

## Sample Reading Response

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Our recent discussion of Benesh's and Santos' essays on the place of ideology in the L2 classroom coincided with my reading of Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children* for my Minority Rhetorics seminar. Although the texts discuss different populations, I see shared themes in both. Primarily, I see the conflicts about whether it is more important to teach minority and international students the skills they need to succeed in the academy and/or the dominant culture of the US and the belief that the writing classroom—for any kind of student—is a locus for empowerment and change. Although I admire Benesh's adherence to a strict ideological approach in her classroom, it makes me wonder if she is, in fact, merely privileging her own ideology over the needs of her students.

Delpit argues that the “progressive liberals” adherence to the process model of writing—and the invention, discovery, expressivism, and voice inherent within such a pedagogy—merely reconstructs the disparate power structure of life outside of the classroom, and does a painful disservice for students who need to learn the skills to function within that structure. Although she avoids a narrow binary of skills v. process, her argument seems to reflect the L2 debate of the skills-based, EAP or ESP classroom v. an ideological classroom, which focus more on critical thinking skills than writing skills.

So how does all of this play out when we work with students? My greatest exposure to L2 writers has been through the writing lab, and most often, they come for help with grammar. The Writing Lab, like most writing centers in the U.S., however, maintains a policy of “no proofreading,” which does not allow us to always serve our ESL students as they wish. The reason for our no proofreading policy is rooted in our pedagogical belief that writing is a process, which has been the basis for our fundamental purpose: teach writers to write better, don't just fix papers. Such a philosophy allows writing centers to position themselves in the university as more than just a service or a “fix-it shop,” and instead, writing centers are portrayed as sites of intellectual scholarship.

All of this is well and good, but what happens when a student comes to the writing lab wanting us to check their grammar? Most often, tutors are placed in the awkward position of telling students that we can't do what they want. The inexperienced tutor will then focus on the paper's higher order concerns as they are trained to do, whether or not the writer wants feedback on that element of her paper. A more experienced tutor might offer to go through the first paragraph of the writer's paper to try to find error patterns that the L2 student can look for in her writing on her own. The experienced tutor's response is in line with the writing lab's philosophy and pedagogy, but in my experience, I usually end the tutorial feeling that the student's goals were not met, and I somehow withheld information that could be valuable to them—information that they wanted.

The lab's policy implies that the lab and its tutors knows better what the students need than the students themselves know, which is similar to Benesh's approach to her ideological, empowering classroom. In our effort to establish our own institutional validity through adherence to the process approach, I often fear that the writing lab has done a disservice to L2 students. Our current policy of looking for error patterns does attempt to help students immediately and, at the same time, teach them the skills they need for writing success over the long term. But when faced with an L2 student who really just wants to make sure her grammar is correct, it's hard to tell her “we don't do that here,” when, in actuality, I am capable of doing exactly what she wishes.