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Cultural models in the U.S. writing classroom: matches and mismatches

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a theory of cultural models and uses the theory to analyse data from a study of a writing course for English language learners at a U.S. community college. It examines cultural models of teachers and learners held by the students, the course tutor and administrators, then discusses the matches and mismatches between informants' cultural models and actual demographic information about students and the events of the semester. It considers the effects of these mismatches on institutional policies and teaching practice. In the course under study, learners were neither sufficiently challenged based on their educational backgrounds and aspirations, nor successfully scaffolded into academic writing. The paper suggests ways for tutors to increase knowledge about students' backgrounds and goals, and thus challenge potentially inaccurate models in order to design instructional approaches that meet students' needs.

INTRODUCTION

It may be a constant of human nature that we perceive people as belonging to certain categories, often despite having insufficient information about them. When people in power make judgements to assign others to various categories, this process can have serious effects on those who are categorised. Educators concerned with the success of 'non-traditional' students have understood the detrimental effects of racist, sexist,

and other stereotypes on classroom practice, students, and their academic success. ('Non-traditional' can include students who are working class, from ethnic/linguistic minorities, female or older than traditional college age.) Researchers into the experiences of English language learners in the U.S. education system (among other locations) have considered the representation, labelling, or rhetorical construction (Spack, 1997) of students and the results of these practices (Harklau, 2000; Losey, 1997). In this article I use the related notion of cultural models (D'Andrade and Strauss, 1992; Gee, 1999; Strauss and Quinn, 1997) and analyse how they influenced the outcomes of a 'basic' writing course at a U.S. community college. 'Basic' education courses are considered preparatory to university-level coursework, but are commonly offered in community colleges and some four-year universities as well. They generally do not carry college credit as they are seen as remedial. ESOL courses are usually placed below basic courses in the hierarchy, as was the case in my study. Community colleges are two-year open-access institutions that offer remedial, vocational, and academic courses. Almost half of all students in U.S. institutions of higher education attend community colleges. Students who complete an associate's, or community college, degree, are eligible to transfer to four-year institutions, although the actual transfer rate is less than 30% of community college students (Grubb *et al.*, 1999).

Cultural models can help us understand the events of the semester, the tutor's and administrators' attitudes, and certain institutional practices. These factors combined to contribute to the starkest outcome of the course – a 75% attrition rate – and to the variable quality of the students' experiences. I begin by reviewing some approaches to the uses of representation and categorisation in educational practice, including cultural models. After discussing the data in light of cultural models, I close by suggesting ways in which staff can become aware of cultural models and learn about students in order to provide more effective instruction.

REPRESENTATIONS, TYPES AND CULTURAL MODELS

In one study, Harklau (2000) followed immigrant students who came to the United States from Vietnam and Turkey during the crucial transition from secondary school to college. She used 'the notion of representation, or archetypal images of learner identity' (p. 35) to understand how student identities shift in different contexts, arguing that:

representation results from constant attempts to hold a heterogeneous and ever-evolving social world still long enough to make sense of it. Whereas identities may be multiple, fragmentary, and subject to constant change, representations

are temporary artifacts that serve to stabilize and homogenize images of identities.

(2000, p. 37)

Harklau's focal students had been construed in high school as 'hardworking, highly motivated students who had triumphed over adversity' (p. 46). Once in college these students were required to take additional English courses. Here their identities, partially formed by having already lived for many years in the United States, sharply contrasted with the:

prevailing representation of ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] student identity [that] depicted students as in need of socialization into U.S. norms and behavior as well as to life in U.S. society more broadly.

(p. 53)

The college curriculum construed ESOL students as newly arrived immigrants who were novice speakers of English with a limited ability to improve their proficiency in the language. In non-academic terms, the independent behaviour the students had learned and used successfully in high school came across to college tutors as a challenging 'lack of cooperation and rudeness' (p. 54). For both academic and interpersonal reasons, the students ultimately rejected the college's ESOL programme, despite having an ongoing need for support with their academic writing.

Likewise, Losey (1997) studied the effects of the 'types' employed by the tutor of a community college basic writing course, English 10, to categorize her Mexican-American students.

