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Easier said than done: collaborative pedagogy and its challenges in the Vassar College Writing Center

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Writing Center

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Educational Studies

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INTRODUCTION

The classroom is one of the first places that we learn how to work with other people whether it is following directions, talking about books, or completing a group project. Theories of radical and progressive education criticize the traditional authority which frames teachers as superior to students. Instead, they advocate for pedagogy that treats teachers and students as equals in a democratic setting. This egalitarian environment enables collaboration between teachers and students co-creating knowledge as opposed to teachers bestowing information on passive learners. Moving from theory into practice, I studied one example of a pedagogical space which strives to be collaborative: the Vassar College Writing Center. Writing centers have positioned themselves as egalitarian spaces where peers collaborate on their writing. However, through participant observation and interviews with those working in our Center, I question the extent to which consultants carry a teacher-like authority in consultations as well as whether our work is as collaborative as envisioned by educational theory. The position of the Writing Center within an undergraduate institution complicates the enactment of collaborative pedagogy. Furthermore, the binaries used to describe authority and collaboration erase the nuanced experiences and contexts of individuals who navigate these pedagogical dynamics.

I chose this topic because of my interest in democratic pedagogy and care in student-teacher relationships. Part of what drew me to the education major was the relationships I had with teachers in my private high school. We often hear that small class sizes and close relationships with teachers contribute greatly to academic success. I was curious as to the theory around student-teacher relationships because in my experience, I had found that the dynamics of my relationship with a teacher would change depending on how much time we spent together

and how well we knew each other outside of the classroom. It would typically result in a relationship that was more friendly, less formal, and less hierarchical.

These topics came up in readings by Paulo Freire and Nel Noddings respectively. Paulo Freire discusses the banking method of teaching where students are empty vessels filled with knowledge by teachers as experts (Bartlett, 2005). He focuses on the political implications of this model and the subversive possibility of a collaborative, democratic model. He speaks particularly about empowerment through literacy and its potential for social justice.

On the other hand, Nel Noddings talks about the socioemotional nature of student teacher relationships. She constructs the ethic of care in which the student teacher relationship is modelled off of the parent child relationship. She envisions teachers as adults who unconditionally accept and care for their students in order to help them grow. She discourages the hierarchical structure that positions the teacher as objective evaluator, which she sees as a dehumanization of students. Their common theme of egalitarian, collaborative pedagogy piqued my interest and I started to delve into their literature to find other common ground between the two educators.

To round out my understanding of collaborative, progressive pedagogy, I turned to John Dewey. He frames the egalitarian pedagogical relationship in a classroom that focuses on engagement, individual growth, intellectual independence, and shared sympathies. In his vision, these elements serve to create a robust participatory democracy for the nation.

Literature generated by other writing centers contextualize this study of the Vassar College Writing Center. Writing centers had a remedial reputation as a result of the circumstances of their founding. They shifted to a democratic, collaborative approach in order to

fulfill ideals of inclusivity, a value that is tied with their position as an alternative to the classroom. However, there have been many challenges to the implementation of the collaborative ideal in the writing center context. The literature explores shortcomings of their positionality and ideological frameworks as well as the political implications of collaborative instruction.

With the questions, concepts, and challenges of collaborative theorists and the writing center community in mind, I conducted an ethnographic study of the Vassar College Writing Center over the span of approximately eight weeks. Vassar College is a highly selective, coed liberal arts college with roughly 2,500 students (Admissions at Vassar College). The Vassar College Writing Center is located in the Thompson Library on campus and is a free resource open to all students on an appointment basis to discuss any kind of writing. It is staffed by fellow Vassar students as a paid position and is directed by Prof. Michael Shem*[1]. Over the course of my study, I learned about how those involved in the Center think of and enact collaborative practice and understand the role of the Center as well as theirs individually.

I came to find that there ultimately was not a coherent idea of and guidelines for collaboration in the Writing Center. Instead, these ideals and strategies that are discussed within the staff depend on the perspective and choices of individual consultants. Consultations proved to be incredibly dynamic and nuanced, qualities which are obscured by reductive binaries around what is and is not collaborative. In the bigger picture, the Writing Center lacks a consistent use of its voice throughout the institution, partially because it is not integrated into the school instruction. The Vassar College Writing Center is a pedagogical space rich with potential for collaborative work, as long as consultants support and strive for it.

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[1] An asterisk (*) denotes where a name has been changed to maintain anonymity.

METHODOLOGY

In my literary study of Nel Noddings and Paulo Freire's work on democratic pedagogy, I worked primarily by reading and comparing their work. While reading their work, I considered the different ways they argue for democratic pedagogy and against authoritarian relationships. I traced their arguments and looked for particular points of contention or agreement. I took notes in order to have a clear sense of their reasoning and concepts before I analyzed the two together and tried to put their ideas into conversation.

I selected this method of study for my thesis because it allowed me to spend time with the literature and examine the nuances of both Freire and Noddings' work. My interest was sparked by the concept of democratic pedagogy. Freire's work was more familiar due to past class experiences while I was interested in Noddings because she presents her case for democratic pedagogy from the perspective of care and ethics as opposed to politics and social justice. I was also interested in Noddings' social-emotional approach to understanding student-teacher relationships. Literary comparison is geared toward this type of close study.

This research method was beneficial for the thesis and its findings because literary comparison produced work that is firmly grounded in the writing of both Noddings and Freire. It created a strong foundational understanding of the arguments and ideas before moving on to the comparative analysis.

I have approached the work with a constructivist epistemological perspective where I, as researcher, make meaning of the work. The constructivist perspective says that material gains meaning when people interact with and interpret it (Crotty, 1998). Noddings and Freire's work as theory continues to exist even if it is not being read in that moment but without readers, their

ideas would not enter reality. As untouched written word, I cannot say that I would find their

work meaningful. I agree with the constructivist perspective that says meaning is born when we

read and engage with the work.

Initially, I intended to conduct only a literary comparison between Noddings and Freire

but through this study, I found myself more interested in the criticism levelled against the two for

proposing theory without guidelines for practice. Regarding Freire, there were concerns that his

concepts either did not have enough nuance themselves or lost their nuance through the process

of interpretation and implementation (Bartlett, 2005). Noddings was criticized for her idea of

teachers as one-caring because in her ethic of care, the cared-for is not required to reciprocate.

Critics found this aspect of Noddings' ideal to encourage the exploitation of women's emotional

labor (Hoagland, 1990). Additionally, others rejected Noddings' use of the parent-child

relationship as a model for larger social institutions of care such as schools because it encourages

paternalism where those receiving care would be seen as childish or even incompetent regardless

of age (Monchinski, 2010). Overall, it seemed that these two theorists were limited by their lack

of grounding in reality and practice. Furthermore, while education theory is valuable and

nuanced, we are educated in so many different ways in our lives that conducting exclusively

literary research felt constrained.

While I was studying the literature of Noddings and Freire, I was also conducting an

ethnographic case study of Vassar's Writing Center for my Anthropology of Education seminar

with Prof. Christine Malsbary. I was a new hire in the Center and as a writing consultant, I was

working with fellow undergraduate students across disciplines to discuss their writing

one-on-one. In the past six months as a consultant, I have worked with students at every point in

the writing process from brainstorming to polishing and with a range of writing from application

materials to academic papers to creative pieces. In the application and training processes, the

director had emphasized the collaborative nature of our work as writing consultants. During our

orientation as new hires, we discussed different strategies when consulting and how to move

away from speaking about a student's writing authoritatively. Prof. Michael Shem, our director,

has mentioned on multiple occasions that he does not want us to work as copy editors but rather

as peers with whom students can discuss their writing. This ideological stance as expressed by

our director and the focus of moving away from an authoritative student consultant relationship

tied in well with my interest in the implementation of collaborative pedagogy. During my

ethnographic case study, I primarily relied on participant observation and interviews. For

participant observation, I would sit in the Center during my hours on shift and note the physical

layout, where people were sitting, when people left, and I would try to listen to the conversations

people would have, both with writers and with other consultants. I only conducted three

interviews in the course of the study, two of which were with the director and another with

Sam*. Interviews usually entailed me preparing some open-ended questions to gain a better

sense of the interviewee's perspective. Usually our conversation would spark more questions that

I had not anticipated. Interviews helped to deepen my understanding of the Writing Center and

how other people view it. I decided to shift gears for my thesis and incorporate an ethnographic

study of the Writing Center. My main questions going into this research were how does the

Writing Center discuss and implement collaborative practices? And what challenges do they

face?

Ethnographic research is hugely different from literary research, both in method and in positionality. The practice is described in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, "These two interconnected activities comprise the core of ethnographic research: First-hand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation" (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 1). Ethnography also acknowledges the bias of using a person as the primary research tool; as the experience, field notes, and analysis all originate from the researcher, they are all influenced by their individual perspective and bias. This phenomenon is largely considered contamination in other research disciplines but I regard it as accounting for the inevitable. Furthermore, if the researcher openly discusses and accounts for their views, we can value their unique lens and what it reveals about the social world explored (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

In preparation for the ethnographic work, I conducted what I initially thought of as a second literature review focusing on the scholarship that has come out of writing centers. I paid particular attention to how scholars understood the authority of writing centers; the way they presented themselves as pedagogical spaces; their ideals of interaction and relationships between writers and consultants; and case studies of writing centers staffed by undergraduate students. I knew that the Vassar College Writing Center would most likely have its own practices and ideals but I felt it was important to understand the history of writing centers more generally to gain a sense of the context. Timelines necessitated that I limit the scope of my search to material that I found immediately relevant to my research question in the Vassar College Writing Center.

Participant observation and interviews as research methods were beneficial to the study of democratic pedagogy and collaboration because it added the dimension of practice to the

theory of Noddings and Freire. It created space to explore the alleged shortcomings of Freire and Noddings in particular, and of democratic pedagogy as an ideal. Overall, this focus on the practice of democratic pedagogy would provide a sense of the implications of theory for the learning environments where we attempt to enact them. Furthermore, I was able to gain a sense of the perspectives and experiences of others so I was not limited to my own as a consultant. Ethnography prioritizes members' meanings of their social worlds but it must be noted that these are best discovered and understood from their use in context. As a result, it is not helpful to ask point blank about these meanings in an interview, save to clarify (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). This understanding resonated with me and I tried not to ask such blunt questions. The consultants who agreed to participate in my study had all been working at the Writing Center for longer than I have so it was informative to hear about how their experience has changed over time.

However, ethnographies are typically conducted over several years. Because of the timing of deadlines and the drastic change in my research method, I observed Process, Prose & Pedagogy, consultations, and staff meetings as well as conducted interviews over approximately six weeks. As a result, data collected may not have as much depth or reflect as many changes over time had the study been longer. With these limitations in mind, I do believe that the data presents engaging findings on the Writing Center, its ideals, and their implementation.

Typically, Prof. Michael Shem, our director, has his course Process, Prose & Pedagogy as the prerequisite to applying to be a writing consultant. However, last spring was an exception and I was hired without taking the class. He explained that it was because he had wanted to expand his pool of potential applications from solely the students of Process, Prose & Pedagogy.

Prof. Shem noted that Process, Prose & Pedagogy is different with each iteration based on what interests the students that semester. I sat in on Process, Prose & Pedagogy (PPP) primarily around the team teaching exercise, which Prof. Shem discussed in an interview as a part of the course which strives to prepare students for their potential role as a writing consultant. The assignment was to form groups to present and discuss selections from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. I was able to observe the class meeting when Prof. Shem introduced and explained the assignment, the three team teaching presentations, and a class debrief when they discussed how the projects went. During these observation sessions, I would sit toward the side of the room where I would be out of the way and take notes, either manually in a notebook or on my laptop, which proved to be a necessity since people spoke quickly. After introducing myself to the class my first time observing, I did not speak to the class. From these observations, I was able to gain a better sense of how Prof. Shem trains prospective consultants and talks about writing, rhetoric, and how collaboration fits into these dynamics. I also saw the range of responses and conclusions students drew from the team teaching assignment and how they defined collaboration afterward.

I conducted interviews with Prof. Shem where we discussed his personal view of the Writing Center, its roles and responsibilities, as well as the context of Vassar and academia more generally. He was able to tell me about our Center's history and how it has paralleled national writing center development. In our discussions, we talked about how the team teaching assignment went and what surprised him about it as well as how he found it relates to our work in the Center. Usually, I had questions prepared in advance based off of recent discussions in either PPP or our Writing Center staff meetings. As with most interviews, we touched on other

topics which generated new questions. All of our interviews were audio recorded with consent and later transcribed for analysis.

I also worked with three individual consultants. However, the current staff totals at seventeen consultants so the experiences and opinions of these three participants do not capture those of the entire staff. There was an initial interview with each of the participating consultants one-on-one in a private setting. We discussed their individual approaches to consultation and writing, their experiences with Process, Prose & Pedagogy (PPP), their memories of consultations that have been particularly good or bad, how they see their authority as a writing center consultant, and strategies that they use in consultation. I then would transcribe the audio recordings for analysis. After that, I was able to use our website through which writers make appointments with individual consultants to find writers who were willing to be observed. After explaining the study to the writers and getting their permission for observation and audio recording, I observed the session and later transcribed the audio recording for analysis. I gave the writer a survey that they filled out away from the consultant, as there were questions regarding their satisfaction with the consultation. Once the writer had left, I debriefed the consultant on how they felt it went and if there were any frustrations or surprises. This recording was also transcribed and analyzed. From this work with consultants, I gained a sense of how individuals' understanding of our role as a Writing Center differ and may drift away from theory as they work as consultants over time. I was also able to gain a sense of how they valued PPP in light of their consultant experience. From interviews and observations, I saw how they discussed writing in abstract, general terms and with a specific example of one student's piece. A limitation to this method of observation was that I was unable to observe more consultations so I did not see how

the consultant behaved differently depending on the writer. Furthermore, I was unable to see the full range of writers and issues that may come up in consultation between those that I observed. I was only able to observe when a writer gave permission and was still comfortable participating after I had debriefed them, which may have reduced my pool of participants.

