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Novice tutors and their ESL tutees: Three case studies of tutor roles and perceptions of tutorial success

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Abstract

This article presents case studies of three tutor/tutee dyads, focusing on the negotiation of tutor roles over a semester as part of a course requirement for MATESOL candidates. Tutors were enrolled in the course “Issues in Second Language Writing,” and tutees were ESL student volunteers. Data came from on-line discussions from the course, videotapes of tutoring sessions, tutors’ and tutees’ retrospective interviews, and the tutors’ final reflective papers for the course. Results indicate that the dyads negotiated relationships that differed from each other but were viewed as successful by those involved. For each dyad, different factors emerged as influential in negotiating the tutor’s role, including tutors’ and tutees’ beliefs about writing, tutees’ language proficiency, affective factors, and aspects of the tutorial setting.

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Much of the published literature used for training writing tutors at colleges and universities is fairly prescriptive when describing the roles that tutors should play vis-à-vis their tutees. Traditionally, good tutoring sessions are said to consist of the tutors asking the writers what they want to work on, allowing the writers to explore their topics and their writing processes and coaching or probing the students for additional information (Harris, 1986). Furthermore, effective tutorials are characterized as consisting of student talk rather than tutor talk, a focus on content and organization rather than grammar, the negotiation of meaning, and tutor questions. In short, the role of the tutor is frequently

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defined in tutor training manuals (e.g., Gillespie & Lerner, 2000; Rafoth, 2000) by contrasting it with the roles of teacher and editor.

For administrators and teachers concerned with providing effective tutoring for non-native speakers (NNS) of English at the university, the tutor training literature often falls short of expectations. Some scholars (Hall, 2001; Harris & Silva 1993; Thonus, 1999b) have pointed out that the advice given to writing tutors who deal mostly with native speakers (NS) may not always work for NNS tutees. For the most part, there is little consideration given to the issue of native language in tutor training manuals. In fact, several studies of tutoring in traditional campus writing centers have found that even experienced writing tutors frequently feel unprepared to deal with the writing needs of NNSs (Cogie, Strain, & Lorinkas, 1999; Harris & Silva, 1993; Szapara, 1994).

One of the main themes of the tutor training literature is that successful tutoring depends on tutors acting as peers vis-à-vis their tutees—supportive, interested readers—rather than as authoritative instructors. However, this stance is problematic for at least three reasons: First, ethnographic studies of tutoring have demonstrated that, in practice, tutors take on a multiplicity of roles, from more to less authoritative. Second, these studies are inconsistent in demonstrating a link between taking on the role of a peer and perceived tutorial success (Henning, 2001; Thonus, 2002). Finally, for many NNSs in particular, the idea of a tutor and a tutee as equals may be culturally inappropriate (Harris & Silva, 1993; Young, 1992, cited in Thonus, 1999b).

Complicating the issue even further, Thonus (1999a) suggests that the most common context for tutoring—the campus writing center—actually prevents tutors from acting as equals to their tutees. Specifically, Thonus argues that tutorials in the writing center can best be seen as institutional service encounters, in which the tutor, as a paid employee of the institution, automatically has more power and control than the tutee and thus cannot easily take on a more equal, collaborative role. This situation frequently leads to “a rift between writing center theory (tutors and tutees are of equal status) and writing center practice (tutors are dominant institutional representatives)” (Thonus, 1999a, p. 227), creating cognitive dissonance for tutors as they attempt to reconcile these conflicting tutor roles.

Thonus (2001) notes that the role that a tutor plays is highly dependent upon context and is negotiated anew with every tutorial. However, little systematic research has been done that specifies the contextual factors that influence this negotiation and how the negotiation of the tutor role contributes to the perceived success of a tutoring session. Researchers have investigated how variables such as gender (Hunzer, 1994; Thonus, 1999a), personality (Thompson, 1994), and language background (i.e., NS versus NNS: Anderson, Benson, & Lynch, 2001; Cumming & So, 1996; Thonus, 1999a) affect interactions within tutorial systems, but these are only a few of the many potential variables that could influence how tutors and tutees perceive the tutor’s role.

An important contextual factor which has largely been ignored in the research literature is the setting in which tutoring takes place. Kail and Trimbur (1987, cited in Healy & Bosher, 1992) distinguish between two settings for peer tutoring: writing center-based tutoring, where students can go to tutoring on a drop-in basis, and curriculum-based tutoring, where a tutor is assigned to a course and all students are required to attend tutoring. Kail and Trimbur favor the writing center model on the grounds that it is less likely to reinforce the hierarchical model of teaching and learning than the curriculum-

based model. On the other hand, Healy and Boshier (1992) suggest that, for English as a Second Language (ESL) students in particular, curriculum-based tutoring can be a useful approach, especially when participation in tutoring is optional rather than mandatory.

This paper describes the negotiation of tutor roles in a setting that differs from both the writing center- and curriculum-based tutoring. The tutors in this study were graduate students in a seminar on second language writing who provided 10 hours of tutoring to ESL students as a course requirement. This context differs from writing center- and curriculum-based models in several important ways. First, as students fulfilling a course requirement, the tutors had the option of presenting themselves as something closer to peers of their tutees rather than as trained experts and representatives of the institution. This may have contributed to a more equal sharing of power than in other settings. Second, the tutees were volunteers who committed to 10 weeks of tutoring, which implied an investment in improving their own writing that may be lacking in settings where students are required to seek tutoring or choose to seek help in a writing center only occasionally. The extended time frame of tutoring also provided opportunities for tutor/tutee dyads to develop relationships that were deeper and more complex than those of typical tutor/tutee dyads in writing centers where drop-in appointments are the norm. The fact that the tutoring took place outside of a writing center or a specific English/ESL course also meant that tutors/tutees had a certain flexibility in choosing the time, location, and direction of their tutoring sessions and could come up with creative ways of negotiating solutions to tutoring dilemmas. On the other hand, as novice pre-service teachers, the tutors in this study did not receive the intensive training and supervision that is generally given to tutors in more formal settings and thus did not have as much background and experience as other writing tutors might have.

This study was designed to investigate the negotiation between tutors and nonnative English speaking tutees in this particular setting. Specifically, we were interested in (a) factors that influenced the negotiation of tutor–tutee relationships, (b) the influence of these factors on the perceived success of the tutoring sessions and the tutor–tutee relationship, and (c) how the negotiation of tutor roles may have been affected by aspects of the specific tutoring context.

