

CREATING THIRD SPACE: ESL TUTORING AS CULTURAL MEDIATION

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When Stephen North laid the foundations for the modern university writing center in his 1984 article “The Idea of a Writing Center,” he proclaimed that “in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what change by instruction” (38). That is, the writing center should focus on the process of writing and not the produced text. While it may be easy for tutors to follow this guideline in general, the task becomes much more daunting when tutors deal with tutees whose first language and style of thinking are different from their own. When the tutor and tutee are separated by a language barrier—and a difference in cultural and historical context—North’s collaborative process tutoring is nearly impossible.

I have noticed that this is a large problem in the writing center at the University of Maryland–Baltimore County where I work. All of us tutors were required to take an extensive course in tutor training and tutoring theory in which we were reminded time and again that a writing center is not what North calls a “fixit shop”—ESL tutoring scenarios were especially highlighted—but I still frequently find myself and my fellow tutors doing nothing more than proofreading the papers of ESL students when a session becomes difficult. In this situation, tutors are given the task of helping tutees transform their “unofficial” product into Standard English prose. In addition, since these students usually appeal to the writing center because their produced texts were rejected—by teachers or their own insecurities about the quality of their writing—tutors feel pressure not to aid in the writing process but to translate the troubled text into their own versions of academic prose.

When an ESL student comes into the writing center, an inherent contradiction arises between what the writing center is supposed to do and what the writing center does for this sort of writer, in particular. A difference in expectations manifests; the tutee expects to have his paper proofread or to be taught why his problems persist, while the tutor does not know what to expect from such a difficult session. Thus, the tutoring session turns into a somewhat nebulous proofreading session, since the tutor’s and tutee’s exigencies are competing rather than communicating or collaborating. The tutee and tutor both expend a lot of energy on parallel paths because their starting points and end points are not common. If intersection—or effective communication—does not occur, a common goal cannot be met. The efforts of the session result in parallel objectives, both of which remain unfulfilled. In my article, I plan to show how a tutor can work to solve this contradiction by creating a “third space” within the tutoring session, a theoretical space where the tutor’s and the tutee’s expectations meet and negotiate. As I will go on to show, third space is not only a space that helps bridge the gap between the unofficial ESL bank of knowledge and the official academic bank of knowledge, but it can also change and shape participants’ identities to become more active and, thus, more apt to change. Furthermore, when such a negotiation is reached, tutors are able to conduct sessions consistent with Stephen North’s idea of a writing center: one where the focus is on a person’s writing process, not the product.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory and Third Space

A fundamental problem that writing center tutors face when working with ESL students concerns the notion of understanding what language is. Before tutors can fully understand an ESL student's language usage, they must first ask themselves where both they and their tutees fit into the larger academic tapestry and how their different understandings of culture play a role in how the two parties can negotiate the writing process. Here, the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin notes, "The word in language is half someone else's" (293). By this, Bakhtin means that an individual is not accountable for how his utterances are understood. No one is independent of society; it is society that determines the words used and understood in communication. From this frame of reference, because the tutee is not independent, society must provide him with the cultural knowledge needed to negotiate successful acts of communication.

While ESL students would seem to be the ones most in need of this cultural knowledge, many times their acts of communication are overlooked or ignored because of how they compose their speech. This is where a tutor can be beneficial to a tutee. If tutors know the rules of academic discourse within the English-speaking culture, they should be better guides in helping their tutees to abide by the proper rules of this new Standard English academic community. But here, two problems arise: first, do such rules of academic discourse definitively exist? Who legitimizes these rules? And second, if tutors could get their tutees to immerse themselves in the Standard English academic culture, does this overlook or undervalue the knowledge a tutee already has from a different cultural framework? For my purposes, I refer to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), a sort of meta-theory that can be helpful in showing the cultural significance in the motivations and historically situated thought processes behind given actions. CHAT can help tutors to see exactly where motives of their tutee's utterances do not align with the objectives they are trying to carry out with their texts.

CHAT derives from Lev Vygotsky's dialectical materialistic psychology. Vygotsky sought to create a shared-tool model of learning to map and analyze any activity and qualitatively assess how subjects and objectives or goals change depending on the mediating tool used. Vygotsky notes that these tools, too, are changed when used. They present a dialectical relationship within any given activity between subjects and objectives, as well as the tools used to obtain an objective. For example, looking at Vygotsky's model in terms of communication, learning occurs when a sender uses a mediating tool or sign system to communicate her intended message to a receiver: in this simple instance of communication, the received message depends on the success or failure of the sender's use of mediating tools. If the tool fails, the sender's message is lost, and the sender must think of another tool to use (Vygotsky 40). Here we see how the relationship between senders (subjects), the words or symbols they use (the mediating tools), and receivers (the people responding to what the sender is trying to communicate) are all components affecting one another.