When [the tutor] spoke of students' progress in English 10 and their prognosis for success in English 15 [the next level course], she regularly referred to the 'type' of student an individual was and how that explained the student's probable success or failure. These types were distinguished from one another by age, proficiency in English, and gender. . . . In her words they were called a) 're-entry women,' b) 're-entry men,' c) 'babies,' [recent high school graduates] and d) those 'who've come to the States late in life'.

(p. 115)

This 'typing' had material repercussions for students. Although the 're-entry' women comprised the majority of Mexican-Americans in the class and earned better marks than the men, only one woman was promoted to English 15. In contrast,

despite their lower marks, the Mexican-American men were promoted. A noticeable difference between the women and men was the degree to which they participated in class discussions in English. Losey argues that despite contrary evidence about students' qualifications, the tutor's use of types played a role in determining her students' academic futures.

Harklau's and Losey's findings are mutually reinforcing and share similarities with my study, notably, the interplay between academic and interpersonal factors in the attitudes of those in power toward English language learners in college. Whether termed 'representation', 'type', or 'cultural model', any framework or model that describes mental structures or processes operates on the level of metaphor, as it is impossible to gain a direct view into the workings of the mind (Carspecken, 1996; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). For Gee (1996), cultural models represent the 'tacit theories' we hold about the nature of the world. Cultural models are images, metaphors, schemas, or story lines that straddle an individual's mind and social and cultural tools and mediating devices (Gee, 1999). Cultural models define what counts for a given social or cultural group as 'normal' and 'natural', in particular contexts, for example, what is considered to be 'normal' if one is a primary school reader, a 'non-traditional' student, or a university tutor. Beyond being mental structures, cultural models:

can have motivational force because these models not only label and describe the world but also set forth goals (both conscious and unconscious) and elicit or include desires.

(Strauss, 1992, p. 3, emphasis original)

This motivational force is important in considering power relations in arenas such as the educational field, as Losey's study showed, and as I discuss below.

Cultural models generally operate unconsciously – therefore identifying them is not a simple or transparent task. Although we can ask people to describe, for example, a typical tutor or student, such questions may merely elicit a version of an ideal type. We can gain access to cultural models, however, by identifying places in data where informants repeatedly discuss certain topics. In addition, 'we must infer from the person's beliefs, actions, and words what theory the person is tacitly using' (Gee, 1996, p. 17), by observation as well as discussion. Individuals interpret, modify, and justify their actions in different and sometimes self-contradictory ways. The cultural models described in this paper emerged from my data and are my constructions rather than models identified by the informants. It is important to remember that

interviews are co-constructed discursive events, that is, informants responded to my presence as well as to the content of my questions.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The semester-long study of the Basic Writing 3 course took place at Monroe Community College (a pseudonym, as are all names here) in a Midwestern U.S. city. At the college, free, non-credit courses such as ESOL and basic writing are offered by the Alternative Learning division. The writing course is intended to prepare students for high school equivalency examinations, college transfer courses, or vocational training. As is increasingly common, the majority of the division's faculty work part-time, with few benefits and little job security (Grubb *et al.*, 1999). Part-time tutors, who often teach in multiple locations, are paid only for their contact teaching hours, not for advising or meeting students.

The students

The 18 students in the writing course included 12 immigrants/refugees and 6 spouses of international students or staff at the local university. Twelve students had earned at least bachelor's degrees; 5 of these also had graduate degrees. Five students were Russians with high academic attainment levels, of whom 3 were retired. The immigrants included Minji, a Korean woman married to a research sociologist. She had one bachelor's degree and planned to begin another. A family of young Palestinians from the United Arab Emirates, Leila, Rana, and their brother, Ali Hasan, were applying to four-year universities. Of the refugees, Saky, a young Laotian man, had a high school diploma, worked for a plastics manufacturer, and wanted to become a police officer. Ahmad, a young man fleeing Sierra Leone, worked at a bakery. He had not completed secondary school but hoped eventually to become a lawyer. All of the students named here, with the exception of Ali Hasan, were interviewed for the study and will be cited in this paper.