1. Method

Case study inquiry was used to investigate tutor/tutee pairs because we were interested in a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 13) and believe that contextual conditions are pertinent in understanding the construction of individual tutors’ roles over time and also the tutors’ and tutees’ perceptions of effective tutoring. As with other studies of this type, this one focuses on a small sample and therefore has limited generalizability. Its primary purpose is to provide a better understanding of how novice tutors construct/negotiate their identities as tutors in a specific setting.

1.1. Context for the study

Tutors for the study were all MATESOL candidates enrolled in a graduate course entitled “Issues in Second Language (L2) Writing” at Georgia State University (see

Further Reading for a list of course readings). One of the course requirements was to tutor an ESL student for 10 h during the semester. The goal of the tutoring was to provide a forum for graduate students to link theory with practice and to apply what they were learning in the course to personal experience with second language (L2) writers.

ESL students were enrolled in either special sections of freshman composition for nonnative speakers or one of two levels of graduate-level ESL writing courses. The course instructor solicited volunteers who wanted tutoring and who were willing to sign a contract agreeing to participate in 10 h of tutoring during the semester. ESL students were matched with graduate students based primarily on their schedules.

Before the tutoring began, graduate students read two articles related to tutoring (Harris & Silva, 1993; Powers, 1993) and discussed them in class. The instructors of the ESL classes whose students were participating also came to class to discuss the ESL course goals and answer any questions that students had about their classes.

To document their tutoring experience and to provide a forum for discussion and reflection, tutors were assigned to on-line discussion groups. Tutors working with ESL students from the same class were grouped together so they would be able to discuss common writing assignments and issues from the ESL class. Tutors were expected to post a summary of each tutoring session to their group each week as well as respond to their group members' postings. There were four discussion groups in all with four to six students in each group. The number of postings to the discussion groups ranged from 184 to 246. The course instructor did not participate in the on-line discussion groups but consulted with tutors on a case-by-case basis when the need arose.

Finally, at the end of the semester, tutors were asked to write a 5-page reflective paper summarizing their experience as tutors.

1.2. *Participants*

As shown in Table 1, three tutoring pairs or cases were studied. Case 1 consisted of Anna,¹ a first-semester MATESOL student from the Czech Republic and Daniel, an Indonesian graduate student in economics enrolled in an intermediate level ESL graduate student writing class. Case 2 consisted of Sandra, an American graduate student who was in her last semester of the MATESOL program, and Lian, a female Chinese graduate student in geography who chose to take an advanced ESL writing course to improve her writing (i.e., she was not placed into the course based on test scores). Kerry, a graduate student in her second year of the MATESOL program, who had lived in Taiwan for 5 years, and Kwan, a male Korean graduate student who was taking an advanced level graduate ESL writing course, made up Case 3. Each of the three tutors was in a different on-line discussion group.

1.3. *Procedure*

Qualitative methodologies, including case study research, call for multiple sources of evidence “with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 1994, p. 13) to

¹All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1
Nationality, major, and ESL class of three tutoring pairs

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Tutor	Anna (Czech Republic)	Sandra (USA)	Kerry (USA)
Tutee	Daniel (Indonesia); major: economics; ESL: intermediate writing for graduate students	Lian (China); major: geography; ESL: advanced writing for graduate students	Kwan (Korea); major: business; ESL: advanced writing for graduate students

increase construct validity. Data for the study come from five sources: the on-line discussions from the writing course, videotapes of six tutoring sessions, tutors' and students' retrospective interviews (described below), and the final reflective papers of the three participating tutors.

After the midpoint of the course, when we felt that tutors and tutees would feel comfortable enough to be videotaped, students were asked if they wanted to participate in the study. Students were assured that the course instructor would not have access to any of the videotape or interview data until after the course was completed and grades turned in. Three tutors and their tutees participated, and six tutoring sessions were videotaped (two sessions for each pair) by a research assistant with neither researcher present. Within 5 days of each session, tutors and tutees were interviewed by the researcher who was not the course instructor. These interviews were tape-recorded. An introspective method—stimulated recall—was used to prompt participants to recall thoughts they had during the tutoring sessions. Following the guidelines set forth by [Gass and Mackey \(2000\)](#), protocols were written, and the same protocol was read to each participant. The participants used a remote control to stop the videotape when they wanted to say something during a particular segment of the session. The interviewer also stopped the videotape to ask what the tutor or tutee was thinking or feeling during interactions that were of interest (e.g., a tutor or tutee seemed confused, impatient, frustrated, pleased), or if they had not stopped the videotape for a while. As much as possible, the interviewer responded to participants' comments by backchanneling (e.g., "Oh," "I see," "Okay"). Overall, three categories of questions were used: those asking about the participants' cognitive states (e.g., What were thinking here?); those asking about the participants' affective states (e.g., What were you feeling here?); and those asking about the participants' pragmatic intent (e.g., Why did you respond in that way?). At times, the interviewer also followed up on interviewees' responses by posing questions to probe beneath the perceived surface comments or to ask for clarification.

A grounded theory approach ([Strauss, 1987](#)) was used in analyzing the data. [Neff \(2002\)](#) provides a rationale for using grounded theory in research on writing centers, noting that this approach is particularly useful for "conceptualizing complex activities and developing theories about them" (p. 134). In grounded theory, researchers must constantly move back and forth between empirical data and theory construction. Data coding is done several times from multiple perspectives, going from open coding, in which researchers apply provisional labels to phenomena that occur in the data, to axial coding, in which researchers make connections between the categories that are constructed through open coding, to selective coding, in which the researcher "refines and develops provisional category relations until the core category is firmly established and other categories are

placed into relationship to it” (p. 139). At this point, the researcher has a “grounded” theory about a phenomenon and communicates the theory in narrative form and through visuals such as flow charts and matrices.