By applying Vygotsky's theory to a student's composing process, one can model the relationship between subject, mediating tool, and response. The subject (the student) uses different tools (rhetorical maneuvers and word choices) to reach an objective (to communicate the intended message to an audience). However, while the student's intentions should be communicated in the produced text, this is not always the case. ESL students in particular often miscommunicate their intentions, confusing their audiences. While Vygotsky's model is useful for organizing factors that play a role in successful communication, in certain unsuccessful situations such as these his model merely shows that something strange is happening with the use of the mediating device but can't fully account for what the problem is, i.e., the ESL student's situation of coming from a foreign community

with foreign rules. Vygotsky's model does not account for an audience or rules of communication; it only shows how communication and learning are interwoven.

There seems to be more behind an activity system than just subjects, mediating tools, and objects; and, indeed, Yrjö Engeström's expanded model of an activity system takes into account the shortcomings of Vygotsky's initial model. Engeström's model shows how any act of communication, as Bakhtin had inferred, is dependent on society, or an audience. Engeström's model keeps Vygotsky's initial model intact (subject, tools, object) but adds another layer, elucidating other factors that go into activity systems (see fig. 1). In order to legitimize and assess standards of communicability, there must be a community. And with this community comes the rules of communicability it creates. Division of labor, too, must be involved in order to place the subject into a role within the community.

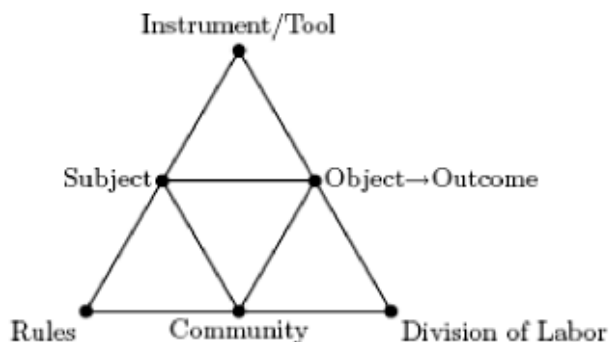


Fig. 1. Engeström's extended model of human activity system (36).

Applying Engeström's extended model of an activity system to the ESL student's composing process, it becomes clear where his actions are coming from and how he justifies these actions to himself. It also becomes evident how the larger academic community interacts with his text (the object produced in the activity system), either accepting or rejecting it based on the standards that academia holds. When an activity system does not produce a text that reflects the tutee's intended motives, it reveals a disconnect between the tutee as an individual within his own activity system and the academic community. This disconnect is due to the tutee having a different understanding of audience, community, rules, and division of labor (elements that reflect the student's unrecognized cultural background knowledge). The academic community with which the tutee is attempting to communicate, in this sense, is essentially foreign to him, and he cannot adequately articulate and structure his text because the process of structuring is based on assumptions of what Standard English academics are seeking.

When the ESL student is psychologically alienated from the community she is trying to communicate with, Engeström's model shows us that there is also disconnection between the student and the rules, as the rules are connected with the community, too. And when the rules also become disconnected from the student, she has trouble successfully recognizing and utilizing the appropriate mediating tools—rhetorical devices, structures, information, etc.—for the objective of producing a text that reflects her motives. The student ultimately becomes isolated from the rules of communication and the community that she is trying to communicate with, as the figure below illustrates (see fig. 2). In order to find out the rules, the student must go through a guess-and-check

process, where she chooses arbitrary mediating tools to create an object—in this case, a paper—in order to see how that object will be received by the community. Through the reception and response of the community, the student then sees the rules. However, since she is separated from the rules to begin with, there is a disconnection between the subject (the student) and the object (the text)—or at least the process of creating a text here is unnatural and riddled with guessing games as to what tools the student should use to compose her message. In many ways, the student is isolated, prevented from communicating through the writing process. As a result, many of the guesses she makes seem to disconnect and estrange the student from the academic community or any of its representatives.

