



PROJECT MUSE®

8 A Cautionary Tale about “Tutoring” Peer Response Groups

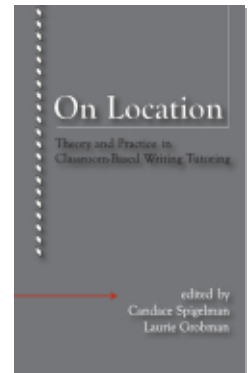
Published by

Grobman, Laurie and Candace Spigelman.

On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring.

1 ed. Utah State University Press, 2005.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9287>.



➔ For additional information about this book
<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9287>

8

A CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT “TUTORING” PEER RESPONSE GROUPS

Melissa Nicolas

In this (post?) postmodern era, it has become de rigueur to question definitions that fix meaning and create rigid categories. Even a cursory review of the current literature in rhetoric and composition shows scholars “questioning,” “troubling,” “refining,” “refiguring,” and/or “redrawing” conventional definitions and categorical boundaries. One of the ways compositionists have challenged traditional ways of thinking about the teaching and learning of writing, for example, is by developing pedagogies that decenter teacher authority and privilege collaborative learning. Indeed, in the last two decades or so, writing center tutoring and peer group work have come to play an increasingly central role in the teaching of composition. As teachers seek ways to facilitate collaboration in order to collapse the boundaries of traditional classroom walls, innovative approaches have been developed; composition and writing center programs have brought students into nursing homes, retirement communities, prisons, elementary and middle schools, and many other locations.

Even within the institution, composition teachers are working to refigure traditional teacher-centered pedagogies. The peer consulting program at my former school, Ohio State University, for example, brought together students from basic writing courses with students from an upper-division English class to form writing groups. This program enabled students of different institutional ranks (first-quarter first-year students to graduating seniors) with varying degrees of writing experience to work together on improving their writing. As the peer tutoring director of this program for two years, I had close contact with all the program’s constituents—teachers, students, and administrators—and I was able to observe the program from various angles: in the classroom, in peer group sessions, and in administrative meetings. I supported the program’s goal of creating an environment where students in different classes, who normally would not come in contact with each other, were able to meet and discuss their writing. However, the more time I spent in the program, the more

concerned I became that even though, in theory, the type of collaboration we were promoting made sense, something was just not "clicking" in the program. This uneasiness was caused by what I eventually regarded as the program's conflation of two related collaborative learning models: peer response and tutoring, and even within the category of tutoring, there was an uncritical collapsing of the boundaries between curriculum-based tutoring and writing center tutoring.

While I am an advocate for peer tutoring and have firsthand knowledge of the asset peer tutors can be to a writing center staff, what follows is a cautionary tale about the problems that can arise when peer tutoring programs, like the one I will describe below, do not align their theory with their practice. In this essay, I suggest that it is important to keep the divisions between peer response and tutoring, as well as distinctions among types of tutoring, firmly in mind as we train our writing consultants because, while these activities are all collaborative, the nature of the collaboration in each model is fundamentally different. Instead of trying to elide these differences, as we did in our program, tutor trainers need to be acutely aware of the distinctions between peer response groups and tutorials and, within tutoring itself, between curriculum-based tutoring and writing center tutoring, in order to clearly present these different models to our tutors.

To begin this tale, I first describe the structure of the peer consulting program that I directed and provide a comparison of peer response groups and tutorials. Then, I explore the role confusion of the peer writing consultants at my former school and end with a description of the ways I have altered my tutor-training pedagogy as a result of this experience. While this essay focuses on the undergraduate consulting program at a particular institution, the issues that surface are relevant to any program using tutors to facilitate peer response groups. My hope is that the critical eye I turn on this program will aid others as they begin to reexamine similar programs at their own institutions, just as this experience caused me to make some fundamental changes to my presentation of this collaborative model when I was given a chance to try it again at a different institution.