For coding our data, we used the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software ([Scientific Software Development, 1997](#)). Working back and forth between coding independently and coming to consensus on emerging categories, we came up with the following list of categories for the data:

- Beliefs about writing
- Anxieties/issues
- Beliefs about tutor role
- Negotiation of role with tutee & instructor
- Tutee’s perceptions
- Strategies for:
 - organizing sessions
 - dealing with own anxieties/issues
 - identifying & solving problems with student writing
 - dealing with affective issues
- Changes over the course of the semester
- Factors in successful (unsuccessful) tutoring
- Additional points of interest about this tutor

Each researcher then independently filled out a matrix that summarized the data according to these categories for each tutor/tutee pair. We then compared our matrices, resolving any discrepancies through discussion and returning to the data. The matrices formed the basis for writing the narratives on each dyad. One researcher was primarily responsible for writing each narrative, which the other checked against her own understanding of the data. At this point the narratives were shared with the three tutors as a means of validating our interpretations of the data. In addition, the researchers reviewed the videotapes of the sessions as a final check on the validity of their interpretations.

2. Results

2.1. Case 1: Anna and Daniel

Anna was a 26-year-old MATESOL candidate from the Czech Republic who had lived in the US for 5 years at the time the data were collected. She was enrolled in the L2 writing course during her first semester in the MATESOL program. When she took the L2 writing course, therefore, she had not yet taken courses in second language acquisition or TESOL methodology, so she was relatively unfamiliar with current theories of language learning and approaches to teaching.

It is clear from the data that Anna came to the tutoring experience with firm ideas about the nature of L2 writing and L2 language learning. The writer simply needs to learn the rules of the language and practice them. At the beginning of the semester, Anna conceptualized her role as someone who diagnoses the areas in which the tutee is weak,

provides an accurate explanation of the rules, and locates appropriate practice materials for the tutee. Anna described her first tutoring session in these terms:

After analyzing [Daniel's] summary, I realized that unfortunately, he makes some global and local errors. To start with, I am going to focus on the global errors, such as unnecessary shift in verb tense, fragments, and simple, compound, and complex clauses . . . I would like to give him some extra worksheets on the global errors that he makes (Discussion, 169–172, 177–179).²

Anna's focus on sentence-level grammar was also apparent in her description of how she prepared for the videotaped session:

Once I corrected his writing, I looked at the similar mistakes that he did, and then I was searching for other materials he can get practice in the mistake he's doing the most . . . And also I was looking at dictionaries and making sure I'm actually giving the right feedback, because there are some aspects of English I'm not sure as well (Interview 1, 28–32).

Anna's tutee Daniel seemed to accept this language informant conceptualization of the tutor's role. When asked about his specific goals for the tutoring session, he replied in rather vague terms:

Actually, I just want to improve my writing. I've written in English. I can write by good organization from my writing class. It is useful when I am in this level of assignment in my homework because in my major, my economics, I have many assignments I must to write (Interview 1, 29–32).

Unlike the two other tutees in the study, Daniel did not seem to have specific objectives for improving his writing and thus allowed Anna to set the agenda for the tutoring session. Daniel's oral proficiency was also relatively low, which made it difficult for him to express himself clearly and sometimes led to misunderstandings with Anna. In fact, mutual intelligibility was an issue that arose frequently in Anna's sessions with Daniel:

R: ³ OK now he's . . . do you think he's understanding everything you're saying here?
Anna: I hope he does. I'm kind of assuming he does. I wish he'd tell me. I really wish he'd tell me, because sometimes I don't know . . . I really like to hear the feedback from him, even if it's positive or negative. And if he understands me, that's good, because sometimes I have a hard time understanding him. And I really need to concentrate what he's saying and trying to say (Interview 1, 271–278).

This problem was compounded, at least from Daniel's perspective, by Anna's lack of understanding of economics terms: "I have many economic words, so Anna sometime is confused about that because some my writing is full of economic topics" (Interview 1, 44–45).

²The coding conventions are as follows: Discussion = [WebCT discussion groups; Interviews = stimulated recall interviews with researcher; Paper = end-of-term course paper] + [document line numbers].

³R = Researcher who was not the instructor for the course and who served as interviewer.

As a second language speaker herself, Anna was also conscious of gaps in her knowledge of English and was uncomfortable when she was unable to answer Daniel's questions in the tutoring session. A solution that Anna and Daniel negotiated helped them make better use of the tutoring hour: Daniel agreed to email his writing to Anna before the session so that she could prepare her comments in advance, and Anna frequently emailed answers to questions that she was unable to answer on the spot during the tutoring session. This solution appears to have been satisfactory to both Anna and Daniel:

I really appreciated actually Daniel sent me over the email his writings because I really have time to prepare and we can cover maybe more things and we don't waste the time because I read really slow (Anna, Interview 2, 151–153).

Because sometimes if I am not give the...give my sample writing Anna have some difficulties to answer my questions. That is why it useful to us (Daniel, Interview 1, 25–26).

Using email as a complement to the face-to-face tutoring sessions was an important step in making the tutoring more useful for both Anna and Daniel. There were other changes in Anna's approach to tutoring as the semester progressed, however. One challenge that Anna faced was how to implement the inductive approach to dealing with errors advocated by the course readings and discussions:

When I asked him whether he knew about his grammatical errors [on a paper he had received back from his instructor], he could not explain me why his errors were underlined. Well, I am trying to apply inductive method and help him to realize his own mistakes, but sometimes I just need to tell him what the rule is (Discussion, 175–178).

In her paper, Anna wrote, "being deductively instructed myself in my earlier years, I have found inductive instruction a challenge" (Paper, 92–93).

In the end, she opted for an approach that included both deductive and inductive methods:

I was really happy when my tutee corrected some of his errors by himself, and when my tutee did not know what was wrong with an underlined error, on the advice given by Powers (1993), I directly explained the grammatical rule to him and gave him the correct answer (Paper, 100–103).

Another lesson that Anna learned from tutoring was the need for flexibility:

I realized that I need to be more flexible than I thought I need to... Every time I meet with my tutee, I spend most of the time answering questions on grammar that he has, and they are completely different from what I spotted in my tutee's first writing sample. Now, I know that flexibility is the key, and in tutoring there is no orderly pattern of instruction as if you would follow when you are teaching in the regular classroom (Discussion, 250–257).

Anna also realized that as a tutor, she had to deal with her tutee's affective concerns and not just his grammar mistakes:

But my strategy has changed a little bit because every time I receive just like this corrected by [the instructor], and we always focus on the little things, and I just wanted to . . . you know . . . wanted Daniel to see that it's not the little errors all the time, but you can look at the big picture, just bring up his motivation a little bit, because just the sea of errors everywhere, and I'm doing something actually, oh well, he might be thinking, well, am I doing something at least right in this paper at all? Therefore I just looked at that way, this time (Interview 1, 243–249).

