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A Transnational Training Model for Peer Tutors: Authority, Rhetorical Awareness, and Language in/through Virtual Exchange Practices

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In Spring 2018, students in Olga Aksakalova's "Seminar in Writing Education and Peer Tutoring" course at LaGuardia Community College in New York City and writing peer tutors in the Writing and Communication Center at the New Economic School in Moscow, directed by Ashley Squires, collaborated in a number of online activities that aimed to enrich their understanding and practice of peer tutoring. The aim of this project was to provide practicing and aspiring writing peer tutors with an opportunity to learn about how peer tutoring functions in different academic and geographic locations and across linguistic divides. From the global rhetorical and civic perspectives, this collaboration was an attempt to de-center a U.S.-based discourse on writing and facilitate instead a global dialogue between peer tutors as they get ushered into the profession of teaching writing and as each of them constructs a writerly consciousness in their own student lives. While the neo-liberal orientation of higher education on both sides of the Atlantic works to commodify and cement linguistic hierarchies of the nation states, facilitating a conversation between two groups of peer tutor trainees on equal footing seemed particularly important in the peer tutoring context. Guided by the discussion of these pedagogical goals and the outcomes they generated, this essay will present a case study of our collaboration. We analyze our assignments and student responses, as

well as our reflections on the project. These artifacts will reveal whether and how the process of navigating the professional space of peer tutoring can be enriched and problematized by an international collaboration.

As most chapters in this collection illustrate, academic writing instruction and its institutional positionality in Russian higher education have revealed a transnational ethos. In this chapter, we understand the term *transnational* as a pedagogical disposition that “both highlights and works to build connections, crossings, and spaces between the existing national, ethnic, racial, and linguistic boundaries” (You, 2018, p. 2) for both educators and students. In the last decade, the emergent culture of writing centers in Russia has demonstrated a great deal of crossings between Russian and U. S. educational systems. By virtue of their name, writing centers in Russia (and other parts of the world) recall the long history of student-centered writing centers in the US. At the same time, Russian writing centers grapple with local institutions’ agendas to expand the scope of Russian scholars’ international publications through writing center consultations and seminars (Korotkina, 2017; Squires, 2018; see also Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). Thus, in Russian writing centers, decisions concerning staffing, training, pedagogy, types of services, policy, and languages of instruction usually consider multiple national and institutional models.

A similar awareness of multiple cultures and languages has been present in U. S. writing centers that have attended to students’ and consultants’ language varieties (Dvorak, 2016) and offered tutoring in multiple languages (Lape, 2013). Thus, the experience of attending or working at the writing center transcends national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, making it necessary for tutor training programs to address transnationality and transculturalism. U. S. tutor training programs, such as peer and director observations, mentoring, and tutor training courses, (Bleankney, 2019), usually have allocated space to approaches for working with multilingual students (Bruce & Rafoth, 2009; Lape, 2013), while Russian writing centers have combined U. S.-based literature with Russian resources on writing (NES WCC Handbook, 2016). In other words, both U. S. and Russian tutor training environments have engaged in transnational work indirectly through writing center training literature, the presence of international students, and English language learners.

This chapter examines a transnational tutor training model that facilitates a direct interaction between peer tutors residing in different countries. We discuss an online exchange between peer tutors at the New Economic School (NES) in Moscow and enrollees in a peer tutor training course at LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York (LGCC) in spring 2018. We argue that this project contributed to the professional development

of our peer tutors and trainees by 1) cultivating a sense of transnational, translingual professional identity; 2) prompting them to sharpen rhetorical skills which they can implement in tutoring by modeling the practice of active reading, listening and advice-giving; and 3) enabling a sustained discussion of the fraught questions of authority inherent to peer tutoring, especially in a multi-lingual environment. As a training practice, we believe this also benefits local writing center communities in multilingual environments by positioning writing as a cognitive and rhetorical activity rather than merely a language skill, a conceptual framing that has emerged as a particular priority in the Russian scholarship on academic writing, as is evident in many of the chapters in this volume (see Chapter 1, Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 10).

Institutional Contexts and Project Motivation

The concept of the writing center arrived in Russia—and in the former Soviet Union more generally—with the establishment in 2011 of the Writing and Communication Center (WCC) at the New Economic School (NES), an internationally oriented institution originally founded in 1992. Since its inception, the WCC has been led by U. S.-trained directors but has employed Russian and international consultants. In the last eight years, writing centers have spread more generally throughout the country; almost all of them serve faculty and graduate student researchers as their primary constituencies. The WCC at NES has remained unique in that it primarily serves students, particularly undergraduates enrolled in the joint bachelor's program run cooperatively between NES and HSE University. As an American-style liberal arts program with a mostly Western-trained faculty, the joint program has remained the closest to American educational norms. The NES WCC is a truly bilingual writing center, offering consultations in Russian and English and assisting students with writing projects in both languages (Aksakalova et al., 2016). However, as the majority of the writing done in the program is performed in English, English tends to be the predominant medium of writing center consultations (Bollinger, 2016).

