

Episode 102: Andrew H. Yim

Pedagogue podcast

Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue, a podcast about teachers talking writing. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this episode, Andrew H. Yim talks about writing center pedagogy, the challenges and joys of writing center work, training and developing new tutors, and teaching and tutoring culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Andrew H. Yim is currently a Ph.D. student in the Composition and Applied Linguistics (CAL) program at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He will begin his new job as the assistant director of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) writing center in July 2022. He currently serves as the assistant director of the IUP Jones White Writing Center, the graduate co-editor of the Peer Review, and president of the Composition and TESOL Association that serves graduate students in the CAL program. In addition, he works as an English instructor at Huaqiao University in Quanzhou, China, and serves as an intern for the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Wikipedia Initiative Cohort.

Andrew, thanks so much for joining us.

SW: Your teaching and research interests are in writing center pedagogy. Can you talk more about how you incorporate a writing center pedagogical approach to teaching writing? What are some of the foundational ideas or principles behind this approach to teaching?

AHY: Thank you so much for asking the question, Shane. So for me, as you know, I'm an Assistant Director and also teaching in China, the two things I always have to consider when incorporating writing center pedagogy into my teaching is what you consider "directive approaches" and "non-directive" approaches. So in writing center pedagogy, for tutor training, a lot of our tutors, including myself, were trained that you have to have a really fine line of balance between how much directive feedback you give to your students. And also how much non-directive feedback you give. I do the same in my teaching. So for example, when I'm teaching students in the writing center or my classes, I always try to provide targeted feedback where I'm not always going to say like, "Oh, good job on that paper." Or, you know, this is what I want to work with my students on: "Okay, I read your sentence. This is how I interpret it. Is your original meaning?"

And they say, "Andrew, yes, that's the original meaning behind my sentence." Then from there, I'll give them some more directive feedback and say, "Okay, here are some ways or strategies that you can revise the sentence." If they're telling me, "Andrew, actually your interpretation doesn't align." I think from there, I also give directive feedback and give them some strategies, right? So, "What you say in your head is maybe not being translated onto paper." So as a tutor, as your teacher, let me give you some strategies or some techniques that you can use to help

express yourself. So your audience can understand you. And if it's like a one-on-one, you know, tutoring session, it's much easier for me to sit down with a student and point things out than in a classroom setting. It becomes a little bit more difficult since I'm navigating 20-30 students.

I think when I'm doing feedback, we call it in writing center pedagogy...we have either synchronous appointments where you and I are talking, we're looking at your paper and I'm giving you feedback right away through talking...what happens more in my classes is more asynchronous feedback where for a lot of my students, before I even talk to them one-on-one, I'm usually looking at one of their earlier drafts and giving them feedback through Microsoft Word or even video comments. So for example, if we go with the synchronous format, if I'm in the writing center or in a classroom, and I'm talking to a student one-on-one, generally, I'm going to set up an agenda, right? I'll spend the first few minutes talking to the student, asking them, "Okay, welcome to the writing center. What are some of your previous experiences with writing with the assignment? How can I help you?"

You know, we'll have a good conversation, get them comfortable if we're in the writing center or in a classroom. And then from there, we'll start to narrow down some agenda items, right? "So you want to work on organization and transitions. Let's see how we can incorporate that into your writing." And same goes with an asynchronous appointment if the writer isn't there. There's also...it's really fascinating because there's been a lot of debate recently in writing center pedagogy on the asynchronous format where people are like, "Is it a writing center appointment, or is it just someone correcting someone's work?" And there's been a lot of research that talk about people's views on asynchronous. I think for me personally, asynchronous can be a very effective tool for a writer. It is hard because I can't see them face-to-face, but I'm able to give them feedback on Microsoft Word comments and try to contextualize it and then encourage them to come see me in a face-to-face appointment or send me questions.

I think from there, those are the two ways I approach writing in the classroom or in the writing center is doing some more directive tutoring, giving them some very targeted suggestions. And then also at other times being more non-directive and then just asking them a lot of questions and seeing where their ideas go and help facilitate that information.

SW: Andrew, you're the Assistant Director of the Jones White Writing Center. What are some of the challenges to this administrative work? And then what are some of the joys?

AHY: Sure, let me talk about the joys first. So yeah, I've been working in writing centers for the past four to five years. I worked at a writing center at Purdue University, DePaul University, which is in Chicago, and also now the Assistant Director at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. What I really enjoy about working in a writing center is that we try to be inclusive for the entire campus community and we try to help any writer who comes into the writing center with any kind of draft at any stage. I know a lot of people make the assumption that the writing center is only for freshman writers, their professors make them come, or it's only for English papers, "How can you help me for a business paper or a science paper or a nursing paper." I've

gotten some nursing papers in the past, but what the joy of the writing center for me is that as a space, our ultimate goal is to help people become better writers. And it's also a free service.