In this excerpt, Anna sensed that her tutee was feeling frustrated by all the errors his instructor had pointed out on his paper. She broke out of her usual role as language informant and commented instead on the strengths of his paper in response to Daniel's perceived emotional state.

In retrospect, Anna's assessment of the tutorial experience in her paper was quite positive. "Tutoring writing to a [NNS] graduate student has truly been a wonderful experience for me, and I am glad that such assignment has been implemented in the course" (Paper, 2–3). However, when asked about a specific tutoring session in an interview, Anna's response was mixed:

Well, the first part when he handed it to me and I was unprepared, it was something, like, impromptu paper, and just tell me the rules, pretty much. And so, yeah, I just was not ready, I mean, you know, not knowing all these grammar rules from my head or anything. And then, well this one I was already looking at the night before the session, and I felt more confident, I guess to, you know, comment on that paper. Yeah, so I felt like, I felt it was more successful. And I especially felt when Daniel tells me, OK, or maybe not agrees or at least responds, gives me some kind of feedback, not just me talking, when you know, I feel he is with me. So I feel like this is successful and he is actually communicating with me, and it's two-way communication (Interview 1, 312–320).

For Anna, success in this tutoring session was related to her ability to answer Daniel's questions and to doubts about whether she and Daniel had communicated successfully.

However, for Daniel success was measured differently. His interview transcript reveals several occasions when he did not appear to understand what Anna was saying to him. Also, Daniel was sometimes frustrated by Anna's inability to understand economic terminology. Much of what he found successful and useful occurred outside the session. In evaluating the session as a whole he reported that he was able to get answers to his questions from Anna's follow-ups:

R: Was Anna able to answer all of your questions?

Daniel: Sometime, he must, she must to check in the book or other source to check, but it's OK, because she always send something by email or letter, and I can have the answer to my question (Interview 1, 41–44).

For Daniel, therefore, success seemed to mean that his questions were eventually answered, even if the tutoring session itself was sometimes unproductive.

To summarize, the dominant role that Anna played in tutoring Daniel was language informant, a role that corresponded both with her own understanding of the goals of writing instruction and with Daniel's goals in seeking tutoring. There were several factors that

contributed to the co-construction of Anna's role as language informant. Daniel's proficiency in English was somewhat low, which may have made it difficult for him to articulate writing needs beyond grammar and also made language errors more salient than problems with content or organization. Furthermore, Anna's lack of knowledge in economics may have made her hesitant to comment on the content of Daniel's writing. Because both Daniel and Anna had learned English formally, they were accustomed to treating language as an object, and thus grammar was a natural focus for both of them. Finally, the exigencies of the second language writing course—in which students had to begin tutoring with minimal training and before issues such as error correction were taken up in course readings and discussion—may have left Anna ill-prepared to deal with the complexities of writing, particularly as she was a new student in the MA program.

2.2. Case 2: Sandra and Lian

Sandra was a 31-year-old native speaker of North American English who was in her last semester of the MATESOL program at the time of the study. Before and during the MA program, Sandra taught English in adult education programs with little experience in English for academic purposes. Her tutee, Lian, was a 26-year-old graduate student from China majoring in geography who had enrolled voluntarily in an advanced ESL writing course and was highly motivated to improve her writing. Sandra seemed to have fairly definite beliefs about the nature of writing, adhering to a view of writing that included a focus on meaning, revision, and feedback from multiple readers. This focus on meaning was communicated to her discussion group:

The important thing I try to keep in mind, though, is to always read the piece of writing through first and get an overall impression before I begin to address local errors, and hold off addressing them until we've clarified content and organization problems (Discussion, 2402–2405).

Although Sandra seemed sure about her view of writing, she was unclear at first about how to implement this view in her role as a tutor. In an interview she stated,

I didn't really have an idea about tutoring in the beginning. I think I would have just, I think I would have just been much, much more of an editor and gone through, I think I would have taken the pencil in the beginning and I would have gone through and underlined things and handed it to her and asked her to check the things I underlined (Interview 2, 300–306).

Lian shared Sandra's view of writing with its emphasis on audience and revision. She described what she wanted from a tutor:

Um, first I want Sandra, I want she regard herself as the audience, as a reader without any background knowledge of the data and I present this material together with her to see if she can understand what I was talking about (Interview 1, 49–53).

Sandra and Lian shared a similar view of writing, and many of the negotiated strategies they used developed out of this shared view. Early on both realized that if Lian read a portion of her paper aloud, she could self-correct. Lian commented,

She asked me to read my article loudly and sometimes when I was writing, if I recall, I didn't realize some of the mistakes, but when I read aloud I would find that some words or some sentence are not correct or appropriate (Interview 1, 70–72).

Self-correction was but one way Lian controlled her own editing. Sandra and Lian negotiated an interaction in which Lian held the pen, had her paper in front of her, and wrote down comments based on their discussions. This interaction was apparent from the videotapes and Sandra also wrote of it:

Lian was always in control of what suggestions and connections were actually marked on the paper. After my initial reading of the paper, I handed it back to her, and for the remainder of the hour, she held the pencil in her hand and marked her own paper as we talked about it. In this way, Lian was able to maintain a good deal of control over her own editing and revision process (Paper, 52–56).

Even though Lian was adept at self-editing, Sandra continued to struggle with her internal editor and her need to correct. Sandra found a resolution to her inner battle after reading Truscott (1996) and Ferris (1999). She explained, "I also have a new appreciation for asking myself the question, 'Is this sentence CLEAR?' instead of 'Is this sentence CORRECT?' That's been an important distinction for me" (Discussion, 3324–3326).

This preference for clarity was shared by Lian. She told the interviewer that she wanted Sandra to let her know "if there are something that I stated not very clear to her and if she think that some conclusion I draw by myself are appropriate to the purpose of the article" (Interview 1, 51–53).

As the semester progressed, Sandra frequently made connections between issues raised in the L2 writing class and what was happening in her tutoring sessions. Reflecting on the course readings and discussions gave Sandra a better understanding of her tutee's writing and helped her expand her repertoire of tutoring techniques. The following quotes are from Sandra's postings to her on-line discussion group:

I found our L2 writing class discussion on contrastive rhetoric really helpful in understanding why she may have done this, since, as a Chinese writer, she is probably not used to being so direct and stating her topic right in the beginning of the essay (Discussion, 156–159).