The LaGuardia Writing Center has offered services in English to the linguistically and culturally diverse student population situated in one of the most diverse New York City neighborhoods, Long Island City. The staff has comprised largely professional tutors and several peer tutors, the majority of whom have attended LaGuardia. Currently, there are 28 tutors, seven of whom have taken a for-credit writing center pedagogy course. Tutors who have attended LaGuardia have provided particularly valuable insights to students and serve as role models. On campus, writing center tutors have partic-

ipated in language and writing events where they share their perspectives on student learning.

During the Spring of 2018, peer tutor groups from NES and LaGuardia Community College participated in a series of guided reflections and interpersonal exchanges on Wordpress. In many regards, these tutor groups were quite different from each other. First, peer tutors at the NES WCC are drawn from the NES-HSE joint bachelor's program. All students in the program—and therefore most of the peer tutors—have been native Russian speakers who have been required to achieve a certain level of proficiency in English in order to take English-medium courses and write an English-language thesis. The NES WCC participants in the online exchange were the first to hold the position of peer tutor in Russian history. While the majority had learned English in school, one of these tutors was a dual citizen of Russia and the United Kingdom and spoke both languages with native proficiency. Additionally, an American international student from HSE who was also an experienced WCC consultant assisted with content moderation and contributed occasional posts.

LaGuardia students who enrolled in the upper-level elective course English 220: Seminar in Writing Education and Peer Tutoring were mainly English majors and shared a native or near-native fluency in English. The course encompassed a rigorous curriculum in composition and writing center theory, combined with actual tutoring and mentoring experiences. Students observed writing center tutorials and tutored their peers under supervision. Upon successful completion of English 220, students could apply for tutor positions at the Writing Center or another tutoring center on campus, such as the Reading Lab.

Though created to deal with local needs, the NES peer tutoring program has necessarily relied on Western models for its institutional form and training ethos. Peer tutors have read classics from the canon of American writing center scholarship, refer to the *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (2016), and have learned practices pioneered at American universities. One of the problems, of course, has been that this pedagogical model imported from abroad has often seemed like an awkward fit for the Russian context, where authority matters and there has not been a strong tradition of collaborative learning or egalitarianism in education. Russian peer tutors may struggle to understand their identities as peer tutors, which may conflict with their self-image as students. This may especially be the case when Russian peer tutors have been called upon to tutor in their second language. Indeed, without a deep sense of the context in which these texts and practices that underpin the peer tutoring model were produced, Russian peer tutors can develop a stereotyped sense of

what peer tutoring entails, one which they must either awkwardly conform to or resist. Exposure to their counterparts in the US presented an opportunity to construct a peer tutoring identity in relation to a more realistic and diverse set of models and even to act as authorities on the subject of peer tutoring.

For LaGuardia students, peer tutoring was a more familiar terrain; the practice is well known in the US, and several campus tutoring centers employ peer tutors. However, it was important for English 220 students to understand a larger, international context for teaching and tutoring writing and develop the habit of learning from peers abroad so as not to conceive of the composition and writing center fields as U. S.-centric. The virtual exchange project for LaGuardia students was a response to Christiane Donahue's (2018) call to broaden the horizon of composition and rhetoric and prepare students for succeeding in a globally interconnected world:

We need to know that (1) we are not alone—other work on higher education writing can help us sharply articulate our own strengths and challenges—and (2) all students must grapple with questions of language and English if they are to be truly and fully prepared. (p. 21)

Operating in a bilingual environment, NES peer tutors could provide an important framework for working with international students or English language learners through such practices as code-switching. LaGuardia celebrates the cultural and linguistic diversity of its students, encouraging faculty and tutors across the campus to capitalize on students' language resources and develop translingual approaches. Thus, communication with Russian peer tutors brought a fresh perspective into LaGuardia campus efforts to promote resources for multilingual learners.

Online Writing, Cosmopolitanism, and Peer Tutoring

The growing culture of global online communication has presented a range of rhetorical and discursive needs that must be addressed in writing classrooms and tutorials. It has reconfigured the role of audience, placing it in the position "to quickly and directly respond to our ideas," redefining the rhetorical triangle that now includes not only reader, writer, and text, but also "location and modality" (Rice & St.Amant, 2018, p. 4). Writers and their instructors have thus considered "[w]here and who our audience is," as well as "what tool they're using to access our content" (Rice & St.Amant, 2018, p. 4). In response, writing tutors have targeted multiple literacies (Balester et al., 2012), and online platforms have supported tutor-student interactions (Lerner 2014; McK-

inney 2009). To assist their peers in acquiring multiple literacies necessary for thriving “in a globalized world and understanding its cultural, linguistic, and communicative complexities” (Hawisher et al., 2009, p. 55), writing tutors need to learn to navigate these complexities themselves. To this end, we combined video presentations with blog postings in our exchange.

