



## **BASIC LITERACY: MEDIATING BETWEEN POWER CONSTRUCTS**

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### **Introduction: Moving into the Project**

I attend Oberlin College, which is located in Lorain County, in Northern Ohio. Lorain County, like many counties in the United States, has a program for adult education. Lorain County's Adult Basic Literacy Education classes (also known as ABLE) reach throughout the community. There are classes in church basements, schools, prisons, community centers, and health facilities; they occur anywhere people are able to gather and usually are held in the evenings. Adults who attend these programs are most often pursuing their General Education Degree (GED); some English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers come seeking help with English; and some already have a high school diploma and just want to "brush up." The ABLE classes are free; the programs are funded by the state, and, consequently, are strictly regulated and budgeted.

I am involved with an ABLE program at Lorain County's Joint Vocational School (JVS) every Tuesday and Thursday evening. During these evenings, there are three levels of classes. The students in the most advanced classes need about three to sixth months to prepare for the GED test itself. The next level class members usually need six to twelve months of preparation for the test. I work

with the most basic level class. Most ABLE programs, simply, cannot afford to fund the level class that I tutor. My position is set up through Oberlin College; Oberlin funds most of my wage and helps buy materials for these classes. Without Oberlin College's involvement, there would be no basic level classes.

The students whom I tutor need help with very basic skills: reading, writing, and arithmetic. There is a significant gap between my class and the other two classes, as it is not uncommon for my students to work on reading a Dr. Seuss book, for example, while the students of the other classes are writing five hundred word essays and doing geometry. My class is unique.

Most of my students are middle-aged men, though I have some women and some younger students who recently left high school. They come every Tuesday and Thursday night, and we work diligently on different assignments. The work is mostly one-on-one. For example, I sit with a student, and she/he reads out loud to me. In the sessions, the differences between us become quite clear; many jokes fly around the room as they laugh, observing that I "can read" and they "cannot." There is an acute gap between my students and me. I am a student from an elite educational institution, tutoring others in the least elite educational institution. My education is valued in American society, and their education is not. This is an incredibly daunting situation. I have attempted to bridge this gap, to find creative ways for interactive learning, and to open communication about "difference." Yet, everything I do only seems to highlight the great educational and social disparities. The following paper discusses one particular learning venture I attempted in my ABLE class. I will evaluate this venture, "Literacy Letters," through various lenses: as a tutor at ABLE classes, as an Oberlin College tutor, and as a student of rhetoric and composition. In this, I have gained an interesting perspective on the interplay among writing, tutoring, and power.

## **Development and Theory of Literacy Letters**

For the most part, really effective writing and reading materials are hard to come by for this kind of tutoring. I find myself struggling to create interesting and helpful writing assignments. I have tried various strategies, from writing a paragraph about a newspaper article we read together to writing paragraphs using new vocabulary words to writing journal entries. The response I hear most to these ideas is, “I don’t have anything to say.” I want to say, “OF COURSE you have something to say. You always have something to say!” But that is a statement that is very far from being fair and one that would probably make my students more self-conscious than they already are. They do, in fact, have something to say, plenty to say. The issue is instead a matter of having something to write or the ability to write. Thus, I was searching for a writing project that could be interactive, engaging, and helpful.

Linda Brodkey documents the use of “Literacy Letters” as a helpful and interesting task for basic writers. In Brodkey’s essay, “On the Subject of Class and Gender in ‘The Literacy Letters,’” literacy letters are a series of written exchanges between an ABLE student and a community member. Brodkey’s scholarly work deals with the unwritten ideas contained in the literacy letters. Brodkey wants to make clear that there is always a power dynamic, even in a place that is often considered neutral or exempt from oppressive hierarchy. She deconstructs the common notion that educational spaces are neutral spaces by examining closely the “asymmetrical relationships between [education’s] knowing subjects, teachers, and its unknowing subjects, students” (656). She would, for instance, say that there are more than only intellectual assumptions behind the statement that “the teacher knows more than the students.” As in my case, I am the advantaged individual (Caucasian, educated, middle class); race, class, and gender, for example, all play a part in educational settings.