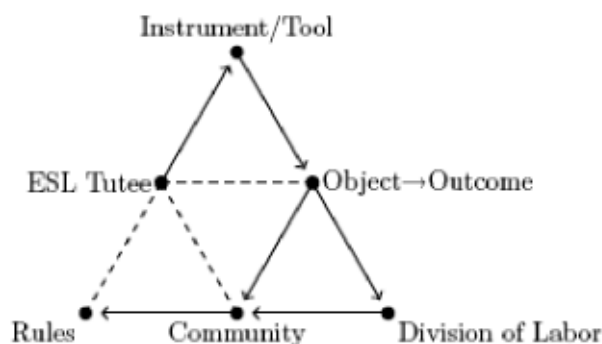


Fig. 2. Representation of an ESL student's activity system in relation to writing. The dashed lines signify disconnects.

But—bringing Bakhtin's expression "The word in language is half someone else's" back into the picture—while the ESL student feels psychologically alienated from the society he is trying to address, he still has to get his means of communication—his system of figuring out what to guess for the appropriate mediating tools, rules, and perspective of audience—from somewhere within society, perhaps based on how he views the academic community or perhaps based on background knowledge from his own culture. The student is lost somewhere between that legitimized, official academic activity system and the unofficial, unrecognized activity system of his mother culture. The space where the student's activity system is located, a space halfway between the official and the unofficial, is what scholars like Kris Gutiérrez have termed "third space" (see fig. 3). By learning how to compose within third space, an ESL student can find more effective and productive means of communicating motives derived from that unofficial body of knowledge (such as background knowledge stemming from a different culture) to the community of an official and legitimized body of knowledge (such as that of academia). This, however, means strengthening and making conscious the third space activity system within which these special cases are operating (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 289–90).

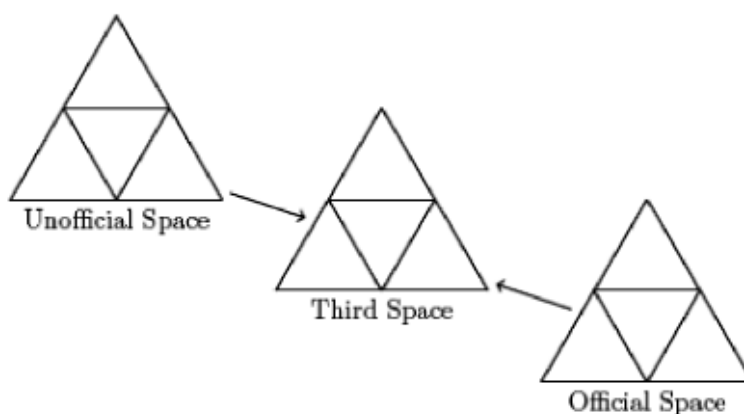


Fig. 3. Third space activity system where official and unofficial spaces meet (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejeda 292).

It is here, in third space, where tutors can help their tutees to modify their composing processes. Tutors become better able to help reconcile the individual and academic motives of their tutees. In the context of CHAT, this means to produce a healthy link between the subject (the tutee) and the community (the teacher or the academic community at large), thereby creating a healthy activity system where the motives of the tutee reflect the exigence of the text the tutee produces. By using what Gutiérrez and her colleagues term “third space discourse practices,” a tutor can help situate the tutees’ own knowledge into the context of academia and thus legitimize it. In an article entitled “Rethinking Diversity: Hybridity and Hybrid Language Practices in Third Space,” Gutiérrez and her coauthors Patricia Baquedano-López and Carlos Tejeda explain that using third space discourse practices means to use “multiple, diverse, and even conflicting mediational tools [to promote] the emergence of ‘Third Space,’ or zones of development, thus expanding learning” (286). Such mediating tools range from the use of different languages (e.g., Korean vs. English) to different means of communication (e.g., writing vs. speaking) to the use of different tutoring techniques (e.g., different scaffolding techniques). By using such tools within a tutoring session and encouraging conflict, tutors can better examine the root of such conflicts and better see how their tutees’ societal views differ, thus giving the tutor a launching point for understanding the tutee’s thought process. Here, tutors can work with tutees to make motives and texts match and ultimately to let the tutee’s unofficial knowledge be successfully communicated to the academic community. The result of such communication can in turn legitimize unofficial cultural knowledge, allowing for more intellectual and intercultural freedom within academia. Thus, the purpose of third space discourse practices is not to encourage students to move away from familiar, foreign cultural bodies of knowledge to more academic bodies of knowledge—these practices bring aspects of both official and unofficial into a third space, producing an area where unofficial utterances can in turn be understood and legitimized.

