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ABSTRACT

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Descriptive and Evaluative Language in Group Tutorials

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Abstract

One advantage of writing center tutorial groups over individual tutoring is that in groups students have the opportunity to become readers of others' writing and to provide feedback to their peers. In such groups, it is assumed that the tutor as facilitator serves as an interactional and linguistic model for students. To test this hypothesis, over the course of a semester we investigated two tutorial groups composed of students drawn from various sections of a developmental English class. The object of investigation was tutors' and students' use of reader-response-based descriptive language versus rubric/criterion-based evaluative language in tape transcripts we analyzed. Our research questions included:

1. To what extent does student language in group tutorials mirror tutor language, especially since in this writing center descriptive language based on reader-response is strongly emphasized over rubric-based evaluative response?
2. If tutors do not model descriptive feedback, what other types of language do they employ, and is this language mimicked by students?

Given the study results, we explore theoretical implications for reader-response theory and pedagogical implications for tutor practice and training.

Introduction

The Writing Center at California State University, Fresno, founded 20 years ago, is based on group tutorials. Students work in groups of three in voluntary, semester-long, fifty-minute, twice-weekly tutorials. Groups are not conceived as supplementary workshops for a specific class. Students are randomly assigned to groups. Approximately 470 students enroll each semester. According to 1999 statistics, 54 % are from English remedial writing courses, 32 % from freshman composition, and 20% enroll in the Writing Center for more than one semester. Like most early writing centers, it was originally intended to be a "proofreading-shop-in-the-basement" (North, 1984, p. 444). The reasons for placing students in groups were intially budgetary. What was overlooked at first was the enormous opportunity tutoring in groups presented to help students develop as critical readers and get involved in collaborative negotiation of revision.

The tutor in group tutorials has two agendas: (1) to help the writer write better papers and (2) to teach students how to read student writing and respond to it—to allow students to become tutor-like. Such tutors have two roles: (1) as responder to student writing and (2) as modeler, elicitor, facilitator and moderator of students' response. The students' roles in a group tutorial are (1) receiver of response, (2) collaborator in generating ideas and in revising papers, and (3) responder to own and others' writing. In this presentation, we will focus primarily on the third role. The goal is not for students to expand their roles to the degree that they actually *become* tutors but to mature into equal participants in group interaction. Thus, the assumption tutors carry with them into group tutorials is this: It is not enough that tutors model writing response; students will have to learn how to respond and negotiate revision themselves.

Tutors must consciously and actively teach students how to respond to writing beyond "I liked the paper" or "This word is misspelled."

In previous research (Gilewicz, in press), we have found that "virtual rubrics" operate in group tutorials to underpin evaluative-directive language versus descriptive reader-response language. This is similar to the distinction that Elbow ( ) made between criterion-based and reader-based feedback. In this study, we wanted to know how these two different types of language promote discussion among students and inform revision. In this paper, we will argue that evaluative questions and responses preclude discussion of writing and revising. We know that this is the case in one-on-one tutorials (Thonus, 1995, 1998). The language of response tutors model to students is of paramount importance. If in group tutorials the tutor only models evaluative questions and responses, it will be impossible for students to acquire the language of reader response.

Most often, students bring to the tutorial response language they learned from teachers who evaluate their writing or use it on "critique forms" distributed in preparation for peer workshops in class. Such language is generally based on assessment criteria (Does the paper have a strong controlling idea? Does each paragraph contain a clearly defined subject? Does the body match the thesis?) Rubric-based language requires students to become evaluators rather than collaborators, makes them assume the "teacherly stance," asks them to formulate their reactions in an evaluative rather than readerly manner. Tutorial interaction becomes limited to the giving and receiving of advice, that is, the offering of evaluations and directives.

If the goal of the group tutorial is to develop students' confidence and skill as readers, not evaluators, the tutor's task is to model and elicit language that engages students *as readers*, not *assessors*. Thus, tutors assist them in describing what writing *does* to them as they read each

other's drafts. In our view, teaching students to form and articulate readerly reactions is the main goal in group tutorials. We want students to become more conscious, discerning, and autonomous *readers*, and to develop feedback that they can trust each other with rather than attempt to become evaluators.