The tutor and administrators

George Cleary, the tutor, was a white, middle-aged man who had taught English as a foreign language for 10 years in Mexico. He was hired three weeks into the semester and was already teaching writing in the college's Arts and Sciences division. Cleary also taught ESOL at another location, worked half-time as a medical interpreter, and had childcare responsibilities. A white, middle-aged woman, the division's lead teacher Maureen Powell has worked at the college since 1976. The dean of the

Alternative Learning division was Ricardo Garcia, a middle-aged Chicano from Texas who has worked at the college since 1986.

Data collection

The class met twice a week for two hours each session for 15 weeks, alternating between a classroom and the computer laboratory. I made field notes for every class I observed and audio taped the class when in the classroom. I interviewed six students (three who left the course – Saky, Ahmad, and Katarina – and three who stayed – Minji, Leila, and Rana) in spring 1999 and one year later. These students were chosen for a mixture of gender, race, and national origin, and because they intended to pursue higher education. I interviewed the tutor twice and the administrators once, and gathered institutional documents and student texts.

Events of the semester

As noted, the 75 percent attrition rate was the primary outcome of the course. Elsewhere I discuss other factors contributing to this attrition (Curry, 2001a). In summary, the less-educated immigrant/refugee students left the writing course by the ninth week. These students felt insufficiently supported by the tutor and administration. The second major outcome was a shift in the enacted curriculum from a focus on writing to a focus on English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Curry, 2001b). Thus the needs of the well-educated students to improve their academic writing were also unmet, and many left because they felt under-challenged. I next discuss how cultural models operated in the study.

CULTURAL MODELS AT MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The tutor's models of English language learners

In Cleary's cultural model of a good student, high on the list are consistent hard work and participating in class, as well as the interpersonal characteristics of acquiescing to the teacher and showing gratitude. To Cleary it's 'just natural' to 'try to be a good student' (Interview, 9/2/99). What this meant to Cleary varied, in part depending on whether students were native or non-native English speakers. Between our first interview in February, when Cleary began teaching basic writing, and the second interview in June, his views on his students had shifted. He initially characterised the native English speakers in his Arts and Sciences writing course as

‘normal’ (Interview, 9/2/99). In the basic writing course, he found the English language learners ‘much more eager, much more sociable, they’re easier to teach . . . because they’re friendlier’ than the native English speakers. He implicitly construed the ‘normal’ native English speakers as less amiable than the English language learners in Basic Writing 3, who:

know how to be good students. . . They’re interested in your presentation. They’re not falling asleep. They’re not distracted. They don’t look disinterested, just the opposite. They look very interested. They enjoy being here. They give you wonderful feedback and satisfaction as a teacher.

(Interview, 9/2/99)

Cleary continued to highlight the interpersonal characteristics of English language learners as: ‘wonderfully expressive; they’re whole dynamic people . . .’; ‘[with] a good insight into things, a good perspective on their world.’ Early in the semester he found them ‘marvelous . . . very motivated; they’re doing the work’ (Interview, 9/2/99).

By the end of the semester, Cleary’s criteria for what counted as ‘normal’ students had changed: the interpersonal criteria had become less important than the academic. The Arts and Sciences students (who were native English speakers) seemed ‘just normal classes. They start a class, and they finish it and they do the required work and pretty straightforward’ (Interview, 19/6/99). Whereas Cleary previously considers the Arts and Sciences students ‘normal’ because they are not particularly sociable, after the semester ‘normal’ has acquired the meaning of diligent and persistent. He contrasted their progress with the high attrition rate and low rate of completion of homework of the students in the basic writing class. Cleary could point to only the Hasan siblings as those who ‘stuck with it. They were just very consistent, had a very positive attitude, and they were there, doing the work.’ At the same time he complimented the basic writing students on their docility: ‘a lot of wonderful people who go along with whatever’s being presented’ although most students had actually gone away from the course. With the native English speakers Cleary more frequently applies the academic criteria of attending class and doing the work, in contrast to the interpersonal values he invokes for the English language learners. A result of evaluating native English speakers on academic criteria and English language learners in interpersonal terms was the lowering of academic goals – and the enacted curriculum – in Basic Writing 3. When the curriculum was transformed from a writing class into a language class, students became bored with repeating work they had done previously.