I began a letter exchange between a junior at Oberlin College, Mae, and a middle-aged student at ABLE classes, Kathy. The letter authors shared their gender, female, and their homes, Ohio; beyond those commonalities, the authors were very different. In this essay, I have transcribed a portion of the exchanges almost exactly as they were written. Spelling, capitalization, word choice, and format remain as they did in the letters; the only difference is that the ABLE student handwrote her letters. I use Brodkey's general method of examining the project based on theories in rhetoric, composition, and tutoring.

### **Helping with Writing: Taking Risks and Stepping Back**

Choosing material for a student like Kathy was difficult because it involved both functional and ethical choices. In the essay, "Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace," author Joseph Williams asserts, "An action is ethical when as its agent, we would in principle be willing to trade places with the person who is its object, or vice versa. Writing in particular is ethical when, as a matter of principle, we would be willing to trade places with our intended reader" (222). Because Kathy felt intimidated by the materials we worked with, I, as the tutor, had a functional obligation to choose writing and reading exercises that would not totally alienate her. My intent in the Literacy Letter project was to choose a medium that would be non-threatening. Letters seem to be a positive medium for writing, because letters are extemporaneous by nature. Yet they are still inscribed with messages about power, which I will explore later in the paper.

Just as it is unethical to write to intimidate our readers, is it also unethical to choose an assignment which highlights disparities between the author and the reader? Is it a tutor's position to decide what material is "appropriate"? I was the first agent of authority in this project; I chose the project and asked Kathy and Mae to par-

ticipate. However, my authority was much more complicated than I originally thought. Though the class setting that I tutor in is not structurally similar to a conventional classroom (that of, say, a fourth grade classroom), my “authority” is a factor for the students. Brodkey states, “Educational discourse grants teachers authority over the organization of language in the classroom, which includes allocating turns, setting topics, and asking questions” (644). What I do in the classroom is inscribed with my own biases and agendas. Williams sees ethical issues involved when tutors choose assignments. Tutors are obliged to think critically about the way the assignments, which they choose, affect their students.

To start, I asked Kathy to write a letter to an unknown friend. She and I talked together about some ideas that she might like to include in the letter. I helped generate ideas, but Kathy composed the letter alone:

*Dear Mae,*

*Oct 31, 02*

*Well, I be around horses all my life. I have a qater horse. she is a Brown horse. she still about 15 hand, high. My Brother has high Bloodpressure, since we got our horse Ace, his Bloodpressure has come down.*

*Thank you your friend*

*Kathy*

Kathy worked for about an hour handwriting the first letter. Although Mae was unaware of it, Kathy was responding directly to my prompts. She and I began talking about horses, and I said to her “Why don’t you tell Mae about that?” Her sentences are a typical length for students in my class. Although her writing makes leaps, it was obvious to me (as we talked) that her thought process was very clear as she easily connected the relationship between her

horse and her brother's blood pressure when she explained orally. However, when she wrote, she lost that connection.

From the beginning, I placed Kathy in a disadvantaged position. I asked her to move out of her comfort zone and write to a stranger. For me, this was a casual sort of thing. For Kathy, it was exactly the opposite. As Kathy wrote the letters, I helped her through the process: working on structural issues (capitalization, punctuation, subject-verb agreement) and developmental issues (expressing ideas, voice). In the following section, I explore the complicated issues that underlie tutoring form and/or content; I am still unsure if the tutoring choices I made were good—both effective and ethical.

Tutoring in composition must progress toward both a final piece and improved writing skills. The work of Nancy Sommers guided me as I gave Kathy feedback. Offering suggestions on her individual letters and on her writing as a whole, I navigated between helping Kathy to find her own voice in writing and helping Kathy to form grammatically correct sentences. I also knew that when responding to writing, questions of authority enter the discourse: who decides what a “final piece” is or what “better writing” is? For this first letter, I intentionally chose to avoid helping with spelling, grammar, or style, unless Kathy specifically asked. I wanted the letter to be a sort of pure form of communication, not one where I, as the teacher, intervened. I wanted to remove myself from the process as much as possible. In the later letters, however, I did work with Kathy occasionally on her writing. In her essay, “Responding to Student Writing,” Sommers believes that “we need to develop an appropriate level of response for commenting on first draft, and to differentiate that from the level suitable to a second or third draft” (345). When working with very basic writers, it is important to view their writing as a part of a larger process, just as I view my own writing as process-oriented. Though Kathy did not compose a series of drafts for each letter, the array of letters them-

selves are a series of drafts. When I did work with her, I addressed concerns that could be applied to a later draft. For example, I suggested always using a capital letter to begin a sentence and a period (or other punctuation) to complete a sentence rather than focusing on particular sentences or word choice. I wanted my suggestions to be helpful for the later process.