So, you know, you're paying for your tuition, you're able to come in, find the tutor you really enjoy. And what's been interesting about the shift with COVID is that a lot of writing centers...the IUP writing center before COVID was primarily in person, there was no Zoom format. So because of COVID, we have now more opportunities for students to make appointments online, meet with me face-to-face over Zoom. They can come into the actual writing center as a space and talk to me, we can set up Zoom chats and see how we can help them, or they're also able to send in their documents through Microsoft Word. Just in general, the writing center, the overall nature, is to just help writers with their writing.

And it can be at any stage of the writing process. I've helped so many writers recently just come in, they have no draft and they're like, "Andrew, I don't know where to start. I'm not a good writer." And, you know, as a writing center tutor and Assistant Director, it's always great to just tell them that it's all about practice and encourage them to start here, keep working at it like any skill in life. If you put in the practice and the effort...a tutor can help you, then they themselves as writers feel more confident. I think for me that's what I love about the writing center, that we're just helping people at any part of the writing stage at the end of the day.

I definitely think some of the challenges, especially with COVID recently...I didn't start my position until August 2020, but I definitely knew talking to my current director, some of the major challenges were a lot of writing centers, including ours, didn't necessarily have a capacity to do asynchronous appointments right away. And for a lot of the tutors what made it difficult in the writing center was, you know, a lot of tutors have very strong opinions on asynchronous appointments and synchronous appointments. Some of our own tutors at the writing center I've talked to in the past...some of them really love the asynchronous model. Others are not as favorable with the model. Like they'll do it, but they're not really in favor of the model. Some people are kind of in the middle where they like the mix in modality. They really like the asynchronous and the synchronous for different reasons.

So, I also think some of the challenges is helping people understand the culture of the writing center. Because a lot of times with professors they'll send their students to the writing center, but it'll make it sound like the writing center is like this model where we're only here to correct grammar or you're only coming for your grades. A lot of times students will be, I'll ask them, "So why'd you come to the writing center for your help?" And they'll say, "Oh, my professor wanted me to come or it's a part of the grade or it's a requirement and then they'll never come back." So it's also trying to help the writing community on campus or other faculty understand that the writing center, while we're a great resource for helping correct some grammatical mistakes, we're more than just a grammar correction service. And that's what I'm hoping to reinforce with my own writing center in the future.

SW: As the Assistant Director, you also train and develop new tutors. How do you go about this process and what are some writing center practices and strategies that you feel like tutors should be mindful of before each consultation or writing center session?

AHY: That's a great question, Shane. So when it comes to training new tutors at the IUP writing center, which I've been doing recently, it's been a little bit of a different model because you know, a lot of models I've been under in the past where I've actually been trained as a tutor is...you would take an entire class, a sixteen week class, and then you would have about a month to shadow tutors. And we kind of do that at the IUP writing center for a lot of our new tutors, we were recently approved for the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) training. So for all our tutors, especially last semester, they all have to go through level one in order to complete the requirement. So generally what happened last semester was we had about 10-12 new tutors, some were graduate, some are undergraduate, and they, after their initial training on day one where we had a six hour training session and orientation session, we ran through, "How does WC online work?" You know, which is the appointments schedule we use. We also talked about general practices, "How do you introduce yourself? How do you write your letter?" Then trainings with every single new tutor. So we did biweekly or bimonthly trainings. We did about four or five of them. And in each session I would walk them through...they have to do two observations of two other tutors appointments as well. And they also do one self-observation of themselves. And then at the end of the semester, for 45 minutes to an hour, they would kind of just like walk me through what they saw in the other tutors appointments and also their own.

I can kind of just see the progression as a semester goes on. And in addition for each biweekly training session, it was centered on a few...I think some of the topics we did last semester is we did one on working with multilingual writers or L2 writers. We did another one on how you address asynchronous and synchronous feedback on literature reviews. Those are some of the things that I've done as the assistant director at IUP...we're not necessarily doing a class, but we're doing bimonthly training sessions. I'm also making sure that all the tutors are completing that CRLA level one, where they are observing other tutors practice.

And once they complete all that training and I meet with them and I feel like they're ready to go, then, you know, we'll open them up for tutoring and they'll hit the ground running. I think that's a model that can be approached for any writing center out there. What's also helpful, too, is that I took a class with my boss and also my professor, Dr. Dana Driscoll, who's the current head of the IUP writing center and she actually taught a course on writing center administration. I actually have some other lesson plans that I had to develop with a group a few months ago, so I do have a lot of plans that I currently have in my portfolio that I'll be redeveloping. I think overall, if a writing center is looking to train their new tutors, I think the general model would be if they can set up some sort of class, give it a few months, there's a lot of like readings out there. I mean, there's like always that classic one by Stephen North, you know, I think from 1984.