We favor "reader-response" over "criterion-based" feedback for three key reasons:

1. Unless both tutors and students are trained in a uniform way to measure writing's effectiveness, using rubric-based language is difficult and unreliable. Students often resort to guesswork between two possibilities that most rubrics dictate: transitions are either effective or ineffective, opinions are adequately or inadequately supported, paragraphs either clearly support the main idea or they don't. We found that evaluative feedback often leads to directive suggestions impeding collaborative negotiation, especially since students often mistrust other students' judgments.
2. From a practical standpoint, during their college careers, students (unless they become teachers) will rarely be called upon to assess writing using evaluative criteria. It is thus more important for students to develop their skills as readers.
3. Readerly reactions (such as confusion, satisfaction, or hunger for more) *precede* measurement against criteria (contrary to what Meyer and Smith [1987] suggest), yet students rarely get to "frolic on the reader playground." Instead, they leap to pronouncing judgments that they cannot ground in previously experienced readerly reaction.

Method

We taped seven tutorials involving two tutors, one of whom (D, female) was a third-semester tutor, while the second (K, male) was a second-semester hire. Both tutors were graduate students in the Department of English at California State University, Fresno, but, at the time of taping, neither had taught composition. In each of D's sessions, one student was absent (a different student each time), whereas no one was absent from K's group at any taping.

During taping of the tutorials, one or both of us were present to record paralinguistic observations. We prepared close transcriptions of the tutorials (including observational data) and analyze three of them in detail here. We focus specifically on the two sorts of response language and tangentially on students' acceptance or rejection of evaluative or descriptive response.

Analysis and Results

At this point, we present transcription of various group tutorials and highlight evaluative response (bolded in red), descriptive response (in green), and student rejection or acceptance of the response (in blue). We then analyze how each excerpt lends itself to answering our research questions, inserting analytical comments (bolded in black). Tutorial roles are abbreviated, "T" for "tutor" and "S1..S2..S3" for the students in the tutorial group. Further transcription conventions appear in the appendix.

The difficulties of engaging in evaluative response. Excerpt (1) shows a very sharp example of how it is difficult for students to engage in evaluative language, even when proffered by a student. In this excerpt, the S2's teacher had given her a rubric dressed in a metaphor to the class to help them revise their papers. This is the first concern S2 brings up with T after her paper is read, trying to measure it against the criteria of the upside-down stoplight metaphor and

bringing with it the language of response suggested by the rubric with which the other group members are unfamiliar. Note how T categorically rejects this intrusion on the tutorial once she realizes neither the students nor she herself could make it workable, and sends the student back to her teacher.

(1) D 4/13 (146-170)

<Topic: S2's paper>

T: Let's decide what you worked, what we, what you want to talk about first.
⇒ S2: You know what we had talked about? Um an upside-down stoplight. Did you know about that?
T: I'm not familiar with this metaphor.
S2: Um. Green, O.K. (.)
T: Oh.
S2: You know that?
T: I think so.
S2: ((writing)) Green, yellow, red.
T: ((to S3)) Are you familiar with this?
S3: Red would be on top.
S2: No, no, no. Upside-down stoplight.
S3: Oh, O.K.
S2: Um and green would be, would stand for like the um [statement, no, statement?
T: [The paragraphs?
S2: Um like a (3s) like a statement. (.) And yellow would be a little bit, I have the notes right here, so I guess I'm going, discussing the statement.
⇒ S3: Are you talking about this? Statement, fact, then explanation?
S2: Well, kind of. But he said it differently, but our, just our teachers are different probably. But that's the same thing.
⇒ T: There's a lot of [metaphors floating around right now.
S2: [Background?
Um ((looking through papers)) (2s) Let's see, it was like (2s) O.K. you have the (2s)
S3: Um (3s)
S2: The, you state something.
T: You state something.
S2: You give a little background knowledge, and then you (.) What was the last one?
S3: Explanation? (.)
S2: It was kind of like that. I want to show you, though, because it's better when I (4s)
⇒ T: O.K. But I'm, I'm not worried about paragraph level right now. I'm worried about content
S2: Here we go. ((reading)) "Claim, argument, or statement, for the green. Give evidence for the yellow. And um reflect and give, reflect and give

evidence." And I wanted to do that on there, but I don't know how to (2s). He said this was one of the tools to make you figure that in. But I don't know how to do, do this thing.