My goal in this essay is to continue the conversation Muriel Harris began in "Collaboration Is Not Collaboration Is Not Collaboration" about the merits of keeping the lines between peer response and tutoring clearly drawn (1992a). I realize it may appear strange at this historical moment to argue for a definition of more discrete categories, but I believe that, pedagogically and ethically, tutor trainers need to be able to clearly

articulate the position(s) they want their tutors to occupy. To put it another way, while I see nothing wrong with the combining of writing center tutoring and peer response groups, I also want tutor trainers to be able to define and explain the roles we ask our students to play and to be able to create training scenarios that more closely align what we ask students to do both theoretically and practically.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS: THE PEER WRITING CONSULTANT PROGRAM

The Peer Writing Consultant Program (PWCP) at Ohio State University evolved out of a complex set of institutional circumstances. In the 1990–91 academic year, the Writing Workshop piloted ten sections of English 110W—a seven-hour course that counted as students’ first-year writing requirement. English 110W replaced English 060, a three-hour course that was developmental and did not count toward students’ first-year writing requirements. According to Suellyn Duffey and Donna LeCourt (1991), two of the creators of the PWCP, the most obvious goal for the program was “to prepare undergraduate students of all majors to meet a growing need for tutors as a result of several curricular changes at Ohio State in general and the Writing Workshop in particular.”

The PWCP at Ohio State University combined students and resources from the university’s basic writing program, English department, and writing center. Two primary groups of students were involved: those enrolled in the first-year basic writing class, English 110W, and those taking English 467, an upper-division writing theory and practice class. Both of these classes were taught by faculty in the English department, yet part of the administrative funding came from the Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW), which housed the university writing center. Together, English 110W and English 467 formed the PWCP and worked in the following way. Students enrolled in 110W registered for class four days a week. For three of these days, students met in a traditional writing classroom with a professor. On the fourth class day, 110W students met in peer groups (two to five students per group) with one or two students from English 467. Students in English 467, or peer writing consultants (PWCs), met with their English professor two days a week. In addition to these traditional class meetings, each PWC worked with two separate groups of 110W students throughout the ten-week quarter. These weekly peer tutoring sessions were required for both the 110W and 467 students, but there were no faculty present at the group sessions.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY: ROLE CONFUSION IN THE PEER CONSULTING PROGRAM

While peer group work and both writing center and classroom-based tutoring are predicated on notions of students directing their own learning and using each other as resources, the chart below summarizing the major differences between peer response groups, writing center tutorials, and classroom-based peer group tutoring illustrates the significant differences among the activities. Both peer response and peer group tutoring are largely influenced by the teacher, while writing center tutoring is student initiated and student led; peer response groups and peer group tutoring are also closely tied to the classroom, while writing center tutoring (usually) is completely separate from the classroom. Peer response groups do not (usually) have a "writing authority" as a member, while both writing center and peer group tutoring rely, to some extent, on a tutor's expertise. Because all the collaborative models have different foci and because each model allows students to learn from each other in a different way, there are sound reasons for creating opportunities for all forms of collaboration in a writing curriculum.

	<i>Peer response groups</i>	<i>Writing center tutorials</i>	<i>Peer group tutoring</i>
<i>Location</i>	Meet in class during class time.	Occur in the writing center outside of class time.	Usually meet in class during class time, sometimes outside of class.
<i>Attendance</i>	Required for class. Participation is usually factored into course grade.	Voluntary and does not factor into course grade.	Required during class time and outside of class.
<i>Structure</i>	Made up of two or more students from the same class. Teacher decides how to set up groups and when groups will meet.	One-to-one. Client decides how often he/she will have a tutorial.	One-to-one and/or small groups. Teacher decides how and when tutors will work with students.
<i>Focus</i>	Product	Process	Product and/or process
<i>Use of time</i>	Must negotiate how to get to all members' work in allotted time.	Entire time devoted to one writer.	How time is spent is (partially) determined by the teacher.
<i>Authority</i>	May have group leader, but all members are from the same class and have similar levels of writing expertise.	Tutor is (usually) more experienced writer than client. Tutor has received special training. Tutor and client are probably not in the same writing class.	Tutor is (usually) more experienced than students in the class. Tutor has received special training. Tutor and student are not in the same writing class.

