

Motivational Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring

by Jo Mackiewicz and Isabelle Thompson

About the Authors

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Writing center tutors know that improving writing skills requires sustained effort over a long period of time. They also know that motivation—the drive to actively invest in sustained effort toward a goal—is essential for writing improvement. However, a tutor may not work with the same student more than once, so tutorials often need to focus on what can be done in a single 30- to 60-minute conference. Further, although tutors are likely to attempt to motivate students to invest time and effort in improving their writing, when writers leave the writing center, tutors' influence might end with the conference. Therefore, tutors must work to develop and maintain students' motivation to participate actively during the brief time they

are collaborating in writing center conferences.

Such concern about motivation is well placed. Because motivation can direct attention toward particular tasks and increase both effort and persistence, it can lead to improved performance and so is important for learning. Motivation is both reflected in and enhanced by students' active participation and engagement in learning and is particularly well supported in collaborative environments such as writing center conferences (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking; Hidi and Boscolo; Hynd, Hoschuh, and Nist; Lepper et al. "Motivational"; Maclellan). Although motivation is a complex phenomenon with affective, perceptual, and cognitive components, we focus here on how tutors attend to the affective component. Specifically, like many studies of educational settings (e.g., Kerssen-Griep, Hess, and Trees; Legg and Wilson; Wilson), we investigate how tutors enhance students' motivation to learn by generating rapport and solidarity with them.

Our purposes are first to review research about motivation, scaffolding, and politeness theory. Then, based on this research, we draw upon two tutoring sessions to illustrate tutors' enhancement of students' motivation through encouraging solidarity and rapport in writing center conferences. Although all aspects of the writing center context may influence a tutor's ability to develop rapport and solidarity with a student, here we focus on tutors' available linguistic resources. Well known in educational research, scaffolding refers to those tutoring strategies used to support students' efforts to arrive at their own solutions to problems or, in the case of writing center conferences, to decide on topics and revisions of existing drafts. According to Jennifer G. Cromley and Roger Azevedo, motivational scaffolding is the feedback tutors provide to promote students' active participation in writing center conferences. To define and describe with accuracy the verbal behaviors that make up motivational scaffolding, we use Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's politeness theory, a linguistic framework familiar to some writing center researchers. Linguistic politeness refers to the language individuals use to meet the face (i.e., the self-image) needs of their interlocutors. Such analysis seems particularly promising because politeness theory explains how rapport and a sense of solidarity emerge from certain verbal (and

potentially nonverbal) conversational strategies—in other words, politeness strategies. The goal of this article is to provide a theoretical foundation contributing to both research and practice in writing centers by describing and showing some examples of tutors' possible language choices that may enhance students' motivation and active participation in writing center conferences.

Our review and subsequent discussion of tutoring strategies are focused and limited in scope. As previously stated, we consider only what happens during writing center conferences; we do not report on what students do after they leave the writing center. Further, although we speculate about students' responses based on commonly used measures for participation, such as the number of words students or tutors contribute to a conference, we are concerned primarily with tutors' linguistic choices as they attempt to develop rapport and solidarity with students. Such a focus on discrete institutional events and on the facilitators of those events is common in investigations of classroom discourse (see, for example, Cazden; Mehan; Nassaji and Wells). Focusing on the facilitator's role in meaning-making and in learning can bring a tutor's behavior to the forefront for observation and, hence, for analysis and critique. Finally, because we are concerned with students' affect, we do not consider cognitive scaffolding or direct instruction, common and vital aspects of writing center tutoring (see our works cited for articles with more comprehensive treatments). With direct instruction, tutors give students suggestions about their writing, explain those suggestions, or ask leading questions. With cognitive scaffolding, tutors list alternatives, prompt, paraphrase, or read aloud to help students arrive at their own answers.

Politeness and Students' Comfort in Writing Center Conferences

Empirical research has analyzed writing center conferences not only to determine how tutors convey their suggestions for improving students' writing, but also to consider students' affect and comfort. This research has analyzed the conversation of writing center conferences for a variety of linguistic and rhetorical expressions, including interruptions, closed or open questions, echoing, qualifiers, directives,

mitigation strategies, volubility, backchannels, and overlaps (see Blau, Hall, and Strauss; Davis et al.; Severino; Thonus, “Dominance,” “How,” and “Tutor”; Wolcott). Student contributions have been analyzed according to number of words, amount of time the student held the floor, questions the student asked and those the student answered, interruptions, and topics raised. Including surveys as well as analyses of writing center conferences, some empirical research has yielded findings relevant to our study. For example, students’ reports of their “comfort” in conferences has been shown to be important to their conference satisfaction (Thompson et al.), and returning for future conferences has been shown to correlate with students’ confidence as writers (Carino and Enders). In a 2001 review of empirical research about writing center conferences, Teresa B. Henning concluded that students’ perceptions of conference success relates in part to students’ feelings of rapport with tutors and to the occurrence of mutual negotiations during agenda setting. Further, in an empirically developed “profile” (Thonus, “Tutor and Student Assessments”) of successful writing center conferences, six of the ten “necessary but not sufficient conditions” (126) related to rapport and solidarity: the student and tutor agreeing on a diagnosis of how to improve the writing; turn structure resembling real conversation, frequent “interactional features” (127); the student and tutor “achiev[ing] some degree of intersubjectivity” (129), or mutual understanding of each other’s intentions; and the tutor’s willingness to accept negotiations of evaluations or directiveness. Hence, previous research has touched on notions of rapport and solidarity in writing center conferences, but no one has considered rapport and solidarity as they relate to motivation.

A fair amount of empirical research in writing centers has also employed Brown and Levinson’s framework to examine tutoring interactions, sometimes for the effect of contextual variables such as tutor and student gender (e.g., Black). However, most of the research on politeness in writing center conferences has focused on tutors’ use of politeness to mitigate the threats to students’ face that tutors carry out while they are trying to achieve a successful interaction (in whatever way “success” might be defined). In so doing, writing center researchers have focused mainly on how tutors use so-called negative politeness, particularly diminutive hedges like *a little*, as in *This*

paragraph seems a little unfocused and modal-verb hedges like *could*, as in *You could move this section to the end of the paper* (e.g., Mackiewicz, “The Effects” and “The Functions”; Thonus, “Dominance” and “How”). In terms of scaffolding, these studies of politeness in writing center conferences help explain how tutors express negative feedback and give suggestions in ways that do not threaten students’ motivation to participate actively in collaboration—the learning that takes place as tutors modulate their direction and student writers take control of their own writings through decision making.