There are other really good writing center pedagogy readings that I had in my files that I can always recommend to others. And then also just incorporating observations where tutors can

observe other tutors. I just think overall, like facilitating the process of making sure that you're checking with each tutor and making sure they feel comfortable and ready to be open for tutoring. And once you follow that process, and I think from there, it takes time, right? A lot of our new tutors, they're tutoring for a semester or even a year before they really feel comfortable being a tutor and it takes time. I think it's a good way to get them ready and started, but then also knowing that they're always going to be learning on the job. I think also doing follow up training sessions will be helpful, too, for any writing center out there.

SW: You mentioned earlier teaching writing in different contexts: Purdue, DePaul, Indiana University of Pennsylvania. You're also currently teaching in China at Huaqiao University, and you were an English teacher in South Korea from 2015-2017. So you've taught in a range of institutional settings across culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. How do you approach teaching and tutoring linguistically diverse students, and maybe even more specifically how does writing center pedagogy influence how you approach giving feedback to multilingual writers?

AHY: Well, what's really interesting about working with multilingual or L2 writers is that the way I approach it is from a few different stances. I would say the first one being that everyone has this assumption of L2 writers...I know there's like a lot of research out there, people will put L2 writers into a category and there's a really good book by Ben Rafoth where he talks about working with multilingual students. In that book, he talks about how there's a lot of terminology out there, and I think a lot of scholars in the L2 field, they might agree with some of the terminology or they might disagree with some of the terminology. I've heard the words multilingual, international, L2, ESL, EFL, ELL. There's a lot of terminology out there. And when you like look at how those populations are defined, I think there is some contention on how those terms can be defined.

I think just working with students from other countries, in general, the first thing I always try to do is...there's a really good reading from Paul Kei Matsuda and someone else, and they talk about three stances that tutors could take on: Assimilationist stance, accommodationist stance, and the separatist stance. I'm trying to go back into my notes in my head on what those stances were, but those three stances...they talk about how you want to take on an accommodationist stance or a separatist stance where you help the...whatever terminology you ascribe to L2, international, ESL, EFL, ELL, whatever writer you're working with, you want to help them find ways to bridge their previous experiences in other cultures into the current context they're writing for.

So that's more of the accommodationist stance where you're not completely eliminating what they learned in their previous contexts in writing, but you're helping enhance it or find ways to bridge it to what they're writing now for us. And the same with a separatist stance where you're helping them maybe maintain like separate linguistic identities, but they're still very relevant. What they advocate against is the assimilationist stance which happens I think a lot in writing where writing teachers especially will just correct their students' grammar, and then they'll tell

their students, “This is right. This is the only way to do it.” I think for me, I try to be very open to the fact that I want my students to understand that there's a variety of Englishes out there.

You know, when you look Suresh and a lot of those other scholars doing translanguaging or translanguaging work, they talk a lot about how writers can have access to their multiple modalities of language. When it comes to standard English versus other varieties of English, I always encourage my writers to bring in their other languages, you know, bring in what they've learned from previous writing situations into their writing. There is always that for me. In a classroom, I can always...I have to also navigate the institutional line at a university. I always tell my students that I don't want to sound hypocritical, at times, but I do understand that. I tell my students, we have access to all these varieties of English and you can use them in your writing, but sometimes when you're writing for a certain job or a certain class, you might sometimes have to consider what those perspectives are and incorporate that into your writing.

So that's what I try to do is help them find the bridge between what they can include from their previous experiences and what the institution might be imposing on them and help them kind of navigate that line. I also think as an L2 writer teacher, I try to be very understanding with my students' grammar and linguistic mistakes. I mean, I am aware that if you're committing like plagiarism issues, especially the first time, a lot of students in my opinion may not be aware of plagiarism. They might be different in another country than the U.S. I always try to give them the benefit of the doubt the first time, but if it becomes an issue over time that might need to be addressed. I also think that's something other teachers can consider, too. They know they have L2 writers in their classrooms and if their L2 writer is struggling, if they can just find ways to meet them halfway. Because I know when you're in a classroom of 30, it's hard to reach out to every single student, but I think if more teachers were able to be more understanding of their students' linguistic errors that they're committing because of the first language barrier, I think it would help L2 students a lot more.

SW: Thanks, Andrew. And thank you Pedagogue listeners and followers. Until next time.