As part of my study, I also observed the optional weekly staff meeting at the Center. There is a small group of consultants who come consistently but Prof. Shem is always there. This semester, there have been a broad range of discussion topics from the Freshman Writing Seminar (FWS) and its assessment, the role of the Writing Center in working with pieces we personally find offensive, the Center's response to anti-black graffiti in the library, strategies for working with non-native English speaking writers, to more casual topics like children's picture books and TV recommendations. These discussions are a space where consultants voice their opinions on our responsibilities as a Writing Center. We have talked about how to navigate the reputation of the Writing Center as part of the institution of white academic English and how we might resist that within the Center's scope. Overall, the staff meetings have been helpful in providing a larger picture of the Writing Center's role at Vassar and in academia that is not as salient in individual consultations. In these meetings, I typically took notes manually that I would later expand on to make field notes.

After accumulating this data, I had to spend time coding the material. Ethnographic coding is a method of processing data that requires reading and re-reading field notes line-by-line to categorize them into themes, transforming the records of personal experience into foundations of interpretation (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). This involved reviewing the material, looking for common ideas and themes which I would compile into an index with page and line numbers

for easy reference. To aid in the writing process, I organized themes around larger ideas that they either discussed or led to, such as authoritative language and expertise in content or rhetoric, both of which were categorized under a larger theme of authority. From this point, I was able to formulate larger observations and arguments about the Writing Center and democratic pedagogy that were rooted in the data.

Once I had coded and analyzed the data, I returned to previous material such as the literature review of Noddings and Freire and the history of writing centers. Because it was impossible to anticipate the data and its findings, I had to tailor these contextual portions to fit the message of the data more closely to create an overall coherent message. I used the literature to frame and analyze the ethnographic material.

FREIRE, NODDINGS, AND DEWEY ON COLLABORATIVE PEDAGOGY

There must be a theoretical understanding of collaborative pedagogy in order to realize the nuance of the concepts and their practice. By examining the theories of democratic student-teacher relationships, we realize the different purposes for which they were envisioned, such as political engagement or moral education. Through criticism, we see the shortcomings of their frameworks.

Both Nel Noddings and Paulo Freire advocate for egalitarian relationships between students and teachers but from frameworks rooted in feminist philosophy and critical pedagogy respectively. John Dewey is also considered one of the primary theorists associated with progressive, collaborative pedagogy and approached it from a perspective of shaping a participatory democracy. Freire, Noddings, and Dewey all strive to change the current state of education and broader society. Noddings' vision is for a world that is more caring and focuses on the interpersonal before generalizing to broader social and institutional changes. Freire looks at political injustice and subjugation and narrows his lens to examine pedagogical relationships that work toward democracy. Dewey strives to engage students in democratic learning environments where they learn how to think critically as citizens. All frameworks have been praised but have also received criticism. Finally, I will discuss the implications these thinkers and their critics have for my thesis.

Freire on Pedagogical Relationships

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and author who lived from 1921 to 1997. He is credited with the founding of critical pedagogy. He worked primarily with teaching literacy which was a voting requirement for Brazil at the time (Freire Institute). He subsequently

considered literacy and education a political tool. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* describes his vision for a radical education that strives to humanize its students and teachers. He argues that dehumanization is not a human quality but rather the result of oppressive systems (Freire, 2005). The banking method of education is defined as when the teacher is seen as owning the knowledge, which subsequently grants them the authority to deposit it in students (Bartlett, 2005). Freire considers this an oppressive form of education and works to create a liberating alternative. Education has been used by oppressors to shape the consciousness of the oppressed in order to limit them, therefore it must be taken back and used to work toward liberation. He argues that education is a tool for indoctrinating the oppressed into the world of oppression (Freire, 2005) He describes his pedagogy of the oppressed as "the pedagogy of the people engaged in the fight for their own liberation" (Freire, 2005, p. 53).

Freire also notes the distinction between systematic education, which only political power can change, and educational projects, which are taken up with the oppressed in the process of organizing them to gain the political power necessary for their liberation. One of the most important concepts Freire introduces in this framework is praxis, which he describes as a combination of reflection and action. Freire proposes a problem-solving education which requires constant linking between topics of study and its effect on people and their reality (Freire, 2005). He wanted education to be accessible, relevant, and grounded in the reality of its students.

Another component of the pedagogy of the oppressed is dialogue, which is a facet of the egalitarian student-teacher relationship. Dialogue is the act of people coming together to understand their reality and must be founded on love. Freire also noted that the process of dialogue is dynamic where the roles of participants shift. Because dialogue and critical pedagogy

are focused on the process, they take attention away from preconceived goals and lessons. By focusing on process and the participants, critical pedagogy combats the banking method, where the lesson and the teacher are prioritized. Additionally, it requires critical awareness of one's context. The oppressed require an awareness of themselves as the subject of transformation in addition to the structures they strive to change (Freire, 2005).

In regards to pedagogical relationships, Freire says that the pedagogy of the oppressed must be humanizing and as a result, it must use co-intentional pedagogy where both teachers and students are unveiling reality, examining it critically, and re-creating that knowledge. This process ensures that the oppressed are actively committed to and involved in their liberation via education. The teacher in this dynamic must trust the students and believe in their abilities and perceptions. As opposed to the banking method where students are meant to be transformed, in the pedagogy of the oppressed, the object of transformation is reality (Freire, 2005). Students and teachers collaborate in this work as equals because the dialogue demands a horizontal relationship between participants (Monchinski, 2010a). Freire also noted that the oppressed must have a reflective role in their liberation, otherwise they are objectified by those who are supposedly aiding them. This violation of the pedagogy is rooted in a lack of the mutuality Freire specified for student-teacher relationships. Freire maintains that student and teacher are separate roles but they do not require antagonism and should maintain the cooperative model. The teacher may be traditionally viewed as the leader but Freire required that they be radically democratic (Monchinski, 2010).

Responses to Freire

Freire's overall theory and its guidelines for pedagogical relationships have been criticized for his use of a singular reality of the oppressed; claiming to prioritize popular knowledge while also labelling it as a false consciousness; the maintenance of teachers' directive roles within an allegedly egalitarian relationship; use of binaries; and lack of instruction for implementation, which has allowed the oppressive structures to remain in classrooms with a new name. Bartlett and Schugurensky criticize Freire's recognition of only a singular reality of the oppressed, which subsequently limits the way in which they may enact and experience oppression (Bartlett, 2005; Schugurensky, 1998). Freire's work fails to take into account that individuals can be oppressed in one regard, such as gender, while being an oppressor in another, such as race. An intersectional understanding of oppression creates multiple realities. Bartlett also disagrees with Freire's point that the students' reality, which the pedagogy of the oppressed claims to respect, is actually a false consciousness of which teachers must relieve students. This assumption is based on the dichotomy Freire creates between the educated knowledge of the teachers and the personal, experiential knowledge of the students as distinct entities. To address this shortcoming, Bartlett suggests that Freire modify his understanding of power to move it beyond the binaries of oppressed and oppressor, teacher and student. Rather, power must be understood as working through individuals, not labels or groups (Bartlett, 2005). Schugurensky traces Freire's use of binaries in this theory to his background in Hegelian dialectics but still argues that their use does not account for the nuance of maintaining anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist stances in the real world (Schugurensky, 1998). Freire did grow to address this shortcoming when he revisited *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

This distinction between the knowledge of students and of teachers severely underestimates the abilities and expertise of the oppressed. When Freire argues that students must realize the reality of teachers, there is a patronizing assumption that the students are not more informed on certain things than their teachers. Freire modified his framework by saying that within this pedagogy, teachers ought to accept that they do not know everything and that students ought to believe that they are not ignorant of everything (Schugurensky, 1998). As for the prioritization of local, popular knowledge, Freire has made this idea of the local too narrow and has failed to consider its broader reach (Bartlett, 2005). Framing the teacher who learns the popular reality of students as egalitarian is false because it is done only so that the teacher can more efficiently teach the students their own reality as an authority figure (Ellsworth, 1989).

Schugurensky also questions the possibility of a true egalitarian pedagogical relationship when the teacher is directing students to a predetermined goal. Freire responded to this critique by saying that due to education's political nature, it is impossible for a teacher not to take a directive role but an authoritarian one ought to be avoided. Schugurensky maintains that classroom democracy and the directive nature of the teacher may be incompatible (Schugurensky, 1998). On the issue of direction and the assumption of the teacher knowing best, Ellsworth criticizes Freire for failing to acknowledge the paternalistic nature at the foundation of all education (Ellsworth, 1989). Critics locate an issue with a teacher's goal and the authority it assumes.

Freire was also criticized for creating a theory without much concrete advice on how to implement it. In response, Freire said that he refused to provide any how-to because he wanted

teachers to be creative in how they implemented it in their particular contexts (Schugurensky, 1998).

Due to the vague nature of the theory behind critical pedagogy, Ellsworth argues that when scholars use it in their research, they reference the concepts with which it is associated as opposed to identifying it within their practice. By leaning into abstraction, their critical pedagogy loses its context and its political implications (Ellsworth, 1989). She first discusses the concept of dialogue, a fundamental component to Freire's work, and takes issue with its assumption of a rational discussion between agents. She views the rational as a quality that has positioned itself in direct opposition with women, people of color, and all who fall into the Other. This effect is due in part to the Enlightenment era's idea of rationality that viewed knowledge as external, assessable fact. As a result, treating a rational discussion as a space for collaborative discussion masks its ability to control voice and the power to speak. It also erases the notion that rationalism has been shaped to support forms of oppression such as racism, colonialism, and sexism. Additionally, student empowerment and resistance is defined in broad, humanist terms so that it is impossible to determine exactly *what* they are fighting against within critical pedagogy. Because teachers have not addressed the imbalance of institutional power in relationships with students, dialogue and empowerment serve to give the appearance of classroom democracy while the underlying authority remains in tact (Ellsworth, 1989).

However, criticism is welcomed in Freire's concepts and frameworks because in his life, he never considered his work to be done and instead wanted to constantly revise and improve his model (Monchinski, 2010a). Instead of regarding schools and pedagogical relationships as binary

as Freire's criticism dictates, some have used his framework to understand the dynamic growth, struggle, and limitations of democratic learning spaces (Hantzopoulos, 2015).

Nel Noddings on Pedagogical Relationships

Nel Noddings, born in 1929, has spent much of her career focused on moral education and care in schools. She teaches at Stanford University but originally studied mathematics before earning a doctorate in educational philosophy. She sees caring as both an educational goal and a foundational part of schooling (Smith, 2016). In order to understand Nel Noddings' ideas about pedagogical relationships, familiarity with her concept of the ethic of care is necessary. One of the biggest distinctions about the ethic of care as a philosophy is that it is a method of morality based in concrete reality which actively rejects abstraction. Caring is specified as a sense of engrossment and receptivity (Noddings, 1984). The ethic of care is focused on one-on-one relationships with a one-caring and a cared-for. Noddings separates the ethic of care into the components of modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling is enacting the ideal of the ethic of care and its guidelines for relationships in reality. Dialogue is the way in which one engages and displays care and engrossment. Practice is the attempt to implement care and to reflect on those trials. The final component is confirmation, which is the recognition of the best in those we encounter, which requires trust and continuity in the caring relationship. Noddings also acknowledges the importance of acknowledging the other in a way that recognizes and respects their ideal as well (Noddings, 1995).

Another important aspect of the ethic of care is that the one-caring does not strive to change behavior but rather relieve suffering on the part of the cared-for. They engross all of their abilities, emotional and rational, in service of the cared-for. The ethic of care requires receptivity

of the one-caring so that they can respond to the presence of the one-caring. Receptivity marks the completion of a caring relationship. Noddings also believes that it is impossible to truly care for everyone because the ethic of care requires a personal relationship and by this logic, it is also impossible for institutions to be ethical (Noddings, 1984).

Noddings does not see a role for universalizing rules and procedures in the ethic of care because in order to universalize, there must be common factors between all situations where it is applied. She also takes great pains to distinguish the ethic of care from ethics of principle, which she characterizes as a masculine ethic because it focuses on an abstract higher power. However, she argues that this does not place the ethic of care in the world of relativism because of the one universal principle that is at its root: sustaining the caring relationship. It is specified that the ethic of care is not interested in the categories of right and wrong but rather in moral sensitivity and perception (Noddings, 1984).

Regarding the ethic of care and its views on education and pedagogical relationships, Noddings specifies that moral education is a community-wide enterprise and must be approached holistically. She also posits that it demands schools and teachers to forge an education that works to support the caring ethical ideal. In line with caring's ideas about morality, Noddings believes that caring for students is the first priority of both parents and schools. She demands that rationality, which is prioritized by masculine philosophies of principle, must serve a higher purpose, which she believes ought to be care. However, anticipating criticism of this vision, Noddings also notes that this does not mean that schools should completely abandon the intellectual for the emotional but rather create space for emotion in schools that previously prioritized objectivity. It is proposed that students are made to feel that they are considered more

important in schools than their subject matter. For Noddings, this means that the attitudes of students should be noted by the school, which would then adjust the material and support the efforts of students according to their needs. As for the roles within the ethic of care, Noddings sees the teacher as the one-caring. She requires a commitment to the student, which includes looking at the subject material alongside the student in order to understand their perception of it and adjust lessons appropriately. Already, this high expectation would produce criticism but Noddings posits that while this kind of pedagogical relationship is ideal, this deep personal connection is not attainable in many classrooms. Therefore, it is expected that teachers be totally present in receiving each student when they address you (Noddings, 1984).

Noddings discusses the three ways to nurture the ethical ideal of caring: dialogue, practice, and confirmation. First, for dialogue to be real, discussion must be truly open to anything students would like. A true dialogue establishes teachers and their students as cooperative educators because of the format's democratic nature. Toward this goal of dialogue, Noddings also proposes that teachers become advisors and counselors in their academic fields so that students who are similarly interested have access to them to discuss even if not their formal teacher (Noddings, 1984).

The maintenance of the ethic of care in schools requires that students become apprentices of care. Noddings specifies that this means students should learn to appreciate and respect the range of human abilities and that the school must foster a safe environment for student exploration. In order to create this kind of supportive environment, she proposes that schools do away with junior high school and instead group students by kindergarten through seventh grade and eighth through twelfth grade in order to maximize time to participate and cultivate a sense of

belonging in each school. In order to practice care, students would also be continually involved in community service projects to develop the skill (Noddings, 1984).