But in examining how tutors mitigate their advice to students to balance their own directiveness with student control, most writing center research has largely glossed over the importance of investigating how tutors’ politeness, particularly positive politeness, supports motivational scaffolding for students. Positive politeness strategies—such as noticing a person’s accomplishment (i.e., giving praise), joking, and being optimistic—generate rapport and a sense of solidarity, but they can be difficult to identify and classify systematically. Susan Wolff Murphy’s study of eight writing center conferences is an exception to the rule; she discusses how tutors used the pronoun *we* to include both conversational participants in the activity.

In addition to the difficulty of understanding their use among American-English speakers, analyzing positive politeness strategies can involve another level of complexity: positive politeness can be particularly difficult for speakers in cross-cultural interactions to use effectively and to comprehend easily. For example, studies of humor in cross-cultural communication show that joking can fail for a number of reasons beyond the hearer’s failure to comprehend the word meanings, syntax, or the utterance’s force (e.g., failure to recognize irony). Jokes can fail when a hearer does not recognize the frame of the joke or the incongruity that creates the humor (Bell and Attardo). Joking can therefore be a tricky or even a risky politeness strategy to use in cross-cultural exchanges because one or more participants may misinterpret a speaker’s intent.

In writing center research, Diane C. Bell and Madeleine Youmans, studying L1–L2 conferences, examine how the positive politeness strategy of praise can generate miscommunication and confusion. This finding is supported by cross-cultural linguistic research on

Chinese compliments and compliment responses (Yu; Yuan), on compliments in Arabic (Farghal and Haggan; Mursy and Wilson), and on interactions between British English speakers and Spanish speakers (Lorenzo-Dus). They found that an L1-speaking tutor may consider praise such as *This is a good place to start* as a “springboard” to further discussion for how the student might improve the paper, while the student might “focus primarily on the compliment itself” and wonder why he or she would need to change the paper at all if it were worthy of praise in the first place (43–44). In short, the important motivating function of positive politeness merits more attention.

In planning our study, we recognized the challenge of accounting for cross-cultural differences in intention to use politeness and in uptake of politeness strategies. We thus limit our analysis here to L1–L1 (American English) writing center interactions. We focus on the substantial role that tutors’ positive politeness plays in creating a sense of connection and thus in contributing to tutors’ ability to develop students’ confidence and curiosity along with students’ ability to work at the appropriate level of challenge and to control their own writing and their tutoring interaction (Johnson and Rizzo). But we also note that tutors’ negative politeness contributes to motivational scaffolding as tutors use it to demonstrate their willingness to make way for and their interest in students’ decisions and contributions. By defining and describing tutors’ motivational scaffolding in terms of the politeness strategies they use, we hope to develop a robust system for identifying, analyzing, and improving tutors’ discourse—what tutors can say to assist students’ motivation to participate actively in writing center conferences.

Motivation

As noted above, motivation is “the desire to achieve a goal, the willingness to engage and persist in specific subjects or activities” (Margolis 223). It influences the time and effort that students are willing to invest in completing a task and to some extent the possibility of transferring learning from one environment to another (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking). Further, the active participation associated with motivation provides an important diagnostic tool

for tutors in writing center conferences (Evens and Michael). The more dialogic writing center conferences become, the better tutors can determine what students need to know and what they already understand; hence, tutors may be more effective in individualizing instruction for students (Puntambekar and Hubscher). Moreover, this dialogue, or “collaborative contextualizing” (Fox 1), also situates writing assignments for both tutors and students. In the same way that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, motivation is constructed through “mutual reciprocity” between students and their environments (Meyer and Turner 112). Therefore, as a substantial part of the environment, a tutor can exert a strong influence on a student’s effort and willingness to participate in a writing center conference. According to recent research about writing and motivation (Hidi and Boscolo; Pajares and Valiante; Boscolo and Hidi; Zimmerman and Kitsantas), motivation influences and is influenced by three major components: interest in the writing task, self-efficacy concerning successfully completing the task, and the ability to self-regulate performance.

Interest can result in increased attention, concentration, and enjoyment of learning (Hidi and Boscolo). Individual interest, which is associated with intrinsic motivation, has been shown to influence learning (Bye, Pushkar, and Conway; Lepper and Henderlong). However, some researchers (see Hidi and Harackiewicz; Hynd, Holshuh, and Nist) argue that situational interest, which is associated with extrinsic motivation, can enhance learning as well. For example, grades are commonly considered extrinsic motivators, with interest limited to the particular situation that the grade results from. Although students are usually very interested in getting good grades on their writing assignments, writing center tutors usually want to inspire a different type of interest, a more lasting individual interest related to intrinsic motivation. Although not directly connected with individual interest, good grades correlate with students’ perceptions of self-worth and confidence (see Van Etten et al.)—important influences on intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators, such as feelings of rapport and solidarity and wanting to please the tutor, may lead a student to invest more effort during the short time spent in a writing center conference and, pushing this possibility even further, may eventually

facilitate the improvement of the student's writing and increase student interest in writing over the long run.

Also influenced by feelings of rapport and solidarity, self-efficacy and self-regulation are mutually dependent. Self-efficacy, or self-confidence, relates to "individuals' beliefs and personal judgments about their abilities to perform at a certain level and affects their choice of activities, effort, and performance" (Hidi and Boscolo 148). It influences effort and persistence and willingness to persevere in difficult tasks (Pajares and Valiante). Identifying successes, connecting these successes with personal control or effort, and cultivating "students' beliefs in their own capabilities" all influence self-efficacy (Pajares and Valiante 160). Self-regulation relates to the control students have in achieving their goals (Zimmerman and Kitsantes; Zimmerman and Schunk). A self-regulated writer is aware of his or her ability to manage the writing process and to find assistance when it is needed. High self-regulation increases self-efficacy and may stimulate a writer's interest in a particular writing task and in writing generally (Hidi and Boscolo). Students are likely to be intrinsically motivated to improve as writers when they attribute their potential for improving a draft (and future drafts) to something they can control and believe in their abilities to make necessary revisions.

Motivational Scaffolding

The term "scaffolding" was first coined and defined by David Wood, Jerome S. Bruner, and Gail Ross in a 1976 article analyzing the effectiveness of certain collaborative behaviors mothers use in teaching their children. When providing children a task to build a block structure that was slightly too difficult to accomplish on their own, one of the researchers (Ross) provided the one-to-one assistance each child needed to complete the building. This assistance was called "scaffolding," which referred to how the adult structures the task, motivates the child to participate in the task, and sometimes performs those parts of the task that the child cannot perform, hence allowing the child to concentrate on what he or she can do. Success is guaranteed, and the child is expected to eventually perform the task on his or her own—competently and willingly. When the child

is ready to perform the task independently, the adult tutor fades and requires the child to assume responsibility for the task. In a related study published in 1975, David Wood and David Middleton explain that scaffolding is successful only within the students' "region of sensitivity to instruction" (181), defined as the students' "readiness" (181) for a particular task. Later, the region of sensitivity became correlated with the "zone of proximal development," the well-known Vygotskian concept defining learning potential as a variable affective and cognitive range with boundaries determined by what a student can do independently and what a student can do with assistance.

