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# INTRODUCTION

Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth

*Tutoring Second Language Writers* is a book for tutors. It is intended to advance the conversations tutors have with one another and their directors about tutoring second language writers and writing. The aim of this book is to engage readers with current ideas and issues that highlight the excitement and challenge of working with those who speak English as a second (or additional) language. The contributors to this collection have geared their chapters toward a US context, but we believe all readers, regardless of locale or the organization of their tutoring center, will find points of entry in these pages that lead to meaningful discussions about working with culturally and linguistically diverse writers and tutors.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS BOOK

This book can be used in courses and programs for preparing tutors and teachers. The chapters can be read individually or together and may be used as a basis for discussions in staff meetings and as follow-ups to tutoring sessions. The chapters serve as references to help answer questions about theoretical and practical issues. Equally important, they raise questions about the complicated task of preparing to work with linguistically diverse populations of writers. Readers can use this book to enliven their curiosity and advance tutor-led research. At the beginning of each of the book's four parts, we offer a glimpse of the topics and questions raised in each chapter. We hope readers will be drawn into the chapters and carry the discussion forward into staff meetings and the many informal discussions tutors have among themselves and with others.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book opens with a chapter that frames the broad focus of the collection around philosopher John Dewey's belief in reflective thinking as

a way to help build new knowledge. It continues with part 1, “Actions and Identities,” which includes chapters about creating a proactive stance toward language difference, thinking critically about labels, and the mixed feelings students may have about learning English. Part 2, “Research Opportunities,” includes two chapters that demonstrate writing center research projects and a third that explains research methods tutors can use to further investigate their questions about writing center work. Part 3, “Words and Passages,” offers four personal stories of inquiry and discovery, and in part 4, “Academic Expectations,” authors confront some of the challenges tutors face when they try to help writers meet readers’ specific expectations.

All of the chapters in this book draw upon research in the fields of second language writing, composition, and applied linguistics, and they connect ideas from these areas to the contexts of one-on-one tutoring. We hope readers will make them a part of the conversations they have over coffee and in staff meetings as well those they have with multilingual students outside the writing center and in the larger community.

There is a growing need for tutors who are better prepared to work with writers who speak multiple languages, including English. We see evidence of this need in the interest and concern generated in the pages of journals and conference programs and in the talks we have had with students and tutors around the world. One collection cannot tackle every question, but readers can add to the conversations begun in these chapters and carry them forward in ways large and small.

# 1

## SECOND LANGUAGE WRITERS, WRITING CENTERS, AND REFLECTION

Ben Rafoth

Tutoring involves multiple responsibilities. Tutors must ask the right questions and listen carefully when writers respond. They are expected to read critically, explain clearly, motivate, and empathize. As they work with writers from different backgrounds and abilities on assignments from an array of disciplines, they are also expected to know their limits and reach beyond them. Tutors are asked to do many things, but it is hard to imagine any writing center where the expectations for tutors' responsibilities do not begin with understanding the purpose of education because understanding education's purpose shapes the meaning and practice of tutoring.

Philosopher John Dewey believed that the purpose of education is to foster a love of learning and a desire for more education. For Dewey (1920), education is an end in itself because openness to learning leads to greater social cohesion, democracy, and equality. These ideals were not idle abstractions in the first half of twentieth-century America when Dewey's writings were taking shape against a backdrop of grinding automation, income inequality, and child labor. Dewey's ideas were born in an American context of swelling immigration, crowded schools, and racial and ethnic tensions that were no less severe than the ones we face today. Dewey believed education was the lever that would move the United States and the world to a better place. It still holds that promise.

For tutors reading this book—from those who have little experience to those with a lot, and from undergraduate to graduate tutors—it is worth taking a moment to understand why Dewey's vision of progressive education provides a foundation for the work of writing centers. I believe it does so for three reasons: Dewey's vision is grounded in real-world experience, it looks toward the future, and it is embedded in a robust philosophical tradition. When learning is grounded in experience, it is driven

by curiosity and the desire to discover new things through research and inquiry. When it looks to the future, learning is ambitious and hopeful; it tries to make a positive difference. And when learning is embedded in a robust philosophy of life, like Dewey's pragmatism, it helps us to think about teaching and writing in the context of broad philosophical perspectives that include epistemology, politics, and aesthetics.

When L2 writers striving to develop advanced literacy step into a campus writing center in the United States, they put more on the table, figuratively speaking, than drafts of their papers. They carry with them a history of their experiences with English, when and how they learned it, the values they associate it with, and the parts of their lives it displaces. They carry with them the struggles and rewards that are part of the experience of learning English. More important, they come to the table optimistic about their future and the role that education plays in it. If they seem intensely focused on their papers, it may be because they know the stakes are high. Second language writers want for themselves and the world they inhabit many of the same things almost everyone does, and they see learning to write well, in English or some variety of it, as a way up, and perhaps out. Coming as they often do from rich traditions of literacy in their homelands, they are also familiar with the aesthetic and intellectual rewards of writing and reading. They seek tutors who can help them attain whatever goals they have for writing.

