THE WORD

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM COLLOQUIUM
CONSCIOUS PEDAGOGY: ENGAGING WITH LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

On April 14, the Third Annual Writing Across the Curriculum Colloquium took place under the sponsorship of the Provost's Distinguished Lecture Series and the York WAC Program. The featured guest speaker, Dr. Shondel J. Nero, gave a workshop on specific pedagogical techniques for engaging diversity in the classroom. Dr. Nero is an Associate Professor of Teaching and Learning at Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Diversity at New York University and her research focuses on challenges and strategies of educating students who speak and/or write in non-standard varieties of English, World Englishes, and Creoles.

Before Dr. Nero's presentation, professors from the English Department, Dr. Jonathan Hall and Dr. Heather Robinson, emphasized the relevance of this workshop to York professors by underlining the diverse student profile at York College. Dr. Hall presented results of research data gathered through surveys about the background of York students, showing that 25% of juniors in WRIT 300 had learned to read and write in English in an English-speaking country outside the U.S. Dr. Robinson analyzed several student papers that employed and reflected on linguistic variations such as African-American English, Banglish (Bengali/ English code-meshing) and Jamaican Creole.

Dr. Nero's workshop consisted of a presentation and activities focusing on how professors can effectively manage today's diverse classrooms. Dr. Nero states that "For instructions especially in writing classes, a real or perceived tension exists between students' multilingual/multidialectal practices and monolingual outcomes assessment typical in schools and colleges." Throughout the workshop Dr. Nero emphasized that it is the responsibility of both students and professors to have ongoing open communication about these differences and their implications.

The effects of diversity can be observed in different ways throughout a course. If students attended school in other countries, the content and expectations of formal education may be different than in the U.S. Moreover, the way students engage with English differs depending on their cultural identities. Having students from countries where English is one of the primary languages makes the boundary between native and nonnative speakers blurry especially for professors who are used to traditional English. If professors try to learn students', linguistic and cultural affiliations then it becomes easier for professors to come with more explicit teaching methods for students with different language backgrounds. This is also in line with Paris's (2012) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) which encourages "perpetuating and sustaining linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as critical to access and power in linguistically diverse, globalized, interconnected world." CSP perspective supports the idea that teachers and educators should familiarize themselves with different language patterns, and find a way to utilize diversity by making it part of their curriculum rather than seeing diversity as a problem to be resolved and overcome.

The last part of the workshop was an activity where participants listened and tried to understand a dialect poem from Trinidad. Following that, a written version of the poem was given which made it easier to detect language patterns and understand the poem. This activity showed that once professors are able to understand patterns and logic behind varieties of English languages, what is hard to grasp at the beginning eventually becomes easier and makes the communication and exchange between students and professors more effective.

PROFESSOR 101 WORKSHOP: On April 7, Hallie Scott led a workshop on "Writing Across the Curriculum Pedagogy" as part of Professor 101, York's Professional Development program for new professors. The workshop focused on ways to integrate WAC pedagogy into classes through low-stakes in-class activities and formal assignments. Low-stakes "writing to learn" activities encourage students to actively construct their own knowledge. Examples include beginning class with a five minute free-write in which students respond to questions that review content from the previous session, having students mind-map their ideas for a paper topic, or asking students to work in pairs to generate a list of quiz questions. Formal assignments emphasize the notion that students are "learning to write" within an academic context and within the discourse conventions of their disciplines. WAC pedagogy advocates that these assignments are scaffolded, or divided into manageable segments so that students are able to get feedback on each step of the process.

YORK TUTORING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP SERIES

This year WAC Fellows, under the supervision of Dr. Jonathan Hall, developed and administered a 10-hour professional development program for both the Writing Center and Academic Achievement Center tutors to ensure effective tutoring sessions. The sessions were interactive workshops, designed to draw upon tutors' experience and expertise and to foster reflective practice. The five 2-hour sessions addressed the following topics:

1-Foundations of Tutoring: The first session of the professional development series, led by Christin Bowman, introduced tutors to some of the foundational principles of peer tutoring: tutors should focus on improving students rather than improving assignments, tutors should create a relaxed and constructive relationship with those they tutor, during tutoring sessions the student – not the tutor – does most of the work, and tutors do not have to be experts in all areas. During the session, tutors worked in groups to think through a list of tutoring do's and don'ts, considering why these rules are in place and how the rules reflect the underlying principles listed above. Through collaborative and thoughtful discussion, the entire group was able to learn from one another's experiences.

2-Active Listening and Learning Styles: The second session, led by Forrest Armstrong and Hallie Scott, focused on active listening and learning styles. Tutors discussed experiences of positive and negative communication with tutees and then the session leader introduced them to the practice of active listening. The participants implemented active listening strategies in two role playing scenarios. Alongside actively listening to students' concerns, tutors must also be able to accommodate different learning styles. The second half of the workshop turned its attention to a discussion of common approaches to learning: active, reflective, visual, verbal, sequential, global, sensing, and intuitive. Tutors discussed their own learning styles and then practiced different modes of explaining information to tutees.

3-Ethics and Handling Difficult Situations: The third session, administered by Hilal Erkovan, focused on how to be an ethical tutor and how to handle difficult tutoring experiences. In the first part of the session, tutors shared their views on the ethical guidelines created by the National Tutoring Association and talked about two main components of being an ethical tutor: being respectful and professional towards students. In the second part of the workshop, tutors were given sample challenging situations that they might experience during their sessions. They were asked to work in groups and then share how they would or would not respond in given situations.

4- Goal Setting and Role Planning: The fourth professional development workshop, presented by Grace Kim, covered study skills, setting goals/planning, and role modeling. The workshop introduced commonly used study methods and tools for goal setting and planning, such as the SQ4R reading method and the guidelines for a SMART goal. During the session, the tutors discussed some common session goals and how to best negotiate goals with tutees especially when the tutees goals were either too broad or too specific. The workshop closed with a role playing activity where tutors discussed ways to handle some specific situations within a tutoring session. Many of their responses included role modeling their own studying and writing habits to the tutees, highlighting the importance and usefulness of role modeling.

5-Critical Thinking and ESL Issues: The fifth session, led by Julie Fuller, covered critical thinking and ESL issues in tutoring. The workshop highlighted two key aspects of critical thinking: 1) it involves having an awareness of and evaluating one's own thinking, and 2) it is a cyclical, recursive process. A PowerPoint presentation offered tutors in the audience concrete strategies for activating critical thinking in their tutees. Tutors engaged in a series of group activities that asked them to apply these techniques in a mock tutoring session. Next, the workshop turned to ESL issues, emphasizing that tutors should encourage ESL students to think critically, rather than simply focus on comprehension or grammar during sessions. It is okay, even recommended, for students to operate in both English and their native language during the process of tackling an assignment, which allows them to think at a higher level. A tutor from the Academic Achievement Center shared his experience of working with an ESL student and responded to questions from other tutors about how he deals with the issues that arise. The workshop wrapped up with the tutors generating a list of tips for working with ESL students.

The York Tutoring Professional Development Workshops Program has applied for certification from the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). This certification is an established national standard for tutor training. They require, at minimum, 10 hours of tutor training, covering specified topics. We have begun to offer training in a more systematic way and, at the same time, to document this is in relation to a national best practice standard.