Over the past thirty-five years, Wood, Bruner, and Ross's concept of scaffolding has been adapted to classroom instruction and especially to tutoring. It has found instructional relevance with many different age groups, including college students being tutored in math, science, and other disciplines (Azevedo, Cromley, and Seibert; Chi; Chi et al.; Cromley and Azevedo; Fox; Graesser et al.; Graesser, Person, and Magliano; Hume et al.; Merrill et al.; VanLehn et al.). However, only a few studies of scaffolding in writing center conferences have been published (see Thompson; Williams), and its potential for understanding and improving writing center tutoring is largely untapped. For tutors to effectively support students' learning through scaffolding, they need to know how to make the writing task manageable for each individual student without simplifying the outcome, to mutually define the goals and establish the agenda for the conference, to recruit students' interest in writing tasks, to encourage students' persistence and effort in completing the tasks, to attend to students' motivation and active participation, and to minimize students' frustration and anxiety during the conference (Clark and Graves; Daniels; Gaskins et al.; Palincsar; Puntambekar and Hubscher; Stone). Because scaffolding can influence solidarity and rapport with students and, at the same time, according to its definition, guarantee in-the-moment success as long as the tutor is present, writing tasks undertaken in writing center conferences should be less frustrating, less anxiety-provoking, and, as Wood, Bruner, and Ross say, "less dangerous" (98) for students than those undertaken in working alone. By building a caring emotional environment, tutors can decrease students' anxiety (Bruning and Horn).

Motivational scaffolding, in part, is the feedback that tutors use to build rapport and solidarity with students and to engage students and keep them engaged in writing center conferences. Tutors in writing center conferences can use motivational scaffolding in ways Brown and Levinson ascribe to positive politeness in conversation—as “a kind of social accelerator” where the speaker indicates he or she wants to strengthen the connection he or she has with the hearer (103). Based on research about motivation and scaffolding, we can describe five types of motivational scaffolding that we later connect with politeness strategies:

- *Praise*—to point to students’ successes; to praise them for specific achievements. Praise should focus on the students’ performance (process praise) and not on their innate, unchangeable characteristics, such as intelligence (person praise) (Dweck; Maclellan), and it should be specific (e.g., *Nice catch!* when pointing to a misplaced comma identified by the student) rather than general (e.g., *Good draft*) (Mackiewicz, “The Functions”; see also Hancock).
- *Statements of encouragement or optimism about students’ possibilities for success*—to build confidence; to reduce stress; to directly encourage agency, usually with reference to effort and persistence.
- *Demonstrations of concern for students*—to build rapport by showing caring; to assure students that the tutoring environment is safe and positive. Among other expressions, caring can be demonstrated through questions about students’ welfare (Cooper).
- *Expressions of sympathy and empathy*—to express understanding of the difficulty of the task, often through confessions about one’s own writing difficulties.
- *Reinforcement of students’ feelings of ownership and control*—to increase students’ developing self-regulation; to increase students’ confidence in their potential for success (see Lepper et al., “Motivational”; Lepper et al., “Self Perception”; Lepper et al., “Scaffolding”).

Politeness and Motivation

The linguistic framework of politeness theory provides a detailed description of the types of rapport and solidarity building important for motivational scaffolding.

Positive Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson outline a variety of specific politeness strategies, and those relevant to writing center interactions fall into three broad categories. First, tutors can give understanding and sympathy. They may do so by articulating understanding of student writers' situations and by acknowledging that they wish challenging situations were otherwise (thus conveying sympathy).

Second, tutors can notice or attend to students' accomplishments or conditions. A tutor may employ the strategy of noticing by offering praise (e.g., *That's a good change*) but may also claim common ground by demonstrating concern that a shared understanding of the task-at-hand exists. For example, a tutor might ask a student *Do you see what I mean?* to ensure that the student understands what the tutor has said and, therefore, to ensure that the two are on "common ground." A tutor might also use repetition, which demonstrates engagement in what the student has said and signals agreement, or he or she might use the strategy of avoiding candid disagreement. With this latter strategy, a token agreement (e.g., *OK but*) is used, even though the speaker does not necessarily agree with his or her interlocutor. Table 1 also exemplifies how a tutor can use the positive politeness strategy of asserting common ground by joking. Brown and Levinson write that "since jokes are based on mutual shared background knowledge and values, jokes may be used to stress that shared background or those shared values. Joking is a positive-politeness technique, for putting [the hearer] 'at ease'" (124). Thus, as a kind of shibboleth, jokes convey solidarity and generate rapport—as long as the speaker and the hearer share the appropriate experience.

Third, tutors can convey that they and the students are cooperators. Brown and Levinson explain this broad category of showing cooperation, which appears to be a critical one for writing center tutors, this way: if two people are conversationally cooperating, "then

they share goals in some domain” (125). This category includes four specific strategies that tutors can use when providing motivational scaffolding: (1) assert or presuppose the tutor’s knowledge of and concern for the student’s wants; (2) be optimistic; (3) include the tutor and the student in the activity; and (4) give reasons.

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies involve carrying out a speech act that threatens face, called a face-threatening act—such as when a tutor makes a suggestion or states a criticism—but simultaneously acknowledging the interlocutor’s (the student’s) want to be independent and free from imposition (131). Thus, tutors can use questions (e.g., *Do you think you should find a few more sources to back up this claim?*) rather than declaratives to state their suggestions (and criticisms) politely. They can also use hedges (e.g., *You could maybe connect these two paragraphs with some transition phrase, like “In contrast”*). With these politeness strategies, tutors acknowledge students’ desires to control themselves and their work.

Finally, tutors may avoid the pronoun *you* or impersonalize the face-threat (e.g., a suggestion) by stating it in passive voice. Tutors also subjectivize their suggestions, stating what they would do if they were in the student’s position. So, instead of saying *You should connect these two paragraphs with a transition phrase*, a tutor might say, *I would connect these two paragraphs with a transition phrase*. Discussing editing sessions about technical writing, Jo Mackiewicz and Kathryn Riley found this negative politeness strategy particularly effective in balancing the need to be clear with the need to be polite.

As noted above, writing center research has focused on negative politeness strategies because of their ability to mitigate the force of speech acts that threaten face. We argue, though, that negative politeness also signals a tutor’s willingness to maintain good relations because it acknowledges and demonstrates interest in a student’s decision-making and ideas.