However, the very reasons students benefit from each model—the different foci and the different types of collaboration—are the same reasons why it is imperative for tutor trainers to make the distinctions among each activity clear, even when a program, like the PWCP, brings these models together.

In English 467, *Theories of Writing and Learning*, PWCs were introduced to the ideas of writing as process, social constructionism, and writing center tutoring theory and practice. Some of the tutoring handbooks required in recent years include *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* (Murphy and Sherwood 1995), *The Practical Tutor* (Meyer and Smith 1987), *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Caposella 1998), and *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* (Gillespie and Lerner 2000). These texts share the assumption that the tutors in training reading them will be working in one-to-one situations. None of these books, however, address tutoring in a group situation, nor do these manuals discuss how to work with a teacher as a classroom tutor, so PWCs were not introduced to the theoretical or practical issues that could arise in their particular situation. Even though 467 instructors, from time to time, would engage PWCs in conversations about how they could adapt what they were reading to their particular group situation, it seemed difficult for PWCs to grasp the nuances of the differences since this was (for most of them) their first exposure to this kind of literature.

The training portion of the PWCP was based on a writing center model that stresses personalized attention. As a short excerpt from the *St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* illustrates, focusing on individual clients and their needs is germane to tutoring practice. “Students vary in levels of autonomy, sensitivity to criticism, ego strength, personal maturity, motivation, and perseverance. Relating to the student as an *individual* and empathizing with his or her particular personality and character traits will go a long way toward forming a special trust, one that provides the motivation, energy, and direction for the tutorial itself” (Murphy and Sherwood 1995, 6–7; emphasis added).

Being able to meet writers where they are is central to productive tutorials. This kind of empathetic connection between tutors and students is enabled by the intimacy of the one-to-one tutorial situation. When the PWCs were sent out to work with their students, however, they were asked to work with groups of two to five students. In order for peer consultants to create personalized relationships with their students in the peer groups, the consultants had to think about, empathize with, and build

trust with several students simultaneously, a formidable task even for the most experienced tutors and teachers.

Additionally, our PWCs had responsibilities not typical of writing center tutors. As Muriel Harris explains, "tutors don't need to take attendance, make assignments, set deadlines, deliver negative comments, give tests or issue grades" (1995a, 28). While consultants did not give tests or grade 110W students, and they (hopefully) did not give writers negative comments, when 110W students came to sessions without work, PWCs were asked to facilitate activities and set agendas for future meetings, thus functioning more as teachers than peer group members. Also, consultants were required to take attendance; PWCs, in essence, then, had to monitor and report on their groups, a responsibility that writing center tutors and peer group members do not have. This responsibility for setting agendas, monitoring, and reporting conflicted with information PWCs were given about their roles as tutors and sufficiently afforded them more "authority" than the other members of the group, further altering the consultant's status as peer and also complicating the idea of tutor.

This confusion was furthered by the program's investment in peer group autonomy, following Anne Ruggles Gere's description of semiautonomous writing groups. In semiautonomous groups, teachers relinquish some authority by allowing students to make decisions about what to work on and how to use their time. While semiautonomous groups are institutionally mandated and group participation is usually required for a satisfactory grade in the course, the ultimate purpose of convening these groups is to empower students to take control of their own writing and learning (1987, 101-3). Unlike peer response groups that meet in class with the teacher present, in order to push our groups toward semiautonomy, 110W groups met without their teachers. Although the 110W and 467 faculty did ask their students to report on what happened in their groups, teachers were almost never invited to sessions. Indeed, oftentimes 110W and 467 professors did not even know where peer groups were meeting because groups chose their own locale: a coffee shop, the student union, a library, a dorm, and so on. Also, in order to stress the autonomy of the groups, the PWCP strongly discouraged teachers from assigning work to be done during the peer group meetings; the program's ideal was for the 110W students, with help from the PWCs, to decide what to work on, how to work on it, and how group time should be budgeted.

