

CHAPTER ONE

TUTORING STYLE, TUTORING STRATEGY: COURSE-BASED TUTORING AND THE HISTORY, RHETORIC, AND REALITY OF THE DIRECTIVE/NONDIRECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL CONTINUUM

I don't want students to perceive me as having all the answers, yet very often I do have the answers they are looking for, and the students themselves know it ... What sort of message are we sending to the students we tutor if they perceive us as withholding information vital to their academic success?

– Elizabeth Boquet, “Intellectual Tug-of-War”

Familiar memes—don't write on the paper, don't speak more than the student-writer, ask non-directive questions—get passed among cohorts of writing tutors as gospel before they even interact with writers in an everyday setting.

– Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, and Elizabeth Boquet

Arguably, no single issue in writing center and peer tutoring theory and practice gets at the heart of one-to-one, small group, or classroom instruction as the question of directive/nondirective teaching methods. The question of how and when tutors (or instructors) should use techniques like open-ended (“Socratic”) questioning versus just telling students what they think they should do, or what the tutor might do themselves if they were in the tutee's position, raises issues involving tutor authority, tutor-tutee (and even instructor) trust, tutor training (or “tutor education” or “apprenticing”), and writing process versus product—all relevant concerns in any writing instruction situation. However, when the rhetorical situation of typical one-to-one tutoring changes—when tutors,

students, and instructors are brought into tighter instructional orbits—so too must typical instructional methods and styles be reconsidered. Further, add into the equation the fact that student writers, tutors, and instructors might have various levels of experience, preparation, and personality and things get even more dramatically complicated. This is the case in situations involving the closer collaboration of CBT programs. How can tutors and tutor coaches (directors, coordinators) adjust their typical tutoring and tutor training styles and methods to accommodate these sorts of multifaceted rhetorical situations?

In their 2008 *College English* essay, Elizabeth Boquet and Neal Lerner draw on critiques of Stephen North to argue that we need to be more open to experiencing two-way streets in theory, research, and practice—in short, instructional learning—between writing classrooms and writing centers. Lerner argues further in his 2009 *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* that writing centers can be much more than physical places or removed sites for tutoring. Writing center theory and practice can branch out into many methods and forms for pedagogical experimentation. He writes, “Rather than a classroom teacher acting as expert witness, jury, and judge in evaluation of students’ writing, writing centers have long offered themselves as nonevaluative, relatively safe places, as *experiments* in the teaching of writing” (15). But what happens when a tutor travels from that relatively “safe” center to the forbidding land of the “expert” classroom teacher? My experimental research and practice on CBT since 2000 has led me to important questions this chapter addresses: How and in what ways can what we know about the rhetoric of peer tutoring styles and methods from writing fellows, supplemental instruction, writing groups, and teaching one-to-one be applied and studied. Then how and why might we share these findings with all teachers of writing? The rhetoric of the directive/nondirective instructional continuum—so often debated, refined, and even resisted in writing center and other peer tutoring circles—offers much in terms of teaching philosophy, holds great practical and critical promise, and needs to be shared with all teachers of writing. In many ways, the focus on how participants negotiate the directive/nondirective continuum offers immense teaching, learning, and communicative implications. Like Harry Denny, I am interested not only in the pragmatics of peer-to-peer teaching and learning, but what these pragmatics might reveal in terms of the bodies (minds) and politics of the various social actors in these collaborative learning ecologies. How and why can purposefully withholding knowledge from a student—in order to activate their own critical and creative powers—affect the teaching-learning dynamic? When and in what ways can simply telling students or tutors what they should or must do be more or less beneficial?

Much has been written on the nondirective or minimalist tutoring approach (see, for example, Ashton-Jones; Brooks; Harris, *Teaching One-to-One*) and sub-

sequent critiques of this approach (see Clark “Collaboration,” “Perspectives”; Clark and Healy; Shamon and Burns; Grimm; Boquet “Intellectual,” *Noise*; Carino; Geller et al.; Corbett, “Tutoring,” “Negotiating”; compare to Gillespie and Lerner’s notion of control/flexibility). I will begin by analyzing several key texts that comment on and critique general assumptions and influential arguments surrounding this debate, including Irene Clark and Dave Healy’s 1996 “Are Writing Centers Ethical?” and Peter Carino’s 2003 “Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring.” I will move on to review texts that use empirical case-study research in their arguments that CBT contexts demand a close reconsideration of the typically nondirective, hands-off approach to tutoring. Finally, foregrounding the case studies in Chapters Two-Four, I will begin to illustrate in this chapter why—precisely because the idealistic notion of “instructional flexibility” is easier said than done—arguments involving tutoring style, via the directive/nondirective continuum, offer important analytical lenses with which to scrutinize the “play of differences” that occur in various CBT situations.

“REALLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE”: THE DIRECTIVE/NON-DIRECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL CONTINUUM AND POWER AND AUTHORITY

When diving deeply into a discussion of directive/nondirective tutoring, we soon begin to realize that—as in any educational situation—we are dealing not just with methodological-instructional, but also political and personal, issues. Clark and Healy track the history of the nondirective (or noninterventionist) approach in the “orthodox writing center.” They describe how in the 1970s and early 1980s, in response to open admissions, writing centers began to replace grammar drills and skills with what would become the HOCs/LOCs approach to tutoring. Along with this new instructional focus, however, came a concurrent concern—fear of plagiarism. The fear of plagiarism goes hand-in-hand with the issue of intellectual property rights—or students’ rights and ownership of their own ideas and writing—a political and personal issue pertinent to tutors, students, instructors, and program directors. As we mentioned in the Introduction, this “concern with avoiding plagiarism, coupled with the second-class and frequently precarious status of writing centers within the university hierarchy, generated a set of defensive strategies aimed at warding off the suspicions of those in traditional humanities departments” like English (Clark and Healy 245; also see Nelson and Garner). For Clark and Healy, the resulting restraint on tutor method soon took on the practical and theoretical power of a moral imperative. They describe how influential essays from Evelyn Ashton-Jones, Jeff Brooks, and Thomas Thompson cemented the hands-off approach to one-to-

one instruction.

Ashton-Jones juxtaposed the “Socratic dialogue” to the “directive” mode of tutoring. Drawing on Tom Hawkins, she characterized the directive tutor as “shaman, guru, or mentor,” while Socratic tutors are given the more co-inquisitive label “architects and partners.” Practitioners were left to wonder if it could be a good or bad thing if a tutor-tutee relationship develops to the point that the tutee looks to the tutor as somewhat of a “mentor.” (And in CBT situations, especially, as we will discuss below, programs are designed with this question in mind since peer mentorship occurs on a regular basis.) Brooks, in arguing that students must take ownership of their texts, associated directive tutors with editors, good editors perhaps sometimes, but editors nonetheless. Brooks goes so far as to advise that if a tutee seems unwilling to take an active role in the tutorial, that tutors simply mimic the tutee’s unengaged attitude and action. And Thompson urged tutors to avoid having a pen in hand during tutorials. In the name of the Socratic method, he also urges tutors “not to tell students what a passage means or give students a particular word to complete a thought” (Clark and Healy 246).

In an ironic twist, Clark and Healy note that “by being so careful not to infringe on other’s turf—the writer’s, the teacher’s, the department’s, the institution’s—the writing center has been party to its own marginality and silencing” (254). In answer to this perceived marginality and silencing, they offer essays by Marilyn Cooper, Shamoan and Burns, and Muriel Harris, as well as the work of Lev Vygotsky, that value the pedagogical feasibility of modeling and imitation and an epistemological continuum that moves writers outside their texts to some degree. Cooper, for example, in her close reading of Brooks, argues that tutors who focus too intently on students’ papers may be missing out on important chances to help students with important, more general writing issues like how the course is going in general or how to approach assignments in creative ways. For Cooper, and others, a strict minimalist approach forecloses the act of negotiation—the “really useful knowledge”—that could take place in a one-to-one, negotiation that takes both the tutor’s and the tutee’s goals into consideration.

Peter Carino urges writing center personnel to reconsider the importance of the too-often vilified directive tutor. Like Clark and Healy, he sets up for critique the idea of interventionist tutoring as anathema to the strict open-ended questioning style advocated by Brooks. Carino then discusses Shamoan and Burns’s “A Critique of Pure Tutoring” in which the authors explain how master-apprentice relationships function in fruitful and directive ways for art and music students. In the master-apprentice relationship, the master models and the apprentice learns by imitation, from the authority of the master artist, the tricks of the trade. In that essay, Shamoan and Burns also suggest the importance of

imitation to classical-rhetorical education. Reflecting on Clark and Healy's essay, Carino concurs that nondirective approaches are defense mechanisms resulting from the marginalized history of writing centers within the university and their subsequent paranoia over plagiarism. Further, Carino applauds how Nancy Grimm advocates the directive approach so that traditionally marginalized or under-prepared students are not barred from access to mainstream academic culture. (I will continue this discussion below.)