As shown in the following section, the verbal behaviors described in detail by politeness theory operationalize (i.e., express) motivational scaffolding through their shared goal of solidarity and rapport-building.

Motivational Scaffolding through Politeness

Table 1 shows the correspondence of specific politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson) to the motivational scaffolding strategies.

Tutors' motivational scaffolding strategies	Politeness strategies that operationalize motivational scaffolding	Example
(1) Praise (general and specific)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (P) Notice S: T positively evaluates S's work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T: <i>This was a good idea.</i> • T: <i>Perfect! Yeah, write that here. That's the kind of thing to transition between those two ideas.</i>
(2) Encouragement/optimism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (P) Be optimistic: T minimizes the difficulty of a complex situation (or of a face-threatening act like a criticism), such as the task of revising a paper. T implies that S will rise to the challenge. • (P) Joke: T calls attention to the background knowledge or values T and S share through humor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be optimistic: T: <i>I think you can do it though. I mean I think you can. It will take a lot of work, but I think that. . . I think that it will be worth it though.</i> • Joke: T: <i>Oh, teachers can be so difficult.</i>
(3) Demonstration of concern for student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (P) Attend to S: T inquires about the extent to which the S understands or is satisfied. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • T: <i>Do you feel comfortable with the topic you're going for?</i>

<p>(4) Statements of sympathy or empathy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (P) Give the gift of sympathy or understanding: T satisfies S's want to be cared for, listened to, or understood. • (P) Include T and S in the activity: By using the inclusive "we" form, T conveys that T and S will take on the task at hand together. • (P) Assert concern for S's wants: T implies knowledge of and caring for S's feelings, concerns, and interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the gift of sympathy/ understanding: T: <i>I mean this is difficult. Don't think that I don't realize that it is.</i> • Include T and S in the activity: T: <i>It seems to me, after reading your paper what's missing is focus. So if we put a check mark next to the things that are not related.</i> • Assert concern for S's wants: T: <i>O.K. So now you're feeling overwhelmed with everything that you have to do, but you'll be fine.</i>
<p>(5) Reinforcement of student's ownership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (P) Use repetition: T repeats in whole or part what S said to validate it and show attention. • (P) Give reasons: T justifies his or her suggestion or explains the payoff. • (P) Avoid candid disagreement: T avoids a strongly stated no response by beginning the response in a neutral or even affirmative way. • (N) Mitigate the FTA: T eases a suggestion through the use of hedges and passive voice and other linguistic forms to avoid imposing on S's views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use repetition: T refers back to something the student has said earlier in the conference: <i>Kind of what you said about the business man, you know?</i> • Give reasons: T: <i>So that would be a good progression. . . . That giving up and that not being yourself is what she's [the instructor is] asking for here when she talks about why it's important.</i> • Avoid candid disagreement: S: <i>So I can't develop it [the topic] anymore.</i> T: <i>O.K. Tell me what you think. Let me go back here. [Begins reading the paper.]</i> • Mitigate the FTA: T: <i>You might want to think about if there are some examples in here that are kind of repetitive.</i>

Table 1: Motivational Scaffolding Expressed through Politeness

(P is an abbreviation for "positive politeness," N for "negative politeness," T for "tutor," S for "student," and "FTA" for "face-threatening act.")

In order to facilitate the application of this knowledge in a variety of writing center settings, through the rest of this article we examine excerpts from two writing center conferences to show how possible attempts at motivating students can be described linguistically in terms of scaffolding and politeness theory. The conferences excerpted here were chosen from a corpus of 51 writing center conferences, consisting of more than 30 hours of student-tutor conversation, and recorded with permission from the Institutional Review Board at a large Southeastern university. At the time the conferences were recorded, the writing center (called the English Center) was a unit in the English Department. The center served only undergraduates enrolled in first-year writing and world literature, both required university core courses. More than half of the tutors were English graduate students, serving in the center to fulfill part of the requirements for their graduate teaching assistantships. Advanced graduate student tutors also taught first-year writing and world literature. The rest of the tutors were undergraduates from a variety of majors. The undergraduates were rigorously screened, and each was recommended by an English instructor, interviewed, and required to pass a proofreading test. During their first year, all tutors were required to attend a weekly training practicum, which not only presented curricular-based information about the common assignments in first-year writing and world literature but also considered pedagogical issues such as how to encourage student engagement and how to scaffold or lead students' thinking. Although tutors were instructed to follow students' agendas, they were also shown how to lead by introducing the possibility of expanding an agenda with student permission. Tutors were told to ask for instructors' assignment handouts as soon as possible in conferences so that they could better understand what students were supposed to do. The tutors in the conferences excerpted below follow this guideline, likely to the benefit of the students they work with.

The conferences excerpted in Examples 1 and 2 were video recorded, and the tutors and the students filled out matching surveys indicating conference satisfaction. As soon as possible after the conferences, one of the researchers conducted a retrospective interview with each tutor, by playing back the recording of the conference and asking questions. We chose these two conferences

to excerpt because they show tutors who appear to take advantage of opportunities to build rapport and solidarity, and in the surveys administered after the conference, both students rated the conferences as highly satisfactory. In their interviews, tutors discussed their attempts to motivate students to trust their goodwill and expertise and to participate actively in the conferences.

Example 1: The Unconfident Student

In this section, we show how a tutor through politeness, particularly positive politeness, attempts to move the student writer from frustration to interest, self-efficacy, and to some extent self-regulation of her learning. Although this tutor does not take advantage of every opportunity to attend to the student's motivation (nor could any tutor), he appears to be actively looking for those opportunities and, when possible, he creates them.

The Example 1 excerpts were taken from a 31-minute conference between an experienced undergraduate male tutor and a traditional-aged female first-year student. The tutor is pursuing a psychology major and English minor and at the time of the tutorial, his second year as a tutor, worked 15 hours per week. He has consistently received high evaluations for his skill as a tutor. The student has come for help with a position paper requiring her to argue that a certain problem exists, to address counterarguments, and to cite sources that agree and disagree with her position. Her classmates have already reviewed the paper, and as the conference proceeds, it becomes apparent that during the peer review, which occurred in front of the class, her draft was severely criticized by both the instructor and the class. Before coming to the English Center, the student has revised her draft according to the directions she received during the peer review. The tutor believes that her new draft does not meet the requirements of the assignment and, based partly on his previous experience with other students from the same instructor, thinks that the student has been subjected to harsh and embarrassing treatment. In the retrospective interview, the tutor says that he is concerned about the student's self-confidence (self-efficacy) as well as her writing ability.