So we spent the bulk of the session working on the reading, which I felt totally justified doing since we've been focusing on reading/writing connections in class this week (Discussion, 309–311).

In addition to focusing on Lian's writing, Sandra and Lian negotiated a relationship that included affective issues in Lian's life. For example, in one of the early sessions, Lian came with no draft but with a gift for Sandra and photographs of Beijing. She was homesick and hadn't been able to work. Sandra listened to her talk about Beijing, empathized, and "let her know that these types of 'relapses' are completely normal and it's [cultural adjustment] not a linear process" (Discussion, 2474–2475). Then Sandra walked her to the counseling center. For the last session, Sandra and Lian met at a café off campus, an indication that their relationship had a personal as well as institutional dimension.

Not all of the negotiations were easy, however. In one instance, Sandra described a disagreement that she and Lian had over a piece of writing:

I'm being stubborn, she's being stubborn, we're both being stubborn. I'm wanting her to put this in, and she's not wanting to put it in, and so we go back and forth on this, and ultimately she doesn't, and I'm like, "whatever" (Interview 2, 79–81).

What was important in these negotiations was that both parties actively participated; neither was passive.

Both Sandra and Lian felt the tutoring sessions were successful, although they may have defined success differently. For Sandra, in part, success seemed to refer to Lian identifying and solving problems on her own and picking up on the tutor's cues. For Lian, success meant receiving a high grade on her paper, finding out if the meaning of her papers was clear to a reader, and having someone listen when she was homesick. That they both perceived the sessions as successful is illustrated by the comments below.

It [the sessions] helped me a lot. In fact, the last one, I wrote an article about air monitoring and I am very interested in the field and I asked Sandra give me some opinion about that article. We worked together, very hard, and finally I got a ninety-seven, a very high score and I'm very satisfied with this (Lian, Interview 1, 57–60).

At one point she [Lian] told me that she looked forward to the tutoring sessions more because of how her attitude would be uplifted by the end of the hour (Sandra, Paper, 121–123).

I'll miss my exceptional tutee. I've learned from/with her this semester (Sandra, Discussion, 3453–3454).

In summary, the primary role that Sandra and Lian negotiated for Sandra was that of interested, supportive reader. Of all three dyads, Sandra and Lian came closest to achieving what might be seen as a relationship of peers. Both preferred to discuss issues related to the content of the paper, in particular the clarity of the content, rather than sentence-level grammar. They negotiated a relationship in which Lian took the lead and was, for the most part, in control of the progression of the sessions. Not only did Lian hold the pen and have her paper in front of her, but she also read the paper aloud, talked about the content, and asked Sandra questions.

There were several factors that appear to have contributed to the success of this pairing. First, Lian's English proficiency was higher than that of the other two tutees in the study. She was also highly motivated and had specific goals for improving her writing, goals that were consistent with Sandra's view of writing. For her part, Sandra was able to implement a tutee-centered approach to tutoring despite the minimal training she received, in part because she was able to make connections between the issues raised in the L2 writing class and her own experience as a tutor. Finally, personality factors may have contributed to the success of this tutoring relationship, as Sandra and Lian simply were compatible. As Sandra wrote:

My tutoring experience really proves that the tutoring endeavor can be successful when the right combination of factors are present. Some of it has to do with luck. My tutee's and my personality simply "jelled" well together (Paper, 113–115).

2.3. Case 3: Kerry and Kwan

Kerry, a 30-year-old native speaker of English who defines herself as multiracial—specifically Irish, Native American, French, Vietnamese, and Chinese—was in her last semester in the MATESOL program when she took the L2 writing class. She was an instructor in the department's Intensive English Program (IEP) and had also taught English in Taiwan for 5 years. As an instructor in the IEP, she had more experience with teaching English for Academic Purposes than the other tutors in the study. She was matched up with Kwan, a student who had been a general manager in Korea for 16 years and was in the process of applying to the business school. Kwan had a very specific goal for his writing: to improve his essay score on the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), a standardized test often required for admission to graduate programs in management.

From the interview transcripts and her contributions to the on-line discussions, it was apparent that Kerry came to the tutoring assignment with a process-oriented view of writing: she saw brainstorming and revision as an essential part of the writing process. She discussed her expectations in an interview: “The first time that we met . . . I was thinking about implementing some kind of process approach and expanding the work he does in class” (Interview 1, 18–20).

At the end of the course when she wrote her paper she affirmed the importance of writing as process: “The act of collaborating on drafts, making revisions, and brainstorming on new drafts was integral to practicing the writing process rather than focusing on the end product” (Paper, 45–47).

Kerry was matched with a tutee who was interested in writing strictly for pragmatic reasons: he wanted a better score on the GMAT. He explained that, “in the GMAT test [I] have a relatively good score in verbal or math, but in writing there was a terrible score” (Interview 1, 31–32). Furthermore, Kwan confessed that he hated writing:

Actually I afraid of writing because I was a manager and I have a secretary too to write for me so I don't use to write. Right now, I have to write so I have to get rid of the fear. I have a writing phobia (Interview 2, 22–24).

Based on her original expectations, Kerry was somewhat disconcerted to find that her tutee wanted to work on GMAT essays, a genre that doesn't ordinarily lend itself to a process involving several drafts. This posed two problems for Kerry: First, it meant that she would have to rethink her approach to the tutoring sessions, and second, she was venturing into territory that was unknown to her because she was unfamiliar with the GMAT. In an early session, Kerry and Kwan negotiated a compromise: Kerry would find practice GMAT essay topics that she would assign to Kwan every week, and Kwan would write the essay and bring it to the tutoring session. Kerry also convinced Kwan to rewrite his essays following her suggestions. According to Kerry, Kwan was skeptical of this approach at first but eventually agreed. Kerry told her discussion group members about their negotiations:

He wants me to get some sample GRE and GMAT essay topics for him each week. I will assign him one and he will write a sample essay for me to look at the next session. I suggested that we begin with a couple of writing samples that he had already written for his ESL class. He was not sure what I was talking about, I mean, why should he look at

something or rewrite something that had already been turned in. After we talked about writing as a process and the possibilities that lay in perfecting and expanding formulated topics, he agreed to give it a whirl (Discussion, 68–73).

