Tutoring L2 Writers: Power-with Strategy for Confidence Building-up

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Abstract

Given that confidence plays a key role in enhancing L2 writers' interest and passion to write in English, the speaker gives priority to enhancing their confidence in English writing when tutoring L2 writers in face to face sessions at Purdue's Writing Lab. Her power-with strategy includes deauthorizing tutorship; being empathetic and patient with L2 writers; empowering L2 writers with critical thinking and analytical skills; and giving full respect to L2 writer's agency.

Presentation Script

Hi everyone.

I am Jianfen Chen, a first year PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue. I am currently working with Purdue Writing Lab as a graduate tutor.

I am presenting on Tutoring L2 Writers: Power-with Strategy for Confidence Building-up

In this presentation, I am going to share with you my understanding of 1. Background of L2 Writers; 2 Power-with Strategy in Tutoring L2 Writers; and 3. Brief conclusion emphasizing the significance of tutoring L2 writers.

So, let's start with a brief background of L2 writers. L2 writers are defined as writers with English as their second language or foreign language, who are studying or doing research at Purdue University. According to results of the survey of the Portrait of the Writer Data conducted by Purdue Writing Lab, the writing process of L2 writers differs from L1 writers in three major ways. First, they add steps when writing in English; Second, they mix L1 and L2 when writing in English; third, they follow rigid method when writing in English. Because of this, for the same writing task, it takes much longer time for L2 writers to finish than L1 writers. L2 writers are challenged not only by the English language but also by unfamiliarity with the English genres and writing conventions. As for the confidence in their writing, between 12-18% L2 writers surveyed expressed that they are not confident in global issues such as "being aware of audience; expressing/connecting ideas; sustaining an argument; organizing the paper; and using feedback to revise". For local issues, between 20-40% were not confident in "forming grammatically-correct sentences; varying sentence structure; using a varied vocabulary; editing/proofreading on my own."

With the understanding of the writing process and issues causing L2 writers to lack of confidence in writing, I found power-with strategy could be very helpful when tutoring L2 writers to build up their confidence in English writing. I borrowed the term "power-with" from Dr. Richard Johnson-Sheehan who argued that power-with rhetoric is especially useful when we are "conversing and collaborating with others to reach consensus or common understanding". I would further this argument by saying that power-with is the perspective and strategy we as tutors can employ to tutor L2 writers in the face to face sessions. First, power-with strategy means tutors are engaging with L2 writers by deauthorizing tutorship and encouraging L2 writers to express their issues and concerns in a friendly and relaxing way. Second, power-with strategy enables tutors to create empathy for L2 writers and be more patient with them. Third, power-with strategy gives priority to discussion of global issues before moving on to local issues, as a way of empowering L2 writers with critical thinking and analytical skills. Finally, power-with strategy invites L2 writers to work together with tutors to spot and fix issues and gives full respect to their writers' agency.

In conclusion, it takes time and courage for L2 writers to share their work with tutors in the writing lab; and power-with strategy, if used with the trust, patience, and empathy, would support L2 writers to develop habits and skills that enable them to become writers who can write well.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.

Works Cited

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