At the beginning of the conference, the tutor asks the student

what she needs help with and reads through the instructor's assignment handout. The student confirms that she has followed the instructions and tells the tutor that her argument—the topic of her position paper—is that people need to be informed about cell phone manners. The tutor realizes that this is not a strong argument. He tells the student as much, using politeness (hedges like *maybe* and the minimizer *one thing*). As he says in his retrospective interview, he deliberately mitigates his criticism that her thesis is not arguable: *But that's one thing that I think maybe I see as a problem before reading it. You have to have a black-and-white contrast for arguments.* The tutor's use of negative politeness at the outset likely avoids shaking the student's confidence any further and improves the chances of motivating her to participate actively in the conference.

After this exchange, the tutor reads the draft silently, stopping to ask questions about the class discussion of position papers, trying to help the student identify the weaknesses in her thesis statement herself. Finally, the student tells the tutor about her humiliation in the class peer review—that she had originally written a more argumentative thesis statement, but her classmates provided many counterarguments and suggested that her thesis statement be confined to informing people about cell phone manners. According to the student, the instructor agreed with her classmates' suggestion. During the retrospective interview, the tutor says that just before the dialogue in Excerpt 1.1 began, he realized that the student had received bad advice and was feeling frustrated. In the conference, he uses a variety of positive politeness strategies to convey solidarity and, thus, increase the student's confidence.

Excerpt 1.1

- 1 T: How about we kind of (1–2 seconds) And I'm not saying we'll have to get rid
 2 of all of this. Some things we'll kind of take out but a lot of this we'll still be
 3 able to use. From what I got, (1–2 seconds) kind of the message that came
 4 across to me in the paper was “be quieter when you use cell phones.”
 5 S: And I know on that position as far as like
 6 T: [Interrupts] Yeah. You're kind of like telling me like “Be quiet. Don't do
 7 this, don't do that,” and it was like less of a strong argued (1–2 seconds) you
 8 know (1–2 seconds) a position paper, than a just “these are the guidelines
 9 to follow.”

- 10 S: Yeah. I know I did for some reason. [inaudible]
- 11 T: And now I (4 seconds) Now what happened in class, I mean I'm sure that
12 happened for a reason, but maybe we can work with that original argument
13 and then take it (1-2 seconds) kind of take it down a notch. Maybe they
14 disagreed with that so much (1-2 seconds). I take it that they disagreed a
15 lot with it and came up with countless counterarguments?
- 16 S: Umm. I was going to set limits both the places. [inaudible] People should
17 know that there are places where people can't talk on cell phones. And then
18 there are places where they can clearly talk in a low tone. And then a girl
19 came up with "What is a low tone?" And then we got into needing to define
20 what a low tone was. What kind of voices, and then I think
- 21 T: [Interrupts] Which can be done. I mean don't think that would be
22 impossible, you know? There are numerous things that (3 seconds) society
23 imposes upon the public that are kind of iffy. For instance, you should dress
24 appropriately. How is appropriately defined? By a code, by a dress
25 S: uh-huh
- 26 T: code and all businesses. So a tone could very easily be defined. You
27 know, you can start off with the broad (1-2 seconds) you know, (5
28 seconds) a decibel level or a loudness level that does not interfere with the
29 conversations or (1-2 seconds) does not, the conversations around you
30 does not (1-2 seconds) what? You tell me.

The tutor begins his motivational scaffolding with the positive politeness strategy of optimism, conveying that although the thesis must change, much of what she has already written can be salvaged (line 1: *And I'm not saying we'll have to get rid of all this*). He acknowledges that the essay needs revising and alludes to the fact that the revision will likely be substantial and, therefore, difficult, but he also assures the student that she will not have to start the writing process over completely.

The tutor continues motivational scaffolding with several other politeness strategies that might bolster the student's confidence. First, with his use of *we*, including both he and the student in the activity, he signals solidarity right at the start. Although she may feel demoralized, he is on her side, and they will work together to revise the paper. The assurances that the more expert participant will support the less expert participant and that during the time they work together he will ensure success are critical to fostering the student's self-efficacy

and defining characteristics of scaffolding. In addition, the tutor uses negative politeness. He minimizes his assessment by limiting its scope (*Some things*) and by hedging the action to be carried out (*kind of*) (line 2). His negative politeness, then, again can reinforce his positive politeness because it contributes to the optimism he conveys about her chance for success in formulating a viable position.

The tutor switches back to positive politeness, using the strategy of repetition (line 12), repeating the student's word *reason* and thus likely validating her claim that she had followed some line of reasoning when she changed her thesis. By acknowledging the difficulty and assuring the student that she will not have to start over, the tutor conveys solidarity and attends to the student's motivation.

After the student explains the counterarguments that her classmates and instructor generated, which she has used to temper her original argument, the tutor again conveys optimism, telling the student that defining a low tone (and thus prescribing cell phone etiquette) is indeed feasible (line 21: *Which can be done*). At this point, the tutor interrupts the student for the second time in this excerpt (see also line 6). Although these interruptions suggest the tutor's dominance, they may also demonstrate his commitment to help the student through his support of her original position, no matter what counterarguments her classmates have given. The tutor also does most of the talking in this conference, particularly at the beginning, again signaling his dominance. However, like his interruptions, the tutor's talk is directed at helping the student. He does not appear to interfere with the student's ownership of her ideas, but instead prompts her in defending and expanding those ideas. The tutor follows up with yet another positive politeness strategy, using *you know?* as a tag question (as opposed to a hesitation as he used it previously, e.g., lines 7–8) to increase the student's interest and, thus, involvement. Indeed, in the retrospective interview, the tutor says that he is at this point trying to get the student to talk to him. As he points out, he is "going to throw the hook out and see if she bites. And maybe say something I can praise her for and break down the barrier." The tutor believes that the student has a lack of motivation to work with him and that she expects strong criticism: "She is expecting me to say, 'This is wrong. This is wrong.' [Tutor hits the table with his fist]. And I am trying not to do

that.” Thus, the tutor seems aware that conveying solidarity with the student by being optimistic and generating rapport and by facilitating the student’s participation are important for conference success.

Later in the conference, the student finally becomes engaged, and the tutor says in the retrospective interview that he feels “energized.” The tutor jokes with the student while providing a mitigated suggestion that moves the student toward a viable thesis:

Excerpt 1.2

- 1 T: OK. Let me propose this to you. And everything I say you’re free to say,
2 “John, that’s just horrible. Why would you think that?” What if we change
3 one of the awkward verbs in your thesis, you know, “should be informed”?
4 How about we change it to something like (5 seconds) What I’m going
5 for maybe is “should adhere to rules of cell phone etiquette.” You know?
6 Because there are certain rules that are understood with cell phones.