The act of reflecting on their practice for and with the global audience of peer colleagues enabled tutors to construct and participate in the globally networked learning environment (GNLE) defined by global learning scholar Doreen Starke-Meyerring (2014) as “robust partnerships extending across institutional, linguistic, national, or other boundaries in order to facilitate faculty and student participation in the shaping of an emerging global social and economic order” (p. 308). As active agents in constructing GNLEs through transnational reflection, peer tutors were in the position to develop a “*kairotic* approach of working to contact participants in just the right way, to convey just the right information, and to connect with readers at just the right time in a sustained or even transactional process” (Rice & St.Amant, 2018, p. 3). This attunement to the communication needs of the audience was key to effective tutoring and a source of growing confidence for new peer tutors.

The pedagogy of international virtual exchange (IVE) has enabled not only rhetorical and digital literacies, but also an active form of global learning. IVE, also known as collaborative online international learning (COIL), virtual exchange, or telecollaboration, is a teaching method whereby geographically separated classes engage in meaningful collaborative projects using digital tools. By placing students in direct interaction and collaboration via synchronous or asynchronous means, IVE facilitated what Suresh Canagarajah (2013) calls “practice-based dialogical cosmopolitanism” (p. 196). It is a form of global citizenship that has enabled communication across difference and fosters the “cooperative disposition” to be “open to others’ difference, and yet achieve community” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 196). When envisioned in the peer tutoring context, the concept of dialogical cosmopolitanism has been particularly pertinent because it has emphasized negotiation, plurality, and dialogue, all of which have been essential for engaging in tutoring with confidence. Its major premise has been key to rhetorical and pedagogical literacies embedded in peer tutoring: “[I]t is not uniformity of values that achieve community, but the ability to align disparate values and features for common goals” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 196).

The process of working together across difference is vital for peer tutoring in local and global contexts. Citing the work of Lev Vygotsky and Michael Oakeshott, Kenneth Bruffee (1978) has illustrated that conversation—internal and social—is a key mechanism in the thinking process, concluding that

teachers must create opportunities for students to construct knowledge in dialogue with each other both in the classroom and at the writing center. This way students participate in “each other’s intellectual, academic and social development” (Bruffee, 1978, p. 447) and develop interdisciplinary thinking and problem-solving skills, among others (see Lunsford, 1991). In the US, peer tutoring emerged in the early 1970s in response to college students’ poor academic preparation and reluctance to seek tutoring offered by professional tutors on campus; students responded more positively to peer assistance (Bruffee, 1984). Currently, peer tutoring has been a common practice in writing, as well as in other subjects, across U. S. colleges and universities where students are offered on-the-job training or specialized courses that can employ methods for learning transfer and thus “aid in students’ learning of writing, interpersonal, and metacognitive skills that can transfer to broad educational, professional, civic, and personal contexts” (Driscoll, 2015, p. 154).

While most writing center scholars and practitioners across the globe have recognized the value of collaboration enabled by peer tutoring, the question of authority has remained prominent, especially in countries like Russia that have more hierarchical educational cultures. In U. S. writing center discourse, scholars have approached this question from the methodological perspective of directive (tutor-centered) and non-directive (student-centered) methods. Thus, Peter Carino (2003) has warned against hierarchical relationships in writing center practice, but he also asserts, “to pretend that there is not a hierarchical relationship between tutor and student is a fallacy, and to engineer peer tutoring techniques that divest the tutor of power and authority is at times foolish and can even be unethical” (p. 98). The directive- non-directive continuum has particularly been problematized in the context of multilingual tutoring, where non-directive models may actually deprive writers working in their second language of valuable information about standard usage (Blau et al., 2002; Myers, 2003). Carino (2003) calls for a flexible tutoring model, whereby a tutor and a student switch smoothly between directive and non-directive methods and adhere loosely to the following principles: “More student knowledge, less tutor knowledge = more nondirective methods” and “Less student knowledge, more tutor knowledge = more directive methods” (p. 110). Similarly, citing the work of J. G. Grutch McKinney (2013), Roberta D. Kjesrud (2015) reminds us that “conferences yield more effective outcomes when tutors move within the entire continuum” of directive and non-directive methods (p. 35).

In Europe, Ella Grieshammer and Nora Peters (2011) report, institutions have resisted peer tutoring by questioning its efficacy and legitimacy. Grieshammer and Peters have offered a list of common arguments against peer

tutoring practice and possible rebuttals (2011) and, as one of the undercurrents for such skepticism, have suggested the perception of peer tutoring as “a threat to the established academic teaching system and to those who are part of it” (p. 123). In Russia, peer tutors have often been seen as inherently inferior to professional consultants, a mentality that has been observable among other students and faculty and sometimes internalized by NES peer tutors. Conversations about how peer tutoring might help get student-focused writing centers off the ground at other institutions (where demand is high but the supply of available teachers to provide staffing is low) tend not get off the ground themselves.