Aspirations such as these find their way to writing centers because tutoring is transformative, as a number of writing center scholars have shown: Condon (2012); Fels and Wells (2011); Greenfield and Rowan (2011); Grimm (1999); Harris (1995); Kail and Trimbur (1987); and Grutsch McKinney (2013). Each of these works has its own philosophical grounding, and it is not necessarily in Dewey's pragmatism. As a whole, however, writing center scholarship devoted to bringing about greater justice in the world through education builds, at least in part, on Dewey's legacy.

I have been a writing center director and tutor for twenty-five years, and it is still remarkable to me how much knowledge, skill, and understanding it takes to be a writing tutor. Compared to a lecturer who stands before a room full of students and imagines everyone in the room to be smart, eager, and appreciative, tutoring is personal. Each session is unique, and a tutor needs to think about a lot more than the talking points in a lecture. This is the case for all of the writers we work with, but it is particularly true for L2 students. More than twenty years ago, Harris and Silva (1993) observed, "We should recognize that along with

different linguistic backgrounds, ESL students have a diversity of concerns that can only be dealt with in the one-to-one setting where the focus of attention is on that particular student and his or her questions, concerns, cultural presuppositions, writing processes, language learning experiences, and conceptions of what writing English is all about" (525). Tutors must contend with learning as it unfolds in the ways Muriel Harris and Tony Silva describe, and when they falter, they must come up with something else. They also must deal with a broad range of individual differences because each student's approach to writing and learning is different, some proceeding methodically and efficiently as they navigate their boat down the middle of the river while others push off and go wherever the current is strongest. Still others spend days on dry land before they embark, collecting supplies and pacing back and forth. Amid the various courses and disciplines, levels of study, linguistic backgrounds, types of assignments, and writing processes, tutors must work close to the ground because language is always stuck to the particulars of context. Tutors must also know that language is also a practice—a tool—and thus a means for changing contexts. Alastair Pennycook (2010), an applied linguist and author of *Language as a Local Practice*, sounds a lot like Dewey when Pennycook writes, "To think in terms of practices is to make social activity central, to ask how it is we do things as we do, how activities are established, regulated and changed. Practices are not just things we do, but rather bundles of activities that are the central organization of social life" (2).

Dewey's ideas are apparent in any discussion of language and practice, which is why they remain relevant to composition theory and pedagogy (e.g., Crick 2003; Phelps 1988) and why they have also appeared in national reports on the future of teaching (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future 1996). Given the problems Dewey saw in the world at the time he wrote, in the first half of the twentieth century, it is clear his notion of reflection is the antithesis of thinking based on prejudices, impulses, unexamined beliefs, old information, discredited theories and sources, and suppressed curiosity and imagination. These ways of thinking must be isolated because they impede individual growth and social progress. One of the challenges to today's tutors is to use reflective thinking to expand opportunities for growth for themselves and all writers they work with.

For tutors who work with multilingual writers, understanding reflective thinking is an essential requirement for the job and the title. There is a lot to know about language and how people use and experience it, especially when it comes to assisting L2 writers in the context of a writing

center. To read and learn from the chapters in this volume, as well as from the many other opportunities provided in the courses, books, journals, and collaborative projects that make up writing centers, means making a commitment to reflective thinking.

There is little doubt that tutors work diligently or that their directors aim to prepare them well, but the challenge is enormous nonetheless. The expectations for advanced literacy are high, and helping students learn to meet these expectations can be a humbling experience. For this reason, however, tutors must expand their capacities for teaching and learning by thinking in systematic and discovery-oriented ways. Those who supervise tutors and direct writing centers are also implicated in this call to expand their capacities for thinking (see Bushman 1999; Farrell 2007). *Teaching Second-Language Writers* provides a step in this direction, and in the remaining pages of this chapter, I hope to elaborate on reflective thinking and how it relates to tutoring and the various chapters in this collection as I see them.

Tutors have probably heard the term *reflection* used to refer to many different things. We are now to a point at which being asked to reflect on something means we are asked to *think about it*—in other words, reflecting, musing, pondering and thinking—they all sound the same. Teachers sometimes implore students *to really reflect on* an idea, which may mean they want students to do more than merely think about it. But what is that, exactly?