⇒ T: Ask him, you should go see him ***. Talk to him because he knows
S2: yeah
T: what he's talking about.
S2: yeah

In this exchange S2 (the writer) herself proposes the form of feedback to measure her writing against. S3 is somewhat familiar with that model. The questions the teacher wants the students to address concern criteria for evaluating an argument, it seems. They are dressed in a metaphorical image of an inverted traffic signal to help the students understand and apply them to writing. In the tutorial, however, these terms of response prove too unintelligible and too artificial to engage a discussion. T rejects the external rubric and evaluative response based on it, sending S back to her teacher for explanation. We believe that T's decision to dismiss this rubric and this language is correct because it is "foreign" to and unjustified in the context of the tutorial.

Juxtaposition of evaluative and descriptive language. Excerpt (2) is from the same session after S3 reads his paper about his father teaching him to read the Khmer language at home. At the beginning of this interchange about S3's paper, notice how the students and T struggle to engage the paper by using undefined, rubric-based, very general terms such as "body," "flow," "content," "grammar," "punctuations," etc. Having no defined basis for evaluation, they run into a dead end. S3 then changes the course of the conversation and the language by using the questions that T modeled earlier in the session with another student: these are descriptive reader responses.

(2) D 4/13 (448-476)

<Topic: S3's paper>
T: ((to S3)) It's your paper. What feedback? (.)
S3: What feedback on my paper?
T: Yeah.
S2: 'Tus good ((laugh)).
S3: I'm going to change this word, this word. Sound better.
T: O.K.
S3: *** And um I don't know, that's it.
T: You feel, you have no clue about
S3: That's because some of the small words, I guess, right?
T: Yeah, but about your content? (.)
⇒ S3: What's content? (.) What do you mean, like um body and the other stuff?
T: Uh-huh. What, what are you saying? (3s)
S2: ((to S3)) [How do you *feel* about your paper? <request for self-evaluation>
T: [Wha-
How-, what is it that you're saying you haven't, you know? Are you planning on another, doing another revision other than just like (.) surface stuff. (3s)
S3: What do you mean by that?
S2: Are you going to do the content? [Not, not the corrections, but are you [going to
S3: [oh [content
S2: work on the content? Or do you like it? Like um how it flows and the words you're [using?
S3: [That's what I'm trying to work on.
S2: Flow?
S3: Flow, content, body, and all that. Except for grammar and this.
S2: Punctuations?
S3: Yeah, I don't need to wor-, I don't need to worry about that. (.) I don't get that very much. But um what I'm basically conce-, concentrating on is um the content, body, see how, see if flow
T: Do you have any ideas about that? I mean are you O.K. with that now, or do you see if you want to change. So [did you want
S3: [I'm not sure.
T: [to know
⇒ S3: [I got to (.) see your question first. <"Engage me as a reader.">
S2: ((laugh)) (3s)
T: All right. Go ahead.
S2: ((to S3)) Why was your dad so strict when he was teaching? (3s)
S3: Why was my dad so strict? That's because my grandpa was a teacher. [***
S2: [I didn't know that.

The exchange above also illustrates how open-ended invitations for discussion of writing are ineffective and in most cases lead to vague global or specific surface evaluations based on truncated "virtual rubrics" that attempt to imitate teacher's justifications for grading and corrections. As long as the discussion revolves around criteria, the students and T do not enter writing. It is not until the writer asks for reader-questions ("I got to see your question first") that the group is able to move on to a productive discussion that continues for the next 10 minutes.

Evaluative vs. descriptive response. We now move on to more extensive samples of both response types. This excerpt is from the second session with three students. The first paper just read is about domestic abuse, which the writer she has already revised five times. In this excerpt, T is trying to initiate a discussion of S1's paper. T and the students use both evaluative and descriptive language. However, T does not nurture descriptive feedback, and he himself mixes evaluative and descriptive language indiscriminately, leaving the evaluative criteria undefined.

(3) K 3/16 (189-231)

<Topic: S1's paper>

T: **That's pretty good. It's been a, it's been awhile since I've seen this paper, so I'm sure a lot of changes. (.) So what do you want us to look for?**

S1: **Just (.) if I have enough evidence to support everything, and if I'm (.), and wait, what did she say? Um., if, if, if, if I give an idea that it'll take you to a different view of what I'm trying to [convey.**

⇒ T: **[O.K. So you want us to see if you [stay focused, or?**

S1: **[Like if, if anything confused you. Yeah, if I stay focused.**

T: **o.k., o.k. o.k.** So what do you guys have um to say about it? I know it's been awhile since we've read this, her essay.