Administrators' cultural models of students

The administrators offered a longer-term view of students in the Alternative Learning division. Dean Garcia's description of Adult Learning division students painted a complex picture:

You've got a variety of students with diverse backgrounds who come, so you've got students that don't have any literacy skills in their own language to students who are highly educated in their own language learning English.

(Interview, 22/10/99)

He pointed out, for example, that the Russians are generally 'very well-prepared people in their language,' unlike the Hmong, whose access to formal education has been restricted for political and historical reasons. Garcia mentioned that 'one of the magnets for our students is the Business division', attesting to students' academic and career interests. Yet within the division, Garcia acknowledged, English language learners are treated differently from native English speakers. 'When we offer the [basic] writing class[es] they tend to be filled by ESL, *ex*-ESL students and then we tend to treat that as an ESL class.' In many cases the ESL students enrol in basic reading and writing once they have finished the five levels of ESL, whether or not they have aspirations to higher education.

Although lead teacher Powell had a similar understanding of the historical and cultural backgrounds of English language learners, her cultural model seems to take little account of their academic potential or goals. For example, when asked whether students are taught to use electronic databases, she replied: 'Most of the students in that class are not looking for that kind of thing yet' (Interview, 18/5/99). However, the majority of the basic writing students had firm academic goals that would necessitate electronic library research. These comments demonstrate how even students who have completed English language courses are construed differently from native English speakers. Thus it may be typical for a basic writing course to devolve into an English grammar and language course, as with Basic Writing 3.

Cultural models of the tutor

Cultural models of the tutor also had important implications for both students' expectations and the tutor/administrators' ideas about what was possible in teaching the division's courses. Dean Garcia romanticised the calibre and dedication of the faculty. Firstly, his cultural model of tutors includes their desire to teach only part-time, which lends support to the division's practice of mainly hiring adjunct

instructional staff: 'because most people that are part-time have other things going. Many times you can create a nice web of support. And some people don't want to work full-time'. (Historically, this argument has also been made to suggest that part-time academic work is ideal for mothers who want to stay at home with children [e.g., Aronowitz, 2000], ignoring the fragmented nature of the contemporary economy.) Although the dean's model may be accurate in some cases, many part-timers would prefer to have secure, full-time jobs with benefits. Indeed, when a part-time tutors' labour union formed at the college in 1996, it aimed to assure part-time tutors the first option for full-time positions. Likewise, Garcia seems not to recognise a conflict in that although tutors are the lynchpin of the division's teaching, advising and referral system, the ESL programme employs merely three full-time tutors. Part-time tutors are expected to fulfil these other functions by voluntarily donating their extra time.

Secondly, the dean sees the faculty as responsible for programmatic strategizing: in discussing how to teach classes filled with students of varying levels of educational attainment, the dean places the responsibility for devising solutions on the faculty:

Garcia: Within the curriculum, you have the ability to address all of those [different students]. Then how do you manage them, becomes your question. Or do you separate those groups? I don't know.

MJC: Has that been tried?

Garcia: That's never been brought forth by the faculty and I'm sure they've got, they've thought of strategies of how to do that.

(Interview, 22/10/99)

While faculty clearly might have ideas about designing curriculum and instructional means to meet the needs of such a range of students, the dean here places full responsibility on their shoulders for handling what is also a structural, administrative problem. Again, with a majority of part-time tutors, such unreasonable hopes are unlikely to be realised.

Thirdly, according to Garcia, tutors often sell themselves short on their ability to use their skills flexibly with a variety of students. He implies that it's a matter of self-esteem rather than appropriate training:

In Alternative Learning, in the basic skills and ESL and all, you've got some of the most creative and talented teachers and people working with them. . . . We're at the cutting edge of how to do business with some folks. I mean, not only do you become a teacher, you also help them in many other ways. . . .