This plan enabled Kerry to implement parts of the writing process (i.e., he would revise his drafts for his ESL class, and she would provide feedback on his GMAT drafts. In return, Kwan would be able to work on the GMAT exam essay prompts. They created a plan for the rest of the semester that Kerry elaborated on in a later discussion:

We made a tentative plan for the rest of the semester. I had downloaded 8 sample GMAT questions from the web and we decided that he would bring one in answered every week. We would also have rewrites to look at every week (Discussion, 497–499).

At times, Kerry struggled with her role as tutor. It appeared that she would like to structure the sessions in a manner similar to a class so she would know what to expect. Kerry confessed to her discussion group:

Some of us were and still are quite freaked out about this whole tutoring process. (I am inclined to go for the fish out of water analogy myself.) What I'd like to know is if any of you feel any better now that we have read more material on the L2 writing process or if all this material is just more confusing (Discussion, 504–508)??

This wish for certainty was reflected in her desire to have answers to questions. She tells her discussion group that “the only thing that is kinda scary is never knowing what kind of errors will appear in his papers. I guess I will just start taking a resource book around with me” (Discussion, 527–528).

Kerry and Kwan negotiated other strategies that reduced Kerry's apprehension: Kwan emailed his drafts and questions to her so she could read the drafts and answer the questions before they met. In an interview, Kerry described a typical session:

Well, I don't really have to prepare much once I have downloaded all the questions . . . Typically we have two or three different papers and we'd already emailed each other beforehand and I knew that he was bringing in three different papers and it might take us twenty or thirty minutes to get through one paper (Interview 1, 42–46).

Another strategy that Kerry used successfully was to help Kwan deconstruct the GMAT writing prompts and brainstorm ideas. She reported to her discussion group:

He mentioned how it took him more time to organize his ideas and decide what to write, than it took him to actually write. So, we had an impromptu brainstorming session on the essay question for next week. We followed this framework: 1. Determine what the question is asking. 2. Decide possible answers. 3. List answers/evidence for the possibilities. 4. Organize the ideas into groups. After that, I thought it might be fun for him to give me an essay question to brainstorm and map out. He enjoyed that and I think that he appreciated the extended practice with brainstorming (Discussion, 607–615).

The videotapes of Kerry and Kwan's sessions revealed that Kerry was in control: she held Kwan's writing directly in front of her and underlined passages while Kwan looked on

from the side. Although Kerry elicited suggested rewritings from Kwan, she was the one who wrote them on his paper. Kerry was aware of her tendency to be in control and wondered whether she was being too directive. She told her discussion group, “I volunteered to be videoed because I’d like to know if I am on the right track with what I am doing or if I am leading too much” (Discussion, 700–701).

Following her interview, in which the researcher commented on Kerry’s tendency to take notes for her tutee, Kerry brought up this issue with her discussion group.

Even in our tutoring sessions, he is hesitant to write on his paper . . . It might save time to have him dictate his ideas to me since I write faster and spell accurately. He sometimes stops writing when he stumbles across spelling. Is it time management or a control issue (Discussion, 2266–2270)?

Kwan appeared to appreciate at least some of the control that Kerry took in the sessions. After reading an early draft of this manuscript, Kerry defended her approach by invoking Kwan’s cultural background:

I taught in Asia for nearly 6 years which means that I am familiar with the expectations of Asian students, i.e., a more direct approach due to the elevated position that a teacher holds in those societies (Kerry, personal communication, August 14, 2003).

Another reason Kerry’s control may have been appreciated is that Kwan had difficulties understanding Kerry’s spoken language:

R: Did you understand what she was saying?

Kwan: At first, I didn’t understand her (Kwan, Interview 1, 185–188).

R: What were you thinking there?

Kwan: Just, I could not understand her point. It’s just out of point, so I’m just thinking what’s she saying (Interview 1, 270–272)?

Having Kerry write things down allowed Kwan to understand through reading rather than listening: “But, after she writes down the sentence, a new sentence, I catch the point. So, writing is a more convenient way to the way of thinking” (Interview 1, 301–303).

Furthermore, in part because of his limited oral proficiency, Kwan had difficulties responding to some of Kerry’s suggestions during the tutoring session, particularly when Kerry responded to the content of his essay:

Kerry (on video): All of this is excellent but I think it could be a little bit stronger if you had more than one sentence in the conclusion. Like maybe if you expanded the idea . . . How do you think you could expand?

Kwan (in interview): . . . Tutor is a decent question or decent request. Think this is anyway, I think it is decent or modest not overdoing request but at that time a little bit embarrassed anyway because I am not prepared and there was a taping and it is creative thinking so a little bit difficult situation. [The tutor asked a decent question but I was a little bit embarrassed because I wasn’t prepared to answer it right away and we were being videotaped and it involved creative thinking so it was a difficult situation.]

R: So, it was hard for you to answer a question, to figure it out and express it?

Kwan: Yeah (Interview 2, 117–128).

Given that Kwan at times had difficulty understanding Kerry, their negotiated strategy of having her write down suggestions seemed mutually satisfactory. Not having to write things down himself may have given Kwan more time to think about what Kerry was saying and to formulate his own speech.

Kerry's desire to know the answers and to have a plan for the sessions did not interfere with her responding to Kwan's pragmatic writing needs. In addition to working on the GMAT with him, she helped him with his resume and application for financial aid. She also looked for opportunities for him to self-edit his writing. While viewing a videotape of a tutoring session, Kerry noticed that Kwan read a portion of his paper and was able to recognize and correct a problem by himself:

I never paid much attention to this, but when I had to watch a video of myself tutoring I realized that I had my student read a portion of his essay aloud. He caught some awkward portions and it went pretty well (Discussion, 1956–1958).

Like the other tutors, Kerry responded to her tutee's affective needs. Kerry seemed particularly attuned to Kwan's nonverbal behavior. While viewing the videotape, she reflected:

I know that he is over there kind of twitching when I'm underlining something and sometimes it's just for a question or clarification but I know that people get kind of touchy about writing on their papers so I think . . . it's very important to say something positive as you go along (Interview 1, 125–128).

On another occasion, Kerry stated, "Well, he has very distinct body language and if you watch his facial expressions and you listen to certain pauses you know when he needs help and then you know when not to help him" (Interview 1, 446–447).