Conclusively, Carino suggests a dialectical approach to the directive/nondirective dilemma, implying that directive tutoring and hierarchical tutoring are *not* synonymous:

In short, a nonhierarchical environment does not depend on blind commitment to nondirective tutoring methods. Instead, tutors should be taught to recognize where the power and authority lie in any given tutorial, when and to what degree they have them, when and to what degree the student has them, and when and to what degree they are absent in any given tutorial. (109)

He offers a seemingly simple equation for when to be direct and when to be nondirect: the more knowledge the student holds, the more nondirective we should be; the less knowledge the student holds, the more directive we should be. (Suggesting the roles specialist and generalist tutors might also play.) He wisely, affectively qualifies this suggestion, however, by stating that shyer but more knowledgeable students might need a combination of directive prodding to urge them to take responsibility for their work and nondirective questioning to encourage them to share their knowledge, while chattier but less knowledgeable students could benefit from nondirective questions to help curb hasty, misdirected enthusiasm, and directive warnings when they are making obviously disastrous moves. Unfortunately, Carino does not also characterize what to do when the *tutor* holds more or less subject matter or rhetorical knowledge, or when the tutor is shyer or chattier. And this is where current research in CBT can help explore this question. And this is also where the terms directive/nondirective can be compared to other closely related pedagogical concepts like control/flexibility (Gillespie and Lerner). Interestingly, Carino points to the dichotomy of power and authority that has historically existed between the classroom and the center, complementing and amplifying Clark and Healy's notion of fear of plagiarism. Because centers have a "safe house" image compared to the hierarchical, grade-crazed image of the classroom, writing center practitioners feel the need to promote a nondirective approach, which they view as sharply contrasting the directive, dominating, imposing nature of the classroom. This

attitude has led to some pretty confining dictums—like tutors not holding a pen or pencil in their hand—that can unintentionally hinder helpful teaching and learning.

A minimalist philosophy may sometimes actually cause tutors to (un)intentionally withhold valuable knowledge from students. Muriel Harris recounted in 1992 how a student rated her as “not very effective” on a tutor evaluation because she was trying to be a good minimalist tutor; the student viewed her as ineffective, explaining, “she just sat there while I had to find my own answers” (379). Although we could certainly question the student’s perceptions, the fact that one of writing centers’ most valuable players, admittedly, might sometimes drop the ball prompts us to continue questioning the writing center’s dualized directive/nondirective philosophies. Yet if we do a double-take on Harris’s views on this issue, we see that she has always seen both approaches as important. Clark and Healy point to an earlier work of Harris’s from *College English* in 1983 “Modeling: A Process Method of Teaching” in which Harris advances a much more directive approach. In describing the benefits of intervening substantially in students’ writing processes Harris asks “what better way is there to convince students that writing is a process that requires effort, thought, time, and persistence than to go through all that writing, *scratching out*, *rewriting*, and *revising* with and for our students?” (qtd. in Clark and Healy 251; emphasis added). Harris, early on, like Shamon and Burns, understood the value and importance of the ancient rhetorical tradition of modeling and imitation *in the service of invention and style*. In order to perform such moves as “scratching out” and “rewriting” tutors must have some confidence in their ability (the theoretical and practical feasibility and kairotic timeliness involved) in offering more directive and traditionally “risky” and potentially intrusive suggestions on issues of substance and style.

“WHAT SORT OF MESSAGE ARE WE SENDING?” TOWARD A HUMBLE/SMART BALANCE

The issues presented above—questions of tutor authority, role negotiation, and instructional method and style—while immediately relevant for CBT, also parallel important, somewhat more general, scholarship in writing center theory and practice and student-teacher writing conferences, scholarship with methodological strengths and weaknesses that reflect our field’s developing understanding over time. Laurel Black’s *Between Talk and Teaching* offers a rigorous examination of the assumptions teachers bring to one-to-one conferences with their students, assumptions applicable for all teachers of writing. Black opens her book with the concept of conferences as one-to-one conversations, which may or may

not use the student's text as the prime mover of conversation. Black points to Lad Tobin's view of the genealogy of conferencing from "first generation" teacher-focused to "second generation" student-focused conferences in which both leave all agency in the hands of the teacher. What Tobin, and in turn Black, look to is a "third generation" of conferencing "that takes into account the dynamic relationship aspects of each writing conference: the student's relationship to the text, the teacher's relationship to the text, and the student's and teacher's relationship to each other" *through conversation* (Tobin qtd. in Black 16). But Black goes on to suggest the complexity of this ideal notion of conferencing when she writes: "Warning bells should go off as we read about conference 'conversation'" (21). Black's work on writing conferences offers a rich spectrum of both the larger rhetorical issues of power and authority in conferencing with an attention to micro linguistic features and cues. The strength of Black's work lies in the acknowledgment and exploration of the complexity of conferences as a speech genre in which, as in one-to-one tutorials, a delicate balance is sought between conversational talk and teaching talk. Black sees the complex interplay between the cognitive, social, and linguistic as contributing forces—to varying degrees, at different locations, in specific moments—to the unstable speech genre that is one-to-one conferencing (echoing to some degree our discussion of the generic "play of differences" in CBT from the Introduction). Yet in Black's analysis of conference transcripts we do not hear the students' point of view, nor the instructors', nor do we get any real sense of what the pre-conference relationship between the students and the instructors are like.