Even though 110W students were required to attend these sessions, by meeting with a peer consultant (not the teacher) outside the classroom,

a central program goal was to simulate a low-risk environment similar to that of the writing center. In theory, because the PWCs and 110W students were all undergraduates and approximately the same age,¹ they could share a relationship that was more relaxed and less restrained by the rules of classroom decorum than in-class groups that met under the gaze of the teacher. As leaders of these groups, PWCs “inhabit[ed] a middle ground where their role [was] that of translator or interpreter, turning teacher language into student language” (M. Harris 1995a, 37). Indeed, consultants helped 110W students interpret writing prompts, decode teachers’ written comments, and aided students in incorporating those comments in their revisions. Also, because Ohio State is a large university and most 110W students were in their first year of college, PWCs often served as unofficial guides, helping 110W students negotiate their way around that (sometimes) impersonal institution.

All in all, PWCs were asked to perform some of the functions of peer group members, writing center tutors, and curriculum-based tutors, and the results, for the most part, were a combination of confusion and frustration. They were involved in the multiple tasks we find typical of writing center tutors—helping students figure out school, providing emotional/psychological support, addressing local and global writing concerns—but, as I have shown, PWCs did not work in a tutorial situation. And as Michelle, a senior PWC, explained, the conflicts resulting from this situation affected even the 110W students. According to Michelle, 110W students “knew they were supposed to be in [the] group, but they really didn’t know the purpose behind it [or] what they’re supposed to get out of our session. . . . I don’t think a lot of the students in any of the groups know the purpose behind the [peer group sessions].”

In our program, then, many contradictions emerged. One of the main reasons writing centers are low-risk environments is precisely because students are not forced to visit and tutors are not affiliated with the client’s course. In the case of the PWCP, however, students had to attend the sessions, and tutors not only were affiliated with the course but they were also supposed to have at least some direct contact with the 110W teachers. This is an area in which I think the PWCP failed the students because we did not make room in the program for the PWCs, or the basic writing students, to address these very real tensions. The theoretical language we gave PWCs about writing center tutoring and peer response groups did not adequately describe what they were actually doing, so, being novices, they may not have been able to adapt the theoretical constructs we gave

them to their situations or even articulate for themselves how these constructs may or may not have applied to them and their experiences.

Another source of confusion for the peer consultants was that they interacted with the peer groups they were asked to tutor only on a limited basis. PWCs were not active participants in 110W classes and therefore were at a disadvantage when it came to understanding what 110W instructors were asking of their students. And, perhaps more important, consultants joined the peer groups on a limited basis while the group members interacted regularly in the 110W class without them. While PWCs were encouraged to attend as many classes as their schedules permitted, the reality was that most PWCs observed only one or two classes per quarter. Since the idea behind a peer response group is to have students in the same class with similar writing expertise work together, adding a consultant—already marked as more of a writing authority than the other group members—who was not a classmate to the group significantly altered group dynamics and marked the PWCs as outsiders to the group process (Soliday 1995). As outsiders, consultants were not privy to 110W class discussions, lectures, or in-class peer group work even though all these classroom activities impacted the dynamics of the peer group. PWCs had to find ways to insert themselves in the middle of relationships and conversations already in process.