As for confirmation, Noddings says that this is when we attribute the best motivation to the cared-for which subsequently shows them a vision of themselves that may be better than evidenced by their actions. As with all things in relationships rooted in care, this requires deep personal relationships. Therefore, it is proposed that contact between students and teachers must be extended, resulting in support for smaller schools, the same pedagogical pairings over several academic periods, and teachers instructing on more than one subject so that there can be increased exposure to that teacher (Noddings, 1984). By carving out more time for students to remain with the same teacher, they should develop a stronger relationship where confirmation can occur, which should in turn support the ethical ideal of caring.

However, it must be noted that Noddings said that institutions cannot be ethical within her framework because they cannot truly care. She does not say that schools are any different in this regard. Instead, she says that the structure of the school as an institution can be altered so that true care can develop between individuals within the institution. So while schools as institutions cannot care, we can design them to support care (Noddings, 1984). For example, an entire school cannot care for its students as an institution because not all of its participants may know each other to the extent necessary to develop a caring bond. However, the school can work to maintain a staff of individuals with ample opportunities to forge long-term, loving relationships with those students.

Teaching as a profession must also change in order to meet Noddings' vision of care. One of her biggest qualms with the current role of teachers is grading. She views it as a violation of

the caring relationship because the teacher must report their students' progress and performance to outside authorities in an objective manner. Noddings sees objectivity as impossible and instead views the work of a caring relationship as highly subjective. Engaging with the student in their work and understanding their perspective requires that the one-caring see them as human and engage them in order to be successful. Making an objective assessment in the form of grading pulls the teacher out of this relationship and asks them to objectify the student and their work (Noddings, 1984).

Other changes in the teaching profession which Noddings requires in order to fulfill the ethic of care are the elimination of specialized language that divides teachers from other educators in the community, reduction of specialization that limits contact with pupils, and an increase in a caring attitude. The division between teachers and community educators prohibits the development and implementation of a cohesive moral education in the community. Noddings also wants there to be teacher apprenticeships over the course of three years when a master teacher would show an apprentice the practice of care. Reflecting the democratic nature of dialogue between teachers and students, there would also be an elimination of hierarchies of responsibility. Instead, there would be circles and chains, where responsibility is shared reciprocally among members of a community and is shifted from person to person. Particularly for cycles of responsibility, Noddings believes that they would create opportunities for teachers to change their role and gain a sense of the community's needs from a different perspective. For example, a teacher would spend some time in the classroom and then spend the next year as an administrator. Noddings posits that this would break the flat nature of a teaching career where one typically stays in the classroom and remains in the same role for many years. She

acknowledges the critique that specialization increases efficiency but she says that this does not apply to institutions that strive for caring (Noddings, 1984).

Responses to Noddings

Noddings' vision for the ethic of care and its role in schools has received criticism for enabling the cared-for and nurturing incompetency; for the relational definition of the self that creates opportunity for exploitation; for a masculinist, anti-radical framework; for ignoring the roles of care as entrenched in gender roles; and for failing to challenge the unacknowledged emotional labor taken on by women. Hoagland criticizes the meager requirements of the cared-for within the framework and says that because they are not required to reciprocate, the relationship is one way and therefore diminished. She goes on to criticize Noddings' parental model because the goal of the one-caring in these instances is to slowly decrease the dependency of the cared-for so that they are no longer needed in the same way. Therefore, the model and subsequently the ethic it supports are both transitory, which undermines the requirement of confirmation. Any attempt to maintain this relationship on a more long term basis only encourages incompetency on the part of the cared-for (Hoagland, 1990). This sustained dependency is also attributed to Noddings' basis of the mother-child relationship and becomes particularly dangerous in a broader public sphere, where it would encourage paternalism on part of those in the caring role (Monchinski, 2010).

Touching on Noddings' discussion of the feminine nature of the ethic of care, Hoagland is also skeptical of the one-caring modeling the values of care for the cared-for, who would ideally go on to become the one-caring in future relationships. Instead, she sees this dynamic as part of the socialization of gender. She posits that girls learn to be one-caring because of the

mutual gender identity with their mother, the caring figure to whom Noddings consistently refers

back. Meanwhile, boys learn to associate women with care and expect it from other women in

their lives instead of learning the behavior of care to implement themselves (Hoagland, 1990).

Furthermore, Hoagland examines the relation aspect of the ethic of care and its

implications for the self. She says that the purely relational nature of the ethic means that the self

no longer exists and one can only be moral in working with and supporting others in the role of

one-caring. The moral person in this framework is always directed by the needs of another,

which Hoagland argues bears a close resemblance to dynamics of exploitation. Hoagland

criticizes Noddings' point that withdrawing from a caring relationship tarnishes the ideal of the

ethic of care. Hoagland interrogates this notion by asking about instances when removing oneself

from a relationship is the only way to help instead of enable (Hoagland, 1990). This touches on

Noddings' own reservation with this point where she noted that in some instances, the tolerance

and non-judgmental nature of an ethic of care can delay the recognition of evil in another

(Noddings, 1984). However, if withdrawal is done to help and alleviate suffering of the cared-for

in the long run, then it may not have as detrimental of an effect on the ethical ideal.

Noddings is also critiqued for the ethic of care from the standpoint of emotional labor and

its lack of recognition. Hoagland says that the pursuit of the feminine ideal of unconditional love

results in oppression (Hoagland, 1990). Herd says that Noddings fails to sufficiently discuss

gender especially when it comes to the consequences that the ethic of care has for public policy.

She questions the growth of a caring social policy when women, who are considered to be

naturally adept at caring do so in positions of relatively low power, are rarely, if ever,

acknowledged and appreciated (Herd, 2002). Overall, Noddings' endorsement of care does not

recognize the current state of care as ignored and unrewarded emotional labor. Monchinski further criticizes the absence of emotional labor and touches on Hoagland's critique of caring as a part of feminine socialized behavior. He notes that Noddings assumes caring is more natural for women, which ignores Hoagland's critique. This assumption further deprives women of credit for the care that they do because it is assumed that it is their predisposition or a natural expression (Monchinski, 2010).

Similar to this, Hoagland expresses concern about the non-judgmental analysis done by the one-caring and posits that it does not support an awareness of the situation. Additionally, because the framework maintains the division of masculine and feminine, which is a masculinist separation, the concepts are masculinist themselves and are subsequently anti-radical (Hoagland, 1990).

Hoagland also writes that it is unacceptable for care to be insular or to ignore the social and political context surrounding it. She goes on to argue that it is insufficient because it does not take into account those outside of an immediate personal relationship, such as the proximate stranger, the proximate intimate, and the distant stranger. By not including them, the ethic of care ignores the effects we have on their lives. Hoagland rejects Noddings ideal of caring in favor of a care that critically examines and challenges inequalities (Hoagland, 1990).

Noddings criticizes the justice ethic as a masculine ethic of principle that encourages abstraction and objectivity (Noddings, 1984). However, Monchinski sees this as a critique relevant to the ethic of care as well. Noddings calls the justice ethic a social construct while, Monchinski notes, failing to recognize the feminine ethic of care as a social construct in the same

sense. He also criticizes Noddings' generalization of the mother's experience into that of all women because not all women are or strive to be mothers (Monchinski, 2010).

Dewey on Pedagogical Relationships

A major influencer of progressive education was John Dewey. Dewey created a model of education that promised to engage students in meaningful learning by drawing on their individual interests and daily lives in curricula. Additionally, schools would encourage moral and intellectual autonomy among students and classrooms would engage in joint reflective inquiry between teacher and students. From this perspective of valuing autonomy, traditional authority was thought to stymie independence and was not looked upon favorably (Pace & Hemmings, 2007). In a paper on authoritarianism and education, Romanish argues that freedom as understood by John Dewey is not achieved by eliminating external authority and passively allowing social progress to take the reins but by fostering an obligation in schools to create democratic settings in which students can develop intellectual independence (Romanish, 1995). In order to create space for the individualism of the student, Dewey believed that schools needed to be flexible and allow room for growth. He also noted that in every aspect of life, our society encourages freedom and individual initiative except for in schools where we expected to be obedient to an external authority (Dewey, 1903). Dewey's framework is a model of collaborative pedagogy because it is centered on students and their growth and engagement instead of the teacher's authority.

Dewey saw intellectual independence as a foundation for participatory democracy. Democracy in his view is characterized by the presence of one's voice in the goals and conditions of their work (Dewey, 1903). Dewey was interested in the social function of schools.

He saw schools as a vital means to strengthen democracy. However, for Dewey democracy was not just about voting rights but also about a larger world view because he believed that social issues require shared social understanding and sympathies. One of the reasons Dewey saw the school as the social center was that previous forms of social control, such as the church, were increasingly relaxed in his lifetime. As a social center, schools would compensate for this slack social discipline. Schools were also the place where people would come together in intellectual discourse through which they would deepen mutual empathy and understanding (Dewey, 1902). Schools educated children, future citizens, in the issues of the nation and helped them cultivate a national connection by way of pathos, which Dewey believed would result in a stronger participatory democracy.

Responses to Dewey

Dewey's understanding of collaboration in schools has come under criticism similar to that of Noddings and Freire; his framework is seen as too vague, rendering it either impossible to implement or vulnerable to authoritarian manipulation. Romanish notes that the power vacuum created by Dewey's unclear framework is dependent on its context, which makes it more nuanced but not impenetrable. The Illinois revisionists saw Dewey's model for schools and prioritization of scientific inquiry as a way to solidify the power of the professional middle class. Because Dewey charged teachers with imparting national goals to their students, the revisionists accused him of passing off an authoritarian, nationalist ideology as democratic pedagogy. John Patrick Diggins, another prominent critic of Dewey, was concerned with how to implement Dewey's frameworks of authority and educational goals as they were based on personal

experiences, the lessons of which are only realized after the fact. Diggins found that this issue left those seeking to follow Dewey's guidelines with ideals but without clear steps to take.

Romanish claims that the aim of education in Dewey's framework is context-driven and lacking an external authority and a guiding principle, making it unstable. This vacuum creates an opportunity for authoritarianism to intrude despite the ideological opposition to it. This vague outline means that the freedom that Dewey's education allegedly strives for is similarly unclear. However, Romanish argues that Dewey's concept of freedom is not so simple and rather is determined by the way authority is defined, the ends prioritized by the particular context, how authority and goals are established, as well as who is included in their discussion and enactment (Romanish, 1995).

As with many theorists, Dewey is criticized for the vague gaps in his framework. Of particular relevance is the dispute around his idea of authority. There are two groups who have debated it: the Illinois revisionists and John Patrick Diggins. The Illinois revisionists speculated that the authority Dewey envisioned was that of a professional middle class, to which Dewey also belonged. They believed that Dewey's framework would support the rise of this class who would maintain power by generating scientific, rational data which Dewey praised as the mechanisms for social progress. The revisionists saw Dewey's unclear concept of authority as ideologically enabling a power play by intellectuals. Part of this was Dewey's inclusion in a movement of pragmatism, the views of which some interpreted as advocating for an increasingly authoritarian government. In Dewey's framework, the main driver of progress was scientific inquiry, which is usually generated by those with credentials from educational institutions. This institutional endorsement would legitimize these experts and grant them the authority to change

society. However, those outside of this professional middle class saw these experts as only engaging other similarly credentialed people when deciding how to change society as opposed to it being a democratic process that engaged citizens, credentialed and not. Critics saw Dewey's support for scientific progress and unclear ideas of authority to advocate for a society professionally managed by a group of educationally credentialed experts. His advocation for progress and scientific inquiry in schools was seen as a move that would only further the influence of the professional class, who would then be tasked with shaping the thought and character of the nation's youngest citizens (Johnston, 2001).

On a classroom level, the inculcation of national values as the educational goal actually pushes teachers to be authoritarian despite Dewey's ideal of a participatory democracy. This has resulted in critics calling teachers operating within Dewey's framework "engineers and manipulators of consent" because they create authoritarian classrooms under the guise of a democratic goal (Johnston, 2001, p. 2). In response to the criticism that experts are engineering society, Johnston posits that Dewey might rebut by noting that the professional class provides data to the public upon which to make decisions (Johnston, 2001). Illinois revisionists argue that Dewey's unclear definition of authority acts as a way in which the professional middle class can solidify influence over the nation using so-called national goals and scientific inquiry.

While the Illinois revisionists saw Dewey's vague description of authority as a grab for power, John Patrick Diggins criticized its obscurity for leaving those striving to follow his model without a guide. In removing theory of an external authority, Dewey said that the experiences of the individual are the authority both on democracy and the classroom. This means that authority is dependent on the individual's cognitive and decision-making abilities. Diggins criticizes

Dewey from the viewpoint that we cannot weigh our actions without an external authority that is stable and reliable, which are criteria that individual experiences do not fulfill. This is concerning when we come to the classroom, where Dewey refuses to set up consistent educational aims, instead deferring to the social context and needs of the classroom. Diggins argues that similarly to how individual experience is not helpful when making choices as a person, without clear educational goals within the framework, we cannot assess educational values. Subsequently, Dewey's philosophy of authority is dominated by intellectual and reflective experience, both of which only manifest in hindsight. Dewey may rebut the issue of experience valuable only in hindsight by noting that intellectual inquiry and experience is communal because we may learn from each other. Johnston goes on to say that in Dewey's framework, the authority lies within the scientific inquiry itself until it is debunked or questioned by other inquiry (Johnston, 2001). However, this rebuttal and that for the Illinois revisionists fail to take into account that inquiry, scientific and otherwise, is developed and enacted by people with their own biases and self-interests. Vesting authority in a social process does not protect it from abuse of power. This abuse is an even greater threat when frameworks are loosely defined and misdirected, for which Dewey's framework is at risk.

Between Noddings, Freire, and Dewey, we have a broad range of collaboration, how it works, and what purpose it serves. They all agree that teachers and students should see each other as equals. While Freire and Dewey consider collaborative learning as part of a political vision, Noddings thinks of it in terms of the socioemotional component of student-teacher relationships. She considers the primary goal of the collaborative, pedagogical relationship to be the fulfillment of the student's needs as the one cared-for. On the other hand, Freire sees

democratic pedagogy in terms of anti-oppression work and Dewey sees it as a tool to create a better, participatory democracy. However, all three are criticized for the lack of attention paid to the practice of their theory. A common qualm is that the vagueness of their frameworks can easily serve as a vehicle for oppression under the guise of democracy and collaboration.