The Proofreading Trap

However, when third space discourse practices are not employed in a tutoring session, and the tutor submits to the role of proofreader, the tutor risks setting the official space at odds with the unofficial space, leaving the third space a no-man’s-land between. The tutee’s unofficial goals are subordinated to the tutor’s official view of what these goals should be. And this is where tutors

become complicit in what Jane Cogie and her colleagues Kim Strain and Sharon Lorinskas refer to as the proofreading trap. In their article titled “Avoiding the Proofreading Trap: The Value of the Error Correction Process,” proofreading is viewed as something to be avoided in writing center sessions, as it inhibits language acquisition on the part of the ESL student. The trap can be seen as a set of two conflicting activity systems: one that knows not to proofread (the tutor) and one that seeks proofreading with the motive of passing a class (tutee). Although the mediating tool (writing) and the object (the text) are shared between the tutor and tutee, the two have very different goals or objectives, and, therefore, must have very different notions of the rules, community, and division of labor that justify their activity systems. Writing center pedagogues have, for some time now, been aware of both the problems and the advantages of ESL proofreading activities in the writing center. While tutors think that they are being helpful by proofreading their ESL tutees’ papers, they are actually stunting language and culture acquisition. Cogie and her colleagues note that ESL tutees, “[w]ith their many cultural, rhetorical, and linguistic differences, . . . often lack the knowledge to engage in the question and answer approach to problem-solving used in most writing centers.” Cogie et al. insist that tutors should make their tutees painfully aware of their differences in culture and the way their culture determines legitimate ways of communicating; then, tutors should act as cultural informants and show how, in Standard English, the rules of legitimization differ. Tutoring sessions should focus not on sentence-level errors and proofreading but on “sharing information about English [that] these students have no way of knowing on their own” (7). Cogie and her colleagues go on to suggest the importance of self-editing for ESL students, minimal marking during an ESL tutoring session, and the use and implementation of error logs, among many other proposals.

The problem with this line of tutoring, as Sharon A. Myers points out, is that in a sense it ignores errors or makes them secondary to learning new ways to successfully communicate. In her article “Reassessing the ‘Proofreading Trap’: ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction,” Myers critiques almost every aspect of the self-reflective tutoring suggested by Cogie and her associates. Myers, instead, argues for tutors to pay attention to errors instead of logging errors to help tutees to correct their reoccurring errors when they arise (288). Proofreading, for Myers, is not a trap, per se. It is a starting point from which a tutor can begin the transference of Standard English onto a tutee. Myers concludes, “A much more relaxed attitude about ‘error,’ one reflecting an appreciation of second language acquisition processes, and better training in the pedagogical grammar of English as a second language would go a long way toward preventing either student or tutor from feeling frustrated or ‘trapped’ in any part of the tutoring session” (233).

While I feel that Myers’s critique is very revealing, that focusing both on language acquisition and on sentence-level errors only when they come up is the most appropriate course of action for ESL tutoring sessions, Myers’s tutors are perhaps unrealistically well prepared. Unlike most peer tutors, they are people who have been trained in language acquisition—people with a firm grasp of both common ESL errors and Standard English. These are not the types of tutors who work here at UMBC’s writing center, tutors who—for the most part—fall back into the “proofreading trap,” as they are unaware of the ways in which the trap may be beneficial as well as inhibiting for language acquisition.

There is a general assumption running through the work of Cogie et al. and Myers that ESL student and tutor are both viewing language in the same light, as professional and experienced ESL pedagogues. This is, however, often not the case, and this lack of experience leads to the proofreading-as-tutoring practices that I have described. For example, in Lucille McCarthy and

Stephen Fishman's article "An ESL Writer and Her Discipline-Based Professor: Making Progress Even When Goals Don't Match," the subject of their article, a twenty-three-year-old Indian immigrant named Neha Shah at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, notes that she made good use of the writing center, a place where Neha's papers were contorted into ones that granted her an A in her composition class (203). Later, when Neha joined Stephen Fishman's Introduction to Philosophy class, she did not attend sessions at the university's writing center as frequently, and her work shows a considerable barrier between her and the professor's understandings of the ways of communicating in Standard English. In the article, McCarthy argues that, to some extent, it was the mismatch of goals and motivations that led to Neha's poor writing (202). What Neha produced was not what Fishman expected, and as Neha realized this (through poor grades and suggestions to go to the writing center) she began to focus more on her writing and became aware of her problems arising from her inadequate acquisition of Standard English. Ultimately, Neha saw Fishman's class as an obstacle in a process to get her diploma, so her motivation was to pass the class. Fishman, on the other hand, wanted to see Neha produce critical thought and understanding of basic philosophical texts; since he did not understand what Neha was writing, his expectations were not being met.