In *How We Think*, Dewey (1933) tried to distinguish between reflection and conventional thinking when he defined reflection as the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions toward which it tends [that] includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality” (9). Carol Rodgers (2002, 845) points out that Dewey’s notion of reflection involves these qualities:

- continuity, or connecting experiences and ideas to achieve greater understanding and social progress;
- systematic thinking, including rigorous, disciplined, and critical thinking about practices;
- interaction with others; and
- a favorable attitude toward personal and intellectual growth.

The first of these, connecting experiences and ideas to achieve greater understanding and social progress, begins with tutors connecting with the writers they serve. Ilona Leki made this point when she wrote,

There is a tendency among humans to see their own social and cultural group as highly nuanced and differentiated but to be less able to fully grasp that all social and cultural groups are equally nuanced and differentiated. . . . But the most effective way for writing center tutors to experience these nuances firsthand is to take advantage of the visits of these multilingual, multicultural individuals to the writing center and show interest in their home language, country, or culture by engaging them in the kind of small talk that usually accompanies tutoring sessions, and so get to know them one by one. (Leki 2009, 13)

The chapters that appear in this book speak to matters of language, locality, and practice. When they are read and shared in the context of a larger program of tutor training and education, these chapters provide new information, theories, and practices essential to the four qualities of reflective thinking listed above.

Take, for example, the question of tutor education and what tutors need to know in order to work collaboratively in a writing center. Chapter 2 connects the work tutors perform with L2 writers to higher education's larger responsibilities for promoting tolerance and justice. It is sometimes easy to forget that education is about the future and the kind of world we want for ourselves and the generations that will follow. However, if tutors and teachers of literacy look forward to a time when the way people speak and write is not held against them, then there must be ways for all educators, tutors included, to help make this future. Frankie Condon and Bobbi Olson write, "We believe that by giving space for tutors to engage in a deeper and more theoretical understanding of their work—particularly their work with multi- and translingual writers—writing centers can be a locus of participatory agency for change. We can help our institutions to transform the conditions in which Othered students write and learn." The coauthors describe how they helped transform conditions as the tutors in their writing center conducted research, discussed, wrote, and produced a book for future generations of tutors at their university. Drawing inspiration from the praxis-based theories of Paulo Freire, they enacted a type of reflection more political than Dewey's but equally committed to the power of teaching, learning, and knowledge making for bringing about change and justice.

Or take a question that often arises in tutoring sessions with L2 writers: what do we do when a second language writer asks for help with a draft that contains many instances of her written accent?

One quality of reflection asks tutors to think of a tutoring session as one step along a path toward greater understanding and social progress. In other words, the question of how to handle written accents

requires a level of understanding that goes deeper than the knowledge required to fix or proofread a paper. It requires knowledge of the writer and his goals and of the relationship between a person's accent and his or her identity. A second quality of reflection requires systematic, disciplined, and critical thinking about the writer and his writing. For example, what are the features that manifest as accented writing, and how are they different from those considered to be unaccented writing? What is the writer's field of study and what does the instructor expect in this piece of writing? What does the student want to achieve with his writing and how does this goal relate to preserving or losing the written accent? Questions like these speak to the need for tutors to be inquisitive and to pursue their curiosity by creating new knowledge. The chapters in this book address various ways to do that: developing and testing theories, conducting observations, examining practices, writing narratives, making interpretations, counting, and qualifying. They also illustrate different types and uses of evidence to support claims, and they show how intimately connected the links are between research, practices, and persons.

Third and fourth, reflective thinking requires interaction with others and a favorable attitude toward personal and intellectual growth. Tutoring is, by definition, collaborative, but written accents are linguistically complex and tutors need to interact with one another and the wider community of multilingual students and disciplinary experts in order to expand, personally and intellectually, their understanding of written accents.

When educators practice reflective thinking in the way Dewey intended (instead of treating reflection as merely "thinking about it"), they strive for the kinds of deeper understanding that connect the decisions and actions involved in teaching or tutoring one person with the larger effort to create a better world. They think systematically and critically about learning, they work with other educators and experts in the field, and they remain open to new ideas. When tutors practice reflective thinking, they expand the possibilities for helping students, addressing not only students' short-term needs but also who they wish to become. Thinking reflectively in this way also helps tutors understand some of the conflicts they may feel about their work, such as the tendency to identify with students who are striving to meet their instructors' expectations while at the same time wanting to maintain and even celebrate the students' accents. In this case, tutors must understand that helping writers recognize and use their accents is not simply part of the writing process; it is a step toward changing our monolingual culture and helping

L2 students participate in the culture. (In the 1980s, many tutors and other academics were involved in efforts to eliminate gender bias in writing, and today the use of inclusive forms has been widely adopted, conservative outposts notwithstanding.) These aspects of working with multilingual writers—reflection, inquiry, identity, and social justice—are examined throughout the book.