Michelle described her frustration with this situation: "Last week . . . they [the 110W students] had papers due, and I e-mailed them all and told them to 'bring your papers, bring copies for everybody so we can talk about it' . . . and they came to class [the peer consulting session] and they had already done it [shared their papers] in their regular class." Michelle was justifiably confused because, as she admitted, she had understood that facilitating peer groups "was supposed to be our role," yet the teacher had given students time in class to meet as a response group without Michelle. At this point, both Michelle and her group were unsure about how exactly they were expected to spend their time together.

Because the PWCs were not really group members nor were they writing center tutors, it was difficult for PWCs and 110W students to understand exactly what role the PWC should play. For example, 110W students had the guidance of their instructor during their traditional class time, so when the peer groups met in class the teacher took an active role in assuring that each group was on task. When these same groups met with their PWCs, however, the burden of providing guidance inevitably shifted to the consultant. Since PWCs lacked the training required to effectively

work with these groups in nondirective ways and because the 110W students worked in teacher-directed peer groups in class, when these constituents met each other, they readily adopted the only model of academic interaction they were familiar with: teachers teaching students. I observed sessions where the roles of “teacher” and “student” were enacted so dramatically that the PWC actually stood in front of the 110W students and lectured them. I point this out not to criticize the work of the PWCs. On the contrary, I think they did a good job given the inadequate training we provided. Rather, I am interested in the paradox of the situation: we wanted so much to provide students with an empowering experience that we allowed them to meet on their own, without a teacher, as part of their course requirement. However, most of the 110W and 467 students were unsure of what to do with this freedom, with this refiguring of roles, so they chose a default position they were comfortable with—the PWC became the substitute teacher. Karen, a junior PWC, expressed this role confusion also. She constantly had to tell her group: “‘I’m not your teacher. I’m not a TA. I don’t get paid to be here. I’m a student like you.’ But I don’t know. Sometimes they just always seem to look at me or toward me. . . . They like to be told what to do. . . . It’s kind of confusing. It’s sort of like a balancing act where you try not to be in it too much but try to be there, but it’s like you’re just not there. It’s hard.”

The 110W teachers, on the other hand, saw the PWCs’ role differently. Michelle said the message she received from the 110W teachers was that “we’re [the PWCs] there to kind of make sure they [the 110W students] are working. They [the 110W teachers] don’t really want us to teach them anything, and we’re just there to help.” In other words, while 110W students expected PWCs to teach them, 110W teachers expected PWCs to take a hands-off approach to the group process.

In retrospect, it is obvious to me that the 110W teachers, 467 instructors, and PWCP administrators were sending mixed signals that ultimately confused and frustrated many of the people involved with the program. The situation that the peer consulting program put peer consultants in asked too much of these talented undergraduates because we did not provide them with the tools to succeed: we wanted them to be part of a peer group even though they were really outsiders; we trained them in one-to-one writing center tutoring methods when they were in fact working with peer groups; and we expected them not to become substitute teachers when, in reality, assuming this authoritarian role was the only option visible to them. During my observations, I saw consultants struggling to

balance this series of contradictions, and I witnessed the "tutoring a peer group" dynamic perplex even the most skilled PWCs. While I did occasionally see a consultant—usually an advanced undergraduate who had previous exposure to tutoring, peer group work, and/or composition theory—who was able to negotiate these contradictions in a meaningful way, ultimately most PWCs (and 110W students) were confused about their role. When students are not well equipped to handle the collaborative situations they are placed in, the activity itself becomes a secondary concern, and participants begin to view the exercise as a waste of time.

THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT: GIVING IT A SECOND CHANCE

Mary Soliday, writing about a similar peer consulting program at her school, sees the situation I just described as a positive "blurring [of] the traditional tutoring role" (1995, 60). She believes this "blurring" of boundaries is a fruitful site for "imagining different ways of collaborating and thinking about the differences in roles" (70) between the classroom and the writing center. I agree with Soliday that programs like the PWCP push on the boundaries between the classroom and the writing center, but I do not see this blurring as necessarily good or productive when tutor trainers cannot articulate *how* they are blurring these boundaries and, subsequently, do not provide adequate instruction for tutors about what their role(s) should be.