Sommers also believes in the responsibility of the teacher/tutor “to show them [our students] through our comments why new choices would positively change their texts, and thus show them potential for development implicit in their own writing” (346). I chose to give Kathy comments about capital letters and periods because I thought it would be helpful. But I am left asking if this was positive change for Kathy or for me? Did my suggestions help Kathy to write more easily and confidently about what she thought, or did my suggestions simply alter her text so it was more compatible with dominant writing styles, such as my own? I thought that it was important not to tip the scale too drastically in either direction. I wanted Kathy to be truly confident in her writing, but I also wanted to give Kathy what she came to classes for—the ability to write in a “correct” way, the skills to write complete sentences on a job application, and the know-how to use capital letters and exclamation marks on a birthday card.

Mae responded to Kathy’s first letter, in typed format:

*November 5, 2002*

*Dear Kathy,*

*My name is Mae, and I’m a friend of Mara’s. I go to school at Oberlin and I study Chemistry. Do you like science? Mara sure doesn’t. I thought your letter was very interesting. I especially like hearing about your horse. What is its name? My cousin shows horses with her 4-H group, and I always want to talk about it with*

*her. And that's great about your brother lowering his blood pressure! Do you think it's because of him spending time with your horse? I think it's really amazing how animals affect our health.*

*So, where is your son now? Is he stationed somewhere with the Navy? A friend of mine from high school is in California with the Marine Corps. I think she likes it all right. It must be very hard for you not to see him, though. Does he come home for the holidays?*

*Speaking of holidays, what do you do for Thanksgiving? I always spend Thanksgiving with my parents, my aunts, my grandma, and lots of cousins. There are usually about fifteen of us all altogether. Thanksgiving may just be my favorite holiday!*

*Well, Kathy, I hope to hear back from you soon. I hope you have fun with Mara in the meantime.*

*Your friend,  
Mae*

Mae begins by introducing herself and emphasizing the connection among herself, Kathy, and me. Mae's first letter focuses mainly on responding to ideas brought up in the letter or ideas that she had previously heard about Kathy through me. At the end, Mae reveals the importance of her family by speaking about Thanksgiving. Kathy wrote back to Kari:

*Dear Mae,*

*Nov, 5, 02*

*How are you doing? Do you like going to Oberlin? Yes I like chemistry. Mara is a good teacher. My horse named is Aces. She is a Quarter horse. Will you please asked our cousin about how old you have to be to in 4-H. Yes, I think it is because He spending time around*



*her. animals make people feel good, is make your health Best. My son may not be going home for thanksgiving, I'm do no know if he get to go home for Christmas. My twin miss he a lot. the holidays make them sad, But that uncle JR take them that be around faimily is good. Will I like hear from you. Thank you for writeing to me. Mara's and your firends are nice people.*

*Thank you have a good Day*

*Kathy*

I was excited about Kathy's response. This was most writing I had ever seen her complete, especially at a single time. She wrote a great deal and answered Mae's questions clearly. When Kathy brought her own ideas to the letter (those that were not formatted around Mae's questions), her language was confused. Notice the sentence, "My twin miss he a lot." The sentence has correct capitalization and punctuation. The suggestions I made to Kathy makes her sentences *look* correct, yet the grammar and language are incorrect.

Some types of writing pedagogy find little room for tutoring proper grammar; thus, structural issues become edged out or eclipsed by focus on only the written content. While I do not adhere to this philosophy of tutoring writing wholesale, theories such as these allowed me to ask myself if I was paying enough attention to content. In his "Reconceptualizing Grammar as an Aspect of Rhetorical Invention," David Blakesley presents the argument that "knowing and saying, conception and delivery, thought and language—each opposition describes in reality what is a united, living process. . . . [W]riters need to learn *how to know* by knowing *how to say*, then to say what they know by saying it so that others know it" (195). Is this to say that, because Kathy writes,

“My twin miss he a lot,” her language really does not convey her intention? When she writes “my twin” she does not actually mean her own twin, but is referring to one of her twin sons who misses his twin brother a great deal. But her sentence does not really express this idea.