Influence

Examining the work done by Freire and Noddings on pedagogical relationships and why they should be egalitarian has been engaging but the criticism both have received has made me consider how these educational theories are put into practice. I am curious as to the implementation of these theories in pedagogical spaces such as the Writing Center as well as the challenges of their practice. Upon learning that the Vassar College Writing Center prioritizes and values collaborative dialogue, I decided to use Noddings and Freire's literature on democratic pedagogy as part of a framework for an ethnographically inspired case study of the Center. To gain a fuller sense of the theory behind democratic pedagogy, I studied John Dewey. With these theorists in mind, I examined the nature of the collaboration that occurs within consultations and the Writing Center more generally. As with the theorists, my study sparked questions regarding collaboration, authority, and the directive role. I found echoes of the criticism against the theorists in the challenges of collaboration in the Writing Center, such as the maintenance of authoritative power under the guise of collaborative work. But before discussing the study and its findings, there is a substantial body of literature from the broader community of writing center directors and scholars that speaks to similar challenges in their experience.

ON WRITING CENTERS

      In the scholarship on writing centers, there are many questions of how they have changed since the creation of the first writing center in the 1970's, which served as an alternative instructional resource for students who felt alienated in large classrooms. Rooted in acknowledging the varied needs of individual students, writing centers had to work to overcome their reputation as remedial spaces while remaining inclusive. Writing centers have struggled with their treatment as supplemental resources, which has prevented their integration into institutional writing instruction. Writing center scholars have criticized the rhetoric of collaboration in the community for creating a binary of the collaborative and the non-collaborative. Other critics have taken issue with how the ideology of writing centers is stunted by the authoritative practices of writing consultants. Examining studies conducted in writing centers on collaboration and consultation reflects the nuance required to implement ideals of democratic education in this particular pedagogical context.

History of Writing Centers

      According to Kenneth Bruffee, the focus on collaborative teaching in the American college context was spurred by the change to open admissions in the early 1970's. As a result of less restrictive admissions criteria, incoming students were less prepared for and unfamiliar with the college environment. When faculty tried to offer additional help to students, undergraduates would not take up the offer, citing that the help was merely an extension of the classroom work with which they were struggling in the first place. Faculty saw a need for an alternative to the typical classroom environment that alienated students and found that peer tutoring was a practice that could be institutionalized with relative ease (Bruffee, 1984). Bruffee himself had firsthand

experience with this growth period because in September 1970 he was made the head of

Freshman English at Brooklyn College following the change to open admissions. He created a

group with other directors of Freshman English within CUNY schools in order to figure out how

to meet the needs of the open admissions students. While visiting classrooms, Bruffee also found

that lectures were not as effective and noted that the political bent of campus politics at the time

emphasized questioning authority. In 1972, Bruffee published the first peer tutoring handbook, *A

Short Course in Writing* and in 1979, he helped found the Brooklyn College Institute for

Training Peer Tutors (Hawkes, 2008). In his reflection on collaborative learning within writing

centers and the broader college context, Bruffee writes that it is not new in the professional

world but it is in college classrooms, which emphasize an individualistic approach (Bruffee,

1984).

Positionality of Writing Centers

In 1980, the Writing Center Journal released its first issue and in its statement from the

editors, they said that the journal was established in order to move past the common perception

of writing centers as remedial spaces (Brannon & North, 1980). This impression was most likely

a result of the causation between the rise of unprepared students and the establishment of

undergraduate writing centers. Harris argues that writing centers need to create a framework of

practice in order to evolve past being seen as a remedial group (Harris, 1982). It was noted that

writing centers were not a fully integrated part of English composition as a discipline (Ede,

1989). Additionally writing centers have to constantly fight for more resources from their

administrations. Their commitment to collaborative consultation is challenged by administrative

preference for the factory model which is authoritative and takes less time but does not help

writers improve beyond one piece of writing because the method is considered cheap and efficient (Moseley, 1984). Towards the end of 2016, the International Writing Center Association, which was originally the National Writing Centers Association established in 1983, released a statement that detailed their commitment "civil discourse, inclusive language, and collaborative practice." (IWCA Web Editor, 2016)

Theory and Ideology of Writing Centers

As a voice for the writing center community, the IWCA still maintains that they support democratic education and collaboration (IWCA Web Editor, 2016). Writing centers view composition as a process and strive to center the students (Brannon & North, 1980). In a study of sociolinguistics among writing center peer tutors, Jacoby found that a peer tutor's effectiveness did not rely on being an expert writer. However, peer tutors were in a liminal space between teacher and student because their position as a tutor lent them authority. The belief that writing centers serve as an alternative to the classroom instead of an extension of it, an idea that harkens back to their founding at Brooklyn College, made peer tutors who relied on the use of the authoritative position of teacher problematic. Jacoby encourages creating awareness among peer tutors of how the authoritative position alienates writers and discussing the interpersonal communication in peer tutor training. Hopefully the language and practices of peer tutors will then be more compatible with the broader instructional goals of writing centers (Jacoby, 1983). Writing centers try to focus on the workshop model, which emphasizes discussion of writing so that writers can improve their technique beyond a single essay. The opposite is the factory model where the consultant corrects all of the flaws in an essay, thus producing a perfect product but not necessarily helping the writer to understand and correct their own errors (Moseley, 1984).

The workshop model is much more collaborative than the factory model but as with all collaborative work, it requires that the teacher give up their status as the sole expert in the room in order for equal collaboration to take place (Gitterman, 2008). Others say that a writing center is at its most effective when it is truly collaborative, meaning that the boundary between tutor and tutee is blurred and both are learning from each other as opposed to solely the tutee learning from an authoritative tutor (Behm, 198). Even though the community of writing centers prioritizes collaborative approaches, their conceptions are varied and nuanced.

Ede posits that writing centers are subversive because they approach writing as a social act which clashes with the traditional academic approach of writing as a solitary endeavor (Ede, 1989). Bruffee argues that the individualistic understanding of academia is rooted in an understanding of knowledge as possessed and used by an individual instead of knowledge as socially generated and sustained. He sees collaboration as an approach to writing that changes its social context because it turns the process into a conversation. Furthermore, he sees education as learning how to join the conversation that creates knowledge instead of trying to accrue an arsenal of facts. From this perspective, education and collaboration show us that we have agency in creating knowledge and can question that which preceded us and those who declared it fact. In this framework, the authority of teachers is rooted in their membership to a community of knowledge that is not seen as infallible (Bruffee, 1984).

Petit discusses the traditional writing center where the tutor is positioned as an institutional authority on academic writing. Petit notes that this traditional center is framed as dystopic within the writing center community. Writing centers have labelled themselves as romantic or collaborative but despite variation in these declarations, their common thread is that

they see themselves in opposition to the dystopian, traditional writing center. Petit says expresses concern that creating definitions of ideal and dystopic, of writing clinic and writing center, neglects the fact that multiple ideologies exist in a space simultaneously. Furthermore, sticking to these labels constrains the way we talk about writing centers. By declaring that a writing center follows only one pedagogical perspective, consultants' options are limited and they may become frustrated. Instead, Petit sees the ambiguity of writing centers and their ideology as a potential site of growth. By dividing pedagogical approaches into utopian collaboration versus dystopic authority, writing center consultants fall into binary thinking, which resembles the criticism against Paulo Freire for dialectical categories of oppressed and oppressor (Schugurensky, 1998; Bartlett, 2005). This understanding of writing centers requires that everyone agrees on the pedagogical approach and its implication for the purpose of the center. If tutors were to embrace the nuanced approach Petit suggests, they would not have to completely exclude pedagogical tactics that have been labelled authoritarian. Instead, consultants and writing center would be able to move between and learn from the discourses in their space (Petit, 1997).

On the role of ideology in writing centers, Young encourages discussion and criticism of best practices in order to improve them. By talking about ideology in the center and examining best practices, it prevents one idea about language and writing from dominating the space which Freire posits as an aspect of the banking method of education. Additionally, Young writes "Collaborating must engender socially shared intellectual tasks focused on the subject matter and purpose, and not on isolated skills, like editing for editing's sake." (Young, 1992, p. 11) He connects the challenges that teachers and administrators who encourage democratic,

collaborative pedagogy face to its subversive qualities. He explains, "Writing centers have sought and will continue to seek ways to collaborate across academic units across disciplines to subvert the notion that the best way educationally to imagine a democratic future is by reinforcing the hierarchical distinctions of the past as manifested in society, in education, and in teaching practices." (Young, 1992, p. 13) He concludes that writing centers and their collaborative approach is of particular importance in an era of educational standardization because centers have long acknowledged the variation of needs among individual students (Young, 1992).

Writing Center Practices

In reviewing a range of studies conducted in writing centers, there are varied understandings of the purpose of consultations, effective consultation methods, and the responsibilities of writing centers. Reigstad created three models of writing consultation: teacher-centered, collaborative, and student-centered. Hayward compares the consultation goals and how they differ between writing tutors and professors. Clark explores the ideal consultation through scripts written by tutors in training which reflect the myriad choices a tutor must make in a consultation. Clark and Sherwood, Melnick, and Smulyan and Bolton all explore the nuance of the authority of the writing consultant and ways it can be transformed in consultation. Young discusses his experience in doing outreach for the Clemson University Writing Center in order to promote the collaborative educational goals of the Center throughout the community.

Tom Reigstad was studying writing consultations between college professors and students through participant observation. In his study, he noted the difference between writing labs as remedial, drop-in, or credit-bearing composition courses. These distinctions serve as

reminders of the Writing Center Journal's establishment in order to gain credibility and distance

from the assumption that all writing labs were a remedial space that lacked pedagogical

innovation. Reigstad paid particular attention to the behavior of the mentor in the writing

conferences and categorized their behavior as either an attempt to facilitate conversation or an

assertion of authority. These two types fit into either the collaborative model or the

teacher-centered model respectively. In the study, the teacher-centered model is characterized by

the tutor speaking the most while the writer listens except for when they are asked a few,

possibly leading questions. The tutor would also provide direct instructions for improving the

piece. In the collaborative model he developed from the study, he found that the tutor would

move between treating the consultation as a conversation with an equal and as a conversation

with a student. This freedom in positionality meant that the conversation was focused around the

ideas within the paper and clarifying their communication. At this point in the conversation,

tutors treated the conversation as one between equals and involved the student in problem

solving within their writing. At the end of the consultation, students were given free reign over

what revisions they thought were necessary. Reigstad also noted a third model that was less

common than the teacher-centered and collaborative models: the student-centered model. In this

framework, the student talked the most and the tutor spoke infrequently save to ask questions.

The consultation emphasized the writing as the student's work, giving the author agency

(Reigstad, 1982). While Reigstad's findings are valuable for categorizing tutor behavior within

the context of writing consultation, it is important to note that the study was conducted with

professors mentoring their students on writing as opposed to a peer to peer relationship. Despite

this difference, his work still provides a helpful description of different types of writing consultations.

Hayward surveyed instructors and tutors in a writing center to compare their goals for consultations. At his institute, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, those who teach the English courses are faculty while the writing center is staffed by non-teaching graduate students. It was discovered that when the two groups were compared, instructors were more concerned with grammar and language mechanics while tutors were focused on ideas and imagination within a piece. Both instructors and tutors were concerned about the development of general intellectual abilities but their secondary priorities of mechanics or innovation varied. Tutors had to be flexible enough to meet the instructor's wishes as well as the student's needs but Hayward argued that the ideal would have been a better communicative relationship between tutors and instructors (Hayward, 1983). Although instructors and tutors were concerned with improving writing, they had differing focuses within that goal, which carry different weights because instructors grade students' work.

Clark's article was inspired by the script she wrote for a promotional video of USC's Writing Lab in which she hoped to display the "ideal" writing consultation. Based on the reflective thinking she did for the script, she decided it would be beneficial to have tutors write scripts for hypothetical consultations as part of their training. Clark sees considering how to teach something to another person as another part of learning the material ourselves. This idea serves as the foundation for hypothetical dialogue. In order to prevent student dependence on the writing tutor, Clark noted that the student had to believe that they themselves generated improvements in their writing. This concern harkens back to the critiques against Noddings

where she was accused of encouraging dependency of the cared-for on the one-caring (Monchinski, 2010). Tutors had to make decisions that usually fell within the four categories of (1) behavior to facilitate productive student-teacher interaction, (2) behavior tied to the focus of the session and the instruction to be followed, (3) composition strategies to discuss, and (4) the assignment of future work. It was also found that it was beneficial for the tutor to get the writer talking because it increases student attention and responsibility within the consultation. Clark argues that tutors ought to focus on higher order concerns in writing such as argument and thesis instead of spending time on sentence level mechanics. Clark also found that in order to help writers strengthen their arguments, tutors should ask questions the writer would ideally learn to ask themselves as part of their own writing process such as 'what is my main argument?' (Clark, 1982).

Onore, Bonifiglio, Hoffman and Noonan looked at how the writing center at New York University worked and how its tutors were trained. They saw the dialogue between writers and tutors as a mechanism to discover what the essay said or at least was intended to say. While tutors were trained with different strategies for writing consultations, they found that these strategies and concepts were not actively helpful but rather served as fallbacks for when consultations were unsure about what to do in a consultation. For instance, one consultant reminded himself when he was flustered that at the heart of each consultation was a conversation between two writers (Onore, Bonifiglio, Hoffman & Noonan, 1982). Consulting concepts and strategies may not occupy the foreground of all consultations but help to inform the instincts of struggling consultants.

Jane F. Melnick conducted a study of three writing consultations at New York University where she served as the tutor to understand the competing demands of teachers and students from the perspective of speech act theory. It was found that in these writing conferences, there were two main impulses: to give the writer's work as much room as possible and to provide the writer the kind of insight they would not be able to provide themselves. She found that the teacher in a writing conference does not need to give up their authority completely but rather become better attuned to when it is needed because student authority and teacher authority are not mutually exclusive (Melnick, 1984). Melnick's work returns to the necessity of understanding the nuance of writing center work and interactions with writers.