The work of Nancy Grimm, which also displays a concern for the cognitive, social, and linguistic forces in one-to-one teaching, has made a major impact on the ways writing center professionals (re)view their theory and practice. Yet, like Black, her research falls short of providing the surrounding contextual information necessary to make full use of her findings. Her conceptualization of directive/nondirective tutoring can also be held up to scrutiny. In her concise yet theoretically sophisticated 1999 *Good Intentions*, Grimm juxtaposes the implications of Brian Street's autonomous and ideological models of literacy to the work we do. Arguing that our traditional hands-off approach to one-to-one instruction is often misguided, she writes:

Writing center tutors are supposed to use a nondirective pedagogy to help students "discover" what they want to say. These approaches protect the status quo and withhold insider knowledge, inadvertently keeping students from nonmainstream cultures on the sidelines, making them guess about what the mainstream culture expects or frustrating them into

less productive attitudes. These approaches enact the belief that what is expected is natural behavior rather than culturally specific performance. (31)

Like Cooper five years earlier, Grimm calls for writing center practitioners to move away from a focus on the paper to the cultural and ideological work of literacy: negotiating assignment sheets to see if there might be any room for student creativity or even resistance; making students aware of multiple ways of approaching writing tasks and situations, making tacit academic understandings explicit; rethinking tired admonishments regarding what we cannot do when tutoring one-to-one. Grimm illustrates what a tough job this really is, though, in her analysis of Anne DiPardo's "'Whispers of Coming and Going': Lessons from Fannie."

While Grimm, drawing on Street and Delpit, forcefully argues for the importance of moving past our infatuation with nondirective tutoring, she may be inadvertently pointing to why it is also perhaps just as important for us to continue to value some of our nondirective strategies—suggesting the truly subtle nature of this issue. DiPardo's essay describes and analyzes the tutorial relationship between Morgan, an African-American tutor, and Fannie, a Navajo student who just passed her basic writing course and is attempting the required composition course. Both DiPardo and Grimm speculate that Morgan's repeated attempts to prod and push Fannie toward what Morgan believed was realization or progress, only pushed Fannie away from any productive insights. The tutorial transcript presented by DiPardo illustrates how Morgan dominated the conversation, often interrupting Fannie (though unfortunately we do not get micro-level analysis like how long pauses were after questions, etc.), how Morgan appropriated the conversation, attempting to move Fannie toward her idea of a normal academic essay. While this approach may ostensibly resemble the directive approach advocated by Grimm, Lisa Delpit, and others, what it leads Grimm and DiPardo to conclude is that tutors must be encouraged to practice "authentic listening": "As DiPardo's study illustrates, without authentic listening, the very programs designed to address social inequality inadvertently reproduce it, 'unresolved tensions tugged continually at the fabric of institutional good intentions' (DiPardo 1992, 126)" (Grimm 69; also see Clark "Perspectives," 46). Ironically, listening, or allowing the student to talk a little more during one-to-ones to enable them to supposedly be more in control of the tutorial discourse, is one of—perhaps the most fundamental of—nondirective strategies.

Carol Severino, drawing on Ede and Lunsford for her 1992 essay "Rhetorically Analyzing Collaborations," associates directive tutoring with hierarchical collaboration and nondirective tutoring with dialogic collaboration (recall Cari-

no's words above). But her analysis of two conferences from two different tutors with the same student points perhaps more emphatically toward our assumptions of what the ideal tutoring session is *supposed* to sound like. The student is Joe, an older African American returning student taking a class entitled "Race and Ethnicity in Our Families and Lives." Severino analyzes the transcripts of sessions between Joe and Henry, a high school teacher in his thirties working on his MA in English, and Joe and Eddy, a younger freshman with less teaching experience. Like the sessions that DiPardo and Grimm analyze above, Henry uses his teacherly authority, from the very start of the conference, by asking closed or leading questions that control the flow of the rest of the tutorial. In contrast, during the session between Joe and Eddy, Eddy starts off right away asking Joe open-ended questions like how he feels about the paper, and where he wants to go from there. For Severino, this sets a more conversational, peer-like tone that carries through the rest of the tutorial. Although obviously privileging the nondirective/dialogic approach, Severino concludes by asserting that it is difficult to say which of the above sessions was necessarily "better." The problem with Severino's analysis, however, is that we do not get a clear enough picture of exactly what was going on during the tutorial. As with Fannie above, we do not know how Joe felt about the interaction. Perhaps he found greater value in Henry's more directive approach. Further, we do not know what stage of the draft Joe is in in either tutorial (information that might have contributed to the level of directive or nondirective instruction). Nonetheless, the value in Severino's overall argument involves her urging those who prepare tutors to avoid prescriptive tutoring dictums that do not take into consideration varying assignment tasks, rhetorical situations, and student personalities and goals—the "always" and "don't" that can close off avenues for authentic listening and conversation.