When the tutor jokingly says that the student is free to tell him that his idea is horrible (line 2), he conveys a positive attitude toward the student, a move that—at least in this L1–L1 interaction—builds rapport and increases the likelihood that the student will be encouraged to continue and perhaps even increase her participation. (Because this joke depends on the shared frame of deference to instructors and tutors and the incongruity of explicitly criticizing one’s instructor or tutor—a frame that is common across cultures—this joke might very well work in cross-cultural interactions too.)

After the tutor’s joke, the student begins taking notes for the first time, a signal that she is engaged and likely understanding what the tutor is suggesting. Indeed, as the tutor says later in the retrospective interview, they have at this point “totally revolutionized the paper.” In Excerpt 1.3, the tutor continues to try to convince the student that cell phone manners can be enforced. He gives examples of places where cell phone use has been prohibited and the prohibition has been enforced (airplanes) and mentions places that have been somewhat successful in enforcing prohibitions against cell phones (the English Center and the university library).

Excerpt 1.3

- 1 S: So I was hoping I’d pick out a topic where it’s more along the lines where
2 it aggravates me, which would be in the hallway, or in the classroom, or

- 3 T: OK.
- 4 S: But, I don't see that being a great position. And I don't see anybody (3
5 seconds) adding cell phone rules to more public places (1–2 seconds) like
6 on the transit for instance. I think it's rude for people to shout on their cell
7 phones, which disrupts everybody else who's on the transit.
- 8 T: That could be wonderful for a topic, you know? What you could do is (1–2
9 seconds) The addition of cell phone policies to places that don't have them.
10 And that's very much what you're interested in, is it not?

After the student articulates her interest—cell phone policies (lines 4–7)—the tutor praises her idea and caps that gift of praise with a tag question that intensifies interest (line 8): *That could be wonderful for a topic, you know?* In the retrospective interview, the tutor says that he has been looking for an opportunity to praise the student, and it is worth noting that he uses process praise—praise for the student's accomplishment—rather than person praise.

At this point, the student has asked questions to develop the new thesis and has stated her preference for an arguable thesis. Therefore, returning back to the argument she put forth to her class and instructor but now more sophisticated and refined, she appears more interested and engaged in the process of revising her paper. In Excerpt 1.4, the conference begins to wind down. The tutor checks the student's outlook on revising:

Excerpt 1.4

- 1 T: Do you feel comfortable with the topic you're going for?
- 2 S: Uh-huh. I think there's a paper that I went out in front of the class was (1–2
3 seconds) "I would like to limit and restrict the use of cell phones in
4 T: uh-huh
5 S: public places" was what I started off with. I think when I got up there I (3
6 seconds)
- 7 T: Did what you (1–2 seconds) you got to shifting a little? OK, kind of like,
8 "Well, I don't know" that kind of thing?
- 9 S: Uh-huh.

The student responds positively and summarizes why she changed her thesis in the first place. By the end of the conference, she is reflecting back on what had occurred in class and how she had reacted to the advice she had received there. The student has already

demonstrated that she is able to regulate her writing process to some extent by choosing to come to the English Center for assistance. The student appears motivated to make the revisions discussed during the conference, even though she will return to her original, much criticized topic. She also seems less frustrated than she was at the beginning of the conference. Politeness strategies such as being optimistic can nurture a positive affective environment by conveying solidarity and rapport and, thus, can facilitate motivational scaffolding.

Example 2: The Complaining Student

The excerpts in this section are intended to show how a tutor's positive politeness, particularly her use of optimism, sympathy, expressions of caring, along with her concern not to take control from the student, help move the student toward a revision that should not overwhelm her. Like the tutor in Example 1, this tutor does not take advantage of every opportunity to attend to the student's motivation, but she works hard so that the student can leave the conference with an achievable revision goal. The excerpts are taken from a 32-minute conference with a female tutor, a graduate teaching assistant pursuing an MA in English, and a traditional-aged first-year female student enrolled in first-year writing. The tutor has almost four years of experience in the English Center—two years as an undergraduate and two years as a graduate student. Partially because of her demonstrated positive attitude and caring, this tutor was selected as assistant coordinator of the Center. She has also been teaching first-year writing for almost two years. The student came to the writing center to get help in revising an essay that has received a grade of C.

In addition to experiencing the anxiety and frustration provoked by revising an essay that has received a grade she perceives as unsatisfactory, the student is writing about unpleasant memories of high school, where she reported that she was shunned and mocked by her classmates, an emotionally laden topic. The assignment that the student wants to revise requires her to write about a change in her life. The conference begins with the tutor asking the student for the instructor's assignment handout and then asking about the instructor's criticisms of the essay. In response, the student states

that the instructor did not mark the essay but instead returned it with a copy of the departmental rubric with the grade and the grade's description circled. The tutor immediately begins using the positive politeness strategy of giving sympathy, by reading the description of the C grade aloud and saying, *It's pretty sad how this C paper is a pretty good paper. When I first read this, I was like "Man, that's tough."*

After asking if the student has revised the essay since it was returned and learning that the student *ha[s]n't had time*, the tutor scans the draft. However, rather than focusing entirely on the paper, the tutor continues to attend to the student. She leans over to keep the essay between the two of them instead of moving it in front of her. She also summarizes and responds as she reads the student's unpleasant memories of her private high school: *An enchilada right on your head! Really? Wow!* and a minute or two later, *Goodness gracious! What kind of school was this?! These people sound terrible.* When asked about these comments in the retrospective interview, the tutor says that she is trying to keep the student engaged to "let her know where I am and that what I am reading is interesting." The tutor appears to be trying to build rapport and solidarity by showing her agreement with the student that her treatment in high school was awful. She is validating the student's viewpoint.

In the retrospective interview, the tutor says that as she scanned the essay, she realized that rather than one life change, the student is writing about two changes — she transferred from a public high school to a private one and then made the change to college. In addition, the writing switches back and forth from the first change to the second and, thus, lacks coherence. The tutor suggests that the student choose one change to write about:

Excerpt 2.1

- 1 T: And I think that talking about those transitions is making your paper seem
 2 a little unfocused. And so I think what I would think about is which of these
 3 you would like to focus on? You want to focus on what you learned from this
 4 change, or do you want to focus on what you learned from that change?

The tutor's questions signal that she has refrained from presuming what the student wants to do, thus reinforcing the student's control over her writing with this negative politeness strategy. Moreover, the

tutor uses politeness to deliver the necessary criticism, softening the blow with hedges (lines 1–2: the verb *seem* and the diminutive *a little*). The student chooses to write about the change from her private high school to college, which had a positive effect on her.

The conference proceeds, and throughout the student talks a great deal about her painful private school experiences: *when I came here no one liked me, so I couldn't. No one would be friends with me.* The tutor continues to show sympathy about the student's bad treatment: *Yeah, of course, yeah. I mean you had some really difficult situations in that new school.* In the retrospective interview, the tutor says that she thought the student might be embarrassed by having the tutor read about such humiliating experiences. Therefore, the tutor says, she showed “extra sympathy” because she was “trying to make [the student] feel like it's okay.”