In an article discussing the training workshops and consultation experiences of writing tutors at a two-year college, Clark and Sherwood noted that the tutors who established friendly peer relationships with writers were more effective than those who took a more authoritative stance. In this study, part of establish a peer-to-peer relationship was having the tutor physically sit next to the tutee as opposed to across from them, which would replicate a teacher-student dynamic. One tutor who was older than the average student and had academic experience in both English and secondary education noted that she was concerned tutees would see her as an authority figure. To remedy this imbalance, she would emphasize her role as a fellow student at the college (Clark & Sherwood, 1981). An egalitarian relationship is a way to establish an effective collaboration but the way in which this is done varies for individuals.

In their study of a writing center in a public high school established by faculty from Swarthmore College, Smulyan and Bolton found that collaboration in the writing center differed from classroom collaboration because the peers had to overcome the boundary of authority that

existed between tutor and tutee. The greater knowledge of the writing tutors upset the balance of

equality between peers and as a result, tutors were in a liminal space between student and teacher

in terms of authority. In their study of conferences, they were found to be more successful when

this perceived authority was either given to the writer or shared with them. Those who worked to

share authority treated the consultation as a conversation where they tried to figure out what the

writer was working to express and brainstormed ways in which that idea would be best

communicated. When looking at the consulting styles of tutors, they found that the choice

between a more collaborative stance or a directive one depended on the tutor's personality. Their

overall conclusion from the study was that the challenge tutors faced was in creating a

collaborative consultation despite the perception that their position as a tutor gave them authority

over their peers (Smulyan & Bolton, 1989).

Art Young details the history of writing centers as subversive educational spaces within

the larger context of American undergraduate institutions before detailing how his writing center

at Clemson University has worked to become more involved with the broader school community.

He argues for writing centers putting an emphasis on integrating the writing center and its focus

into the broader college culture by noting how this decision made Freire's lessons in Brazil so

successful. He writes:

> Thus, we too need to understand the local culture of our particular campus in
> order to develop those collaborative strategies which might assist us in subverting
> education as usual and in demonstrating the usefulness and the justice of our
> alternative vision for a democratic society. When we think of sustaining and
> increasing the influence of writing centers, writing programs, writing instruction
> on our campus, we need to do our best to understand the educational and political
> context in which we operate. (Young, 1992, p. 7)

Understanding college culture is not just a way in which to increase the effectiveness of writing

centers but also to disrupt banking method concepts of knowledge in which teachers fill students

with their superior knowledge. At Clemson University, they have held faculty workshops

sponsored by their writing center and have had writing center staff both serve on university

committees and work with members of the university community outside of the classroom.

These forms of outreach provide staff with an understanding of the university culture and

subsequently an understanding of which parts of the university would benefit from

student-centered collaborative projects in order to create educational change. Young also notes

that the risk of the failure of these projects is not an inherent quality of collaboration but rather of

subversion (Young, 1992).

Throughout this exploration of the literature on writing centers, there have been recurring

issues that echo concepts from the theoretical frameworks of Noddings, Freire, and Dewey.

Writing centers are concerned with the relationships established between consultants and writers

such as how a consultant presents their authority and its influence on the effectiveness of the

consultation. This attention paid to connection and relationship harkens back to Nel Noddings'

social emotional approach to collaborative learning. The educational goals of writing centers as

subversive, inclusive spaces touches upon the social justice roots of Paulo Freire's critical

pedagogy and dialogue. The empowerment of writers and their expression, and the importance of

this endeavor in the context of educational institutions, echoes the focus of John Dewey's

collaborative education in participatory democracy. Similarly to theorists, there have been

complaints that writing center rhetoric of idealized collaboration obscures the nuance of

consultations, usually in an attempt by writing centers to distance themselves from their remedial reputation. All of the democratic pedagogy theorists have been criticized for creating vague frameworks that would enable traditional, authoritative teaching to continue under the guise of collaborative practices, which has also been said of writing centers.

From this literature, there is an array of concepts and questions that will also carry over to the examination of the Vassar College Writing Center. The writing center community has wrestled with questions of the purpose and practices of a writing center in and of itself, but also in alignment with its larger institution. Writing centers have struggled to push past their reputation as remedial spaces. They have questioned what ought to be the focus of writing centers and consultations. A significant issue in the practice of consultations is how consultants navigate their authority amongst their peers and whether it impedes attempts at collaboration. These are all concepts that will be revisited in the ethnographic portion.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF AUTHORITY AND COLLABORATION IN THE VASSAR COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

Introduction

Like the broader writing center community, the Vassar College Writing Center values

collaboration, according to its Mission Statement, interviews with the director, and staff meeting

discussions. From my time in the Center and in conversations with others, I have come to

understand collaboration in this context to mean individuals coming together to develop a

common understanding of a written piece's argument and points for improvement. The idea of

collaboration and how it is implemented in a writing consultation context undergoes translations

and reinterpretations as it journeys between contexts with varying goals and stakes. However, the

higher goal of inclusivity that collaboration serves is lost when the Center wrestles with its role

within Vassar College.

Collaboration and Its Forms

> The mission of the Vassar College Writing Center is to facilitate a community of writers that empowers individuals to direct their own education through the social process of writing.
> 1. The Writing Center nurtures the ongoing discovery and creation of knowledge through critical inquiry and collaborative dialogue;
> 2. Cultivates the articulate and appropriate expression of ideas;
> 3. Promotes interdisciplinary thinking and knowledge transfer beyond the constraints of a classroom;
> 4. Challenges students to claim agency through the act of writing;
> 5. and, affords consultants the opportunity to evolve as theoretically and pedagogically-informed writers who can speak cogently about their practice.
> (Vassar College Writing Center, 2017)

The mission statement of the Vassar College Writing Center includes collaboration but as

we have encountered the its conception from the perspective of theorists, it is a difficult ideal to

define and realize (Vassar College Writing Center). The syllabus for PPP, the prerequisite for a

position as writing consultant, similarly prioritizes collaboration as it notes that students will be asked to ponder the possibilities of collaborative learning (6.1-15). This objective is incorporated into the team teaching assignment, which was observed. Because PPP is normally a prerequisite to apply for the writing consultant position, it is an important place for students to cultivate a sense of collaboration and what collaborative consultation strategies might look like.

The team teaching assignment in PPP required students to work in small groups to present and interpret a portion of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The students were first collaborating within their groups to create a coherent interpretation and presentation of the text and then discussing with their classmates. In interviews with Prof. Shem, he explained collaborative element of the team teaching assignment as the work between the group members. He described some of the aims of the assignment as the group members collaborating with one another in discussing a text and its significant features in order to present that to the larger class (25.28-26.1). The team teaching assignment provided an introduction to collaborative literary analysis.

After all three of the groups had presented, Prof. Shem led the class in a reflective exercise on the collaboration component of the team teaching assignment. He asked students to write down responses to the following questions: why did your group focus on your particular content? Why did your group use your methods for this focus? What is your definition of collaboration? What are the goals of collaborative learning? How do we achieve them? (101). After students shared their responses to the question of how the groups selected their focuses and why their methods supported this, Prof. Shem asked them to write down their individual definitions of collaboration (98.14-15). The responses ranged dramatically. One student talked

about the value of collaboration because it draws on the perspectives and skills sets of those involved, and it requires empathy. A second student mentioned the dimension it lends a project, while another brought up the way collaboration enables us to surmount that which would be much more challenging as an individual. One student discussed the benefit of constant feedback. A student spoke to the power of collaboration to pull the focus away from the teacher giving knowledge and instead creating it as students, a dynamic which echoes Freire's banking method (98.26-100.7). Clearly, the students practiced collaboration but their understandings of it varied widely on individual levels and from these ideas, it was unclear whether they had an idea as to how collaboration would influence a writing consultation.

In an interview following the debrief class, Prof. Shem and I discussed how he perceived the success of the team teaching projects. A big point of success was how well the groups were able to facilitate discussion with the larger class (107.7-10). A facet of this that he wish had been addressed was an opportunity for counterargument, which none of the presentations had included (109.1-2). He noted that those who were not the teaching group may not have read the material for class that day as closely and may not have been as engaged to push back against the teaching group's interpretation (109.5-10). Instead, non-teaching students took on a more passive role as the audience to the teaching group's presentation. Between group members, they had the same level of familiarity with the material and a shared grade at stake. These circumstances are not true of the rest of the class when they are not presenting. Shem's note of different levels of investment in the collaboration contrasts Noddings' vision of true dialogue, which requires equal investment on the part of all participants (Noddings, 1984). The collaboration of the class discussion takes place within a context of varying academic investment and literary familiarity in

the presentation. Therefore, it cannot be considered the same kind of collaborative work as that which developed within each teaching group. Prof. Shem said in the interview that a counter argument or at least room for alternate interpretations would have fostered more of a collaborative dialogue but as it was, it more closely resembled a writing consultation, particularly where a freshman writer listens to a consultant's experience with their text (109.20-29). Here, there is an important distinction in Prof. Shem's understanding of dialogue, passive reception, and writing consultations. He said that the passive reception of the non-teaching students more closely paralleled (at least one type of) writing consultation than the ideal collaborative dialogue would. Subsequently, we realize that Prof. Shem senses that there are writing consultations which do not satisfy a level of collaborative dialogue.

This anxiety touches on the question of stakes in collaboration, which is also a part of writing consultations. Just as I do not consider the discussions of the team teaching assignments purely collaborative, writing consultations at the Center do not fit the theory of collaboration, despite what we may strive for. Consultants do not have the same pressure on the consultation and its results as students do. Writers are anxious about their work; they are allegedly going to be rewarded for doing well either with a good grade if the writing is academic or with an acceptance if it is for application materials. Thus, the democratic dynamic of dialogue and collaboration is not applicable to the consultation or class discussion contexts.

One way that the Writing Center staff discussed authority and its management was dividing it into the domains of content and rhetoric. The Writing Center tends to focus on rhetoric because we see a range of content from the various disciplines, which would make it almost impossible to maintain working knowledge of all content. Presumably all consultants are

comfortable with rhetoric but when they are given a paper covering material that they have also studied, a consultant would have some authority over content as well. These instances can lend them a more authoritative position in the consultation because they can take an evaluative approach to the content. This dynamic came up in an interview with one of the consultants, Jared*. Jared is one of the few STEM majors on the staff at the Writing Center and has noted that he is usually able to fact check science papers (34.12-14). This fact checking veers away from the focus of rhetoric discussed in staff meetings.

A similar level of authority due to expertise on content also arose in three of the PPP observation sessions. I observed the students present in teams on their assignment to read a portion of *Finnegans Wake*, develop an interpretation, and explore it with the class. In an interview, Prof. Shem noted that the goal of the assignment was to have the students collaborate on an interpretation of Joyce. However, the class had not read the entire book nor had they gotten much background on it apart from its reputation for infinite interpretability. In each of the group presentations, Dr. Shem interjected with some additional background information on Joyce and the larger work of *Finnegans Wake* (50.3-6; 58.20-26; 71.18-22). The students in the class repeatedly emphasized their discomfort with presenting a part of a book they had not read entirely so these comments were helpful but also carried weight because they came from the professor of the class, who is also a scholar of Joyce's work. In a debrief of the class presentations, the students discussed how they had drawn on other scholarship on *Finnegans Wake* to give them a level of comfort with the text (97.27-28). At the same time, using outside sources lends a level of expertise and potentially supplements the students' role as teacher for the presentation. In an interview following the conclusion of the presentations, the professor noted

that there was a lack of space for counterargument in the projects. He attributed this to the time constraints but also noted that there might have been a sense that those presenting had to show all of their knowledge in order to feel that they had fulfilled the assignment (109.16-17). In a sense, students bolster their authority in the temporary role of presenter by gathering credentialed information on the material in order to fulfill the expectations of their professor's assignment. The factors of the teacher leading and dominating discussion to a passive audience resembles Reigstad's category of the teacher-centered writing conferences (1982). This focus on the teaching group stymies the intended collaboration of the assignment because it closes down the dialogue of a counterargument.

Although PPP is different each time in order to accommodate the interests of its students, I wanted to find out how the course influences the methods of consultants years later. When asked about what he took away from PPP as a consultant, Jared noted that remembering the consequences of an argument, which we usually refer to as the 'So What?' question, has stuck with him when discussing conclusions with writers (32.19-20). He also mentioned that he still talks about the value of an individual's perspective in writing, particularly when a writer is not confident that their perspective on a prompt is unique (33.6-9). When asked about any consultation strategies from PPP that have stuck with him, Jared replied that there were none and that the closest one he could think of was reading for coherence, which he posited he had learned from the process of working as a consultant (33.12-14). From this interview, it seems as though Jared did not gain a clear sense of how he would bring collaboration or other theories of writing from PPP into his role as a consultant at the Center. Nicole* found the value of PPP in its less direct approach to teaching writing. She said that she learned how to write without the framing of

"here's how to write" (36.22-37.2). But when asked about what strategies from PPP she uses in

the Center, Nicole noted she could not think of any (37.5). When asked about what in PPP she

found valuable, Sam said that the course was more about changing the way she thought about

writing in academic contexts than about applicable skills and strategies (78.22-79.2). She also

noted that she had not had much previous experience with discussing writing on a meta-level,

which helped prepare her for open-ended, less traditional writing assignments (79.8). It should be

noted that none of the questions from these interviews specifically asked about collaboration in

order to prevent leading questions and maintain the integrity of members' meanings. This lack of

strategies is reminiscent of findings that showed consultation strategies serve as fallbacks for

when consultants falter (Onore, Bonifiglio, Hoffman & Noonan, 1982). Overall, it appears that

these consultants found value in PPP for how it taught them to think about writing as opposed to

instructional guidance on the collaborative discussion of writing.

Dialogue, Directivity, and Providing a Service

Of the three consultations observed, I was able to survey all three writers. In these

surveys, it was clear that the writers had all come with a goal in mind or certain areas of

improvement. In the survey, I asked 'how helpful was this consultation?' and respondents could

circle any number between 1 and 7 with 7 representing the most helpful. Overall, it appears that

they all found the consultations helpful, with one responding to the question with a 5 and two

responding 6. The survey also included 'did this consultation fulfill your needs?' and

respondents could circle Yes, Somewhat, or No. There were two responses of 'Somewhat' and

one response of 'Yes'. Considering that the writers dictated what they wanted from consultations

and were more familiar with the content of the material than consultants, we return to the question of directivity and its potential hindrance to dialogue.