S2: **Yeah, seems long.**

T: **What's the difference?**

S2: **She put more into it.**

T: **Like what? Like what? 'Cause yeah, I agree with you, she's put some more, a lot more um detail, I think? Sure. What else? (2s)**

⇒ S2: **Maybe the grammatic?**

T: **What about that part?**

S2: It's ***.
T: Oh, O.K.
S2: Well, I can't remember ***.
T: Yeah, it's been awhile since we've actually seen this. (3s) ((to S3)) How about you? (.) Anything um different that um you've heard this time around?
S3: Um, it's easier to ***.
T: O.K. Like the story's easier to (.) to listen to? Because, because of what?
S3: uh-huh
Because ((cough)) because I don't know, I, I just (.)
T: It just (.) um let's see
⇒ S2: Transitions ***?
T: Yeah, I think so. Like are there places um where you thought um she added what she didn't like or didn't belong? (4s) There's a long, it's a long paper, so. (.) It'd be different if we had like actual papers in front of us so we could like critique it, but um just from listening to you read it (.) the examples that you gave us were much clearer, I think, so that could be like one of our major um differences this time around. (2s). But let's
⇒ see. How do you like her examples that she gives? (5s)
S2: The examples [are like you can believe it's true that happened to her.
T: [yeah
Is it believable, you said? Yeah? Why is it believable?
S2: 'Cause we know what happened to her. She's feeling what a battered
T: o.k.
S2: woman feels.
T: Do you remember some places, or do you remember (.)
S2: The busted lips.
T: The busting lips. Why does that stick out to you?
S2: Well, that's violent.
⇒ T: Violent, descriptive, right?
S2: Uh-huh.

Notice also how feedback solicited from S2 and S3 is in third person (with the answer going then to T, not to S1); then T turns to S1 (the writer) and treats her as "you" (2nd person). This alliance between T and S2, and between the T and S3 alienates the writer. Interaction is almost never S-S but almost always T-S. Functionally, there is no group interaction because the readers are in one camp and the writer in another: the perfect set-up for evaluation. When so much evaluative language is involved, there is no specific discussion that leads to revision. T and the students resort to criteria ("focused," "transition," "descriptive"), which the tutor reinforces. This is

similar to the rubric-based discussion of the spotlight in our first example. Neither the students nor T can engage with the paper.

As the excerpt continues in (4), T repeats the concern with transitions, continuing in the evaluative language mode. Both students mimic what T says, which tells us that T's modeling of evaluative response is successful although the discussion it generates is not.

(4) K 3/16 (231-247)

<Topic: S1's paper>

T: O.K. Um good. Um (.) **the transitions into (.) like every paragraph, did you feel** (.)
⇒ S2: **Every paragraph connected.**
T: Connected, you think?
S2: Uh-huh.
T: O.K. ((to S1)) Yeah, from listening to it, you made the transition, I think before it was different, it was kind of different, it was hard to understand, but I think
S1: uh-huh
T: **you fixed it much better, and as a narrative kind of thing** it's extremely
S1: uh-huh
T: **believable, so that was kind cool. So what changes exactly did you, did you make to it?**
⇒ S1: **Like the transitions and how I explain my examples more**
T: uh-huh yeah, yeah
S1: and I switched sentence that I would jump from one sentence to another, so
T: yeah
S1: I connected them all. And added some other things, like [details.
T: o.k. [Like which parts, which parts? Because I think I was like hearing some stuff that wasn't in the original one, and I think the paper is longer because of that. So ***.
S1: It is long, it's like a paragraph longer, like I didn't have about the laws. Like I didn't think, I just had what we should do, but I didn't, I didn't say why or anything like that.
T: Oh, O.K. Hmm. (.)

In excerpt (5) below, we see the continued tension between evaluative language from S1 and T and descriptive response from S2 and T. Earlier in this session, S2's paper was read and discussed first and then the group moved on to S1's paper about her experience in the Summer Bridge Program during the summer. What preceded the following exchange is S1's explanation about the Program. In the next interchange, S1 asks for an evaluation but does not receive it;

rather, her group-mate and T give her descriptive feedback. This sounds like "real" conversational interaction. At the end of the excerpt, evaluative language emerges as "hooks" to return the writer to the paper with the material generated in the conversation.