Methodology

Considering peer tutoring’s varied histories and roles across national and institutional domains, understandably, the works outlined above tackle the relationship between authority and learning from different angles; but they have remained focused on individual locations and present the writing center scholar-administrator perspective. We wished to add another note to this existing conversation by inviting aspiring and practicing peer tutors themselves to analyze their own collaborative tutoring practices and formulate concerns and approaches to authority in peer tutoring.

Our project took place in April and May of 2018, and during that period, participants were given four initial assignments (see Appendix for full prompts): a group introduction video, a response to the partner group’s video, a reflection on collaborative learning in the writing center, and a reflection on multilingualism in the writing center inspired by the Ohio University Writing Center’s video series, “Becoming an Ally” (Ryerson & Phillips, 2020). Text posts were between 300 and 600 words and were designed to engage participants in conversations in which they could pull from recent experiences in their training as well as in actual consultations. However, at the time of this collaboration, the NES peer tutors were the only ones who had performed consultations independently. Participants were thus required to respond to other blog posts. Upon completion of the project, the students were asked to complete a 500-word reflection on the overall experience.

After student responses had been gathered, we analyzed and coded them according to how they addressed the main objectives of the project while also remaining open to themes that the participants introduced on their own. In this sense, while professional identity was certainly present in much of the discussion, the question of peer tutor authority—whether and how a peer is qualified to provide writing advice—proved both particularly fraught and

important. Though we were also interested in how peer tutors understood and negotiated lines of authority in peer tutoring from the inception of the project, this question was never explicitly presented to the participants. In the first two assignments (video introduction and blog post #1), we gave students the freedom to select their own areas of interest. Two subsequent assignments focused on the implicit aspects of authority in peer tutoring: mutual learning and language use.

Findings

In the remainder of this chapter, we analyze the posts themselves in terms of these three themes—professional identity, rhetorical awareness, and authority—as they unfolded in response to each prompt.

Introduction Video and Blog Post #1

The first ice-breaker assignment (video introduction) offered a chance to envision one's professional self as a transnational figure. Namely, after introducing themselves and their local environments, many participants moved beyond our prompt to name an area of interest or challenge and pose questions to their partners (discussed below). Responses could potentially enrich their local tutoring experience. To come up with a question, they had to imagine the contours of their partners' environment, that is to move mentally across the world, and then situate the partners' advice in their local setting.

Although the assignment was open-ended in asking the participants to name any aspect of tutoring work of special interest or challenge, a majority of project participants on both sides (four out of six of LaGuardia students and two out of four of NES peer tutors) chose to reflect on various authority issues. Two LaGuardia students anticipated the hardship of guiding peers in areas that may not be their strongest suits, such as outlining. One LaGuardia student identified the difficulty of explaining “abstract . . . concepts,” a perceived weakness that can potentially undermine his confidence, while the other student conveyed a more explicit awareness of the “power dynamic” of peer tutoring that is “hard to dismantle”: “I am twenty-one. What makes another 21-year-old a greater writer than someone else?” One NES tutor pointed out the challenge of dealing with students whose level of English proficiency is higher than the tutor's.

In one exchange, two participants engaged with the question of authority so deeply and passionately that their rhetorical performance became exuberant. A NES tutor explored the “apparent contradiction” inherent in peer-

to-peer interactions: “The very name ‘peer consultant’ contains some kind of contradiction. . . . ‘[P]eer’ assumes horizontal relationship between people while ‘tutor’ or ‘consultant’ assumes vertical relationship between people because one teaches another.” The tutor wondered how this contradiction can be “resolved in different contexts and in different environments.” In formulating his question, the tutor showed awareness of his international peer audience’s institutional and national context and hedged his claims in order to reflect the limitations of his experience. He also contextualized peer tutoring at NES—“Here at NES students generally expect that peer consultants would behave just like regular consultants”—and proposed a plausible comparison: “Probably in some other places peer consultants are more expected to give more informal, feedback.” While the tutor was aware of the locale-specific differences, he was careful not to cement them; rather he transcended them by pointing out the duality in peer-to-peer tutoring relations. This is a good example of what Canagarajah (2013) has called the *cooperative disposition* or respectful attitude toward national or cultural differences and understanding of the shared values to “achieve common goals” (p. 196); in this case the goal was to conceptualize the dual role of peer tutor regardless of their geographic location. The tutor’s respectful openness to difference and attempt to find a common ground, paired with his descriptive language about directionality of authority, illustrate not only his intellectual and linguistic investment in this subject-matter (i.e., authority as a pressing issue), but also his ability to create a comfortable kairotic space for his international peers to engage in dialogue.