Part of our approach in the Writing Center is to make better writers, which is up for subjective interpretation by the consultant. Some may argue that this goal creates a directive, authoritative role for the consultant, which may impede with fostering a collaborative environment. However, Freire did acknowledge this criticism of democratic pedagogy and notes that a directive role, which is inevitable thanks to the political nature of all education, does not necessitate an authoritative role (Schugurensky, 1998). Consultants have their own thoughts on authority and direction in consultations.

Some consultants have voiced a resistance to an authoritative dynamic in consultations and would rather emphasize their role as a peer. In an interview, one of the consultants, Nicole replied to the question of what is your consultation approach by saying:

> I guess I just try to be their contemporary because that's what I am. In the beginning I was so nervous like I have to be better and I'm a good writer and all these things. Especially before I was a senior, I got a lot of people who were older than me and that's terrifying so I guess I just try to remind them that I'm on their level and that like, I guess I can be a bit self deprecating at times, I guess a bit anecdotal just to remind people that I've been there too but at the same time I try not to like get too buddy buddy because I want them to know that I respect their time, that they came to me for a service so I try to keep the line between professional and like, self assuring… (37.23-38.7)

Here, we hear one consultant's perspective on how to engage with writers. The question of authority is raised when she discusses working with older writers because she wants to maintain a level of credibility. Older students at a smaller school like ours can be intimidating because they are more knowledgeable about and comfortable in the environment. As a result, a younger student may not be seen as having enough experience to critique an older student's writing.

However, the credibility she seeks is not one that puts her above the writer but one that establishes her as their "contemporary" who has worked through similar issues with her own writing. The use of the shared student experience was also how an older writing tutor decentered the authority of her age and expertise in another college writing center (Clark & Sherwood 1981). Nicole also does not want to veer too far over into the realm of peers because she is concerned that it would harm their professional relationship, hindering her ability to work with them on their writing. The perspective of the peer-consultant relationship is a balance between consultant as a peer and consultant as a service provider.

Another consultant, Sam voiced similar opinions as she saw the consultant-writer relationship as egalitarian. When I asked what her ideal relationship or rapport to have with a writer is, she responded:

> I think the thing that tended to work best for me is to, like it's tricky because you want people to trust you and think that you know what you're doing but at the same time I never want it to feel like, like a power dynamic where we're not equal. So I think I guess this is a tactic that I use but it's not as much, I don't know. It's more of a like, I'm empathizing with you tactic is when I'm like 'I notice that you do this. I do that too or I used to do that too'. I talk about conclusion all the time or theses all the time. I talk about my own struggles with those things. So I think, I guess the line that I try to walk is that I try to establish that I have read a lot of essays and know how to talk about this stuff but I still go through the same thing as they do and I'm still very much a student and I'm learning with them. And I think it's especially effective when it's a brainstorming session and they're literally just talking at you. Because they're the expert there. They're always going to be the expert in content. So it's odd to me to ever act like you're the teacher because you're both teaching each other. They're teaching content and you're teaching them, how to like how best to communicate that content. (81.21-82.8)

Here, she expresses an aversion to the authoritative connotations of taking on a teacher role as a consultant and instead sees both writer and consultant as authorities but on different areas of the writing, returning to the theme of content versus rhetoric in the Center. The notion of writer and

consultant teaching one another is reminiscent of Freire's idea of co-intentional pedagogy and

participants working together and teaching each other (Freire 2005). Rhetoric dictates the way in

which we "communicate that content" persuasively. In her establishment of a collaborative

relationship, she is also concerned with how to set up her experience and her role as a consultant.

In Sam's case, she draws on her experience as a contemporary like Nicole does. Both Nicole and

Sam present themselves as peers and draw on the shared student experience.

In discussion of their personal philosophy around authority and writing consultations,

both Sam and Nicole note that they try to present themselves as contemporaries to writers.

However, Nicole makes the distinction that she wants to remain professional and be mindful that

as a consultant, she is providing a service to writers. Approaching the job with this mindset may

help consultants to fulfill some of Noddings' criteria for a caring relationship, such as centering

the needs of the cared-for and the component of practice, a self-reflective commitment to

enacting care (1984; 1995). The mindset of a consultation as a service grants more flexibility and

focuses in on the writer's needs, which helps them to grow, as envisioned by Dewey, and

decenters the authority of the consultant, as Freire theorized.

Similar to Noddings' caring relationship, writing consultants perform emotional labor

with writers. When asked about her consultation approach, Nicole said:

> ...and I guess I try to gauge what, I try to let the person guide the session. Some
> people need to talk about generally and some people have their checklist and
> some people have a really great paper and low self esteem. I feel like a therapist
> sometimes. Yeah, it kind of depends. (38.7-10)

Nicole remarks on the various needs of writers that are addressed in consultations, ranging from

talking about their paper to boosting their confidence in their work. Represented here is the fact

that consultants are not limited to discussing the text in isolation from its author. A writer's self

esteem falls outside of the realm of rhetoric and writing but addressing these issues helps the

consultant develop a rapport with the writer. Acknowledging and validating a writer's emotional

state helps the consultation discuss rhetorical issues with the paper because open conversation

about their feelings may dispel defensiveness. I asked Sam about her preferred questions and

strategies in consultations and she replied:

> I feel like it varies so much. What's something that I use a lot? Like, I've tried
> this recently more...I think I've tried- I've been using the more bolder - the bolder
> tactics because I've been feeling more confident as a consultant. Like having
> people read their stuff out loud but only if they seem chill. Like if they're
> stressed, I'm not going to have them do it. (80.19-23)

Here, Sam notes that she modifies her consultation strategy based on the emotional state of the

writers. This observation highlights the demands on consultants to not only be comfortable

talking with writers about their texts but also with the emotions involved. Regarding her

philosophy of and approach to consultations, Sam said:

> Yeah. I, like my ultimate goal, and I, this is good because it'll reinvigorate myself
> because I used to think this before every consultation and I've kind of just gotten
> into the groove and not thought about it as much anymore but like my goal is to
> get people, like when they leave to not only feel okay but to be excited to write
> the rest of their stuff. And that's lofty but my initial goal, like if they're crying is
> to have them not cry but the next level is be like 'okay, if you're not feeling
> engaged with this' which is what happens when people are like 'read this paper
> please, I want to be done with it'. You're like, 'why though?' What about this
> made you want to write about this? (81.7-14)

Sam's aim of consultation speaks directly to the emotional labor that consultants do and, in this

instance, actively strive for. Sam hopes to encourage enthusiasm in writers, not just a deeper

understanding of their argument or grammar. The fact that this is Sam's consultation goal

highlights the importance of the writer's emotional state and the effect that consultants can have

on it. The two female-identified consultants discuss working with the emotions of writers while

the male-identified consultant did not. This phenomenon parallels Hoagland's criticism of Noddings for not acknowledging that emotional labor is part of women's socialization but not men's. It is also a form of labor that largely goes unrewarded and unacknowledged (Hoagland, 1990). In a staff meeting, Shem included "decreasing writers' anxiety" as part of our job as writing consultants (105.12). Here, our director acknowledges that emotions are present in consultations and part of our role as consultants is to work with them.

Sam's questions intended to elicit enthusiasm from the writer are part of the cultivating self-knowledge as a writer in order to improve. This strategy for growth highlights the importance and influence of emotional investment in writing, indicating the possibility that writing in and of itself is a form of emotional labor.

The emotional labor of consultations is just one of the needs that can be met by the flexible approach of providing a service. The attention to writers' feelings is an indication of the engrossment of some consultants in their needs, which is a characteristic of Noddings' role of the one-caring (1984). Although some consultants are cultivating caring relationships with their writers, a larger discussion of how this is done and why it is beneficial would benefit the entire staff in creating a holistic understanding of consultations. The perspective of consultations as opportunities to provide a service, thus creating caring relationships, would further enable consultants to meet writers' needs with greater flexibility than guidelines of best practices that are not always applicable.

In providing a service that seeks to meet the needs determined by one participant, we return to the question of whether it is possible to truly engage in a dialogue when one person has a directive role. Some argue that authority is necessary in the classroom in order to lead

development (Monchinski, 2010). While this stipulation is helpful for practice, it does veer away from the original theories of collaboration. Therefore, the relationship between writers and consultants is not egalitarian The theoretical ideal of collaboration as a co-creation of knowledge as discussed by Prof. Shem in debriefing the class and by Freire is distant from the format of this pedagogical exchange. The Writing Center may not have the same kind of authority as traditional, non-collaborative learning environments because consultants usually try to present their authority as readers. Subsequently, consultations and the Writing Center generally occupy the liminal space between collaborative and authoritative.

Are Consultants Teachers?

Another notable aspect of Sam's personal philosophy of writing consultations is the rejection of consultants as teachers (81.21-82.8). However, our director supports the framework of consultants as writing teachers. He first mentioned his belief in passing during a staff meeting but also noted that it is an idea from which the larger writing center community is working to distance itself (18.3-5; Brannon & North). When asked about this idea in an interview, he replied that it came from his understanding of the different kinds of writing centers. In college writing centers staffed by graduate students, there is a difference in expertise between a freshman writer and consultant who is earning their PhD. He contrasts this category with those like our Center which is staffed by undergraduate students. He said:

> ...where it's staffed by undergraduates and these are your peers coming in, there's a little bit less of that authority that we have to de-center and we can sort of respond to each other's work as colleagues because the skill level and the content knowledge level is sort of similar. At least, that's what the research tells us. Watching the on the ground, it's more effective for us to think of ourselves as writing teachers, one because we're thinking about rhetoric all the time. We're thinking about how language communicates, not just what it communicates. And the more we think of writing as a mode of teaching, the more we can begin to adopt that mode into our conversations as well. I also think that another move we

ask writers to take on often is to take on the role of the teacher. So we're suggesting that one reason that it's really useful for a writer to come in to the writing center to talk to a consultant who may not know anything on what the paper is about, is if you have to teach this to me and I can then go to the paper and see that this has made it onto the page, then you've done your job. We're asking our writers to take on that mode of teacher. I think that we need to accept that a little bit more as well. And I can go one step further and say that we're not necessarily teaching objectivity, you should do it this way, right? That that takes over the writer's agency a bit too much. Really what we're doing is teaching the writer how to see how the reader can interpret the text. So we're teaching them our interpretation. In that sense, I think just the language of teaching makes it a bit clearer what our job is as opposed to saying you're just giving feedback. It's a little bit more nuanced than that. (25.4-23)

According to his interpretation, our director does not use the label of consultant as teacher to denote an authoritative relationship between writer and consultant but rather as a way of understanding how the consultant does their job. Also, it is important to note that the director sees undergraduate consultants and writers as on similar levels of proficiency with content and rhetoric, which contrasts with Sam's belief that the writer is the expert on content and the consultant is the expert on rhetoric. He expresses that speaking about our interpretation of texts in terms of objectivity would impinge on the writer's control over their own work. Author agency is also a quality of both the collaborative and student-centered models created by Reigstad (1982). His view is nuanced in that he considers writing consultants as teachers not because of how their relationship with writers is authoritative but because consultants are concerned primarily with communication and rhetoric.

Consultants are not teaching writers about writing but rather they are teaching writers their interpretation of the writing. They are narrating their experience as readers. Another layer to the director's understanding of consultants as writing teachers is that the act of writing requires the author to be a teacher. Therefore, writers are also expected to teach through their texts. This

difference in how Sam and our director the implications of framing consultants as teachers points to the issue of talking about different things with the same name. The teacher role, in Sam's perspective, has an authoritative connotation while our director sees it as an extension of consultants narrating their experiences as readers.

Narrating Experience as a Reader to Decenter Authority

A strategy for consultations that has been discussed time and again is narrating experience as a reader. From my observations, this usually means telling the writer what you took away from their piece. Narrating experience as a reader builds off of the value of consultants as a fresh pair of eyes on the work.

In an interview, Prof. Shem described the writing consultant's role as a reader, "When we're working with a piece, part of it is process driven and part is product driven. What we're doing as readers is really trying to truthfully narrate our experiences of their text just to give writers a sense of how a reader is possibly interpreting their work. ...you should care how I'm interpreting the piece, how effective it is, if you've inspired questions in me as a reader." (24.5-15) This is a strategy that we in the Writing Center usually refer to as narrating your experience as the reader. As Prof. Shem has said, it is about relaying to the writer how the text affected you and what you found its argument to be, and it is part of how he thinks of our role as consultants.

In a staff meeting, one of the new consultants mentioned that she had had writers come in with papers that were due in a matter of hours. This is an issue that many consultants have had and is commonly complained about. This consultant was worried about how to best work with a paper like this considering the limited time the writer would have to make any serious

argumentative overhauls. She was also concerned about building the writer's confidence in the text, which is another commonly discussed part of the job. Prof. Shem said that the best thing the consultant could do in this case was "Give them your experience and what it could still use." (105.3-4), which essentially describes the strategy of narrating your experience as a reader. In the same staff meeting, Prof. Shem said, "Part of the job is to be a welcoming space, decreasing writers' anxiety, give tools and motivation they need to go forward. Sometimes part of that motivation is saying look there's a gap here.'" (105.11-14). Here, the consultant pointing out issues in the argument by narrating their experience as a reader in order to encourage the writer to continue working on the paper. In this description of our roles as writing consultants, Prof. Shem frames narrating experience as a reader as a way to do the job of a writing consultant.

Because narrating experience as a reader is a strategy that is discussed in PPP and staff meetings and is implemented in consultations, it is valuable to understand the purpose for its use. During the same staff meeting, another consultant brought up that a writer had come with a paper that discussed concepts which confused the consultant. When asked to explain the concepts, the writer said that they were just quoting the sources and were not entirely sure. The consultant was concerned because he knew that the writer was taking the paper to the professor's office hours the next day. When asked about the best response to this, Prof. Shem said "A concern is I don't want them to regurgitate what I say to the professor - couch what you're telling them in "look I'm just a single reader, here's what I'm seeing" - distance ourselves from evaluation." (105.23-25). Here, the strategy of narrating as a reader is used to eliminate or at least minimize the interpretation that the consultation serves as a form of evaluation. When we frame our responses to writing on individual terms, we try to step away from the role of teacher or expert.