While Fishman told Neha to go to the writing center because he did not know how to address her problems in language acquisition, I would feel that it is fair to say that the writing center tutors at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte probably knew even less than he did on the topic of language acquisition. That is why the tutors, when Neha took her composition class papers to the writing center, ended up rewriting her texts and, according to her, suggesting how to compose her paper. Neha was ultimately the victim of these corrections and suggestions as she lacked the problem-solving skills necessary to successfully compose appropriate Standard English prose in subsequent writing contexts. She thought that if she turned in proofread papers she would pass the class and come one step closer to her diploma. Indeed, it seems that Neha's activity system usurped the tutor's because, while the tutor knows not to proofread, the tutor does not actually know what to do in situations like Neha's and in the end succumbs to what Neha wants. That is, tutors generally are not the ideal experts that Myers assumes them to be; therefore, they default to proofreading because they do not know how to benefit tutees other than by participating in the proofreading of sentence-level errors.

But in the conflict between the tutor's and tutee's activity systems comes the relevance of the tutor as a cultural mediator. Tutors, by creating a third space for relevant language acquisition, can act as more than just a stand-in for a university professor. They can and do represent the official body of knowledge, yes, but they are also freer to help address specific problems they notice tutees having than a professor who teaches a class of twenty-five students. The recognition of an ESL student's problem is only the first step in creating a third space, and, arguably, due to the limitations of classes and the heterogeneous nature of classrooms, teachers cannot move past this first step and begin creating a third space. Tutors have the liberty, as Gutiérrez and her colleagues suggest, to participate in third space discourse practices to set up and utilize a third space zone of developing ideas that links unofficial knowledge to the official knowledge expected in academia. While it may be hard for tutees to transcend their motives of getting good grades, it is possible, as I will show, to get them to participate in a third space tutoring session, one that employs use of multiple means of communication to help them learn how to communicate their intentions to the representatives of unfamiliar and official discourse communities. Ultimately, with a shift in identity from unofficial space to third space, ESL students can act as cultural mediators themselves, mediating the ways in

which discourse is legitimized in their unofficial way to the legitimized and official community. Thus, an ESL student who acts as a cultural mediator is in a position to eventually legitimize and incorporate the unofficial into the official.

Tutoring as a Means of Cultural Mediation

While peer tutors are appointed to their role of tutor by the academic community, and while tutors, in this sense, represent the official bank of learning and activity, tutors are freer to bend the official rules and focus on the unofficial due to their peer and student roles. Tutors are not academics, though they act as stand-ins for academics. They have background knowledge and know how to produce activities that will grant them recognition by the official, but they are still not part of the community that creates and governs rules or divides labor; in the eyes of academia, peer tutors are still students. This technicality of the peer tutor's role in academia makes the tutor best suited to participate in third space discourse practices. While tutors do not have the authoritative power of teachers, they represent and reflect this power in a tutoring session. Tutors, in being given the role of tutor, have both a teacher's authority in a tutoring session and a student's role in the academic division of labor, community, and rule usage. Knowing that tutors hold the power in tutoring sessions and, thus, can negotiate the power between tutor and tutee is essential for understanding how tutors can diverge from their normative tutoring session when dealing with special-case tutees like ESL students. In such collaborative sessions, however, tutors need to be extremely aware of what they are doing and saying in order to create—as Gutiérrez and her colleagues suggest—consciousness of competing socially and historically situated and legitimized activity systems.

One way a tutor can create such a consciousness is to focus on difference and conflict. But this is a tricky game. As Linda Flower, in her article "Intercultural Knowledge Building: The Literate Action of a Community Think Tank," notes, "The conflict among these representations [culturally situated realities] is a tangled web: the counter-productive aspect of conflict (e.g., misunderstanding, competition and anxiety) may co-exist with the generative potential of difference (e.g., with the possibility of altering perspectives, rival hypotheses, competing conceptualizations, and an expanding division of values and priorities)" (239). These sorts of coexisting contradictions—the ESL student's knowledge and the tutor's knowledge—act as a launching point from which tutors can focus on difference and show the enriching qualities that their diversity brings to any collaborative tutoring session. Flower also notes that the interesting and productive value of CHAT is that it focuses on transcending "the dualisms of the individual self and its social, material circumstances, of mind and behavior" (241). Using CHAT to analyze culturally situated activity systems and the conflict between these activity systems, for this reason, can a helpful tool in strategizing ways for tutors and tutees to transcend their social and material circumstances.