In chapter 3, for example, Michelle Cox observes that some teachers penalize students for any writing that appears to lie outside the narrow boundaries of Standard Written American English. “Editing this accent out of a client’s text will, in effect, render their identity as an L2 writer invisible. And yet leaving these markers in the text may leave the student vulnerable to criticism or a lower grade. What should the tutor do in this case?” Cox’s nuanced perspective helps tutors better understand the tradeoffs involved when working with students whose writing is accented.

While chapters 2 and 3 help orient tutors around questions of identity and the writer’s purpose, chapter 4 looks into a Spanish-dominant context in which avoiding English is part of the writing center’s reality. Ambivalence toward English is the focus of this chapter, in which Shanti Bruce takes readers on a visit to the Centro de Competencias de la Comunicación (CCC) at the Universidad de Puerto Rico en Humacao (UPRH). Bruce delves into the complicated status of English teaching and learning in Puerto Rico, an island territory of the United States in the eastern Caribbean, where Bruce recognized a prime place for multilingual writing center research. Her chapter shows that language policies in places like Puerto Rico, Quebec, California, and elsewhere can be studied on location or from a distance. Recent debates on the US mainland about English-only policies and some politicians’ insistence that English be required for citizenship or legal status often fail to recognize the close relationship between language, identity, and the natural resistance people feel toward having an identity imposed on them by others, even if that identity leads to greater economic opportunity. As Bruce discusses what she heard while listening to the tutors at CCC talk about English (one tutor said, “My dad wants me to sound Merengue, and my mom wants me to be totally American like Frank Sinatra”), readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complicated nature of being a language gatekeeper. By traveling to Puerto Rico, asking questions, and listening to tutors at CCC, Bruce is able to collect important data.

Ambivalence toward English is shared by many multilingual writers, including those who live in diverse places like Miami-Dade County, located in south Florida, where almost three-fourths of all residents

speak a language other than English at home. This fact is reflected in students who visited the university writing center where Kevin Dvorak (chapter 5) and his tutors worked and to a lesser extent in the backgrounds of the tutors themselves. They spoke freely about their linguistic differences, but when it came to tutoring, these tutors tended to use English only when working with student-writers. This tendency changed when Dvorak and his tutors decided to examine the assumptions underlying this practice. Eventually they settled on two questions to investigate: When and how might code-switching be used during a tutoring session? What are students' and tutors' attitudes toward code-switching in the writing center? Underlying these two questions were even more basic ones: do tutors and clients prefer using both languages since that reflects the surrounding linguistic environment, or do they prefer to stick to English since that is the target language they are usually trying to learn and master?

Questions like these lead to the rich data that lives within each writing center. Many ideas can be inferred from the data tutors themselves create in the form of video recordings of their own sessions and of their responses as they watch them replayed. In chapter 6, Glenn Hutchinson and Paula Gillespie tell how they have done this kind of recording in their own center and what tutors who try it can expect. One outcome of their research for the Digital Video Project was the beginning of conversation circles, one in English for international students in the United States for their first semester who want to practice their English informally and in a low-risk environment. They also started a Spanish conversation circle so students, many of whom are children of immigrants to the Miami, Florida, area, can practice their Spanish. In other words, by examining their conferences in a systematic way, the tutors in Hutchinson and Gillespie's center discovered a way to serve the needs of those who want to improve their L1 (because most of their schooling has been in English). Audio-only recording yields interesting data too, and it has a long history as a research tool in writing centers. For tutors who are interested, a search of dissertation abstracts using the keywords *writing center*, *tutor*, and *audio recording* yields many hits.

A better understanding of many concepts used in writing center research, like conversation analysis, semistructured interview, action research, and grounded theory is the focus of chapter 7. Rebecca Day Babcock, whose own research has won awards and grant funding, takes the reader on a tour through various stages of inquiry. Speaking directly to her readers, she explains what scholars have studied, what opportunities await future researchers, and the reasons anyone would want

to bother to undertake the investigations she proposes. Her chapter appears in the middle of the book, often the point at which readers have gathered up ideas and may be thinking about launching a research project of their own. For these readers, there is this advice from one of the tutor-researchers Babcock interviewed for her chapter.

My advice would be to really be open when you start analyzing your research. Go in with your question, be focused—but be ready to find connections you would never expect. I ended my project in a place I never anticipated, and that I wish I'd left myself more time to explore. Also, talk to people—the best ideas come from being able to bounce your ideas off people. Finally, the writing center literature has great breadth and is pretty easily accessible—utilize the knowledge that's already there, and then use it to branch out and bring us new ideas! (158)

Whether for a tutor who wants to explore new approaches to take with multilingual writers or for a writer trying out a new genre—lasting change requires experimentation and a disposition for learning that entails risk taking. As Neal Lerner (2009, 40–41) has shown, these qualities were present in the science and writing labs dating back to the first several decades of the 1900s. Dewey is also associated with the laboratory method of instruction (Dewey founded the first laboratory school, at the University of Chicago) and promoted “attitudes of mind” that would lead to experimentation and risk taking in learning (see also Council of Writing Program Administrators 2011). These remained central to Dewey's concept of reflective thinking and his overall vision of education, even as his concept and vision were faulted by conservative critics.