Challenging traditional notions of writing centers and the roles writing centers play in the academy is a worthy goal, and this collection, *On Location*, provides examples of the productive ways this is happening in programs across the country. However, if we wish to collapse the boundaries among peer response, writing center tutoring, and curriculum-based tutoring to create more fluid roles for our tutors, we need to also be especially vigilant about articulating these moves to the tutors we are training. As compositionists and writing center professionals work to create new models of collaboration among our students, we must remember that we approach these collaborative arrangements from a position of educational privilege; we are well versed in the theories and pedagogies that guide our practices. We have a firm understanding of how different models of collaboration can and should work, so, for us, breaking down these models and putting them together in novel ways may be an exciting challenge, full of theoretical and pedagogical possibilities. But our novice students do not have this rich background knowledge, so when we shift the foundations, they may have no place to ground themselves.

I have recently been given the opportunity to start a similar PWCP at another school, Penn State Lehigh Valley, but before I agreed to participate in classroom-based peer group tutoring again, I had to decide if I really believed in the possibilities this type of collaboration holds. Ultimately, my decision boiled down to one key question: Do tutors and peer group members gain something from this experience that they could not gain from more traditional writing center tutoring or peer response groups? In the course of answering this question and revisiting this essay, I have come to realize that there is enough promise in using consultants to facilitate peer groups that I want to try to redress at least some of the problems with implementing this collaborative model that I have talked about in this essay. Hindsight has helped me see that what I first thought of as an inherently flawed model (tutors facilitating peer groups) is not so.

By utilizing this model of peer collaboration, writing consultants and peer group members have opportunities to participate in a sustained collaboration with a group in ways that even individuals using the writing center on a regular basis cannot experience. Because the model I discuss in this essay mandates both consultant and peer group attendance, many students who would not otherwise meet a writing tutor have the opportunity to build trust and community with a writing consultant and their group mates at predictable and regular intervals. Additionally, since this model is an integral part of the first-year writing course, over time, students may begin to view what they may have initially thought of as “fluff” or a “waste of time” as an important component of the writing process.

Tutors benefit from this model, too, because meeting with the same group of students week in and week out allows tutors to build rapport with their group, which in turn can help tutors be more at ease with the new role of “tutor” they are trying on. Also, tutors in this model get to see multiple drafts of the same essay, follow an assignment from prompt to final revision, and see how their tutees are growing as writers. Unlike in many “one-and-done” writing center tutorials, both tutors and peer group members can become invested in the writing process for an extended period of time.

Almost paradoxically, I have decided that to enable the kind of free and open exchange this model presupposes, I need to become more directive and prescriptive in my approach to teaching this model. This assertion may make advocates of any form of peer tutoring uncomfortable because, as Peter Carino reminds us, writing center scholarship (at

least since the late 1970s) has emphasized the nurturing, nonauthoritarian, nonhierarchical nature of peer tutoring (2003, 96–97). In our quest to model this type of environment for our tutors in training, many tutor trainers, like me, have adopted a kind of egalitarian pedagogy in our tutor-training classes or workshops, but I now think this decentering of authority and power was at the heart of many of the problems I saw in the PWCP at Ohio State. No one person, neither among the 110W teachers nor the 467 teachers, had the definitive say on how the peer groups should work. Indeed, a large part of my job as the peer consultant director was to be an intermediary between these parties because neither group was supposed to act as a sole authority. While I was initially drawn to this idea of shared authority, in reimagining how to set up a program in light of the concerns I have raised throughout this essay, I have decided that the program needs to mark a clear authority figure, and this authority figure needs, as much as possible, to provide clear definitions to all the participants about their roles.