What I am suggesting is that tutors should not begin tutoring sessions looking for what they know and understand, but rather, they should avoid trying to understand what they cannot. To try to understand and interpret an ESL student's difficult text is equivalent to translating the text from what the student is saying to what the tutor is interpreting it as. That is, when tutors attempt to understand their ESL tutees' texts, they often end up viewing the text through their own interpretations and contriving their own intended messages, which may not be the same as the tutees'. The tutor and tutee may come from two entirely different cultural backgrounds, and, thus, the writing process works differently for them. By assuming what the tutee's message is, the tutor removes the tutee and the tutee's goals from the tutee's writing activity system and replaces them with her own goals. In this

case, the tutor is directly manipulating the tutee's activity system, rather than helping the tutee to do this (in third space). As a result, the tutor can never truly understand an ESL student's original goal or meaning in her text. Likewise, academia begins not only by declaring that the ESL student's text is wrong and must be mechanically modified, but also by looking for ways to modify the meaning of the text to something more standard or presentable—here we see a tutoring situation similar to Neha's interaction with the writing center for her English composition class. A writing center is supposed to focus on the process of producing text, not the text itself.

However, the text can be a valuable launching point for beginning to conduct third space discourse practices. The degree to which the tutee is conscious of the rules that govern his use of writing, the acceptance of his text in the academic community, and his position as a student all factor into his troubles writing texts in standard academic prose. These are all problems in social consciousness that inhibit the writing process, an inherently culturally legitimized process within a given community. Tutors can help solve these problems by first acknowledging the differences between the ESL student's text and a standard academic text. Tutors can ask questions about the cultural motivations, histories, and backgrounds that led their tutee to produce his written text in the way he did. Here, tutors can prod their tutees to understand how they interpret all the factors that go into producing the objective outcome of successfully communicable academic text. In analyzing the outcome from a text, tutors can see the inherent activity system involved in their tutees' writing processes. In the activity system of producing text, the subject, mediating tools, and object are given (the tutee, his writing, and his text, respectively), but the degree to which the tutee understands the rules, community, and division of labor vary, and this locates the ESL student in the writing process.

I argue that, if ESL tutees knew the full extent of their cultural marginalization and the attempt of academia to enculturate them into its Eurocentrically established community, these tutees would show some level of resistance to mere proofreading. This, however, relies on the assumption that ESL tutees know that the writing center is a place to learn and not a mediating tool to use in the larger objective of getting a diploma. This is why it is important, as I stated earlier, to prod a tutee—in the most polite and nonconfrontational way, of course—to find out her true intentions in seeking help at the writing center. The motivation for going to the writing center must be to learn, and the tutoring session objective must fulfill this need. Tutors have the power to proofread just as much as they have the power to redirect the tutoring session away from the text and into third space, meaning tutors can help raise consciousness of differences in their unofficial ESL students' identities and the contradictions that lead to their poor writing in an official academic context. While tutors are placed in a position of power due to their legitimization in academia, they do not have to cooperate with the academic structure and reproduce the marginalization that accompanies proofreading and so-called suggestive structuring of texts.

Focusing on the CHAT-based components that govern the activity of production (the dialectical relationships between subject, mediating tool, object, rules, community, and division of labor) means first recognizing that the response to the object is not equivalent to the response to the ESL student's intentions. Culture is necessarily linked to the process of text production, in that each community views the object through its own culturally and historically situated lens. Staying true to Stephen North's idea of a writing center, a tutor who helps an ESL student to realize the complexities of his culture in relation to the culture he is writing to/in will help not only language acquisition but also the writing process as a whole. That is, when ESL students realize the differences and importance of successful communicative habits both in their culture and the culture they write to, the significance

of the historically situated pragmatic context of words and their associated outcomes is given a purpose: to communicate the unofficial to the official, thus granting a place for the unofficial within the official. Tutees are given an answer to the question “Why learn to learn?” Their learning will be directed and molded for the sole purpose of giving themselves, and others like them, a place and voice within academia.

Third Space Tutoring in Practice

Tutors may have their own motives; ideally, they will have the motive of creating a third space tutoring session that helps ESL students to acknowledge their position in academia, ultimately encouraging ESL students to actively learn and successfully communicate their nonofficial exigencies to an official academic audience. In this section, I will give an example of a successful third space tutoring session with a twenty-one-year-old Korean second-year female student whom I will call Kim. Kim is part of UMBC’s English Language Center (ELC), a center that teaches ESL students English and the professional skills needed in the workplace. Though the ELC has highly trained teachers and tutors who deal specifically with English language acquisition, Kim came to the writing center because she wanted to know if her work was comprehensible. She was, in essence, using the writing center as a way of measuring her ability to communicate in English.