Rhetorically and conceptually, he succeeded at sparking the full attention of one LaGuardia student who devoted her entire blog post to his question about authority. She admitted to selecting it after having reviewed “all of the questions posted” on the blog and then proceeded to survey two basic premises of peer tutoring that could help to disrupt the dichotomized view of power relations between the tutor and the tutee. She wrote,

1. The tutor is not the one who marks the paper. The writer makes his or her own corrections to the paper during the consultation. I feel like this establishes ownership of the paper and it shoes [sic] that the tutor is giving advice and guidance rather than just grading a paper.
2. There is always a conversation. The tutor is always engaging the writer and they work together to find solutions. The conversation creates an area of learning for both the tutee and the tutor.

She concluded the post with this sentence: “I hope this post helps build the bridge between you and the student and puts you on the same level.” This response indicates that the NES tutor’s ideas resonated with her and encouraged her to connect what she was learning in the course (e.g., non-directive tutoring style, collaborative learning, respecting student’s ownership of their writing) with the unsettling question about student expectations from peer tutors. Rhetorically, she was responding to an eloquent and confident peer, so her own rhetorical act was charged. Her assertive tone, terse writing, and final sentence indicate the ability to create a peer-to-peer explanation that was clear, confident, suggestive, and conclusive, the kind of ability associated with competent tutoring.

This blog post was not the only one that contained peer advice, partly because the assignment prompt asked participants to suggest strategies or ideas in response to their international peers’ questions and inquiries. Our assignment sought to create opportunities to engage in the learning-by-doing practice of advising peers, which we hoped would build participants’ confidence in their own tutoring practice. For example, the experienced NES tutor who served as moderator explored how a writer’s voice can be preserved through truly collaborative effort:

My best tip for helping a tutee maintain and find their voice is to ask them to explain their thoughts or to restructure a sentence out loud. While they speak, I like to write down the words that they use. If the meaning of the sentence is clear, the student can include it in their paper. If there are still some issues, we can discuss them in the framework of the new explanation that they have just given.

She described a hypothetical session wherein the tutor decided which route to take and roles to assign in facilitating the student’s thinking process. In making a valuable connection between this sentence-level work and the broader principle of Socratic questioning (“I’ve also found that this strategy can be very helpful for guiding students to create a structure for their essay through the use of targeted questioning.”), she reminded her audience of the tutor’s leading force in the session. At another level, she succeeded at giving clearly demonstrated advice to her audience of peer tutors by providing examples of the questions she might ask in a session: “What’s your main point? What evidence do you have to support it? How does one piece of evidence differ from another?” Her post itself served as an example of a rhetorically successful peer-to-peer explanation: clear, developed with examples, and well-paced.

In asking students to respond to each other's concerns, we were mindful of the fact that a successful tutoring practice requires a synthesis of experiences: deep engagement with theoretical concepts, one's own experience as a writer and learner, peer review and other writing activities practiced in college classes, non-academic writing in multiple media, and tutoring observations. We share a conviction that a successful tutor training program must facilitate practice in synthesizing these knowledge sources in productive ways. Our project established the framework of an international dialogue as a way to loosely simulate tutoring session conditions that required deep contextualization, a high level of detail to illustrate points, and acknowledgment of and openness to difference. In her discussion of digital notebooks in cross-cultural exchanges, Josephine Walwema (2018) insists that "[i]ntercultural interaction is . . . not only situated and dynamic; it also 'requires high levels of sensitivity and a genuine mutual search for reciprocal understanding' (Ujitani & Volet, 2008, p. 297). And that mutual search for reciprocal understanding is rhetorical" (p. 21). A rhetorical situation constructed in and through a transnational space requires and enables the kinds of rhetorical work that define successful tutoring.

LaGuardia participants were not yet practicing tutoring at the time of writing their first posts, so in responding to their international peers' questions, they drew from their experiences as students of writing and their course material. One LaGuardia student relied on his own experiences with writing and peer reviews to provide confident and substantive advice. He responded to his peer's question about ways of addressing tone in a tutoring session by providing three major lines of advice: ensuring the writer's tone is consistent throughout the paper; checking for sweeping generalizations, "emotional and inflammatory language," and colloquial expressions; and helping to align the writer's tone with the "assignment's contextual nature." Parenthetical examples helped clarify his points, and active first-person clauses "I recommend" (mentioned twice), "I explain," and "I help" revealed the student's confidence in the material he had already learned and practiced with peers. The closing line addressed to the audience ("I hope this helps!") makes it clear that the post was actually a response to a question posed in the video and a self-conscious attempt at mutual understanding.