Theorizing and conducting research are the lifeblood of learning. Contemplating the many possibilities for research is a good follow-up to chapter 7 and can be done independently or with other tutors. Some of the possibilities might begin with questions like these:

1. What would you like to know about the L2 students who visit your writing center? Do you talk to them outside the center? Hang out together? If so, have you developed a relationship that could give you an entrée for interviewing them for your research?
2. In staff meetings or in a tutor preparation course, have you examined samples of accented writing? If not, make a point of noticing, in your own tutoring sessions, the features of drafts containing accented writing written by second language writers and compare these features to those of drafts written by a diverse sample of L1 writers. If you are an L2 speaker in a US writing center, consider sharing your writing with the group. Look at grammatical forms as well as features that mark the piece's style and voice. Compare the two texts and try to describe the

similarities, differences, and anything else you notice. Share these findings with other tutors and researchers and invite their input into what the similarities and differences suggest about the identities of these writers and their writing.

3. For L2 tutors: L2 writers write with an accent to *varying* degrees. Why do you think this is so? In what sense do L1 writers also write with an accent?
4. Are there examples of writing on your campus, in social media, or in the surrounding community that are meant to be rude and offensive toward certain groups of people? What impact do you think they are intended to have, and do you think they have that impact?
5. Attitudes and relationships can change dramatically during the four years of college. Have your attitudes toward using Standard American Academic English changed over time? What is responsible for this change? Have the attitudes of your family members toward Standard American Academic English also changed? Explain.

The chapters that make up part 3, “Words and Passages,” provide an interlude in which tutors and former tutors write about their own journeys of discovery. Though somewhat shorter than the other pieces, these chapters remind us that the path of learning is seldom safe or smooth. In chapter 8, Elizabeth (Adelay) Witherite describes how her passion for social justice led her to design an empirical study for her master’s thesis, completed in 2014, and titled *Writing Center Tutors’ Perceptions of Social Justice Issues: A Multiple Method Qualitative Study*. Witherite asked the question, “How do peer tutors experience and conceptualize social justice issues within the context of tutoring sessions in the writing center?” She collected data from eight participants through interviews, concept mapping, and social-category ranking tasks. This chapter tells the story of how she settled on her research question and managed to answer it after gathering more than eight hours of audio recordings and 145 pages of transcriptions. The distinction Witherite examined between experiencing and conceptualizing social justice issues turned out to have significant implications for understanding how words create or block opportunities for personal growth and social progress.

Philosophers are fond of describing those who try to solve intellectual problems as being caught on the “horns of a dilemma”—a conflict of truths, values, or beliefs; on the one hand versus on the other hand. Tutors experience these conflicts on a regular basis, and they can get caught between defending an instructor’s comments and empathizing with a writer’s struggle. How is a tutor to handle, say, a situation in which an instructor, who is US born and identifies as American, comes

across to the student as unfair and disrespectful, while the student, who is Ghanaian, feels shamed and defeated? In chapter 9, Jocelyn Amevuvor describes her experience of reading and later interpreting a professor's written comment from two different perspectives, one from the teacher's and the other from the student's. Situations like these are difficult for tutors to sort out because one can never be 100 percent confident about the interpretation. Tutors are sometimes the only people available to help writers deal with conflicts that arise when they receive harsh or ambiguous comments. In Condon and Olson's chapter in part 1, "Actions and Identities," we saw that tutoring is implicated in conflicts such as this, where power, race, and discourse come together and demand that we think about what is fair and just. Here again, reflective thinking is necessary to address such conflicts. While an honest dialogue between the student and his professor is usually best, such dialogues often don't occur. The instructor may be unavailable or the student unwilling to speak with him. In this case a tutor becomes one of the last people the writer can turn to. What is memorable about Amevuvor's chapter is that it doesn't pretend all tutoring sessions end happily. When tutors and writers confront hard problems, tutors seldom learn how things eventually work out for the writer. Did the student and instructor come to some sort of resolution? Was the tutor helpful? Does it matter that the tutor may never know the outcome?