(5) D 3/16 (481-500)

<Topic: S1's paper>

⇒ S1: ((whispered)) **What do you guys think of this paper? (3s) "I think your paper really sucks."**
<S1's request for evaluative response and mocking response>
S2: **Um (.) You know what? At the very beginning I didn't even know what you were talking about? But (.) I know something about going to school (.) at State, and then (.) I didn't know what you were saying, w-, why you had to take this program, that you lived there, I didn't know you live-, I didn't get that. I didn't, maybe because I didn't have the paper in front of me, I don't know. But I didn't**
S1: mmm
S2: **know that you stayed at the dorm. I know that you said, "roommate," so I know your, I knew your, um (.) and then um (.)**
T: **O.K. I have a question. How long did you actually stay? You said it was three [weeks**
<T models descriptive response>
S1: [For, yeah it was three weeks long. I only stayed for about week and a half, two weeks.
⇒ T: **You might want to tell them (whispered)**
<T's evaluation-directive response>
S2: **So you didn't get credit, or what?**
<S2's descriptive response>
S1: No, I didn't get credit.
S2: **How much, like how many units would it have been?**
S1: F-, four or six, I think it's four, [or six
S2: **[And what kind of classes were you taking, like [a bunch, or?**
S1: [Math and English, you only take math and English.
S2: Oh really?
⇒ S1: **I guess I should [explain that.**
<S1's self-evaluation-directive>
S2: [Jesus.
Yeah.

T could have asked "What information is missing here?" = "lack of development" (on a rubric), but instead her response comes in the form of reader interest (descriptive reader response).

Student disregard for evaluative response. In (6), from the same tutorial as (5), the conversation about Summer Bridge continues. Notice the gradation in emphasis in T's evaluative statements in the second half of the excerpt and S2's disregard of the T's evaluative mode.

(6) D 3/16 (647-665)

<Topic: S1's paper>

S1: Because I don't like to be under like anybody's rules and stuff like that. That's just me. Even when I live with my parents. It's so awful.

⇒ T: ((whisper)) **Tell us that.**
<T's evaluation-directive>

S1: Why do people want to know that, though?

T: Because you tell us it's like a jail. Because you tell us this is a horrible

S1: ((laugh))

T: experience. You're telling us it really, really, really, really sucked. O.K. Why does it really, really, really, really suck?

⇒ S2: **Yeah, I didn't know it was that bad. You didn't make it sound bad like that. And that's what's you were trying to do, wasn't it?**

S1: Uh-huh.

S2: It didn't sound [as bad.

S1: [Bad-mouthing Summer Bridge.

S2: You were just saying how got, how you were trying to get over it, but.

⇒ T: **I don't care who you're bad-mouthing. You need to um to (.) su-, support your claim.**
<T's evaluation + directive>

S1: [O.K.

⇒ S2: **[How bad is it?**
<S2's descriptive question substantiating T's directive>

T: **Why, why does it suck, [which is fine.**

S1: [O.K.

S2: **Why did it bother [you?** ((laugh))
<S2's descriptive question, continuing from previous>

⇒ T: **[I mean, what about, about how objective tutoring is: "Fine, support your claims, I'm happy." You know?**
<T's mocking evaluative response>

S1: O.K.

⇒ T: ((whispers)) Does that make sense?

It is interesting how S2 brackets T's strong, emphatic evaluative statement. She does not mimic it but rather continues in a reader-response vein. T pulls rank on S1 ("I don't care who you're bad-mouthing") in order *not* to let her reject the feedback. The turn to criteria-based language punctuates this tutorial, so much so that T returns to mock it several turns later ("Support your

claims, I'm happy"). T appears to realize the authority evaluative language carries in this context. Notice the lower volume of descriptive language exchanges as compared to this evaluative one. At the end, T's whispered question "Does that make sense?" almost begs the student to let her back into the readerly role.

Student appropriation of the reader-response role. The next excerpt is taken from an earlier part of the same session. S2's paper about teacher substitutes is being discussed. T models for S1 reader response to S2's paper. S1 does not participate verbally (she only backchannels), but S2 responds by questioning a substantive concern in her own paper and self-directs revision.