Some of my teachers will say . . . as soon as they find out that some of the students are learning disabled, they [are] sort of like, oh, my god, I can't work with them, because I'm not trained. But you know everything else they've been doing with them has been just as effective.

(Interview, 22/10/99)

Garcia's comments shift the focus from the importance of relevant preparation for tutors (e.g., to teach learning disabled students) to tutors' simple lack of confidence on a personal level. This extract again demonstrates that Alternative Learning division classes commonly include a large mixture of students, that tutors may not be well prepared to teach. The dean's cultural model frames tutors as multitasking, constantly available, and dedicated – to the extreme that they assume programmatic responsibility and teach a wider range of students than they are qualified for. The 33% turnover rate among part-time tutors in the division suggests that these expectations may be unrealistic.

Lead teacher Powell also alluded to the division's reliance on tutors to undertake general curricular and programmatic functions. She discussed one strategy for teaching well- and less-educated adult students in the same class, making use of well-educated students who opt to repeat these classes:

individual teachers have done this rather successfully. . . . We made deals with some [students] and we said you may continue to come to this class if you will volunteer in this situation for so many hours a week. . . . mostly with the Russians.

(Interview, 18/5/99)

Like the dean, Powell naturalises the practice of individual tutors assuming responsibility for larger structural problems. Besides the ad hoc practice she details here, the division has not formally considered how to meet the challenge of teaching adults who may have had almost no formal schooling in their native countries alongside students who may have previously earned graduate degrees. Overall, then, tutors feel the brunt of both the division's needs and the administrators' cultural models about what the tutors can offer.

Cleary's own cultural model of a good tutor includes attributes related to classroom teaching as well as institutional behaviour. Firstly, a good tutor individualises teaching to address students' needs and creates a comfortable classroom environment. He values 'treating [students] as individuals and looking at their level and trying to bring them up.' A good tutor monitors students' progress, 'to make

sure they're adequately performing the steps necessary to understand the process and then to replicate that somewhere else.' The model of tutor as motivator, corrector, and guide emerges: 'So just motivating them to keep on writing and constantly correcting their writing and showing them the path toward more successful structures.' At the same time the tutor is the transmitter of encapsulated, distinct content to the students, in a traditional banking-style pedagogy: 'It has to be practical analysis [of the readings]. It has to be something that gets from the text through the teacher to the students' (Interview, 9/2/99). Despite wanting to draw on students' backgrounds, Cleary, like the tutor in Losey's (1997) study, does not see students themselves as the knowledge base for constructing curriculum. Instead he combined selected readings from the writing textbook with his own notions of common second-language writing issues and grammatical problems.

In Cleary's model, a passion for teaching motivates tutors: 'because you like to teach. That's probably the reason you're there.' Here Cleary's model shares elements with the dean's model of tutors' motivations. To Cleary a commitment to teaching is incompatible with aims such as improving working – and learning – conditions. (It is important to note that labour unions are not widespread in U.S. higher education, although they are more common in community colleges than in more prestigious four-year universities. Unions do often represent school teachers, but on a state-by-state rather than a national basis.) For Cleary, 'real teachers' make no demands on the administration:

I'm not a union person, just by nature because I'm a **real teacher**. . . . Teachers are normally individuals who like to teach and don't get involved in union activities. There are certain people who do enjoy doing that sort of thing. . . . I don't enjoy it at all.

(Interview, 19/6/99, emphasis added)

He alludes to the time shortage and lack of job security that commonly make many tutors hesitant to ruffle the feathers of administrators. 'What I don't like about it [the union], it sounds like an adversarial situation. And I don't like to do that. I'm very cooperative.' Yet this passivity, which mirrors the student docility that Cleary esteems, had negative results for the course. Being 'cooperative' meant that when administrators did not give Cleary necessary information, materials, and support with the course or adequate access to college facilities, he accepted the situation.