What does writing look like when it balances the tension between preserving a writer's identity and meeting an instructor's expectations? In chapter 10, Pei-Hsun Emma Liu describes research she conducted for her doctoral dissertation and includes the writing of one of her participants, Angela, who spent many years learning to write Chinese while she was growing up in Taiwan. Liu tells us that when it came to writing in college in the United States, Angela felt writing in English made her thoughts seem simplistic, and this bothered her. She was torn between the part of her identity that placed a premium on being a good student and pleasing her teachers and another part that treasured the fullness and beauty of Chinese writing. Liu describes how, eventually, Angela came to write in a way that seemed to mitigate her conflicted feelings.

Angela is one of thousands, and perhaps millions of people worldwide who harbor ambivalent feelings about the need to learn and use English. On the one hand, they know learning English can create upward mobility for them and perhaps the members of their families. It can significantly increase the chances for better employment opportunities, scholarships, and access to the trove of information, literature, and scholarly journals available on the Internet. It also opens the door to the wealth of

prose and poetry in the Western canon. For these reasons, parents and grandparents of young people often encourage them to learn English. On the other hand, learners and their families may also know that learning English is not always necessary or even desirable. As the economies of their own countries prosper, many people around the world see that knowing English is only one alternative for achieving mobility (Liu and Tannacito 2013). Languages like Chinese, Arabic, Hindi, and Spanish also create economic opportunity. And perhaps, they think, it is not necessary to learn an additional language formally, in school, because many people do just fine figuring out ways to communicate as they go along—on the job, in the laboratory, by using translator apps, or by watching television and playing video games. Multilingual tutors can probably think of many examples of how this figuring-out operates.

In chapter 11, Jose L. Reyes Medina writes with one of the most distinctive voices in the collection, probably because he feels so passionate about the topic of how he learned English. After coming to the United States, and while attending college, Reyes Medina tutored at Bronx Community College in New York. Since then he has set his sights on earning a doctorate in psychology. Most monolingual speakers probably never give much thought to the dedication it takes to learn a language well enough to earn a college degree with it. Americans may have studied a foreign language (typically Spanish, French, or German) in high school or college, perhaps spent a couple months studying abroad, or maybe visited a place where they tried to use the language to communicate with an indulgent waiter or souvenir dealer. But learning a language well enough to study at the college or graduate level, with native speakers and in their own country, is another thing altogether. And while becoming immersed in another language and culture provides unparalleled experiences classrooms cannot even begin to duplicate, the effect is often overwhelming and takes a heavy emotional toll, at least for a time. Learning a new language in this way involves sustained levels of self-motivation and sacrifice. There are also frequent setbacks that demand persistence and confidence. Reyes Medina's chapter gives tutors a glimpse into what he did as an L2 student to learn English outside class and away from the writing center. His message is not boastful but is inspiring because it shows how much motivation Reyes Medina has and how much learning has already occurred. It may even cause monolingual tutors to begin learning another language. Doing so is rigorous but not impossible, and as Reyes Medina demonstrates, it is the accomplishment of a lifetime. Learning English made him a better tutor and a more thoughtful individual all around.

Part 4, “Academic Expectations,” narrows the focus of this collection to some of the specific demands school imposes on literacy. It describes how tutors can help writers negotiate these demands, bringing to mind two of the qualities of reflective thinking in Dewey’s philosophy of education: reflection requires interaction with others in communities and a disposition that favors personal and intellectual growth. The first few chapters in this section deal with key terms like *critical thinking*, *disciplinary writing*, and *self-editing*, terms that show up in many of the assignments and rubrics students struggle to understand.

In chapter 12, Valerie Balester begins this section of the book by posing a question that has an elusive answer: what is *critical thinking*? This term may be one of the most taken-for-granted notions in American higher education, appearing in course descriptions, college recruiting brochures, syllabi, and policies about assessing learning outcomes. Undergraduates no doubt discover it means one thing in one discipline and something else in another. International students may not be familiar with the term at all, which is not to say they do not think critically. Rather, the notion can seem strange to them, as in, “Critical thinking—is there any other kind?” In a thoughtful and wide-ranging chapter, Balester invites tutors to look outward and see how the idea of critical thinking translates to academic settings elsewhere. Balester’s exploration of this concept has important practical applications too, as it demonstrates times when tutors must explain things that can seem obvious to insiders but confounding to everyone else. In these cases, Blau and Hall (2002) say, tutors must be cultural informants. Those who are not deeply familiar with American culture are often confounded by highly specific cultural references like *cowboy mentality*, *KKK*, *yard sale*, or *subs and suds*.

These responsibilities—looking outward to other disciplines and being a cultural informant—begin with another hallmark of reflective thinking: having a disposition toward personal and intellectual growth, both for oneself and for others. When Balester stresses that certain ideas and events are difficult for international students to navigate, she does so because it can appear that students are shy, withdrawn, or “just don’t get it” when in fact they have no point of entry into the topic of conversation. Stepping outside the cultural bubble requires an openness to discovering things about one’s own culture that are taken for granted and a willingness to participate in the give and take of conversations about sensitive topics. Orienting one’s tutoring sessions around ideas relevant to students’ experiences and approaching new information in an open-minded way go hand in hand with reflective thinking.