To start this process, I have decided that it is vitally important for the writing teacher and the tutor trainer to have a firm understanding of what roles they expect tutors to assume in the peer groups, in addition to having specific criteria for what the groups should be striving for. Because I am now at a small institution where the logistics of this arrangement are possible, I am both the tutor trainer and the first-year instructor involved with this program. In other words, I am training peer tutors to work with peer groups in a first-year writing course I am teaching. This move hopefully eliminates many of the mixed messages that were so confusing in my old program and provides me with the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of the types of issues I will need to call to the attention of first-year writing teachers who may want to use this model in the future.

For example, one issue I am already aware of is the need for the peer groups to meet during regularly scheduled class time with me present. My hope is that my presence, both figuratively in the structure of the program and literally in the room as peer groups are meeting, helps to deflect some of the authority novice writers want to invest the tutor with while relieving tutors of the burden of having to take attendance, provide discipline, or otherwise "be in charge." Keeping the groups in the classroom may make this activity seem more formal than when students could meet anywhere, but it also suggests that the peer group time is important and serious enough to take place in the classroom, and, hopefully, the familiar setting makes a positive contribution to the comfort level of the

groups. As an added bonus, questions or problems are addressed immediately and, therefore, groups do not reach an impasse where they cannot go on with their work until they find the answer, as often happened in my former program.

Another critical difference in the way I am (re)constructing this program is that I am introducing my tutors to the literature on both one-to-one tutoring and peer response groups. For the former I have chosen Donald McAndrew and Thomas Reigstad's *Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences* (2001) and for the latter Karen Spear's *Sharing Writing: Peer Response Groups in English Classes* (1988). While neither text addresses the specific model of tutors tutoring peer response groups that my students are participating in, including conversations about the nature of peer group work in the structure of the tutor-training course gives the PWCs a broader understanding of the different ways collaboration can happen. I am hopeful, too, that as texts like *On Location* and Moss, Highberg, and Nicolas's *By Any Other Name: Writing Groups Inside and Outside the Classroom* (2004) become available, I will be able to incorporate reading that does concern itself with the specific nature of the work my PWCs are doing.

Besides providing PWCs with information about their roles, I am able to train my first-year writing students about how their groups should work. To address this goal, I place my students in "permanent" peer groups at the beginning of the semester, and I construct classroom activities that require them to work together throughout the semester at times other than just during peer group sessions with their PWC. This set up is, of course, similar to the one in my former program; however, the crucial difference this time is that the first-year writing students do not use their peer group time away from the PWC to work on their papers. Instead, they use that time to perform other writing-related tasks, like discussing readings, responding to in-class writing prompts, or reviewing homework. Additionally, while my syllabus calls for several single-authored papers, the final paper for the course is a collaborative paper that requires the group to work together to collect data, do research, draft a paper, and present an oral report. Since the first-year students know that this group project is a course requirement, they (hopefully?) have a vested interest in making their group functional, and they have assignments they do without the PWCs so that the time the PWC is present is reserved for discussion of and work on specific writing assignments.

I have also built this focus on group work into my tutor-training course, as I think it is important for tutors who are facilitating peer groups to also

have the experience of being in a peer group. My PWCs worked together to create a conference presentation for the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, and the assigned final project for the course will be completely designed and carried out by the class. In both cases, the PWCs need to negotiate authority and workload as well as balance individual personalities, strengths, and weaknesses in order to help keep the group moving forward. An integral piece of both projects is a reflective essay the PWCs write at the completion of each project in which they think about their participation in the process, identify key issues that arose during the collaboration, and draw connections among the theory they have read, the work they are doing with their peer groups, and their own experience as a peer group member.

The changes I have made to the way I present this program to both the tutors and the first-year writers certainly do not address all the issues I have highlighted in this essay, and, as such, I am sure I will continue to alter my pedagogy as I continue to learn from each class. Importantly, though, I am learning to work with/in the ambiguity. Although I still believe it is important not to conflate tutoring and peer response groups, I also believe there is much promise in figuring out how to bring these models into productive coexistence.