Four, more recent, case studies, while also having their limits, inch us closer toward building feasible theoretical frames and methods for analyzing the deployment of—and pedagogical implications of—directive/nondirective instructional strategies. Susan Murphy's 2006 study of tutorials uses Goffman's theory of self-presentation and Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness to frame her argument that analyzing discourse strategies of self-presentation can provide clues to how tutors enact nondirective strategies. Her discourse analysis of four tutorials illustrates various graduate student tutors alternately imposing and displacing authority. One graduate tutor, working with a student on a novel the tutor is unfamiliar with, attempts to perhaps "save face" by aligning himself with the field of English, in the process using jargon like "flashback," "rhetoric," and "foreshadowing," and even going so far as to urge the student to "Go read some criticism. Develop some ideas about the book" (75, 77). On the other hand, another graduate tutor, while also displaying an alignment with the field through

the use of the pronoun “we,” alternately distances herself from literary critic experts and aligns herself more closely with the student writer with the pronoun “they.” Murphy argues this sort of desire to save both her own face and the face of the student writer “seems to be a result of a desire to both claim and reject the authority that comes with her role as graduate student, teacher, and consultant,” requiring being smart and humble simultaneously (78). In their 2012 study of tutorials, Jamie White-Farnham, Jeremiah Dyehouse, and Bryna Finer report similar issues with authority and trust in their attempts to map “facilitative” and “directive” tutoring strategies. The authors note the directive strategy of using tag questions like “right?” at the end of sentences to keep students “on board” as well as, like in Murphy’s study, alignment with the authority of the instructor and the field with a phrase like “often, when teachers say that, they do mean ...” (5). Yet the authors also report having trouble definitively mapping what they call facilitative tutoring.

Two 2009 articles by Isabel Thompson and colleagues provide both breadth and depth of analyses that might help further differentiate and qualify between more directive and nondirective tutoring strategies. Thompson et al.’s “Examining Our Lore” offers a study of 4,078 conference surveys from Auburn University’s English Center to ascertain how “various conference attributes related to writing center mandates affected tutors’ and students’ conference satisfaction” (87-88). 26 of the tutors were graduate students, and 16 undergraduates; 3,330 conferences were conducted with students enrolled in freshman composition courses. The researchers’ cogent findings—based on compelling statistical data—support Carino’s and others’ assertions from above regarding the complex nature of traversing the directive/nondirective continuum. Students reported high satisfaction with tutorials when they felt the tutors were answering their questions; students also reported satisfaction when they felt comfortable during the conference. Despite the fact that tutors were trained in nondirective approaches, tutors reported that the more directive they were, the more satisfied they were with the conference. How much tutors talked (or conversationally “dominated” the session) or how closely tutors acted like “peers” had little statistical effect on student satisfaction. Thompson et al. ultimately support arguments from Clark (“Perspectives”) that, in practice, tutors are unable to avoid being directive, and students, in fact, appreciate this directiveness. Yet, the authors are careful to qualify this claim when they assert:

Neither our survey nor other empirical research about writing center conferences suggests totally discarding nondirective tutoring strategies. Students’ efforts, feelings of being challenged, willingness to take risks, and independence are vital

for their engagement ... tutoring strategies have been found most satisfactory when they are flexibly used—when they vary between assuring students’ comfort and ownership of their writing and answering students’ questions to improve writing quality. (96)

This concern with balancing tutorial methods to include attention to both acts of trying to coach students toward strategies to improve their papers (or writing in general) and the pedagogically affective is given a more focused look by Thompson in another 2009 article.