(7) D 3/16 (200-229)

<Topic: S2's paper>

T: **But I have a question. Something that you don't have set up, and now that you went back and re-read the prompt, I can see what you're doing, but reading the paper I don't see it. If Mrs. F, I'm sorry about your name, is the teacher, why are you introducing her? (.) You, you, you start off with the teacher, but you're talking about substitutes. (.)**

⇒ **Do you see what I mean?**

S1: Uh-huh.

T: Because (.) Like

S2: Well, like I'm saying (.)

⇒ T: **If the paper's about substitutes she starts off telling us about a teacher.**
<T's descriptive response meant as "training" for S1 to perceive what she perceives as a reader; notice how T refers to S2 as "she", which shows her trying to address S1 only)>

S1: uh-huh

T: **So (.) I, I wouldn't have (.) going backwards having the knowledge I do now,**

S2: o.k.

T: **you know, having read the prompt my understanding is, is, tell me if I'm wrong here. I mean, are you trying to say that, well you got the information from the t-, you got the information about substitutes from a teacher? But if you're starting off telling us about a teacher (.) if the paper's about substitutes, that, what does that say about your introduction? Have I, have I jumped into really deep water? ((to S1))**

⇒ **(2s) Does that make sense, S1?**
<T's descriptive response and "training" for S1, taking S1 "on board" to be a reader>

S1: Uh-huh. (3s)

T: So. Um (.) I mean, this is a decision what are you, what are you, what do you want the audience to know? (4s)
S2: Um (4s). Well (2s) maybe I don't know if you know, but um but Miss F the teacher was a sub (.) [you know.
T: [That's not in the paper at all.
<T's description-evaluation but not followed by a directive; S2 makes next move>
S2: Uh-huh (.) [Um
T: [I know this because you were talking about this on the couches over there. (2s)
⇒ S2: **Let's see, what do I want to say? (.) Um ((writing)) ***. (3s) Miss F ***. (.) ***. How does a teacher know how to be a sub? (.) Know about substitutes?**
<S2's descriptive question to herself>
T: uh-huh

T's descriptive feedback here has been aimed not only at the writer (S2) but also at the other student. T wants to make sure S1 as the audience is "on board" as T is trying to explain some incongruency in the paper. The verbal gestures toward S1 in the form of referring to S2 as "she" point to the fellowship T tries to maintain with S1. She senses she may lose S1 as audience if she doesn't make sure S1 follows her argument. The exchange proves successful to the writer as she follows it immediately with questions to herself and generates writing. T, however, does not re-engage S2 to participate *actively* in the exchange that follows this excerpt.

Student acceptance of descriptive response feedback (as self-directive). Excerpt (8) follows on the heels of the previous one. Here we see S2 herself rephrasing evaluative language into descriptive concern for audience. Then, she accepts T's and S2's descriptive questions by producing *self-directives* (shown in blue).

(8) D 3/16 (259-287)

<Topic: S2's paper>

T: What do you want to do to this thing? I mean, what do you want to do to this paper?
S2: **Well, um to make it follow the prompt, I have to make it involve, or pertain to everybody, but I don't know how to do that.**
<S2's evaluation tied to rubric>

⇒ **And I don't know why you, or any-, like you s-, the average person, would want to (.) read this, you know?** (3s)
<S2's descriptive question to T>

T: I don't know. (.) Why don't you create it, maybe you could do it, well, you know, this affects. Well, who does this affect? You know?

S2: Just people that are, well (2s) I don't know.

T: The issues of subs

⇒ S2: **If I, maybe if I changed it, it could affect the people [who are in**

T: [Change it?

S2: **the class with the sub. (2s) And (.) [the way you teach as a, I mean, (.) some have**

T: [***

S2: **had to be a sub, and some have had teach after having a sub. (.) So (.)**
<S2's self-directive based on acceptance of descriptive feedback>

T: *** [*** deal

S2: [That's kind of everybody, but (.) **So that's if I, maybe if I change the paper, I'd be answering his question, "So what does this mean to people who aren't teachers or students?" Because every-, everybody has been a student. I don't know. Maybe not.** (4s)
<S2's self-directive based on acceptance of descriptive feedback.>
<S2 on the brink of finding answer to her teacher's question and to her own question above: purpose and audience. T does not pursue this; instead, she evaluates the prompt.>

⇒ T: **It's, this is a difficult prompt because it's something you are so close to. I mean, the different, difficult subject issues, because you know you got the information from your mom, this is something you plan on doing, this important to [your**