As a tutor, Kerry appeared to struggle with her natural tendencies to take on a teacherly role. On the one hand, she wanted her tutee to find his own writing style, to self-edit, and to take charge of his own writing, but on the other hand, she wanted control of the sessions by planning them in a manner similar to a class and engaging in tutor-centered behaviors (e.g., doing the writing and reading aloud from his essay). In the end, Kerry came to some resolution of her anxieties and realized the limitations of the tutoring assignment:

Alright, I think that we all tend to get a little stressed when we don't have all the answers or can't even pretend that we do. However, we are not writing instructors [yet:]), we are tutors. We look at the papers from their class and help them understand the feedback given to them. We help them prioritize and we do the best that we can given the circumstances (Discussion, 351–354).

Kerry felt that tutoring was successful when she was able to successfully implement a plan for the session, meet her tutee's writing needs, and ask questions that enabled him to solve his own writing problems. Additionally, as she mentions below, she felt successful because he was finding his own voice and gained confidence as writer: "I was really happy

that he actually elaborated on it because now I feel like more of his writing style is coming out. . . . he feels more confident now” (Interview 1, 119–121).

For his part, Kwan was apparently pleased with the progress he was making in his writing. He allowed Kerry to control the sessions and when given the opportunity to take notes on their discussions, he wrote little. Another interpretation is that by having Kerry write down points from their discussions, he was able to process them later and decide what to incorporate into his paper. For Kwan, success seemed to be measured in terms of affect and comfort. Through tutoring and by writing numerous essays, he began to like writing and certainly felt more comfortable writing. In his interview, he expressed this change: “So, actually I hated writing, but with tutoring, I changed my mood to writing” (Interview 1, 60). In Kerry and Kwan’s relationship, the primary role that Kerry played was somewhere in between the language informant that Anna was and the supportive peer that Sandra became. This relationship was negotiated out of an initial conflict of expectations, with Kerry wanting to implement a process approach and Kwan wanting to pass the GMAT. Like Anna, Kerry had a tutee whose oral proficiency was somewhat low, and much of the videotaped tutoring sessions were devoted to sentence-level concerns. However, in keeping with her view of writing as finding one’s own voice, Kerry attempted to elicit several possible ways of expressing meaning from Kwan and then had him choose the one he preferred. Kerry also helped Kwan with the initial brainstorming and gathering ideas for writing and provided opportunities for practice, which helped to lessen Kwan’s anxieties about writing.

The relationship between Kerry and Kwan highlights some important factors in the negotiation of tutor roles. Kwan’s limited oral proficiency, Kerry’s natural inclinations towards control, and her perceptions of what would be appropriate given Kwan’s cultural background were all factors that helped to create a relationship in which Kerry dominated much of the interaction. Although this relationship may not have fit the description of what “good” tutoring is supposed to look like, the end result was that Kwan’s anxiety about writing was reduced and he was able get his writing needs met.

3. Discussion

This study investigated the negotiation of roles for tutors working with ESL students in a setting that differed substantially from the typical campus writing center. For each tutor/tutee pair, different factors became salient in negotiating the tutor’s role and their perceptions of success. In this section we highlight three of these factors: the tutee’s oral proficiency, the tutor’s background and training, and unique aspects of the setting—specifically, the fact that the tutoring took place as part of an L2 writing course for graduate students.

One important factor that affected the tutor roles in this study was language proficiency. For Daniel and Kwan, who had problems with oral proficiency, directive tutoring—in which the tutor had control of much of the session agenda, wrote down responses, and gave answers to questions on grammar and vocabulary—was a strategy that allowed the tutoring session to be conducted relatively efficiently and also addressed the tutees’ genuine need for information about the English language. Similarly, the strategy of using email between

the sessions allowed Anna and Kerry to be better prepared for their sessions, reducing their anxiety about being caught unprepared, and reduced their tutees' frustrations about their inability to express themselves clearly face to face. These issues were not relevant to Sandra and Lian, however, because Lian's proficiency was such that she did not have difficulties either expressing herself or understanding her tutor, making a more inductive, tutee-centered approach more feasible.

Another important factor was the background and experience of the tutors and the training received. Of the three tutors, Anna had the least teaching experience and was the newest in the MATESOL program as well as a nonnative speaker of English. As a result, she had fewer resources to draw on in the absence of thorough tutor training; it is thus perhaps unsurprising that she focused on grammar in her tutoring, as this was an area in which she felt more comfortable. In the second language writing class, the discussion of treating sentence-level errors in writing came fairly late in the semester, perhaps too late to affect Anna's tutoring substantially. In contrast, Sandra was completing her MATESOL and was also an experienced teacher. She also made conscious efforts to apply what she was learning in the L2 writing class to her tutoring. For Sandra, then, the brief training given to tutors may have been adequate as a starting point, and she continued to refine her tutoring strategies through reflection on the issues raised in the course.

How did the setting for tutoring affect the negotiation of tutoring roles? The setting in this study differs substantially from the two most commonly mentioned tutoring settings: writing center-based tutoring and curriculum-based tutoring. In a qualitative study of this nature, it is impossible to make statements about causality, but the data suggest several possibilities. As noted earlier, in other tutoring contexts, it is frequently difficult to resist the natural tendency of tutors to maintain control over the tutoring agenda despite the traditional wisdom that tutors should construct themselves as supportive peers of their tutees rather than experts. One question, then, is whether the tutoring model discussed in this paper—where tutors are students fulfilling a course requirement—can make genuine power sharing possible. In the case of Sandra and Lian in particular, a relationship of equality came closest to being realized. In their videotaped sessions, it was clear that Lian was in control of the agenda: for the most part, Lian had control of the pen and paper and set the tone for the session by asking for comments on very specific aspects of her writing. The informal setting of their last session (a café off campus) also symbolized a relationship of peers rather than instructor/student. The fact that Lian was highly proficient and was enrolled in ESL by choice rather than by placement may have helped make this relationship possible, along with Sandra's confidence in her own abilities as a tutor and their shared understanding of the goal of tutoring.

For Kerry/Kwan and Anna/Daniel, the evidence for a peer-like relationship is less compelling, as in both cases the tutors tended to take on the role of language expert and to control the sessions, for reasons noted above. However, certain aspects of their relationships did indicate some departure from the tutor-controlled norm. As Thonus (1999b) states, one hallmark of a peer relationship in tutoring is the freedom to reject a tutor's advice, which both Daniel and Kwan did on occasion. Furthermore, both Daniel and Kwan seemed to understand that Anna and Kerry were novice tutors, and although they both commented on the gaps in their tutors' knowledge, for neither of them were these gaps particularly important in their perceptions of the tutorials' success. Finally, in both cases

the strategy of emailing papers between sessions was suggested by the tutee, indicating that the tutees felt comfortable suggesting modifications to the structure of the tutorial.