Blakesley would criticize my suggestion to Kathy to work on capitalization and punctuation. He believes that tutoring pedagogies whose “purpose [is to manipulate] surface structure is reader-based and whatever consequences these skills have for the writer’s competence (potential for generating deep structure) remain unarticulated” (198). According to this model, as I attempted to help Kathy deal with simple structural issues (like capitalization and punctuation), which I thought could be helpful for future work, I was actually avoiding dealing with larger issues. Perhaps I should have been helping Kathy to learn how to know rather than to make her writing compliant with the standards of grammar.

Whether she realized it or not, Kathy, recognized standards of language and grammar and mimicked them. Kathy’s second letter (above) was patterned almost exactly around Mae’s. She answered each of Mae’s questions directly, and asked one of her own. Like Mae, Kathy reveals aspects of herself through details of her family. Kathy “knows” about her family. Mae only provides a format for Kathy to express in writing what she already knows. As a tutor, I could never really teach Kathy “how to know” about her family. She, not I, experiences her family and her life. Kathy and I are in a situation where I am supposed to teach her what or how to know, but there are limits to this instruction: I could never teach Kathy about her own experience. I could-at best-provide a framework for expressing her knowledge or give her a different lens through which to view/interpret her experience. There were many things I was able to teach Kathy, and, importantly, there were plenty of things Kathy could teach me. Simply because her knowledge was

not about grammar or language, did not mean she did not “know” anything.

Tutoring is a balancing act: in this situation, I negotiated between attention to form and attention to content, between my goals as a tutor and Kathy’s needs as a student, between Kathy’s confidence in writing and Kathy’s “rightness” in writing. There was one more negotiation, which was perhaps the most important negotiation, that between power/authority and subordination/subjectivity. In “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Mary Louise Pratt writes about the encounter between the person(s) of authority and the person(s) of subordination. She states, “The idea of the contact is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy” (179). Pratt highlights the idea that there is no place of neutrality or safety, even in the educational sphere. I would be ignoring the contact zone of education to assume that Kathy, in Pratt’s words, “was engaged in the same game and that the game is the same for all players” (181). The game of education is not actually a fair one. As a rule, “When speakers are from different classes or cultures, one party is exercising authority and another is submitting to it or questioning it” (181). I exercised my social and intellectual authority, unwittingly, in tutoring situations. Mae, also obviously, exercised her social and intellectual authority. Thus, an authority/subordination relationship was especially prominent in the letter exchanges. Kathy mimicked Mae’s format and style, which was the dominant and acceptable way of writing. Pratt terms this process “transculturation” and defines it as “[the process] whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant . . . culture” (178). Teaching Kathy how she “should” know happened inevitably in this contact zone situation. It was not my, nor Mae’s, intention to have Mae do exactly as we did. The literacy letters

were supposed to be a medium through which both Kathy and Mae could express themselves comfortably. But I am left with questions of how anything can be comfortable in the contact zone.

The contact zone is tricky but not useless; in this contact situation, formidable problems surfaced. The difficult questions about pedagogy, power, and authority became formative. The contact zone challenged me to think about my role in tutoring and allowed me to alter practices and shift my emphases. The following exchange, in particular, challenged me to consider the ways my personal values entered into my tutoring, perhaps overstepping my role as a tutor.

November 21, 2002

*Dear Kathy,*

*It seems like you really like animals—I think Petland is a great place for you to work. What do you do there? Do you like your coworkers? I hope you'll have a chance to ride Ace this weekend. I think the weather is going to be a little bit better. And who are Steven and Jarod? Are they relatives or just friends?*

*Cambridge is a pretty nice city. There really isn't much to do, but I like my house a lot. I live outside of the town, near a lot of farms. Ohio is lovely in the fall. The colors of the leaves make nice landscapes. Sometimes I like to just drive around and look at the leaves. It's very relaxing.*

*I'm glad that you like going to class with Mara. She talks about you and your classmates a lot. She really enjoys it. I hope you have a good weekend, Kathy. Don't work too hard!*

*Your friend,*

*Mae*

Kathy replied:

Nov. 21

*Mae,*

*I work in the Back with the Dogs. Yes, I Like the coworkers, they are very good people to work with. Maybe I will have a chane to Ride her. The weather man said on the T.V. we may get snow this weekend. Steven and Jarod, they are my twin boys. I like being outside a lot. I like writing to you.*