The responses emerging from NES participants were more grounded in tutoring practice. They highlighted crucial examples of how tutor authority can be challenged, but also how these moments could be turned into productive learning experiences. One tutor identified the challenge of "helping people improve their works on topics that are completely unfamiliar to us." He proceeds to contextualize his work and difficulty:

In our university many people have a very strong understanding of economics, and it is not rare for the papers to be filled with the analysis of subjects completely unfamiliar to me. It can be very confusing when you see a significant portion of the vocabulary for the first time, when you are unable to differentiate between set phrases and grammar errors and when not only the argumentation, but even the point being made in the text is unclear[;] however it is vital to understand, that none of said limitations fully prevent you from providing useful feedback for the students.

The tutor reminded his peers that they can still support the tutees by commenting on structure and “logical inconsistencies.” He insists, “it is necessary to remember and demonstrate that your lack of knowledge in a specific field, does not diminish your English writing authority in any way” and proceeded to recommend:

Be clear about what you know and what you don't, because definitions of new vocabulary and set phrases can simply be looked up online, while the act of pretending to understand new concepts can result in personal humiliation, or simply bad advice.

The determination with which this tutor provided advice mirrors the content of his advice to “be clear about what you know” and his awareness of the audience's needs. Along the same lines, another NES tutor offered confidently articulated, pointed suggestions on how to combat “the lack of confidence that you can help students” due to being younger in age. He encouraged his peers to “understand your strength,” “prepare in advance to a consultation,” and accept that “confidence appears with experience.” Another lively post from a NES tutor colorfully sums up the ideas implied in her peers' posts: “A peer consultant is not the person of encyclopaedic learning, but somebody who can give the independent feedback.”

One NES student noted that there are even situations in which peer authority can carry more weight than that of a “professionally trained consultant.” Constructing a hypothetical situation based on the tutor's own experiences, the writer suggested that peers can leverage their “capital” in cases where pedagogical ideals conflict with a student's pragmatic concerns about the word volume of an essay or its ultimate grade:

In cases, where a student's motivation is unclear or complicated, peer tutors can make learning happen even more seam-

lessly than some professional consultants. Trading off some professionalism for a deeper integration into the student body therefore is a right choice for some writing centers to make.

Noteworthy here was the tutor's explicit mention of the rhetorical work embedded in the tutor-tutee interaction: "tutors can employ ethos of their peer status to convince the student to take their side of the table." What seemed to be implied here was a tutor's agency in the session that could potentially help to enhance their confidence.

Blog Post #2

In the second blog post, participants reflected on effective collaborative practices and strategies to deal with student resistance to collaboration. While both groups discussed assignment tasks and document types specific to their local tutoring contexts, such principles as respecting the writer's ownership of their work and mutual assistance, helped establish the common ground between the two institutionally and nationally distant environments. The blog contributions helped establish that as a teaching principle, collaboration emphasizes interdependence between tutor and tutee. One NES tutor noted: "The most difficult consultations happen when the students simply expect the tutor to edit his work and do not take part in the process." He shared a useful strategy: "In such cases I usually explain to them that I cannot know what is on their minds and therefore cannot properly edit the text without their cooperation." The success of the tutor's work thus depended largely on the engagement level of the student. In fact, one LaGuardia student echoed this principle through a Benjamin Franklin quote: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

The emphasis on mutual learning figured in both sets of posts. One NES tutor noted,

Despite the fact that I'm a peer tutor, I'm also learning from them how to write. For instance, a year ago I didn't have much experience of writing CV and CL. However, I have seen many such texts during this year. Sometimes, when I find a problem in a student's writing, I understand that my texts have similar issues. So, looking at the writing of other people, we have a great chance to understand our personal mistakes because lookers-on see more than players. For this reason, now writing a CV or a CL for an application, I feel more confident.

Interestingly, here the learning of the tutor himself became the source of his confidence as a writer and, by extension, as a tutor as well. A LaGuardia student also noted what tutors may learn from their tutees: “We may learn small things such as a new word or a new type of diction but we can also learn larger things about topics in various subjects.” One sentence in this post was particularly useful in pointing out that mutual learning is not unique to a tutoring situation or its cultural context, but rather a part of human interactions: “I also feel that we as humans learn from one another.” Our fairly straight-forward question about collaborative learning elicited ample discussion about a range of approaches to collaboration, as noted above. But most importantly, the discussion further reconfigured a common view of authority as a rigid hierarchical construct and presented it as a process-driven, fluid construct that can shift between the student and the tutor. The stress on mutual learning implies that authority is not something to be chased, but rather noticed and negotiated as it emerges in the tutoring process. The topic of collaborative or mutual learning also moved the experience of teaching and learning out of specific linguistic, cultural, and institutional contexts, and let participants see each other as part of the same global profession.