Students' cultural models of the tutor

Despite having a range of interests, personalities, and goals, no major differences emerged in the cultural models of students who stayed and students who left the

course. Their models of tutors, based on their comments about this writing course, previous courses, and other ideas, split into two general categories: the tutor's personal qualities and the course's curricular aspects. In students' aggregate model of personal characteristics, the tutor emerges as a leader; organised, with a specific agenda; experienced; multitalented; fun; interesting; outgoing; challenging and demanding; respectful of students; considerate of students' interests; lively; joking; and yet serious. Students cited tutors who embodied these ideals, including Powell, who has 'got the ability of many things', according to Minji. Similarly, Rana mentioned Paula, the course tutor in autumn 1998:

She likes joking, so she was good also, the same and she also respects like the students' ideas. Also if it was silly but she accepted it like it's serious, I mean, . . . so she was really good.

(Interview, 26/4/99)

Ahmad also praised one tutor: 'Each time that I'm in her class, she's very lively, the students are lively' (Interview, 17/6/99). Saky singled out a full-time ESOL tutor, Richard:

He knows what he doing 'cause he old man. . . . He see somebody sleeping or not awake yet, too early, he say something, joke, and wake you up, keep going, whatever.

(Interview, 7/7/99)

Students appreciated a tutor who uses a curriculum that supports them in improving their writing; goes at a reasonable pace; chooses good books; helps students contextualise lessons; and employs enjoyable methods. Students who had previously taken the course liked collaborative group work, peer review, free writing, and individual conferences with the tutor during class. Curricular activities that created interest and energy were popular. Saky commented about Richard, 'He play games with English, involved with it, you know.' He also complimented his reading teacher: 'She's speaking loud and slow, really great,' even though 'I know I'm gonna be bored, but hey, it's how we learn, you know,' which he contrasted to the too-fast pace in Basic Writing 3. A younger Russian, Katarina, also pointed to her reading teacher, who 'had some kind of agenda, had some books for studying English, to study from, in English grammar' (Interview, 22/6/99).

Students' models also distinguished the attributes of an ineffective tutor. Negative personal characteristics included being boring, talking too much, shouting at

students, shutting down students, and being racist. Minji, Katarina, and Saky connected boredom with leaving the Basic Writing 3 course. Minji said explicitly: 'So after [Cleary] feel that boring, who want to be in that class one more time?' Negative curricular attributes included a tutor who is vague about requirements for work; lectures too much; teaches too much grammar; uses pop quizzes and vocabulary lists; and chooses uninteresting topics.

Students operated from active cultural models about what they hoped to encounter in the course. Whether they had taken other courses, whether their criteria match the latest educational research, whether they left or stayed, students articulated clear criteria for good and bad tutors. When their experiences of an ineffective tutor and unsuccessful curriculum reached a critical point, most students left the course.

CONCLUSION: MATCHES AND MISMATCHES BETWEEN CULTURAL MODELS

Models about students

The tutor/administrators' cultural models of students included positive aspects related to students' personal attributes. Yet these models omitted an understanding of the previous educational achievements and goals of most of the students. Likewise, the models failed to encompass students' aspirations, as compared with the goals that students identified as having. As a part-time tutor, Cleary had little time to get to know the students, nor did he engage in instructional activities that would have assisted with this objective. Additionally, the administrators failed to pass along their general and specific knowledge about the division's students. The circulation of inaccurate and stereotypical models of English language learners contributed to the fact that students were not offered a challenging curriculum, writing assignments, or classroom experiences. When the tutor's and administrators' expectations and support for students do not match students' needs, adult students may leave, as they are not compelled to remain in a course. In such a case, not only do students suffer frustration and aborted attempts at education, but programmes such as these which are funded by government grants end with poor completion rates.

Models about tutors

To varying extents, students and staff shared cultural models of the good tutor as organised, interesting, creative, and taking initiative. Mismatches exist between the students' models and the teaching practices they encountered. Some held a model of

the tutor as ‘workshop facilitator’ who supports students in developing their writing. Cleary did not employ this approach, perhaps as a result of his lack of training in teaching writing and his primary experience as a language teacher. Nor did the difficult working conditions allow Cleary to realise his ideal of understanding students on an individual basis.

I feel that way, that it [the course] didn't live up to anyone's expectations, well, up to a few, a few people who completed the course, it lived up to their expectations. But it didn't live up to my expectations.