*Mara and her friends are very good teachers. I hope you have a good weekend too. no I am not married. I am to fat for that.*

*HAPPY HOLIDAYS*

*from,*

*Kathy*

The final lines in Kathy's response are strikingly personal, and when I read them, I felt very uncomfortable. I did not really know if I should pursue Kathy's idea of being "to [*sic*] fat" for marriage or if I should just let it drop. I was uncomfortable because I assumed this statement to be self-degrading; perhaps I also reacted because Kathy went "too far," shared too much personal information. However, was it possible to see Kathy's statement as an example of her expressing herself to a friend, Mae? Was it really my position at all to discuss what I saw as the implication of Kathy's assertion? When working with Kathy, I often found it hard to recognize where any lines were. I was unsure if I would be crossing boundaries by asking Kathy why she felt the way she did or by saying something like, "Oh, don't say that Kathy!" I did not want to encourage self-effacing writing, but at the same time, it was her writing, not mine. My values were not Kathy's values, and my tutor position did not grant me authority to alter Kathy's values. In her

article, “What Line? I Didn’t See Any Line,” Molly Wingate hands over her piece of knowledge, “My rule of thumb is this: If you think you have stepped over the line, you probably have” (12). Wingate also states, “It is not exactly reassuring to realize that the line always moves and that tutors find it by crossing it” (14). True, but where did that leave me when I tutored Kathy? Even now, I am unsure of what is and is not acceptable. This experience pushed me to evaluate the boundaries of the tutor-tutee relationship.

Even before the questions of language and codes of authority surface, I am still unsure if my choice of Mae as correspondent was appropriate. Was writing to Mae at all natural for Kathy? Why would Kathy have something, anything at all, to write to a stranger, particularly to Mae, who existed in a very different world?

Brodkey examines how the authors of the letters represent themselves. Mae, certainly, never identified herself as an authority figure. Yet, Mae was represented not only through her language, but also through her word choice, her grammar, and her method of writing. Kathy, too, represented herself directly and indirectly. The simple fact that she was writing *with* a tutor *in* an ABE class demonstrated her position: educationally, socially, and economically. Mae’s writing spoke to Kathy and Kathy’s writing spoke to Mae about their respective positions in society.

Brodkey also examines actual written language; she states “each institutionalized discourse privileges some people and not others by generating uneven and unequal subject positions as various stereotypes and agents” (641). Brodkey would say that Mae’s subjectivity was “positively produced” and thus she accepted and even embraced standard “discursive practice.” Mae was able to express herself clearly and paint the portrait she wanted to paint. She had command of the English language and could thus positively show, or produce, herself. She was comfortable representing herself. Kathy, on the other end of the spectrum, could not describe

herself as she might desire. She could only describe herself with the language she could access. She was negatively represented in the writing process, and she therefore resisted the methods. Resists, has resisted, will resist?

Kathy resisted the institution every time she said to me, “I have nothing to say.” She was at first very uneasy about the idea of writing, and this comes through in her first letter. She did not ever introduce herself. Instead she wrote according to my prompt. Under Brodkey’s model, Kathy and Mae both wrote as a result of their personal subjective representations. Is this why Mae was typing from her personal computer at an elite Oberlin College and Kathy was printing on a legal pad just a few miles down the road at the county’s JVS?

### **Implications for Tutoring and Tutoring Practices**

I wish that I could say that the letter exchanges are the least institutional and the most pure method of communication; however, I find myself realizing that the power inscriptions are always unavoidable. Kathy and Mae did not escape the inscribed power structures, though their exchanges were seemingly successful and comfortable. These letters, like Brodkey’s, “[ultimately challenge] the ideology that class, and by extension race and gender differences, are present in American societies and absent from American classrooms” (657). These differences permeate all aspects of life *including* learning. The rhetorical practice of letter writing seems to be casual, and thus would not be politically and socially charged. Yet, Kathy was unable to assert herself as an agent of the process. Rather, she used Mae’s letters and positive representation as a template, one that she attempted to follow. Mae’s template operated in a very specific space, leaving little room for spontaneity. This method does not truly support new ideas for someone who is uncomfortable in the medium. These letter exchanges are incredi-

bly complicated and deserve great attention and thought.