Thompson’s highly detailed microanalyses of one successful tutorial session, “Scaffolding in the Writing Center,” uses the frame of scaffolding to investigate how analysis of both verbal and nonverbal cues might help further contextualize directive and nondirective (or facilitative) tutoring strategies. Thompson’s analyses complements and enriches Severino’s discussed above, by illustrating how a peer undergraduate tutor starts off a session using more typically recognized nondirective strategies, like Eddy, to get the student writer involved and taking ownership of the paper. (Thompson characterizes the tutor and student writer as follows: “The tutor is an experienced and well-respected undergraduate male, a senior majoring in psychology, the student is a female freshman” [425].) But she also details how, as the session progresses, the tutor feels freer to deploy, like Henry, more directive strategies. What results is a more balanced humble/smart session, like the one reported by Murphy above, that both the tutor and tutee rated “highly successful.” Especially promising in regards to mapping/categorizing directive and nondirective strategies is Thompson’s frame of scaffolding. She divides this frame into three categories: one, direct instruction, and two that—for the sake of analysis—we might consider more facilitative or nondirective, cognitive scaffolding and motivational scaffolding. Thompson details why developing trust and comfort requires an active session where verbal cues like backchannels, pauses, and overlaps hint at the “subtle persuasion” involved in moving closer to the fruitful intersubjectivity of the coveted successful tutorial. While the directive instruction category is obviously more in line with directive strategies—giving explanations, answers or examples, or posing leading questions—and cognitive scaffolding sounds very much like nondirective strategies—demonstrating, giving part of an answer or asking an open-ended question then “fading out”—I would argue that the third category, motivational scaffolding—using humor, providing positive or negative feedback, evincing sympathy and empathy—could be considered a nuanced form of nondirective tutoring, perhaps one requiring the sort of facilitative “authentic listening” called for by DiPardo and Grimm. Visually, we might imagine directive/nondirective

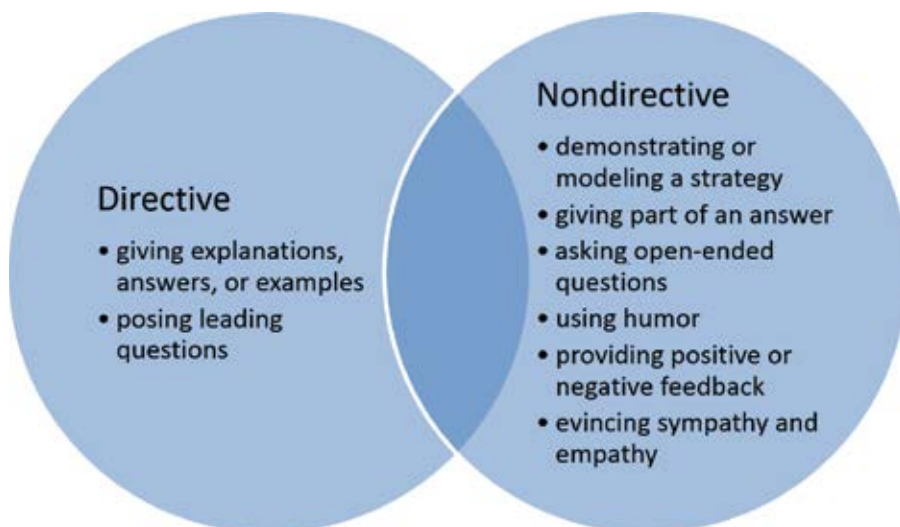


Figure 2: *Overlapping reality of directive/nondirective strategies.*

strategies overlapping at any given moment during tutorials, as in Figure 2.

Applying these methodological insights to CBT settings, I want to pose the same “higher risk/higher yield” question that Boquet asks in *Noise from the Writing Center* of any tutor: “How might I encourage this tutor to operate on the edge of his or her expertise?” (81). Then I want to analyze what happens when tutors must negotiate this challenging new role. What happens when a less-experienced or less-“trained” or perhaps even over-trained tutor attempts to work with a student writer? What happens when tutors—with varying levels of experience or training, with different personalities, with different notions of how they are “supposed” to act—are connected much more closely with the students and instructor of the course?

“THEY LIKE TO BE TOLD WHAT TO DO”: NEGOTIATING DIRECTIVE/NONDIRECTIVE TUTORING ASSUMPTIONS WHEN MOVING BETWEEN THE WRITING CENTER AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING CLASSROOM

Above we discussed how tricky it can be to balance directive/nondirective instructional methods when teaching one-to-one. Others who have reported on their experiences as small-group peer response facilitators (often done in writing classrooms rather than at the center) have echoed these and other concerns—while also expounding on the benefits of small-group tutoring, including opening avenues for closer writing classroom/center connections and

teaching students how to better tutor (peer review) each other's work (Spilman; Lawfer; Shaperenko; Corbett "Bringing," "Role"; Decker "Diplomatic"). In my earlier work on CBT, I reflect on my experiences visiting classrooms in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In the brief 2002 "The Role of the Emissary" I narrate two visits to classrooms, one where I simply discuss the services of the writing center, and the other where I actually sit in on a peer review and response session. My argument in that early essay calls for writing center tutors to boldly travel into classrooms with full confidence in their abilities to share what they've learned about learning to write. But the thinly-veiled attitude I dance in that essay was motivated by a belief touched on in the Introduction of this book: the scapegoating attitude that writing center and one-to-one tutoring is a better teaching-learning paradigm than classroom instruction. In the *On Location* chapter "Bringing the Noise," I narrate idealistic scenes involving students, tutors, and instructors getting along famously in the classroom—while illustrating how tutors can embrace more directive instructional roles that can complement more nondirective strategies during peer response facilitation (also see Decker "Diplomatic"; Anderson and Murphy; Gilewicz). I also describe how something as simple as having a tutor visit to talk about her personal experiences with academic writing can offer interpersonal points of identification and connection between tutors and students, students and the academy, and the writing center and the classroom. These sorts of experiences in traversing into classrooms, into the turf of a classroom instructor to listen to fellow students and to talk with them about whatever concerned them most at that time, would provide the impetus for further practice and future experiences. But others in the same collection offer a more conflicting view of what can occur when making the leap between center and classroom—especially when tutors trained in nondirective instructional approaches bring this more hands-off philosophy to the developmental writing classroom.