The work Kim brought with her to the writing center was a research paper she was composing on healthy eating habits for her ELC 051 class. When we first sat down, I asked her what she was expecting from our tutoring session. “My English writing is not very good,” she told me, “and I am not sure what I am to write.” Her spoken English was not actually poor at all, as she was able to clearly speak and make evident what her difficulties were. However, she was having trouble identifying what she was supposed to write and how she was supposed to write it. Clarification of what and how Kim was supposed to write on the topic of healthy eating was her motive for coming to the writing center. I told her that, while the writing center often proofreads papers and looks for sentence-level errors, I would not do this in our tutoring session. I wanted to see how clearly she could communicate her intentions, and I made this known to her from the start.

Kim had been to UMBC’s writing center before, so she knew the standard way in which most tutors begin their sessions: a read-aloud method that is designed to enable tutees to catch their own mistakes. Our session was no different in this respect; I had her read her paper aloud, but before she began reading, I asked her to mark only the parts of her paper that confused her or the parts where she wasn’t sure if she was being clear. “If you don’t mark anything,” I explained, “then I’m not going to be able to help you.” This motivated Kim to actively read her paper and look for disconnects between what she meant to say and what she was saying. While reading aloud, Kim vigorously marked phrases and words about which she was uncertain.

Kim caught many of the syntactic and semantic errors she was making during the read-aloud section of our session, and this is, in part, why UMBC tutors use this method. However, what I was interested in seeing, as I made clear to her before she began reading, were places where she felt that her text (the object) was not accurately communicating what she meant (her motive for writing the text), thus resulting in an improper or ambiguous interpretation of what is written (the outcome). By having Kim find and highlight her perceived trouble areas—be it how to compose a research paper, the topic of healthy eating in the United States, why healthy eating is important, or her understanding of what Americans must do to achieve healthy eating—I could, in a sense, move backwards in Kim’s writing process and see how the composition of text represented her unique ESL activity system; that

is, I could help Kim to recognize not only the text (the object), which was to portray a certain message (the outcome), but also: herself (the subject) in relation to her text, her use of resources (mediating tools) to compose the text, what it meant to eat healthy (the rules), whom she was writing to (the community), and what power her own opinions held in her text (the division of labor). All of these components went into Kim's writing of her research paper, as well as the overwhelming uncertainties she had about them, which made her understandings of academic research (the official body of knowledge) unclear and which made her feel lost and confused in her own paper. Furthermore, Kim did not know her audience or where she fit into her research, which created a text that did not clearly connote her motives for writing.

I began using third space discourse practices by focusing first on the areas that Kim highlighted; most of them had to do with certain foods, eating habits, and health terminologies with which she was unfamiliar. For example, at one point during the read-aloud section of our session, Kim struggled saying words like "celery" and "obesity." When she was done reading, I went back to the text and pointed out that she had not highlighted the word celery and asked her if she knew what celery was. She did not until I drew a picture of a stalk of celery. She did not know many of the vegetables—from Brussels sprouts to stringbeans—she cited in many of her sources. I asked her, then, why she would include information in her paper that she was unfamiliar with, to which she replied, "For the research paper, this is important for American health." This got us into a discussion about what exactly she knew about American health issues. My intentions were to show Kim that, while she did not know or fully understand the official knowledge she was citing, she did in fact know more than she believed she did. By opening up a space for Kim to recognize herself and her unofficial knowledge of Korean eating habits, she could then draw this information into how she understands the official knowledge. In other words, by helping Kim to recognize herself in third space, she would be able to culturally bridge what she already knows is typical of her Korean heritage to the American academic information she doesn't fully understand.

Kim was in no way naive about the general concerns in American health, even though she did not know some of the terminology. She knew about the food pyramid, about McDonalds, about cholesterol, about heart disease, about what she called "people dying of eating fat," etc. These were also concerns that she grew up hearing about in Korea, though the foods, statistics, eating regimens, and suggestions for exercise were notably different, judging by what Kim told me. Her understanding of American health issues in eating habits was not fully American, as she acknowledged the problems to be similar but more extreme forms of the ones Koreans faced, and her understanding also was not based on the official academic information she had acquired in her research: Kim's understanding—as her paper certainly signified—was centered in a confusing tug-of-war between two cultural banks of knowledge regarding the issue. By highlighting the cultural contradictions she was feeling toward the issue of healthy eating habits, I was asking her to recognize herself as writing in third space, between the official academic American body of knowledge and the unofficial Korean body of knowledge.