Nancy Grimm works with ideas of power and domination in her article "Toward a Fair Writing Center Practice." Grimm states, "Members of the dominant group have difficulty conceptualizing oppression because it lies outside their lived experience. They tend to minimize its effects because they confuse it with the injustice of domination" (103). I must evaluate how I dominate in tutoring situation. Do I dominate because of the nature of my position: I was the tutor; Kathy was the student. Or do I dominate because of my social position? Grimm encourages tutors to recognize their own agency in the process of educational oppression. For example, when I asked Kathy the question "What do you think we should work on?" she shrugged and shied away. Kathy did not have the vocabulary to talk about "proofreading" or "sentence level errors." By trying to have her decide what to edit, I only widened the gap between her understanding and "acceptable" writing practices. Instead of having her decide what to work on, I used my authority as tutor to choose what we worked on. I decided that Kathy should work on capitalization and punctuation in her letters. My intent was to make her comfortable writing and, eventually, to improve her skills. Grimm would suggest, however, that my choice left Kathy out of the process and only catered to the dominant way of thinking. I was using my privileged position as an authoritative tutor *and* as a member of the dominant social group. I was, in fact, encouraging Kathy's denigrated status in the educational sphere. Grimm also writes, "Students from underrepresented groups experience oppression in classrooms and writing centers every day. They experience it bodily and intellectually and because the dominant group doesn't *intend* it, because underrepresented students do not feel prepared to take on the social arguments against it, they remain silent" (107).

Kathy is not an underrepresented group within the ABLE basic



level classroom, since the class is designed for the most basic level of students. She is, however, underrepresented in the educational system as a whole. According to Grimm, although neither Mae nor I were trying to assert our authority and high position in the educational system (and society), we did. We participated actively and passively in this “unjust structural oppression” (107). As I tutor I must realize “how systems function, how language influences the construction of Self and Other, how literacy as cultural and social practice, how political action produces social change” (110). Because Mae could write clearly and use language “correctly,” she was able to define herself through her writing. Kathy could not do this, and thus became the opposite. Kathy was relegated to “Other” status. Both Mae and I needed to evaluate the way in which we were affecting Kathy’s ability to write.

In “P is for *Postmodernity* and for Possibilities,” Grimm asserts, “Postmodern thinking provides no easy answers to these questions, but it does hold in check our assumptions about the neutrality of the critical stance expected in academic discourse” (23). She believes that postmodern thinking can transform and reevaluate a person’s ideas about power structures. For example, Grimm states, “a postmodern framework . . . encourages me to think of students not as isolated individuals but as members of communities and families” (20). It was important for me to think of Kathy outside of the classroom experience. Kathy was a member of a community and family that was entirely separate from the ABLE classroom. She was not simply the “Other.” In her own life, Kathy lives as “Self.”

Another avenue to postmodern thought is the ability to “simultaneously maintain multiple viewpoints, to make quick shifts in discourse orientation, . . . to negotiate cultural and social differences, to handle the inevitable blurring of authorial boundaries, and to regularly renegotiate issues of knowledge, power, and owner-

ship" (2). Grimm's suggestions keep the authority of the tutor in check. The postmodern tutor should be willing to learn from her students, to try new approaches, and to view her students through different lenses. The postmodern tutor should also realize that her authority as a tutor should come from her knowledge of the subject material, not from her social position: her power is limited.

The composition and tutoring theories I chose to work with in this paper center around boundaries, power, and constructs. Through examining these theories and my own experience of tutoring, I realize more and more that there is no neutral zone. I play a part, Kathy plays a part, Mae plays a part. We all come to the table with our own backgrounds, our own beliefs, and our own agency. Though Kathy and I may have used the same pencil and may have written on the very same pad of paper to compose and refine letters to Mae, we wrote in very different ways. Our language is charged with our background.

I strongly believe that in order to establish a successful tutoring session, the tutor must be willing to recognize some of the influencing factors when working with basic literacy students. I do not believe that I now or will ever totally understand the impact of my language, my tutoring style, and my authority. Furthermore, I can not fully understand Kathy's reaction to my language, tutoring style, and/or authority. Tutoring in this capacity could be seen as climbing a slippery slope. To recognize the risks involved is to take a step in the right direction. It must be a constant process of locating comfort zones, tweaking and adjusting those comfort zones. Tutoring must not establish a singular set of rules, or an understanding of all students as "Kathy." Just as there is no neutrality, there is no one way to tutor.

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