What appears to be the turning point in the conference—the point at which the tutor and student determine the paper's focus—occurs across the excerpts below (Excerpts 2.2–2.5). The tutor has been giving advice about how to revise the essay so that it clearly focuses on one change, from private high school to college. She suggests that the student read through the essay, putting check marks by information irrelevant to that change. When Excerpt 2.2 begins, the student has realized that no small amount of work will be involved:

Excerpt 2.2

- 1 S: I guess it's going to get hard now changing it from public to private
2 T: yeah
3 S: because
4 T: [Interrupts] Right, that was your whole focus really.
5 S: Yeah.
6 T: Because it was how when you changed into the private it was so different.
7 S: Yeah.
8 T: So it will be
9 S: [Interrupts] I have a feeling that I'm going to be writing it all over tonight.
10 T: Yeah, you probably will be, you know. And with these revisions it always
11 ends up being (1-2 seconds) You know, it's always a lot of work in order to
12 try to get a better (1-2 seconds) to try to write a better paper.
13 S: Yeah. I just spent like all last night revising it, a whole new paper, because

- 14 I'm doing two papers at once for the same teacher.
 15 T: oh
 16 T: I see. So this is taking more time than you had originally expected?

The tutor responds to the student's assessment that changing the focus of the paper will be difficult by agreeing with her and summarizing why the change would be difficult (line 6: *Because it was how when you changed into the private it was so different*). The tutor's response constitutes what Brown and Levinson would call giving the gift of understanding (129). That is, by summarizing or paraphrasing what students say, tutors show that they understand. Indeed, after the student again states that the effort required for revising the paper will be substantial (line 9: *I have a feeling that I'm going to be writing it all over tonight*), the tutor (in line 10) agrees with her again. Rather than minimizing the time required for the revision, the tutor agrees with the student, demonstrating her concern not to mislead. Further, by acknowledging the difficulty required for such an extensive revision, the tutor also sympathizes with the student. In addition, in lines 11–12, the tutor tries to encourage the student by helping her make the connections between writing improvement and effort, possibly to convince the student that the quality of the essay—and the grade—are under her control.

The tutor conveys understanding again after another complaint from the student (lines 13–14), using an explicit marker of understanding: *I see* (line 16). With her confirmation question in line 16 (*So this is taking more time than you had originally expected?*), the tutor employs yet another positive politeness strategy: she asserts knowledge of and concern for the student's wants. That is, the tutor's questions signal her understanding of what the student is thinking—that revising the paper has taken up a lot of time already, making spending more time on it particularly troublesome. With this signal of shared knowledge, the tutor conveys solidarity with the student and, in a sophisticated move, shifts her expression of sympathy about the student's terrible experiences in the private high school to focus entirely on revising the essay.

A few turns later, the discussion of the assignment continues. In Excerpt 2.3, the tutor conveys optimism about the student's ability to revise.

Excerpt 2.3

- 1 S: Yeah. She's giving me the extension on the other one. I was like,
2 T: okay okay
3 S: "Oh man."
4 T: I think you can do it though. I mean I think you can (1-2 seconds) It will
5 take a lot of work, but I think that (1-2 seconds) I think that it will be worth
6 it though. I think if you take out these things that focus on the transition
7 from public to private and mainly focus on the negative things at your private
8 school, and then focus on your transition to college, I think you can do it.
9 S: Yeah, I hope so.

After the student explains how it is that she has two papers to revise in a small amount of time, the tutor employs optimism. With *I think that you could do it though* (line 4) and *I think you can do it* (line 8), the tutor builds the student's confidence without denying the extensive changes that the student needs to make or the time those changes will require. In lines 4–6, as in lines 11–12 of Excerpt 2.2, the tutor again correlates effort with writing quality and states explicitly that the effort is worthwhile. Thus, in terms of motivational scaffolding, the tutor continues to provide comfort without misleading the student about the difficulty of the revising task.

Even so, a few minutes later, it seems that the student is still frustrated, as she complains that the revision will require writing a new introduction, one of her self-proclaimed weaknesses. Therefore, the tutor proposes a quite different possibility for the revision.

Excerpt 2.4

- 1 S: So I'm going to edit that whole thing out and just say I went from the guys
2 (1-2 seconds) because that's going to be so hard.
3 T: Well, how about this then? Would you rather focus it on this? [points to
4 draft] Even though this change is kind of a negative one, but she didn't say
5 it had to be positive.
6 S: Exactly.
7 T: She just said it had to change you in some way.
8 S: Okay. I'd rather do that then.
9 T: Okay. Well, then what you need to do is (1-2 seconds) the same kind of
10 thing, but it might be a little easier, but go through and take out the stuff

- 11 about the transition [to college. Yeah. And really focus on what you learned
 12 S: [to college
 13 from this transition.
 14 T: (3 seconds) So yeah, let's go find it. Where, where is it at about college?
 15 (30 seconds)

This excerpt includes the tutor's questions to the student about the paper's focus (line 3: *Well, how about this then? Would you rather focus it on this?*). Such questions indicate that the tutor is not presuming to know what the student wants to do and that the tutor is concerned that the student remain in control of her own writing and the agenda for the conference. Moreover, as she has done previously when the student complained that she would be *writing it all over tonight* (Excerpt 2.2, line 9), the tutor uses the strategy of avoiding candid disagreement, refusing to contradict the student's assessment that the revision would be *so hard*. Instead, she gives the student another option and in doing so conveys that she is trying to cooperate.

The other option the tutor has in mind is that the student focus on the negative change from the happy time at a public high school to the unhappy time at the private high school—rather than the positive change from the unhappy time at the private high school to the happy time in college. With this hedged suggestion, the tutor generates what appears to be a turning point in the conference, showing she is willing to discard the work they have done and move to what she refers to in the retrospective interview as “Plan B.” Typical for this conference, the choice of how to focus the draft belongs to the student. At the end of Excerpt 2.4, the tutor demonstrates her concern for the student by offering her help in finding the information to be deleted from the draft. Indeed, she uses the strategy of including both the tutor and the student in the activity in her use of *let's* (line 14), signaling her intent to help the student.