S2: [uh-huh

T: **educational life, and you're going to have to go beyond that, and it's a little difficult.** (6s) Uh-huh. (.) O.K. What can I say but talk to him? [the instructor]

⇒ S2: **Any other revisions? Anybody?** (2s)

In the second half of this excerpt T fails to pick up on the opportunity S2's self-directives created to address the important issue of the paper's appeal to a general audience. Critiquing the prompt indirectly critiques the instructor and obviates the possibility of addressing the core of S2's question. S2's evaluative question at the end is very global, nonspecific, not engaging the audience response at all, in effect ending this part of the conversation: "I got enough. Let's move on."

Student rejections of directive response feedback. Excerpt (9) shows an earlier part of the discussion of S2's paper on substitutes. T elicits response from S1 without giving any guidance

or modeling for how to respond. T's invitation is very open-ended, which, in our observation, inevitably leads to a global evaluative response. S1 follows this response with an evaluation-directive sequence around a local concern ("You should put 'Says Mrs. F'"). Note that S2 categorically and repeatedly rejects S1's directives, something extremely rare in one-on-one tutorials. T reinforces this rejection as the writer's decision.

(9) D 3/16 (167-196)

<Topic: S2's paper>

T: ((to S1)) Well, do you have any feedback? What would you like to tell her about the paper?

⇒ S1: **I think the paper really sucked, no I'm just kidding ((laugh)). I, I like your paper. I thought it was good,**
<S general evaluation—first mocking, then serious and global>
so I (.) the only thing is that um like when you're reading, like the very beginning, you know, "ring, ring, ring," how you make it sound like ((cough)) people talking? Really? (.) Like it, it, it sounds like um, I mean because you've got to like read it like have the paper in front of you to know it's like people talking or something like that. And um (5s) like should you put like, like, um, why don't you go back ((laugh)), you're staring at the tape recorder.

S2: Huh?

S1: You were like staring at that thing.

S2: Oh, um.

S1: No. ((reading S2's paper in a monotone)) "Ring, ring, ring, hello, this is Miss Favelo, the second grade teacher in room 50. I've come down with the flu and won't be in
⇒ today. Can you get a student for my class?" **You should put ((with great emphasis))** "says, Mrs. F."
<S evaluation-directive sequence around a local (non-substantive) concern>

T: We talked about that last time.

⇒ S1: **I know, but you've got to like revise it. Bring it revised next time. [((laugh))**
<S metacomment on the writing process>

S2: [But this is not
⇒ **that I wouldn't have done that anyways, though. [It's not what I do.**
<S rejection of directive feedback>

S1: [Why not?

S2: Because it's like, it's not a sto-, I don't know, um (.) Because it says right here, "Hello, hello, this is Miss F." So why would I have to say, "said Miss F"? (.)

S1: See, I don't know, because to me it sounds like more of like, something that somebody says. Like, it doesn't, I don't know, you got to have like the paper in front of you to see these little thingies?

S2: Yeah, but this is something that *** saying. (.) And I'm not like (.) telling the story,

⇒ well, I *am* telling the story, but I'm not um (3s) um **like I don't want to put** ((looks at both T and S1)) (.) well, you know how stories are. Like (.) where they start the scene like they, what is it called? (.) Um um like a little (.) descript-, kind of like a little caption like what's going to happen in this, you know? I don't want it, you know?

⇒ T: **I'm not sure what you mean but (.) you know what you don't want to do, so don't do it.**

<T reiterates rejection of S directive>

We determine from episodes like this that responders—both T and student—succeed more often in having their feedback accepted by the writer when they offer reader response versus evaluative response.

Discussion

We have seen in several of the excerpts how evaluative language impedes discussion by preventing students from experiencing writing as readers, keeping them from noticing how writing acts on them. When students are busy trying to formulate a judgment which they cannot ground in a readerly reaction, they are not able substantiate and explain their statements and often resort to directives for the writer. The three tutoring sessions we examined in our study point to a greater effectiveness of non-evaluative, reader response language both to engage responders in a meaningful discussion of writing and help the writer arrive at decisions about revision. Sustained discussion based on reader responses often leads the writer to articulate *self-directives*. Writers may more readily reject directives based on evaluation from other students because they may not trust them. Readers' descriptive responses, however, find more trust and consideration.