Barbara Liu and Holly Mandes, though also celebrating overall success in CBT initiatives, describe how certain adjustments had to be made to the typical nondirective approach when tutors were moved into the classroom. The authors explain the transition of moving tutors from the writing center into the classroom for their developmental writing course, English 100Plus at Eastern Connecticut State University in terms of three problematic assumptions: writers usually come to the center of their own accord; the typical one-to-one tutorial is supposed to focus on the writer not the paper; and the writing tutor's role is of learner, listener, and questioning conversation partner, not expert teacher. Liu and Mandes would soon come to realize that "the nonintrusive, writing center(ed) model in which Eastern's tutors had been trained did not always meet the needs of the students with whom they were working in the classrooms" (88).

Yet the authors maintain that less-prepared writers are often more apprehensive than mainstream student writers because they are aware of being, or have at least been identified by others as, somehow remedial. When tutors are circulating in the classroom, in their zeal to help, they can all too easily “invade the writer’s comfort zone” treading “a thin line between help and invasion” (91). In building a relationship based on *trust*, tutors come to learn that the demands of on-location tutoring and mentoring may cause them to have to reevaluate and redeploy some of the most cherished pedagogical strategies learned during their tutor training.

Like Liu and Mandes, Melissa Nicolas also points to the fact that this arrangement requires students to meet with tutors, rather than the typically optional writing center meeting. In her “Cautionary Tale” we see the difficulty in tutors moving from a more writing center-like setting to an instructional setting that demands that they move beyond the role of the emissary to closer communicative contact and negotiation with teachers and students in the classroom. This new arrangement puts tutors in a high-risk situation where they may be struggling to apply what they have been taught from orthodox writing center theory and practice to this new and different instructional context. Nicolas reports how this caused authority and role confusion in the tutors. One tutor explained how, even though she tried to downplay her authority while working with students, still “they just always seem to look at me or toward me ... They like to be told what to do ... It’s kind of confusing. It’s sort of like a balancing act where you try not to be in it too much but try to be there, but it’s like you’re not there. It’s hard” (120). The hard fact is that when tutors are in the classroom in the capacity of a helper or assistant of some sort it will look to students as if they must be there for a reason—the reason of course to share some knowledge or skill that the students may not necessarily possess. And just as classroom teachers either learn to balance levels of control and directiveness, questioning and listening, or just letting students run with ideas, tutors and students develop a heightened sense of these instructional moves. Here, again the idea that *student desire* for what they see as what they need, and the willingness either to oblige the student or not—or *tutor desire* to live up to the theoretical ideal tutor—is not always an easy choice for peer tutors to make. It is the double-bind that underscores each move the tutor makes whether tutoring one-to-one or collaborating in the classroom.

Finally, we must also factor into the equation that so many developmental classrooms are filled with diverse students, and diverse tutors. In relation to my treatment of Grimm DiPardo, and Severino above, Lisa Delpit insists that “there are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a ‘culture of power’” (“Silenced” 568) that students and teachers must negotiate. Delpit be-

believes that those who hold power are often least aware of it, while those without it are fully aware of their marginal subject positions. Delpit further claims that explicit, direct teaching of these codes or rules enable those outside the margins of power to gain access to the resources needed for positions of power (569). Drawing on a study of cross-cultural interactions by John Gumpertz, Delpit suggests that efforts toward nondirective, power-displacing instruction may actually be less helpful for some students than more direct, power-acknowledging methods. Others (Mann; Neff; Corbett “Learning”) claim that students with various learning disabilities (LDs) require tutors who are willing to take a more active, interventionist role in these students’ learning to write and writing-to-learn performances. These questions of the connections between instructional method and tutor, student, and even instructor identity will resurface repeatedly in the following chapters.