To help Kim recognize her writing as being influenced by both American academic and Korean cultural motivations, and thus to recognize herself within third space, I used a scaffolding technique: I instructed Kim to write down, in three columns, what she felt the differences in eating habits were between first Americans, then Koreans, and lastly herself—a Korean living in American culture. In the section under Korean diet, she noted that most Koreans eat mainly vegetables, but as fast food chains are becoming more and more popular, there are increasing health issues. In the section under

American diet, she noted that Americans eat mostly high-fat foods, “box foods” (processed foods), and fast food, which lead to unhealthy eating habits. In the section under her own eating habits, she noted that she eats a lot of Korean food (meaning foods like vegetables, fish, and tofu) but when she doesn’t have time to get Korean food, she eats fast foods, which are unhealthy.

I then led her back into her text to a certain passage she cited and was unsure about regarding a healthy eating program. I asked first if she understood what the source was stating (which she did to some degree) and next if the healthy eating program applied to her and her diet (which it also did). In this instance, I am trying to show Kim that there are connections between the official research information she gathered and her own Korean-American identity that Kim may have overlooked when writing her text. This way, Kim can relate to the official information more so than when she first wrote her text; before, she saw the research as a generalization about the American population, a population within which she did not identify herself. By recognizing herself within the American population through her Korean identity, she could think more freely and connect ideas between herself and her research data. She was also then able to better understand the official community through understanding how her eating habits differed from and were similar to those of the general Americans represented in the statistics. Immediately, she reanalyzed how she was using her resources (the mediating tools) to create her text; for instance, in the section where she offered alternative eating habits, she asked me if she could use traditional Korean foods like kimchi in place of what she had previously written down—things that were foreign to her, like granola and beans. I replied that of course she could and stressed to her that, though she was writing a research paper for her teacher, she was ultimately the author of her piece.

The notion that Kim could incorporate her Korean diet information into her paper made thinking about the relevance of eating habits easier for her to understand. While there were still many words and terms that she did not know, she could understand the general ideas promoted in the official research sources and see where her background information could be useful in giving tips—for example, on what sorts of low-cholesterol foods people should eat and how foods should be prepared. Kim left the center feeling that she could synthesize in her paper her Korean knowledge with the official body of research on eating habits. In this sense, Kim is not only making learning from her research practical to her own life, but is also making room for Korean-Americans within her paper on American eating habits, thereby using third space to enhance her original research.

There was definitely a change in the way Kim looked at her research before our session and after it, and I argue that this change came from learning within her third space identity. While she still does not fully understand the academic health regimens included in her paper, she told me at the end of the session that she understands them much clearer now that she can see her relationship to them. Once she arrived at a clearer motive through recognition of herself within the activity she was to write about, her writing (the object) was less confusing and more informative (the outcome) to both her and others.

Conclusion

Third space tutoring does not always work, as I have come to realize. But the reason why is situated in how the writing center is viewed within the university: as a kind of fix-it shop or a place for last-minute proofreading before an assignment is due. Many of the instances where third space tutoring did not work in my experience were a result of differences in expectations between me and my tutee. Students, peer tutors included, need to understand that writing centers are meant to be places

where tutees can work on process and not product, and this means that the university at large needs to stop thinking of writing centers as proofreading services. Writing centers have the ability—and, in my view, a very unique one—to change and shape academia. They can help the university to become more democratic by helping marginalized students to clearly communicate their meanings and contributions. This does not mean that tutors should help their tutees to structure their papers and does not mean that tutors should try to even interpret their tutees' papers. It means tutors should help tutees recognize what factors go into their writing and where they stand in the larger official structure of academia.

While the writing center is just one of many components in a complex university student support system, it definitely can be a very convenient tool for helping marginalized ESL students' voices to be heard. Compared to other components of academia, the writing center seems to be one of the most free places for ESL students to express their ideas without unwarranted scrutiny—that is, if their tutors let them. Walk-in writing centers, like the one I participate in, cannot fix all of a tutee's problems in one sitting, granted, but in one sitting, we can at least analyze, identify, and address problems in cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication that complicate and confuse the reader and writer alike. One way of addressing misunderstandings and miscommunications is by utilizing third space discourse practices. Third space tutoring means stepping out of the controlled and rationalistic environment of academic discourse and working on uncovering and making conscious the conflicting cultural bodies of knowledge that go into ESL students' writing processes. The writing center, then, can be something closer to what Stephen North envisioned: a place that truly does focus on process and not product. In a way, the writing center is a unique place for tutors and tutees alike to discover active, intellectual, and intercultural communication skills and ways of learning that, in time, have the ability to shape the university's body of knowledge into a democratic, multicultural, and multifaceted reality.

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