

# Power and Authority

## “Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring”

Reading by Peter Carino

### The Terms

- “Power” and “Authority” are not seen as positive terms within the Writing Center community
  - Writing Centers are known as nurturing and friendly environments, these words hinder that image

### Where it all Began...

- Writing centers as an institution struggled to gain their own power and authority
- Many successful writing centers were at the bottom of the hierarchy when they opened up on campus
  - They have felt less empowered and do not want to make the students who come into their centers feel this way

### Peer Tutoring

- “The use of undergraduate peer tutors has powerfully shaped writing center practice for more than twenty years, and the idea of peership has served in center scholarship to represent writing centers as non-hierarchical and nonthreatening collaborative environments most aspire to be” (Carino 96).

Indirect Tutoring	Direct Tutoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can cue students to recall knowledge they have as well as construct new knowledge</li> <li>● Tutor asks questions and the student’s answers lead to an improvement in their writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A form of plunder, rather than help</li> <li>● Equivalent to the tutor taking ownership over the student’s work</li> </ul>

### Peter Carino

Attempts to sort out...

- Why writing centers have been uncomfortable with holding power and claiming authority
- Why they mask these terms with “peerness”
- How writing centers might have more success if they refigure authority as a tool in tutorial work
- How tutors can be trained to recognize when to use their power and authority and how to do it without becoming an authoritarian

### **Carino Argues**

- Training should not be nondirective peership but should be flexible
  - Tutors should learn to switch between directive and nondirective methods as needed and develop a sliding scale (110)
  
- The word peer is pushed to the extreme
  - Need a balance between nondirective and directive tutoring
  
- Tutorials depend on authority and power
  - Authority about the nature of writing and power to proceed from or resist what that authority says
    - One or the other must have authority, usually, it is the tutor
    - Or both must share authority to produce a collaborative peer situation, this is rare
  - No matter what techniques are used, both people, or one person, must have the knowledge and occupy the position of power and authority in a hierarchical relationship

### **Important Quotes**

“I believe that peer tutoring should not be dismissed, but refigured in terms of the way authority and power play themselves out depending on the player in any given tutorial” (102/103).

“A non-hierarchical environment does not depend on a blind commitment to non-directive tutoring methods. Instead, tutors should be taught to recognize where the power and authority lie in any given tutorial, when and what degree they have them, when and to what degree the student has them, and when and to what degree they are absent in any given tutorial” (109).

### **Discussion Questions**

- What have your experiences with power and authority in your sessions been like? Do you find yourself talking a more direct or indirect tutoring method?
  
- Do you think students see us as authoritative figures or does the nonhierarchical environment really diminish this identity?
  
- How does being online impact the roles of power and authority in the Writing Center?