These approaches are particularly valuable when uncovering the source of confusion and misunderstanding.

Understanding what it means to enter the conversation is an aspect of intellectual growth for tutors and writers. It is the reason instructors insist that students in upper-level and graduate classes use forms of language that track closely to their field of study and narrow their audience. As Jennifer Craig says in chapter 13, tutors may feel like strangers in an unfamiliar place when reading a paper written in a discipline different from their own—along with “some degree of being awkward, lost, vulnerable, and out of control” (217). Over time, Craig explains, tutors gain confidence as they learn about other disciplines from the papers and students they encounter. Over the years, Craig has worked with writing tutors, colleagues new to disciplinary writing, and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). Those who tutor at MIT must respond to many proposals, reports, and presentations from science and engineering students, and a big part of her job is to help those tutors find a way into those documents (by figuring out their purpose and audience, for example). She is unflinching about the challenge these sessions can pose, but she notes that along with the challenge and uncertainty comes growth. Tutoring is hard in part because writers, as they think and talk about their work, shift rapidly between disciplinary and general knowledge, not to mention subject matter and style, words and paragraphs, and local and global concerns. As other chapters in this book show, writers increasingly move between languages, codes, and discourses. Tutors must challenge themselves to learn about other disciplines and languages as they step outside their comfort zones. Craig helps her colleagues and GTAs to do this and shares the advice she gives them with readers. She also offers three vignettes to illustrate the unavoidable complications that arise outside the comfort zone: one vignette shows a tutor who focuses on the writer’s rhetorical strategies and prioritizes writing skills over language-acquisition skills; a second vignette introduces a tutor who feels unready to approach a writer’s text and yet must contend with the writer’s resistance; a third depicts a session that teeters between convergent and divergent thinking as the writer strives to nail down the results from his data analysis while the tutor urges more reflection.

As Craig notes, tutoring L2 writers may be primarily about writing, but those writers also bring with them language issues that challenge the skills of many English monolingual tutors, most of whom would benefit from learning not only another language but also more *about* English, particularly from an applied-linguistics perspective. For example, it

takes a solid understanding of the concept of *clause* (dependent versus independent, relative versus adverbial versus noun) to explain certain uses of pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation marks that affect the intended meaning of a text. The ability to talk about clauses is also important for explaining larger rhetorical concerns such as the arrangement of *given* and *new* information. When a monolingual tutor's explicit knowledge of grammar lags behind that of a multilingual writer's, the session may be less productive than it could be, and the tutor's credibility may suffer as well. In the final chapter, chapter 14, coauthors Pimyupa W. Praphan and Guiboke Seong express their belief that tutors who work with L2 writers first need to figure out what the writers do and do not know about English, especially for the purpose of providing corrective feedback. Praphan and Seong earned their doctorates in the United States before returning to Thailand to teach English as a foreign language. Praphan also worked as an ESL tutor. They are acutely aware of the importance of *formal accuracy* and *error gravity* in learning another language, and in chapter 12 they explain why these concepts belong in the vocabulary of tutoring. Tutors will likely conclude, as Carol Severino et al. (2013) do, that these concepts add an important dimension to the debate over higher- and lower-order concerns.

Dewey said, "Education is not preparation for life. It is life itself." For writing tutors everywhere, perhaps the takeaway from this book is to keep learning—about language, languages, writing, and writers. Keep striving to discover ideas and practices that improve tutoring. Use all of the resources at your disposal, and challenge yourself.

I once read an article, published in the *New Yorker* magazine, on what it means to strive for greater understanding, systematic and critical thinking, interaction with others, and personal and intellectual growth—in other words, Dewey's notion of reflective thinking (Gawande 2011). It's a true story that involves not a vibrant young tutor but an old mentor, and not a writer but a doctor. The two men came together already highly accomplished, secure, settled. Why mess with that?

Atul Gawande, the author of this piece, is a surgeon, and the highly specific set of skills he uses makes all the difference to his patients' recovery. For a time in their careers, young and inexperienced surgeons perform worse than their older and more experienced counterparts, but over time they get better and better—up to a point. Gawande began to wonder why so many surgeons' skills tend to plateau after reaching a certain point in their careers. Surgeons should keep getting better,

but they don't. He noticed his own skills had reached a plateau and he decided to do something about it. He got a tutor.

He refers to his tutor as his *coach*, and he is someone who used to be Gawande's teacher in medical school but is now retired. Gawande's tutor followed him into the operating room, sat off to the side, and took copious notes as he observed a procedure to remove a patient's thyroid gland. Afterward, they talked in the doctors' lounge, and Gawande's tutor reviewed the operation with him.