RENEGOTIATING OUR BEST INTENTIONS

This review of the directive/nondirective literature begins to illustrate why scholars in writing center and peer tutoring theory and practice urge practitioners to keep our pedagogy flexible and attuned to the protean nature of peer collaborative interaction. In short, tutors need to be aware of the rhetorical complexity that any given tutorial or any given visit to a classroom can entail. This complexity means that tutor coaches should stay wary of the all-too-tempting rules of thumb and “familiar memes” Geller et al. caution against in the opening quotes that can lead to Black’s “reductive binaries,” unintentionally cementing strained social relationships between tutors, tutees, and instructors. Writing center and peer tutoring people are proud of our history of caring and focusing attention on the individual learner. But in our quest to always be the good guys, the guide on the side rather than the sage on the page, have we alienated some outside our centered family circles? Harking back to the parent genres in the Introduction, in dramatic terms, Burke writes that the scapegoat is “in effect a kind of ‘bad parent,’” and that “the alienating of inequities from the self to the scapegoat amounts to a *rebirth* of the self. In brief, it would promise a conversion to a new principle of motivation—and when such a transformation is conceived in terms of the familial and the substantial, it amounts to a change of parentage” (*Grammar* 407). Writing center practitioners—like many writing teachers—have perhaps played the blame game too often and for too long, resulting in lopsided theory and practice. Whether blaming the classroom/center discursive goat—plagiarism, teacher assignments, grades—or the directive/nondirective instructional goat, writing center scholarship grapples with ways practitioners might continue to reevaluate and revise our best intentions. CBT

theory and practice seeks to reclaim the consubstantiality of the writing center and the writing classroom: moving the idea of a writing center dramatically from physical place to theoretical and practical space, enlarging and enriching the scope of teaching one-to-one and in small groups, and creating a larger arena for rhetorical investigation, reconsideration, and reevaluation.

We can reevaluate the importance of the classical-rhetorical idea of modeling and imitation in the service of invention, arrangement, style, and delivery—in short, in learning how to learn and teach writing. Adding the idea of modeling, a willingness to sometimes take a more hands-on approach to tutoring, can complement a tutor’s instructional repertoire. Tutor coaches (be they directors, or more experienced co-workers) can offer suggestions—or models, or examples—of when it might be more or less appropriate to be more or less directive or nondirective. Something as fundamental as asking a student at the beginning of a tutorial what phase their draft is in, a question that neither Healy and Clark nor Carino address, could go a long way toward setting up just how hands on or off a tutor can be (or how much researchers can surmise from tutorial transcripts). We can (and often do) realize that sometimes it’s all right to give a pointed suggestion, to offer an idea for a subtopic, to give explicit direction on how to cite MLA or APA sources, (in later drafts) to offer examples of alternate wording and sentence constructions, in short, to practice along a continuum of instructional choices both collaborative *and* empowering, allowing for alternate moments of interpersonal and methodological collegiality *and* agency-building. Once we feel that our best intentions more closely match our potential for best practices, we can find ways to further question and more rigorously examine these reconsidered notions.

But how well will all my effusive rhetoric above regarding directive and non-directive tutoring—“tutoring on the edge of expertise,” cultivating instructional “flexibility” or a “smart/humble” balance—hold up under both macro-contextual and micro-analytical scrutiny? In the remaining chapters I will undertake one of the most rigorous examinations of in-the-field practices of tutors, instructors, students, and coordinator engaging in the close collaboration of CBT ever attempted. The same questions concerning directive/nondirective tutoring philosophy and strategy and CBT we’ve been touching on in this chapter will resurface, but in much greater depth and detail: How do tutors in various CBT scenarios deal with walking the fine line between collaboration and plagiarism, between intervention and invasion? How does more intimate knowledge of course content, teacher expectations, and/or closer interpersonal connections between teachers and students, affect the ways tutors deploy directive and non-directive strategies? How does tutor training in directive/nondirective strategies and philosophies hinder or enhance their interactions with student writers? And

returning to that central question from the introduction: How can what we know about peer tutoring one-to-one and in small groups—especially the implications of directive and nondirective tutoring strategies and methods brought to light in my and others’ case studies—inform our work with students in writing centers and other tutoring programs?

The above scenarios reported in the literature begin to clearly illustrate just how complicated things can get when you combine various instructional aspects of the parent genres, as well as different participant personalities, goals, and instructional experiences and backgrounds. These scenarios take us closer to an understanding of how authority, trust and directive/nondirective method negotiation intertwine to either deter or promote successful CBT partnerships. But in the next chapter I will begin to offer readers a set of methods and methodological tools that will enable a much deeper multi-perspectival, triangulated view of how these pedagogical issues played out in my case-study research. While scholars caution practitioners and experimenters that tutors may need to be more or less directive when interacting more closely with instructors and courses, my study suggests just how tricky this notion really is. I’ll report on tutors whose performances shattered my expectations: tutors with much experience who talked too much and listened too little; conversely, tutors who held back so much that students felt like these tutors weren’t doing all they could to help, or tutors with very little experience identifying—and making meaningful connections—with teachers and fellow students.