Other aspects of the tutoring sessions that differed from the traditional writing center- or curriculum-based model are worth noting. The strategy of using email to supplement face-to-face meetings proved to be quite helpful in the two cases in which the tutee's language proficiency caused difficulties in comprehension. For many NNSs, internet-based tutoring might well be a more productive avenue for improving writing proficiency than face-to-face tutoring, particularly if tutees have difficulty understanding the tutors' spoken English. Recent research has suggested that for some learners, the authentic social nature of internet communication can be helpful in the acquisition of literacy in first and second language (Lam, 2000; McKeon, 2001).

Another aspect worth noting is the affective component of these three relationships. In part, because each relationship had 10 weeks in which to develop, the tutors and tutees learned to "read" each other. Kerry became adept at noting Kwan's nonverbal communication and responding as she believed appropriate (e.g., praising him when he looked discouraged). Anna changed her tutoring strategy in response to her concern that Daniel's instructor's focus on errors was demoralizing; she began to focus on the positive aspects of Daniel's writing. Sandra took on the role of supportive listener when Lian felt homesick, and their relationship took on a more personal aspect as a result of these interactions. Sandra and Lian also took advantage of different spaces; Sandra walked Lian to the counseling center, and they had tutoring sessions at cafés.

What factors influenced their perceptions of success? For the three tutors, success was defined differently. Anna defined success in terms of her capabilities as a tutor: Was she able to answer Daniel's questions, and did she communicate successfully with him? For Sandra, in contrast, success was defined in terms of her tutee's ability to become an independent writer and self-editor. Kerry defined success both in terms of her own ability to implement a plan successfully and in terms of her tutee's increased confidence in writing.

For the three tutees, success was primarily measured in terms of whether they had achieved their writing goals. Daniel was able to get answers to his questions about English grammar from Anna (either in the session or over email); Lian received a good grade on her paper after working on it with Sandra; Kwan overcame his fear and dislike of writing after working with Kerry.

Henning (2001) argues that the following characteristics of tutorials tend to make them successful: (a) how well the tutor and writer negotiate an agenda that meets the writers' expectations, (b) whether or not the writers are able to get and apply the information they need, and (c) how well the tutor establishes rapport with the tutee. Henning's review of the relevant research suggests that whether or not the tutor has a collaborative or directive stance towards the tutee, focuses on content or sentence-level concerns, or talks less than the tutee appears to be less important in terms of perceptions of success than these three factors. Our data support Henning's conclusion. The three tutor/tutee pairs negotiated different agendas and different roles for the tutor, but in each case the tutees appeared to get what they wanted out of the tutoring sessions and felt that the tutoring was successful. Rapport, or solidarity, cannot be measured objectively but is frequently inferred using discourse analytic techniques to investigate features of conversational involvement, such as backchanneling, laughter, and small talk (Thonus, 1999b, 2001, 2002). Although analysis

of the discourse of the tutoring sessions was beyond the scope of this study, the videotapes do reveal that these phenomena occurred regularly in all three dyads.

4. Conclusion

Thonus (2001) expresses the hope that, as a result of qualitative research on tutoring, “tutorial manuals and theories will correspond more closely to evidence, not anecdote, and to what the practice of tutoring *is* rather than what it *should be*” (p. 78, italics original). Our research, though limited in scope, contributes to this effort. Our data suggest that a complex set of variables influence the roles that tutors play and that there is not a direct connection between specific roles and the perceived success of tutoring. Although writing center theorists claim that tutors should construct themselves as peers of their tutees, this may not always be possible, nor is it necessarily desirable. Peer tutors may be helpful for native speakers or highly proficient nonnative speakers, who primarily need to learn to write for an audience and develop an “inner voice;” however, in the case of students struggling with proficiency issues, there may be more of a need for language support, and a tutor who can provide answers to language questions may be more appropriate.

Our study also suggests that the setting for tutoring affects the negotiation of tutor roles. The extended time and flexibility of the tutoring program presented in the study allowed tutors and tutees to negotiate a wide range of strategies and roles that contributed to the perceived success of tutoring for all three dyads. Although the study was limited—particularly in the fact that dyads self-selected to participate and thus tutor/tutee combinations that were unsuccessful are not represented in the study—we are encouraged by the results and believe that both tutors and tutees benefited from the tutoring assignment. Having the tutoring spread out over the course of 10 weeks allowed tutors and tutees the opportunity to get to know each other, try out different tutoring strategies and roles to find out what worked best, and deal with each other as individuals rather than simply as tutor/tutee. In the case of international students, a structure that includes affective support can be particularly helpful as they frequently experience homesickness and culture shock, and a sympathetic tutor can be helpful in overcoming these difficulties. For the tutors, the tutoring requirement gave them opportunities to connect the theory that they were reading about and discussing in class to actual students and their writing issues.

We would like to sound a note of caution before recommending that this model of tutoring be adopted on a larger scale, however. Providing tutoring for 10 weeks over a 15-week semester means that tutoring must begin before many essential issues of teaching writing can be addressed in the course, and tutor training cannot take up a substantial amount of class time in an already full curriculum. Some student-tutors who have sufficient background and experience may be able to tutor effectively even without extensive training while others may require substantially more training, including observing other tutors and being observed themselves, to be effective.

On a final note, our study brings up the question of how to define success in tutoring. As observers of the dyads in our study, we brought our own biases of what “good” tutoring should look like, and we felt that some interactions matched our description more than others. In particular, we felt that Sandra and Lian’s interactions most closely matched our

ideal, and we watched the videotapes of Anna and Daniel with some trepidation, noting Daniel's difficulties expressing himself and Anna's frustration at not knowing whether Daniel understood her. Yet after reading a draft of this manuscript 9 months after the L2 writing class had ended, Anna informed us that she and Daniel had kept in touch during the intervening months and that she had continued to work with Daniel on his writing until he returned to Indonesia at the end of the academic year. Our study provides a useful reminder that the benefits of tutoring—as with any kind of teaching—may not be recognized immediately but are often only evident with the passage of time.

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Course texts

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