Blog Post #3

Questions of authority were also implicit in tutors’ discussions of multilingualism, though they emerged in many different ways. LaGuardia participants occasionally doubted their ability to cope with the demands of tutoring multilingual students. One writer described his first experience tutoring English as a Second Language (ESL) students as “frightening,” echoing a lot of the emotionally charged language that has appeared in the literature on the tutoring of multilingual students by monolingual consultants (Blau et al.’s [2002] “Guilt-Free Tutoring” is a paradigmatic case). Despite this trepidation, LaGuardia participants embraced the concept of “allyship” as modelled in the Ohio State video series (Ryerson & Phillips, 2020) as well as strategies like code-switching (shifting between languages or dialects) in a consultation. However, they continued to use somewhat more emotional language and to emphasize the role of these practices in creating a good relationship between tutor and tutee as well as making the tutee feel “comfortable.” Said one writer:

By code-switching, students can feel like the tutor is their ally in writing a paper because the tutor is speaking to them and explaining things in the student’s first language. . . . International or bilingual students who come to English speaking

schools may find sanctuary in knowing there is someone in a position of authority who has a similar background as them. It also provides reassurance to have someone else understand you and be able to help you in your own language.

In this sense, the LaGuardia participants understood the tutor-tutee interaction as one in which the tutor must proactively avoid or disrupt the authority structures that are implied in the context of anglophone hegemony, in which a representative of an anglophone writing center is perceived as a de facto authority on the English language. Code-switching, in this context, could disrupt this dynamic and help the tutee feel less at a disadvantage.

On the other hand, NES students tended to emphasize the utility of such practices and were less interested in the social justice aspects of allyship. This may be due to the cultural and political context in which they were working and studying, but a bigger contributor to this difference was likely the fact that these peer tutors shared the same language background as the students they worked with and therefore tended to reflect on their own experiences of learning the English language when discussing their approaches as tutors. Furthermore, because they offer consultations in two languages, using English within the consultation is always an explicit choice. One Russian consultant said that students were “often resistant to speaking English” with her, “as they know me as a native Russian speaker. Therefore, they sometimes try to switch the language of the consultation.” She believed it was important to insist that the consultation be conducted in the language of the document being discussed, as in her opinion, students in her program did not get enough speaking practice and also needed more opportunities to “develop thinking in English”:

I think most multilingual people are acquainted with a three-step path in our brain: we see the object or think about it, then as a first association comes is the word in our mother tongue, and only after that we translate it into second language.

Learnership thus has become another source of knowledge and authority and often became a tool with which NES participants could both inform their U. S.-based peers (who they may have assumed to be monolingual) and contested the notion that insisting on standard English was oppressive. The aforementioned post was quoted at length by one of the LaGuardia participants, who, after discussing the importance of allyship with multilingual writers, accepted the idea that insisting on standard English facilitates communication both within the consultation and in the broader context of international academic communication: “English is recognized globally with

many different dialects and having a standard of writing makes it easier for us to communicate. It is not a tool of oppression.”

What was somewhat remarkable was the fact that native speakerism did not seem to play a significant role in any of these reflections. Multilingual tutors (in both Moscow and New York) did not express doubts about their own authority with regard to English. If anything, the multilingual NES contributors to this project evinced fewer anxieties and fears surrounding language in consultations since they could appeal to their own experiences as learners and their knowledge of what challenges speakers of their native language might face when they learn English.

Students' Final Reflections and Our Conclusions

The foregoing is a demonstration of how an international collaboration can facilitate the development of peer tutors' awareness of the contextual nature of their practices while at the same time seeing themselves as part of a shared pedagogical enterprise that transcends borders and language. Even though rhetorical acts happened across national borders and professional contexts, the nature of the peer tutor's experience (e.g., negotiation of authority, confidence, rhetorical and intellectual effort to build knowledge collaboratively) was essentially the same. Different national and institutional perspectives simply highlighted different levels of experience and in doing so provided a deeper understanding of the tutoring job. A LaGuardia participant delivered this point well in his reflection: “Having the perspective of another writing center, especially one in another country, helped shape the idea of a unified writing initiative to assist in creating better writers.” The same tutor noted that “people across the world [were] doing similar things if not exactly. The twist is that they are doing it with another completely different language and writers” and concluded, “It was a marvelous experience seeing the world in a closer environment.”

In their final reflections, some tutors suggested that the collaboration had changed the way they conducted consultations or given them some new things to try, but the practical benefits seemed less significant than the reflective ones. As one Russian tutor aptly said, the discussion “made me seek formal justifications to my intuitive practices.” Participants also showed developing rhetorical awareness in writing in an online format for their international partners. One NES participant described self-consciously moderating his typical academic style and adopting a more conversational tone, showing awareness of the fact that “operating in a different tone means invoking different rhetorical techniques and strands of vocabulary.” Furthermore, because

his “idea of the LGCC students was vague at best,” he avoided any attempts at irony or humor that could have been misinterpreted or given offense. Conversely an LGCC participant mentioned avoiding “colloquialisms that they [his Russophone colleagues] would not understand.”

