of him, establishes "dichotomous boundaries," then transcends those boundaries in a third term he calls the "actual reader": [1] the "hysteric" . . . goes to the text for 'medicinal' purposes, and [2] the 'connoisseur,' a person 'will-less,' 'hungerless,' [goes] to art for nothing but art itself. . . . [And (3) the 'actual reader'] is an indeterminate mixture of these two extremes" (Warnock 66-67; from Burke, *Counter-statement* 180). The point seems to be that writers never have full control of their texts because, even if they try to control the degree to which they project themselves, readers can never fully recover authorial intent.

What are the forces operating when a peer tutor reads a peer writer's text and the peer writer expects the peer tutor to respond? In the process, how are reader(s), writer, and text revised? And, in reading peer writers' papers and responding to them by selecting certain questions, summarizing, or commenting, to what degree are peer tutors projecting their own conceptual or ideological/psychological agendas onto the peer writers' texts? Can anyone really limit this projection or must one simply subtly redirect it?

Barbara Johnson suggests that, if we read but once, we read only what we can read and understand; we read ourselves, our own projections (3). We also read selectively; we suppress, and we exclude. As Marshall Alcorn notes, we act narcissistically, partly, he thinks, out of fear of losing something of ourselves. We project our images and stories on other images and others' stories. Is it true that, in one sense at least, the words on the page seem to "mean" only insofar as they are consumed by the projective process" (Holland in Alcorn 141)? Or is it true, as Bleich seems to think, that interpretation is only "motivated resymbolization" (in Alcorn 142)? Both Holland and Bleich seem to indicate that signifiers play little role in announcing meaning but take on meaning through unconscious motives of readers. If this is true, is any peer reader's reading as valid as any other's or as valid as any teacher's?

Alcorn himself argues that the particularity and the materiality of the text's signifiers, i.e., the material words on the page, do things to a reader's projections when readers encounter those signifiers in the text. "Texts are not blank screens" (142) that mirror the projections of the reader (any more than a non-directive teacher like Murray is a blank screen that mirrors his students' projections). According to Alcorn, Bleich would deny that the materiality of the signifier and the "nominal meanings of words" had any significance because "these things cannot 'mean' anything except themselves, and this 'meaning' can never be transferred from one person to another except by repetition of mere dumb signifiers" (Bleich in Alcorn 143). But Alcorn argues that, while the

'material' signifier does not guarantee a stable referential event, . . . [it] does guarantee a stable perceptual event that plays an important role in conscious, unconscious, and narcissistic reading processes. The material signifier offers itself as a criterion for accountability in textual response; readings that fail to encounter the actual signifiers of a text are failures in reading. (142-143)

The phrase Alcorn uses to name the failure of a reader to encounter the particularity and the materiality of the signifier, which he maintains are crucial in the "self's anchoring and its splitting – and its transformation" (144) – is "projective occlusion," or the covering up of the text, the arbitrarily placing of something in the text; it is a kind of blind, imperious projection that seems to avoid any of the signifiers in the text (146).

In contrast, when the reader uses "some *thing* in the text as a stimulus for deriving . . . personal significance" (as when a reader uses literature to embody her own idealizations), Alcorn calls this process "projective idealization." Occlusion, then, actually appears to be a form of resistance (avoidance of signifiers that one perceives as potentially undermining one's values or sense of self), which some commentators see as important to learning and expanding oneself, but only if the resistances are noted and articulated (Davis, "Pedagogy" 749). Resistances recognized as such could help in learning because they imply the existence of another discourse the reader is concealing from herself, one that resists the dominant discourse (Davis, "Freud's" 621). In either occlusion or idealization, according to Alcorn, reading involves projection and is narcissistic; in reading, in other words, readers appropriate texts. But, while the occluding reader avoids the text's signifiers and absconds the text, the idealizing reader encounters the particular and material signifiers and modifies or reworks them for her own use, the projection seeming to be catalyzed and animated by the signifiers' materiality.

If peer tutors were trained not only to be as conscious as possible of their own programs and responses to peer writers' texts but also to know the differences between Alcorn's projective occlusion and projective idealization, the tutors might learn to read peer writers' papers with more care, alert to their own resistances and how the programs of those whose work is before them differ from their own. And, in sharing responsibility for making meaning and in honoring plurality, peers may become more conscious of hidden political agendas and "force relations" and participate more consciously and critically in the continual construction, destruction, and reconstruction of knowledge.

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