Talking about our impression of a text as a single reader carries different weight from talking about our impression of the text as a English composition scholar. It is those with expertise and authority who we see as capable of evaluation and by distancing ourselves from such positioning, narrating your experience as a reader is a way to decenter the authority of writing consultants, which makes it more collaborative by somewhat equalizing the power dynamics between writer and consultant.

The use of narrating experience as a reader to decentralize consultant authority is a valuable strategy in light of Smulyan and Bolton's findings that the perception of writing tutor's greater knowledge disrupted the egalitarian relationship between peers. They found that consultations were more successful when the tutor's authority was shared with or given to the writer, which typically took the form of the consultant treating the consultation as a discussion of the writer's ideas and possibilities for their communication (Smulyan & Bolton 1989). Narrating experience as a reader is a strategy that consultants can use to surmount their perceived authority and return to a more egalitarian, peer-to-peer relationship.

Narrating experience as a reader is also discussed in PPP. In his introduction of the team teaching assignment:

> "MS goes on to talk about how there are many ways to teach *Finnegans Wake* and that in PPP, they are looking at rhetoric in particular. The team teaching assignment looks at how to teach and read the text, interpret it and tell other people about it. Usually reading texts means trying to master them and stripping them of ambiguity but this is impossible with *Finnegans Wake*. Instead of presenting the assignment as a master of the text, the focus is on the language itself and how it affects you as a reader and why does it frustrate you? Why have you interpreted it this way?" (8.15-20)

Here, Prof. Shem, referred to as MS in the field note, is encouraging the students to approach the team teaching assignment in a manner that bears a resemblance to narrating experience as a

reader. He says that the assignment considers how we interpret text and tell other people about it, which is what a consultant does when they use the narrating strategy. Furthermore, the assignment is rhetorically focused, which echoes discussions from staff meetings where we have talked about our involvement with rhetoric in consultations.

One example of narrating your experience is from one of Sam's consultations that I observed. The writer was there to brainstorm and outline an essay using two sources of children's literature that used animals to teach morality. They were struggling to find a common theme to frame the essay. Sam said "...what I'm seeing here and like feel free to disagree with me, is that the kind of throughline is the really important relationship between the two sources is that both of them are reading kids like they're more on the animal spectrum than the adult spectrum, or than the adult end of the spectrum." (132.1-4). I consider this an instance of narrating experience as a reader because Sam is clearly framing her point as her individual opinion of what she has seen as someone discussing the work with the writer.

However, narrating experience as a reader is just one strategy that may help consultants manage their authority in consultation. The other strategies a consultant uses and the ways in which they frame their feedback also position their authority in consultation. In a consultation where he was reviewing a writer's Greek and Roman Studies paper, Jared picked up on a quote whose significance was unclear:

> "Um, I guess I kind of didn't see the function of this quote in this paper. 'Um, when he saw that the water had made him half man.' [reading aloud from text] That just, that statement in and of itself does not, to me, say enough that can go on unexplained. *Okay*. [writer speaking] So I would like an explanation of this quote after you've placed it and that's generally just good practice because also I had no, I guess, concept of what the water was so to speak so as you're introducing a concept and you know describing the meaning of the concept without describing either so that just left me confused." (141.13-20)

The majority of the comment fits into the strategy of narrating your experience as a reader; he uses personal pronouns to mark that this is just his interpretation and gives his impression of the text and what responses it elicited in him. However, he then refers to "good practice" when talking about the unclear significance of the quote and how it would be improved by providing an explanation. While the strategy of narrating experience used Jared's authority as an individual, referring to "good practice" creates the sense that Jared has familiarity with broader writing practices and what is considered good writing. By referring to the existence of precedent in writing and integrating quotes and then encouraging the writer to follow them, Jared establishes an authority distant from the collaborative model. Furthermore, this phrasing of feedback tells the writer to change the piece but not why, echoing the factory model of writing consultation which produces perfect writing without informing writers (Moseley, 1984). Reigstad's teacher-centered conferences also include the tutor giving directions for improvement without qualification (1982). So while the use of narrating experience as a reader did position Jared's authority as a consultant in a more collaborative light, his commentary immediately following did not preserve this shift. It reminds us that writing consultations are filled with small nuanced moments and influences that are not fully captured when we label entire centers as collaborative or conservative. They are complex and the relationships we create within them are not static.

We can see in the language used in one observed consultation that consultants can occupy a role of authority on writing. One consultant said to a writer "First let's start with the fact that the title should be more succinct." (140.11-12) Here, the consultant's words reflect a sense of authority. By saying that the title should be more succinct, it is assumed that the consultant

knows the conventions of titles and when they have been broken. There is no discussion of alternative options and the phrasing of this observation does not leave room for the writer's choice to change. Additionally, the consultant presents their opinion as "fact", an idea that is grounded in reality and difficult to contest. These assumptions embedded in the language used by the consultant contrast with strategies such as narrating experience as a reader. This way of framing feedback on writing is one instance of how other choices in a consultation may alter a previously egalitarian dynamic. It also contrasts with more collaborative strategies, hinting at the range of choices available to consultants.

Bilingual Learners and Writing Center Ideals

Non-native English speaking writers and their needs present a challenge to the Vassar College Writing Center's ideals of collaboration as reflected in the content prioritized in consultation. Consultants are encouraged to have the writer lead discussion and to present feedback in a non-evaluative light. This approach echoes Noddings' rejection of grading on the grounds that it objectified the student (1984). But, returning to his description of the consultant's role and narrating experience as a reader, our director has presented different reasoning for our non-evaluative approach, framing it as not wanting to mislead writers on how their professor will assess them (24.9-15). When writers come to us with the explicit request of correcting the grammar and fluency of their English, they implicitly communicate that, at least when compared to them, we are authorities over English and they want us to evaluate them. While the collaboration in rhetoric-focused consultations are not as egalitarian as originally conceived in theories of democratic pedagogy, these grammatical requests explicitly disrupt an ideal of equal standing and some Writing Center practices.

The broader Writing Center community has shifted its focus on developing collaborative approaches in order to move beyond the reputation of writing centers as remedial spaces (Brannon & North 1980). However, as discussed previously in the context of larger writing center theory, the demonization of the remedial and the idealization of the collaborative rob writing centers of nuance (Petit 1997). In a conversation with Prof. Shem about writing centers and their reputation as remedial spaces, he said that the rejection of remedial work appears to be a coded way for centers to say that they only want to work with good writers (29.13-15). This is a particularly relevant issue for Vassar's Writing Center because non-native English speakers come in and ask for help with their writing, usually with a focus on mechanics and grammar. For example, in my experience, some have asked if their writing sounds natural to me or if they have used idioms appropriately. This approach is contradictory to what we are encouraged to do because we typically emphasize higher order concerns, which are related to the argument of a piece but on the other hand, flow, phrasing, and mechanics are relegated to lower order concerns. This prioritization parallels the emphasis Clark places on argument and thesis rather than on mechanics (Clark 1982). This hierarchy is a way to prevent consultants from copy editing work instead of engaging with its argument on a deeper level. However, the requests and needs of non-native English speakers do not fit these priorities. When working on mechanics and grammar with non-native English speaking writers, consultants have authority as native English speakers that may not be noticeable when working with other native speakers. In this instance, should we see ourselves as providers of a client-focused service or adhere to an ideology of writing that frames the grammatical work, as requested by these writers, as authoritative and undesirable?

We have discussed the needs of non-native English speakers in staff meetings. One instance was when we were discussing the Freshman Writing Seminar (FWS) assessment. One consultant asked if the assessment had data specific to ELL needs and our director said no. However, he did note that about a quarter of respondents said they were uncomfortable with reading, writing, and researching and that the population that self identified as non-native English speakers was roughly the same size (3.13-15). He was careful to note that there was no way of checking if those populations were the same (3.16). Prof. Shem mentioned that there were two writing seminars geared toward non-native English speakers but neither were fully enrolled, and he was unsure why that was the case (3.26-28). In the same meeting, he said that he wanted to get a specialist to work with non-native English speaking students but worried that it would "ghettoize the problem" (3.17-19). This choice of word immediately harkens back to a pattern of segregation for English language learners where their programs are less robust, classroom conditions poor compared to the rest of the school, and academic achievements underappreciated (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003). His use of the term reflects that Prof. Shem is cognizant of the potentially harmful effects of creating separate resources for non-native English speakers. If a separate resource were established, it might enable the Writing Center to further distance itself from this kind of work and continue focusing on higher order concerns, only strengthening the hierarchy that places rhetorical work above mechanics and language instruction.

Students whose first languages are not English have writing instruction needs that may not be fully addressed, especially by an unstandardized program such as the FWS. At the same time, it appears that some consultants feel that these needs ought to be fulfilled outside of the

Writing Center because we do not have the necessary expertise to work with them. This deficiency was voiced by Sam in an interview when I asked her about what she felt PPP was missing in terms of preparation for the Writing Center:

> Something that we talked about a lot in my first year that we didn't really talk about that much in orientation was how to navigate consultations with students who are English as a second language. Um, and that's a unique challenge and like something that people have extensive training for so the fact that people expect us to do it, and Matt I think agrees with me, is a little bit bonkers. (79.20-25)

Here, she notes that the idea we would be working with non-native English speakers seems beyond our scope as a writing center. By bringing in an outside expert and holding workshops on this topic, it reflects that writing consultants are not fully equipped to work with this population and their particular needs or challenges. Although we ostensibly try to maintain a dialogue with all writers, there is extra preparation needed for this population. Our lack of such preparation inhibits the Center's ability to meet the needs of non-native English speaking students.

Between our lack of training in working with non-native English speaking students and our prioritization of higher and lower order concerns, our Writing Center is not geared toward working with this underserved population. The Writing Center community has articulated an ideological stance against being a remedial space, and remedial work is typically associated with language instruction and mechanics. However, these topics are ELL students' primary concerns when they come to the Writing Center. Unfortunately, our training focuses us on the rhetoric and argument of pieces. In light of these factors, are we leaving non-native English speakers behind by prioritizing the rhetorical above the grammatical? Like Prof. Shem, I have questions of how to address these needs without isolating students. Consultants should get more training on working with non-native English speakers but I also believe that there needs to be an explicit

conversation about the way the different needs of this population should (or should not) change

our consultation approach. Writing center scholars have noted the discomfort consultants

experience when working with non-English speaking writers and have posited that it is because

consultants feel that they are violating the rules of consultation when they are directive and

correct grammatical mistakes in their writing (Nicklay, 2012). While this research may not have

come from the Vassar College Writing Center, the recurring discussions of how to work with

ELL writers indicates that at least some of the staff feel the discomfort discussed by Nicklay.

The flexibility of understanding our role as consultants as providing a service to fulfill the needs

of writers is beneficial in this case as well. However, we also have to understand that ELL

writers do have different needs and thus we should expect to use different strategies or discuss

different aspects of writing with them.

I am also curious if there are other ongoing conversations on how to address the different

academic needs of non-native English speaking students at Vassar. In the ethic of care, Noddings

notes that institutions cannot care in her framework because care occurs in relationships between

individuals (1984). This understanding holds true for Vassar regarding its population of

non-native English speaking students. To show care for these students, Vassar has to increase the

presence and visibility of individuals who are willing and equipped to help them with writing.

These reflections push us to dig deeper into what our role is as writing consultants and

what collaboration looks like. In light of the discomfort consultants have voiced, I believe that

Nicole's mindset of providing a service to writers may help encourage greater flexibility in our

approach to consultations. If our ideas of being non-evaluative and non-authoritative are not

going to be helpful to the writer in that moment, we must be comfortable setting them aside. The

service approach can be viewed from the same perspective as Noddings' ethic of care; consultants would be more concerned with their ability to fulfill the needs of the writer rather than if their practice would be categorized as right or wrong along writing center ideals, just as Noddings bases her ethic in relativity rather than universalism (1984). Otherwise, consultations are instances for us to implement ideals of collaboration with no direct benefit. By focusing on meeting the needs of writers in consultation, we place them at the focus so we can make our decisions off of them instead of based on ideals that are not always helpful.

Implications of the Writing Center's Authority

While there is a variety of individual understanding of the writing consultant's authority, there is the larger question of the Writing Center as a whole in the context of our college. In staff meetings, we have discussed the goals of the Writing Center, its role in politics at Vassar College, and how other parts of the institution may limit that. The importance of understanding the broader context of the Center is underscored by both Freire's stipulation that dialogue requires we know and critically examine our context and Hoagland's modification of the ethic of care to include its social context to account for its political implications (Freire, 2005; Hoagland, 1990). Young has also remarked that an understanding of and integration in the culture of the Center's college helps to further the goal of democracy (1992). Genuine collaboration and the purposes it serves implicates each consultation and the Writing Center as a whole.

In a staff meeting, our director brought up that our mission as a writing center is to work with a holistic idea of writing, which means talking through suggestions with writers in order to help them reach their goals (2.12-13). The qualification of directives and focus on the writer's direction are also in Reigstad's student-centered model of writing conferences (1982). Shem has

also said that we strive to make not only better writing but also better writers in the long term. Another goal of the Center that he has articulated is the notion that we must maintain a dialogue with all writers and that we need to get writers to discuss their work with one another (87.22-26). Additionally, our mission statement explicitly states that the Center "Promotes interdisciplinary thinking and knowledge transfer beyond the constraints of a classroom" (Vassar College Writing Center). This has proved difficult because we are only one source of writing instruction, and a secondary one at that.