In the retrospective interview, the tutor says that she was willing to accept the student's rejection of her advice and move to Plan B because the student seemed frustrated. Earlier in the retrospective interview, the tutor discussed the importance of calibrating feedback according to the student's motivation. She says that when the student told her she did not have time to make the suggested revisions, “I tried to go smaller, and say, ‘Okay, if you don't want to do that, what

do you think would be the next best thing?” Rather than pushing the student to make the revisions she believed would most improve the essay, the tutor decides to focus first on lowering the student’s anxiety. The tutor’s decision may have been important in enhancing the student’s motivation to participate actively in the conference. As the tutor says in the interview, “I try to pay more attention to the text, but some students’ personalities are such that you can only work with them if you work with them.” The conference continues, with the tutor and student working on the new revision, a revision that details the loneliness and desperation of her experience in her first two years at private school.

Excerpt 2.5

- 1 T: Does that make sense? And let’s see here, [reading from draft] “This is the
2 first year at school and I cannot fit in. I felt fat and at this point in
3 S: uh-huh
4 T: my life and I felt like I could not take anything to heart. My second year,”
5 Okay. Then you transition. Then you say, “My second year at private school
6 I was considered a slut by other girls.” So here you talk about not taking
7 everything to heart, and here you’re talking about another terrible story. So
8 what’s the connection between that? (1-2 seconds) Did you start to take it
9 to heart here?
10 S: Yeah.
11 T: Okay. So what’s a transition sentence that you could use?
12 S: Hum, that towards my second year of school I started taking things to
13 T: yeah
14 S: heart.
15 T: Perfect! Yeah, write that here. That’s the kind of thing to transition between
16 those two ideas.

By this point, it seems that enough trust has been established to allow the tutor to read aloud embarrassing details from the student’s draft without stopping to show sympathy. Hearing these details does not appear to affect the student’s motivation to participate in the conference. The tutor is also able to insert specific praise for the student (lines 15–16: *Perfect! . . . That’s the kind of thing to transition between those two ideas*). The praise is particularly strong because it responds to an identifiable accomplishment, creating the transition

sentence.

As the conference winds down, the tutor continues to sympathize with the student about the difficulty of the writing task. She also uses optimism to encourage the student to continue: *Okay. So now you are feeling overwhelmed with everything that you have to do, but you'll be fine.* The conference ends with the student again complaining about the deal she cut with her instructor that allows her to revise two papers simultaneously and the enormous workload it caused:

Excerpt 2.6

- 1 T: Oh man, that's difficult.
- 2 S: It was really crazy.
- 3 T: [joking tone] Well, go hurry! Work on it. Don't waste any time.

Even at this point in the conference when the student has moved away from the draft she and the tutor were working on and is complaining more generally about all the work she has to do, the tutor uses positive politeness, specifically, by giving sympathy (line 1: *Oh man, that's difficult*) and by jokingly issuing a directive to the student (line 3: *Well, go hurry!*).

Conclusion

Motivational scaffolding strategies operationalized through politeness provide a means for identifying, analyzing, and discussing an important aspect of writing center tutoring—tutors' linguistic resources for building rapport and solidarity with students and attending to their motivation during writing center conferences. Affective connections are essential to these conversations, which, at their most successful, require high levels of cooperation among participants. Motivational scaffolding reflects tutors' care for students. When carried out via positive politeness, it can do more than save face for students. For example, praising students for specific achievements can not only point to behaviors that students should reproduce but also build students' confidence and self-regulation. Avoiding candid disagreements with students can enhance their ownership of their writing and acknowledge their primary role in agenda-setting throughout the conference. Further, by directly expressing concern and sympathy, tutors can emphasize students' importance. Because

“notice,” “attend,” and “give” strategies may in particular get lost in teachers’ classroom comments, it is important that tutors focus their full and caring attention on students, work to develop rapport and solidarity, and demonstrate their respect for them. Through reinforcing the students’ ownership, tutors also emphasize students’ responsibility for their writing.

Empirical research based on our investigation about motivational scaffolding and politeness in writing center conferences might consider the effects of these tutoring strategies on students’ and tutors’ satisfaction and conference success, however success may be defined. By recording conferences and then conducting retrospective interviews during which tutors and students are asked to recall their responses to certain comments or circumstances, we can consider the effects of motivational scaffolding as it is operationalized by politeness in a particular writing center context, with a specific tutor and student, and at a certain time in composing. We can also count how frequently tutors use motivational scaffolding strategies in writing center conferences considered satisfactory by both tutors and students. However, because, in most cases, we cannot define in-the-moment conference success except in terms of satisfaction, measuring frequency of occurrence may be misleading. It is possible that tutors can be too polite and try so hard at motivating that students will be turned off.

Further research might also consider writing center conferences with participants differing according to race, ethnicity, cultural background, and other characteristics. Even though all four participants in the two conferences excerpted here are white, American-English speakers, one of the tutors is male while the other is female. Both tutors are knowledgeable about the typical assignments and about the attitudes and quirks of instructors in first-year writing and world literature. They also demonstrate their caring for students and use many of the same politeness strategies, including mitigation, optimism, and joking. However, the tutors also show some differences. Whereas the male tutor in Example 1 helps the student develop her revision and improve her confidence by giving her examples to convince her that the first topic is better than her current one, the female tutor in Example 2 also gives the student advice, but she does

not try to persuade the student to adopt a certain topic. In fact, the student changes her topic in the middle of the conference. Along with her flexibility and her commitment to the student's control of her own writing, the tutor in Example 2 loads the conference with sympathy for the student—for the student's difficulty in revising two essays simultaneously as well as for her awful experiences at the private school. Although the different approaches used by the two tutors in these two conferences seem to lead to good outcomes for the students, in other conferences, we might find more complexity and confusion in the tutor and student dialogue. We need to be able to discuss some potential problems with attempting motivational scaffolding when the student and the tutor do not share the same cultural background.

Although this article focuses on verbal tutoring strategies, future research might consider how tutors' nonverbal strategies—for example, hand gestures, eye contact, and posture—can enhance rapport and solidarity in writing center conferences. According to Adam Kendon and Geoffrey Beattie, body posture, hand gestures, and other forms of nonverbal communication show how people feel about each other and how willingly they invite relationships. Janet Beavin Bavelas et al. identify two categories of hand gestures: topic gestures, which are representational and “depict semantic information directly related to the topic of discourse” (473), and interactive gestures, which are not representational of topics but “refer instead to some aspect of the process of conversing with another person” (473). Tutors' interactive gestures may allow tutors to reach out to students and draw them into the conversation.

Probably most important, based on this review, we can now identify a range of linguistic alternatives to inform the tutoring strategies available for use in writing center conferences, and we can describe these alternatives in our training for new tutors. Hence, we can help tutors to become more aware and make more conscious choices about what they say to students. Research has shown that without training, tutors are not likely to use strategies that attend to students' motivation (see Graesser, Person, and Magliano). The more we know about the linguistic possibilities available in writing center conferences and the more often we pass that knowledge on to tutors, the better we can serve students.

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