(Interview, 19/6/99)

One cause of Cleary's frustration was the mismatch between the administrators' cultural models of the ever-available, completely dedicated tutor and the reality of Cleary's situation. Tutors were expected to gather a good deal of knowledge about students, mainly to refer them to the division's support programmes. With the delivery of educational and advising services predicated on the availability of part-time tutors who receive little orientation, training, or mentoring, not only do students suffer as a result of poor instruction and missed opportunities, but tutors also experience frustration and resentment.

Gee (1996) proposes that English language learners can be taught about the cultural models operating in the new society in which they study. Not only should students learn the cultural models circulating in a new environment; staff can likewise become aware of their own cultural models. In Losey's study the tutor had not reflected on her categories for Mexican American students:

Although Carol [the tutor] was aware of the pitfalls of categorizing students, she was also honest enough to admit that teachers (indeed, all humans) rely on past experience to interpret the present. She said that it was the diversity of the classroom that forced her to ‘click’ into different modes of interpreting and assessing students in the classroom. She was not cognizant enough of her different types to know she had four, and she did not talk about them (except when asked to), unless referring to a specific person. These types do reveal, however, the importance past experience plays in understandings and interpretations of the present and their intricate connection to Carol's goals for the class.

(1997, p. 116)

As an observer in the tutor's classroom, Losey could identify Carol's categories and point them out to her. Most tutors are not normally the subjects of research, however. One way for tutors to understand the role of cultural models may be to explore their own models in teacher preparation programmes. However, as Grubb and associates (1999) point out, community college tutors are generally expected to have advanced degrees in the subject matter, but do not have training in teaching itself. Peer teaching observations may provide another means for tutors to learn about how their cultural models may be operating.

In addition to identifying their own cultural models, college writing tutors need to learn about students' educational, cultural, and work backgrounds as well as their future goals. This process is one aspect of what Gee calls 'explicating our tacit and removed/deferred ideologies', which is important because 'theories ground beliefs, and beliefs lead to actions, and actions create social worlds ("reality")' (1996, p. 21). Data-gathering mechanisms for the purpose of learning about students include distributing a questionnaire at the beginning of a course. Individual tutor-student conferences to identify students' writing issues and concerns present another opportunity. Unassessed student dialogue journals offer a further means for students to engage in communication with tutors. By seeking such information, tutors become acquainted with individual students, which helps reduce the power of inaccurate cultural models to hinder effective teaching.

In Basic Writing 3, clear matches existed between the students' and the tutor's cultural models of a 'good tutor'. The realities of the working environment at the college, however, complicated the tutor's attempts to realize his model, in part because of mismatches between his model of the students and their lived histories. Cleary was also constrained by receiving little support or training from the Alternative Learning division, as is common in community colleges (Grubb *et al.*, 1999). In this respect the mismatch between the administrators' cultural models of both students and tutors enabled administrators to turn a blind eye to the exigencies of the environment in the division, which relies on a predominantly part-time faculty to meet a wide range of institutional and student needs.

This study, along with those by researchers such as Harklau (2000) and Losey (1997), has demonstrated the negative consequences for adult students of the circulation of cultural models that inaccurately reflected the reality of students lives; likewise, the inaccurate cultural models of tutors that the administrators held resulted in negative consequences for the tutor, the students, and, indeed, the institution. I have highlighted the importance of tutors getting to know their students on an individual basis, and offered pragmatic suggestions for engaging in dialogue with students and gathering relevant information about their educational

backgrounds, achievements, and ambitions. Nonetheless, the implementation of these suggestions requires time and interest on the part of the tutor. At the same time, it is important for administrators to realise the structural constraints that make it difficult for part-time teaching staff to manifest extreme dedication to one work site, no matter how much they may desire it. As institutions of higher education on both side of the Atlantic continue to open their doors to ‘non-traditional’ students, and as the pressures of the global economy result in increased numbers of part-time tutors, these competing pressures are unlikely to disappear. Ignoring these pressures, however, will result in repeated examples of student and tutor frustration and high attrition rates.

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