As part of a larger educational institution, it is a challenge for our goals and ideals to be represented throughout all writing instruction or pedagogy at Vassar. A contributor to this tension is the Freshman Writing Seminar (FWS), which our director has been assessing with other professors. The FWS requires that students come into the Center for at least one assignment. In discussion of the FWS assessment, our director mentioned that there is a broad range in the responses. For example, one reply to the question of 'how many total pages did you write in the semester?' was four. While the director admitted that there was some trouble with the broad interpretation of the survey questions, he also noted that it is difficult to standardize and centralize the FWS because it is taught by a group of professors (2.30-32). He said that at Vassar, there is a culture of freedom for professors which might resist standardization (4.7-10). Furthermore, our director does not have a say in the larger decisions made around general education requirements such as the FWS (2.15-17). This hierarchy, which prevents the Writing Center from introducing an opinion in broad scale discussions on writing instruction, begs the question of what administrators and committees that steer academics expect of the Writing Center? In response to the lack of a standardized foundation of rhetorical instruction in the FWS,

two consultants are working on a brochure to act as a general writing instruction resource (4.10-12). Hopefully it will serve as a reliable foundation for writers who may not be comfortable reaching out to their professors or consultants. Regarding the authority of the Writing Center, the brochure's effect will remain unclear until it is written and distributed. Since the brochure is meant to be a foundational guide to essay writing, it might present the conventions of writing as plain "good practice". A more empowering approach would be to explain why these conventions are effective in argumentation, thus giving writers the ability to discern when deviating from traditional formulas would be more effective. As a result, the brochure would help to produce both better writing and better writers, as the Center strives to do.

Apart from the instructional issues that we encounter as part of a larger institution, there is also the matter of the political implications of our actions. Following the instances of anti-black graffiti in the library, we had a staff meeting to discuss our response as the Writing Center. Due to logistics, we were unable to meet until almost a week after the student protest in front of the library. Several consultants voiced the opinion that we had missed the opportunity for a direct response to the event and instead said we should frame it as a general anti-racist response. There were varying opinions on what would be appropriate but one consultant noted that we are closely associated with academic English, which has elitist, white implications (89.2-3). In response to the question of how Process, Prose & Pedagogy is geared toward preparing students to be consultants, our director has said:

> We read David Foster Wallace's Authority and American Usage. Part of that is, it's a review of these usage dictionaries but also there's this...I don't know what to call it but this exploration of expectations and genre and style, really. He gets into this notion of the difference between standard written English, which he's called standard white English, and standard black English. And how in his courses he's forcing those writers who are used to speaking in standard black English to write in standard white English and why he's doing that. So we talk a lot about

assimilation in terms of language and you know, where's the line? Should we be teaching or consulting or pushing students toward a standard written English? Or should we actually have a discussion with them challenging some of the conventions of the academy? (27.21-28.4)

Clearly, our director strives to encourage awareness of the oppressive history of academic English, which was also discussed in the Process, Prose & Pedagogy team teaching presentations (45.3-6). The idea of good writing practice in an academic setting is built off of a hierarchy of linguistic expression that is racialized, gendered, and classed. As a writing center, we are perceived as an authority on and policing force of these conventions. It is a challenge to consider these structures within our own institution and the logistics of resisting them. Our director also asked what is the Center's role in upholding or resisting standard white English as an assimilationist tool? Freire also recognized language as a tool for oppression (2005). One consultant noted in our discussion of the racist graffiti that there is no clear response when the conventions of academic white English are a significant part of our larger institution (87.16-18). We were struggling to reach a conclusion for our response and our director asked if anyone was expecting a response from the Writing Center, to which one consultant responded that students were frustrated with the institution and that the Center is part of the institution (90.26-28). When brainstorming possibilities for resistance as a writing center, our director reminded us that we should stay within our scope of writing (88.29-89.1). Even when we narrow our scope to the writing that comes into the Center, there are many questions as to our responsibilities and roles.

In several staff meetings, we have discussed our role in handling material that we fundamentally disagree with and find offensive such as when a piece supports misogyny or racism. Our director has also expressed concern that there may be a possible increase in such instances because of Trump's election (15.19-20). After sharing some experiences consultants

had in and out of the Center, our director brought up the question "is it our responsibility to help them defend their claims?" (15.29-30). One consultant replied that we have to because it is a part of our service as a writing center. Additionally, our emphasis on rhetoric and maintaining a dialogue with all students would seem to push us toward an obligation to work with writers whose pieces we may find offensive. One consultant said that as consultants, we have a choice to either work with the paper or assess why the author thinks and argues as they do (17.12-14). The consultant then asked if we should see these offensive papers as individual texts or as conduits for a problematic mindset (17.15-16) Our director replied that such questions are what the Writing Center is for and that we give writers feedback in order to make them better writers. However, for this to be effective, they must respect you as a reader and they will retain agency in making the changes (or not) (17.16-19).

In this conversation, our director also noted that when offensive writing seems to be directed at a fringe audience instead of an ideological middle, it loses academic value (16.27-29). He said that as academic writers, we are obligated to address the middle and write persuasively (17.4-6). This concept of the rational center, unaffected by radical opinions, harkens back to the Illinois revisionists' critique of John Dewey's vision of collaborative education for a greater democracy (Johnston, 2001). Illinois revisionists claimed that Dewey wanted to use research generated by scientific inquiry and positivism to solidify the power of the professional class. This same prioritization of rationality serves a protective function against radical, bigoted ideas thriving in academia in Shem's reply. However, this belief in rational academia ignores a long history of allegedly objective sciences, such as phrenology, being constructed solely to further the exclusion of people from human rights. As noted with Dewey, institutions that claim

objectivity are created and maintained by biased individuals and thus are vulnerable to abuse of power.

Following both of these discussions wrestling with questions of our larger role as a writing center at this college, I did not leave with a sense of a clear, unified response. Individual consultants all had different ideas and while there were shared sentiments, we struggled to find a response everyone supported. Weeks after the protest, the only change in the Center are two signs that say 'IN THIS SPACE, BLACK LIVES MATTER.' This is a valuable message but I do not believe that it changes the authority of the Writing Center on academic, white English. There is no invitation for a broader range of voices and styles. The signs may deter writers from coming with racist papers but only if they are conscious of the racist implications of their words. Regarding how to handle papers with oppressive ideas, I am reminded of Hoagland's criticism that Noddings' ethic of care does not address the social and political contexts of care and the consequences it may have (Hoagland, 1990). Freire also emphasized awareness of context as one of the central features of dialogue (2005). In this sense, as consultants who care about writers and rhetoric, I believe we should not work with these writers without telling them the violent implications of their arguments, much less help them to improve those arguments. To do so would be to focus solely on our instructional responsibilities as writing consultants and ignore the violence of ideas whose communication we have aided.

I acknowledge that stepping away from these writers fails in the eyes of the ethic of care. However, I personally disagree with ideas that promote devaluation of and violence against other human beings. I interpret their communication as a violation of the Writing Center ideal of

inclusivity because in aiding the perpetuation of these ideas, I am implicated in the

dehumanization of people who may also come to me as writers.

Conclusion

From this ethnographic study, I examined the way in which collaboration is set up as an

ideal of the Vassar College Writing Center. It is articulated in our Mission Statement as well in

the preparatory course, PPP. However, in this process of creating the ideal, there appears to be

little in the way of strategies for its practice. Furthermore, collaboration is applied across varying

contexts that pull it away from its theoretical roots. Our director recognizes that not all writing

consultations are as collaborative as we might hope, which reflects their collaborative potential.

The authority of consultants can disrupt the possibility for collaborative dialogue.

Questions around directivity and dialogue, particularly if they are inherently incompatible, touch

upon the nature of authority's interruptions. In the case of writing consultations, both the writer

and the consultant want to improve the text. However, consultants in the collaborative model

articulated by our director and the broader writing center community also hope to improve the

writer. While this goal sounds beneficial, it creates the possibility for the consultant's idea of

good writing to become the focus of the exchange as opposed to the writer's needs. I believe that

this decentering of the writer might be prevented if the consultant were to approach their role

from the perspective of providing a service because it is defined by the writer's needs.

The emotional labor already present in writing consultations indicates that collaboration

cannot only engage instructional, rhetorical work with the text. Consultants work with the writer

holistically, not their ideas in isolation. This aspect comes to the fore when the writer's anxiety

and emotional investment in the work hinders discussion of their piece. The emotional labor of

writing consultations may increase with use of the perspective of providing a service, which would require reflective work on the part of each consultant to determine their boundaries. However, I believe it would be beneficial for a discussion about emotional labor in consultations and its implications for a holistic view of writers to take place on a larger scale.

As understood from the differing opinions on the framework of consultants as teachers, there is individual variation in the understanding of collaborative concepts that affects their practice. An example of a strategy based on a collaborative premise is narrating experience as a reader. However, through various examples of its use, its use in consultation does not make the entire interaction collaborative. It is only one choice made by a consultant. Consultations have collaborative potential but it is the choices of the consultants that determine its realization.

Beyond the level of individual consultations, the Writing Center has unresolved questions around its goal of inclusivity on a larger scale. The broader writing center community's aim of inclusivity, which harkens back to their founding as an alternative to classrooms that alienated students, created its collaborative ideal. But in the case of the Vassar College Writing Center, rigid ideas of what is and what is not collaborative have hindered our ability to work with non-native English speaking students. The aversion to and lack of preparation for meeting their needs indicates a shortcoming on the behalf of the Center to meet the goal of inclusivity. I believe that we must rethink our ideas of collaboration in order to meet this goal. Instead of centering ideas of good writing, as in the teacher-centered model of writing conferences, we have made the mistake of centering an unforgiving concept of collaboration. To remedy this, we must rethink our collaborative principles to re-center the needs of all writers.

Our response to the violently anti-black graffiti in the library is another instance in which we did not act as inclusively as we idealize. While the signage does promote anti-racist views, it does not do so with the nuance required to acknowledge our implication as an institutional authority on white, academic English. Between our desire for a voice in the broader institution of Vassar College in terms of integration into writing instruction, as exemplified by our discussion of the FWS, and our minimal response to the bias incident, our voice as a part of this institution is inconsistent. It centers our instruction while ignoring the violent implications of our founding and the language that we represent.

The questions around dealing with violent, oppressive material in consultations similarly touches on the divide between our instruction work and its implications. In this instance, consultants may veer away from the goal of inclusivity that underlies collaboration in writing centers when they make their choices of if and how to work with writing that dehumanizes and objectifies others. As with the practice of any ideal in this context, the choice is individual. As a consultant, I refuse to help improve violent writing because I see it as against our ideal of inclusivity and because I am personally biased against those ideas and people who strive to perpetuate and substantiate them.

The practice of an ideal depends on individuals, which reminds me of Freire's point that we must remain constantly critical of ideology, including our own (2005). This sentiment is exemplified by his openness to criticism of his work. The Vassar College Writing Center must be similarly vigilant with our ideals and how they affect the work we do. We should be ready to change them because like consultations, ideals are effective when they are dynamic and nuanced.

CONCLUSION

> The collaborative paradigm is not new to us. Writing centers have been places for collaboration from their beginnings: for tutoring, for conferencing, for the talk that brings clarity to purpose and ideas, for the listening that empowers those who would write and speak. Writing centers were founded on an alternative vision of the way many people learn and develop facility with language. (Young, 1992, 4)

And at this point in the thesis, the collaborative paradigm is not new to us either. Nel Noddings, Paulo Freire, and John Dewey's theories of collaboration reflect the ways in which collaborative ideals and pedagogical relationships can be enacted as well as the ends they serve, such as creating care in relationships, transforming education as an oppressive space to one of critical consciousness, and fostering shared understanding to strengthen democracy. Literature from writing centers provides insight into the history and complexity of centers as pedagogical spaces. It also reveals the ways in which the writing center community has conceived of and framed their perspective on collaboration within this context. Finally, an ethnographic study of the Vassar College Writing Center exemplifies the nuance of these spaces and their struggles with enacting and maintaining ideas of collaboration.

In terms of my original interest in this topic of collaborative student-teacher relationships, I have gained an appreciation for the moments in which my teachers have treated me as an equal and as a friend. I now recognize this choice as a pedagogical one that serves a larger purpose. Furthermore, I can imagine that these egalitarian relationships have affected me beyond those interactions, influencing my understanding of my value as a student, which is a concept that has tremendous power.

After conducting this study and reading some of the theory around democratic pedagogy, Petit's point about the danger of binary thinking is realized. It also harkens back to the criticism

of Freire's use of binary thinking (Schugurensky, 1998). At the Writing Center, we talk about being collaborative and non-evaluative and in doing so we push authoritative, traditional writing instruction into the category of the undesirable. In doing so, we limit the tools that we can use in consultations and we also limit the ways in which we can consider consultations; they are either authoritative (bad) or collaborative (good). This perspective erases the nuance of the dynamics within each consultation. Hence, we are unable to appreciate the effect of different consulting strategies and choices.

Ideals should not be static, particularly if their rigidity prevents the fulfillment of their goals, as it did in the case of non-native English speakers at the Vassar College Writing Center. By rooting theory and ideals in their purpose and practice, we add realism and may hopefully bridge the gap for which Dewey, Freire, and Noddings were criticized.

But we cannot consider writing centers in isolation from their academic contexts. During the debrief in PPP following the team teaching assignment, one student noted that in collaboration, she felt like she was "cheating" (99.14). In writing center literature, this concern with collaborative learning is not unfamiliar. One article details why visiting the writing center is *not* plagiarism (Behm 1989). However, underlying these accusations is a different epistemological perspective held by academia. The accusation levelled against writing centers in this instance is not a matter of consultants literally writing papers for students but rather because consultants help students generate ideas. Only if knowledge originates from an individual does this exchange fit the concept of plagiarism. In the perspective of collaboration, knowledge is created socially with others and cannot be attributed to one instead of the other. This understanding of knowledge threatens those which academia has promoted. Part of the reason

that writing centers are at risk when they take a collaborative approach is that it challenges the epistemological belief in academia that knowledge is individually generated (Bruffee 1984; Young 1992). I posit that this may be part of why the Vassar College Writing Center is not more integrated into the broader English instruction. It also frames us as an alternative to the classroom, rather than its extension (Jacoby 1983). So in response to Shem's question, "Or should we actually have a discussion with them challenging some of the conventions of the academy?" (28.3-4), I say we must. We should remain an alternative to the classroom because that position is more flexible to meet the needs of writers and is constructed in opposition to the oppressive forces and history of traditional academia. An alternative space has the potential to be a resistant one, should its members choose to do so.

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