What we found in this study is that students responding to evaluative and descriptive language from their tutors or group-mates may offer directives either to self or to others. Tracking the cause-effect relationship between tutor input and student output, however, requires more data and more in-depth analysis of tutorial transcripts as well as follow-up interviews of

participants. It is also important in future research to make an analytical distinction between such student utterances as "I need to work on my transitions" and "I need to work on my thesis" and "I need to make that clearer." Nevertheless, we believe the limited data we presented here lend credence to the notion that student self-directives before group discussion based on readerly response are evaluative and unconvincing, whereas self-directives after such a discussion are better internalized, grounded in clear purpose and perhaps lead to substantive revision.

Conclusion

At this point we can suggest some implications of this study for tutor training. Should the writing center train everyone to use the criterion-based feedback for measuring writing against some norms of effectiveness, or should it develop in group members a language of descriptive, reader response? For evaluative, criterion-based language to be effective both students and tutors would have to be trained to measure writing in the same way. We see the difficulty of such training in contexts outside of the writing center, in "norming" sessions or "interrater reliability" training in response to writing tests or portfolios. We saw the same difficulty in the very first transcript—the discussion of the upside-down stoplight. Is it worth it, then, to train tutors and students in this sort of evaluation if we do not intend either tutors or students to become evaluators and would be faced with the difficulty of correlating evaluative criteria with criteria used with each classroom instructor? It is more important for students to experience writing as readers, notice its workings on themselves as audience, learn what it means to be an audience and gain practice in formulating their responses. Readerly response should always precede evaluative response and dominate in a tutorial setting.

How then should tutors promote the use of descriptive response language? At the beginning of the semester, in training both students and tutors in reader response, it is important that the request for reader response is followed by ample time to record the response *in writing* before the conversation re-engages in order to have students sustain the readerly perspective for the whole response. Writing down of the response also assures that each member of the group practices it. During the discussion the tutor needs to monitor the response language, otherwise students often lapse into the response they learned from teachers, which is often evaluative-directive. Tutors need to be conscious and consistent models of descriptive language and monitor students' responses. If, for example, the tutor takes time out to "train" another student in the language of reader response (as we saw in excerpt [7], "she" in T's training of S1), he/she must "re-engage" that student with the ongoing conversation as a responder.

Finally, we do not advocate the elimination of all evaluative criterion-based language in writing tutorials. It does have a place in group tutorials, as some of our examples have shown. Nevertheless, we do advocate that descriptive reader-response prevail and precede evaluative response.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

Transcription style is taken from Thonus (1998), based on is Edwards (1993), Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993a), and He (1994). The style is *vertical*, a running arrangement of text in which utterance and nonutterance materials are presented as they occurred in real time. Utterances are represented by conventional American English spellings for words and parts of words. Filled pauses (*um, hmm*) and listener responses (*Uh-huh, O.K., Huh?*) are represented and treated as words. Conventional punctuation (periods, commas, question marks) signals basic intonation contours, and exclamation points mark emphatic statements. Overlaps between participant contributions are symbolized by square brackets ([ ]) aligned vertically, as in this example:

T: Oh, so how all [of them relate to lecture, and not just how the leprechaun, [or just, just the
S: [That's kind of what I was doing [Yeah,
T: [the leprechaun [relates.
S: [leprechaun. [uh-huh

Joint productions and interruptions are sequenced spatially:

S: So that's why
T: What's manifest function mean?
S: Manifest function
T: I mean is this something that you explain in your paper?

Backchannels are inserted on the line just below that of the speaker who has the floor, as illustrated by S's *o.k.* and *uh-huh* and T's *yeah*:

T: O.K. um so let's see. So what you're going to do then, let's just review here, (.) is
S: o.k.
T: add the collector's, I think that the main thing that you need to be doing is adding the collector's interpretation to [each of these paragraphs because
S: [uh-huh
I give the informant's, pretty much.
T: yeah

These symbols code nonutterance (nonlinguistic, paralinguistic) material:

(.)	Short pause (1-2 seconds)
(5s)	Timed pause (2+ seconds)
(( ))	Additional observation: laugh, cough, sigh, etc.
>	Hand striking or pounding a surface

These marks reflect analytical and display concerns:

***	Undecipherable or doubtful hearing
⇒	Turn(s) focused for analysis

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