At the same time, this collaboration was subject to many limitations. One LaGuardia tutor commented on the asynchronous nature of communication:

The hardest part of this was the fact that we were communicating through blog posts and it wasn't always easy to get conversations flowing. I would have loved to have an option to live chat with that so we could have gotten responses quicker.

Though this was logistically difficult, future iterations of this project might include more synchronous interactions through video-conferencing or real-time text chat options, either in groups or partners. Secondly, while we the authors feel that the prompts helped focus and direct the discussion, some participants found these constraining. One NES participant in particular would have appreciated a more “argumentative element” and found that the generally irenic environment of the collaboration did not allow for any deep interrogation of some of the fundamental premises of peer tutoring. Rather, it tended to foster uncritical repetition of the agreed-upon virtues of the writing center format: “talking right things about how tutoring sessions ‘establish student’s ownership of the paper,’ ‘preserve the voice of the student,’ etc.” and foreclosing “more serious discussion of why this format is effective or at least a hint of comparison with other means of teaching.” We would suggest that this was also a limitation of the participants’ inexperience. Having had little time to put their learning into practice, it was difficult for them to develop informed critiques.

Based on the above findings and tutor recommendations, we would like to suggest that international collaboration can be a productive form of ongoing professional development for peer tutors. We recommend, however, that tutors are given opportunities to evaluate their experience not only at the end, but throughout the collaboration. As facilitators, we had regular check-ins with each other during the project and we also checked with our peer tutors, but having a structured, perhaps anonymous, written reflection could have enriched our understanding of the participants’ experience. In the same vein, participants could also take a more leading role in facilitating the discussion; for example, they could contribute questions or even suggest the form of online activity.

Finally, we suggest that one broader benefit of this type of professional development for peer tutors is that it can offer ways of conceptualizing writing studies as a global, rather than narrowly Anglo-American, field (Donahue,

2018) and help to “connect writing center worlds to multiple relevant worlds outside the center” (Severino, 2016, p. ix). It can also point to the common ground between different national and institutional tutoring environments and thus allow peer tutors to discern professional and personal connections with colleagues whom they could otherwise perceive as the Other.

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Appendix: Assignment Prompts

1. Group Introduction Video: In a video of approximately 10 minutes, introduce yourselves to your international peers. In addition to any personal information you wish to share (name, major, interests, what you enjoy/find challenging about peer tutoring), please provide an institutional context where you practice/observe tutoring. Also, provide some details about your institution's writing center: student demographic, common writing concerns, language in which writing is presented, policies, and whatever else seems important. Finally, what aspects of peer tutoring do you find particularly interesting and/or challenging?

2. Blog post #1: Write a response to your international peers' video. Which concerns and interests about peer tutoring did they share with you? Based on your experience as a writing student, observer of tutoring sessions and/or practicing peer tutor, can you suggest any concepts or practices that might address these? (350–600 words; complete by Tuesday 4/24)

3. Blog post #2: A major feature of peer tutoring is collaborative or mutual learning. It can create exciting opportunities for both tutors and tutees. For example, writers may feel less inhibited to express their concerns to a peer than to an instructor and tutors may find themselves exploring new writing genres or content areas. Keeping this in mind, in your experience as a practicing tutor or observer, what types of assignments and concerns do students bring to the writing center? What strategies do peer tutors use to support the students without compromising opportunities for collaborative learning? Do you see student writers' resistance to collaborative learning? If yes, how do tutors handle it? (350–600 words; complete by May 3)

4. Blog post #3: Please watch this collection of videos about working with multi-lingual writers: <https://www.ohio.edu/graduate/graduate-writing-and-research-center/becoming-ally-film> and review this article: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/We-Must-Help-Students-Master/243079>

Which scene(s) in the video made a strong impression on you? Why? Which scene(s) are relevant to your tutoring context (LaGuardia)? How so?

Drawing on the video and the article, as well as your own experience, reflect on when it might be productive and unproductive to deviate from standard English or code-switch during a session. (350–600 words, May 20)

Final Reflection

Please reflect on your COIL experience, using the following questions to

guide your narrative. Your reflection should be at least 500 words.

1. Review our blog and your notes. Which ideas revealed by your international peers about peer tutoring were familiar to you? Which were new?
2. Did your perspective on peer tutoring change as a result of participating in the COIL collaboration? Please use specific examples to illustrate your point(s).
3. Did the COIL collaboration illuminate anything new about your culture? About the culture of your international peers?
4. Did you have to adjust your communication habits when building a connection with your international peers? Why or why not? Think about whether/how your written, oral, body languages had to be modified to communicate successfully.
5. What aspect of this collaboration was challenging for you?
6. Overall, what was the most interesting and useful learning moment for you in your collaborative activities with international peers?
7. What is your major take-away from this collaboration that might help you in any aspect of your education, professional and life experience?