The mentor/coach/tutor reflected back to Gawande many of the things he did in a less-than-optimal way. For example, instead of draping the patient so both he and the surgical assistant could work efficiently, Gawande draped to his own advantage, which hampered the assistant. He held his elbow too high, letting wires become tangled. He used magnifying loupes that restricted his peripheral vision, and he committed a host of other mistakes that, taken together, can significantly affect the outcome of surgical procedures.

Gawande listened and took notes as his tutor broke things down for him. He is now a fan of this type of feedback and recommends it to his colleagues.

There are many lessons writing center professionals might take from this story: don't dwell on mistakes, don't wait until the situation is over to intervene when something is going wrong, don't compare tutoring to a medical operation. But two things stand out for me that I believe are easy to overlook. First, the doctor came to recognize on his own that he needed help, and second, he took action to get it. To take these parts of the story for granted is tempting because sensing that you need help seems obvious, but it's not. Most people at the top of their game (and many who are not) don't think they need help, so when they actually do ask for it, a door opens. Dewey showed us that education is most meaningful when learning is voluntary, or what some call *self-sponsored*. Gawande is famous and well respected, and he was at least as successful as his surgeon peers. No one but he knew his skills had been leveling off. But what he experienced troubled him, creating an opening for learning that Dewey called *doubt* and we might call an *exigency*. Gawande wanted to do better, and for that he had to take a risk with a novel approach. He might have done otherwise and concluded that his sickly patients, not his skills, were the reason some of his operations fell short of the desired outcome. He could have blamed his surgical assistants, the equipment he was using, or the stress hospital administrators were inflicting on him. Instead, he risked his ego and his reputation by asking a mentor to observe and critique him so he could improve. In other

words, Gawande, in his midforties, decided to become a learner by replicating the kind of observation and feedback he experienced when he trained as a young doctor.

As a result, Gawande not only improved his own skills, he learned techniques about surgery, and about observing operations and giving feedback, that he now shares with other doctors. In terms of reflective thinking, Gawande's decision to break out of his comfort zone meant he adopted an attitude toward learning that gave the highest priority to personal and intellectual growth. He reached out to others who could help him do something he was unable to do by himself—that is, view his performance from a fresh, critical perspective. And he connected what he discovered to a deeper understanding of himself and the work of surgery so he could then extend what he had learned to surgeons everywhere. This doctor's movement from doubt to investigation and interaction, and from there to connection with his broad group of peers, is the essence of reflective thinking and a model for tutors.

When tutors think reflectively, as Dewey and his followers believe, they will find doing so creates its own reward, and in the company of a supportive team, can be downright transformative.

### *Questions to Consider*

1. Suspending judgment may be one of the most important yet challenging things for tutors to do. Make a list of ten things you think tutors are most likely to judge prematurely when they work with L2 writers. If you were to ask the L2 writers who visit your center to do the same, how much do you think the two lists would overlap? If you were to do this as a full-blown research project, what are some of the sociocultural considerations you would have to take into account before you invited people to participate in your study?
2. The qualities of reflective thinking described in this chapter make demands that are sometimes hard to follow. Which ones do you find hardest? Rank the items in the list below, with one being the easiest and four the hardest, and then compare your rankings with other tutors.
  - continuity, or connecting experiences and ideas to achieve greater understanding and social progress
  - systematic thinking, including rigorous, disciplined, and critical thinking about practices
  - interacting with others
  - maintaining a favorable attitude toward personal and intellectual growth

### For Further Reading

Dewey, John. (1910) 1933. *How We Think*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

In this short book, John Dewey shows what pragmatism means for epistemology (what it means to think well) and for pedagogy (the study of teaching and learning). Dewey defined critical thinking as “reflective thought,” by which he meant suspending judgment, maintaining a healthy skepticism, and exercising an open mind. These are qualities tutors can develop, independently and with others, as they tutor, through listening, probing, questioning, and imagining.

Hughes, Bradley, Paula Gillespie, and Harvey Kail. 2010. “What They Take with Them: Findings from the Peer Writing Tutors Alumni Research Project.” *Writing Center Journal* 30 (2): 12–46.

In this award-winning article, the coauthors surveyed 126 tutor alumni from three universities to demonstrate that being a tutor has multiple and long-lasting effects. Long after they graduate and move on, former writing center tutors remember the impact of their work in the writing center on other parts of their lives. They also remember the reflective component of their training and how they learned to think deeply and critically about their work. In bestowing the IWCA’s 2010 Best Article Award on this piece, the awards committee noted that it “represents a monumental achievement for the field of writing center studies” because it shows, among other things, a useful model of research for the field.

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