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Communicating Ethos at the Center

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Tutoring center staff must communicate their credibility to effectively assist students. Ethos is a term used within the discipline of rhetoric to describe the process of demonstrating one's good character and credibility. Based on the works of Aristotle, ethos is one of three devices or modes of argumentative support. *Ethos* refers to the character of the speaker, whereas *logos* concerns effective reasoning, and *pathos* relates to the use of emotional appeals. Although they are often considered separately, appeals to ethos, logos, and pathos may function collectively to persuade an audience. While a speaker's prior reputation influences audience perceptions, the concept of ethos fundamentally concerns how speakers demonstrate their character through discourse. Like logos and pathos, ethos is constructed rhetorically through the process of interaction (Baumlin, 1994). Ethos is a matter of practical importance for tutors; in order to believe that a visit to a tutoring center is valuable, students need to believe that tutors are knowledgeable and trustworthy. In this chapter we describe different dimensions of ethos and explain how they might apply to peer tutoring centers, particularly for those that employ undergraduate tutors.

Communicating Wisdom

Smith (2004) identifies wisdom and goodwill as two dimensions of ethos that have particular salience to peer tutoring practice. Wisdom is a multifaceted dimension of ethos that involves both specific knowledge of the subject under consideration and practical wisdom, or the "capacity to apply a rational principle to practical situations that call for a choice about actions" (p. 11). As Smith explains, wisdom is grounded in "knowledge based on the speakers' experience that guides good practice . . . in a contingent and diverse world" (p. 11). Effective tutors should convey specific knowledge about the subject matter under

discussion and they must demonstrate tutoring ability by providing appropriate feedback and advice to students.

Tutor education and training can provide an important foundation to develop skills necessary to communicate wisdom.¹ Practical wisdom in tutoring situations calls for adaptive communication that is sensitive to the variety of relationships that structure student learning, including relationships between tutors and tutees, faculty and students, and student groups outside the classroom. Furthermore, tutors should be able to offer guidance and feedback that enables tutees to develop their own critical thinking capacities and skills. Effective tutors also exercise practical wisdom as they ask questions that help them determine what aspect of their assignments tutees understand, how tutees approach their own learning process, and what their instructors expect of them. When students visit a tutoring center to fulfill an instructor's requirement, it is particularly important that tutors assess the tutee's own goals and investments in their learning process. As Locke and Latham (2002) argue, students with specific goals pay more attention to and learn more from educational activities. Assessing students' goals and investments in the outcome of the session requires careful audience adaptation, which is a point that we will discuss in the following passages.

Communicating Goodwill

Goodwill is another dimension of ethos. Smith (2004) defines goodwill as the demonstration of offering advice without the expectation of reciprocation from the audience. In other words, goodwill communicates that the tutor has the tutee's best interests at heart. Hyde's (2004) definition of ethos in terms of a dwelling place, or radical openness to the other, elaborates on the philosophical dimensions of goodwill. The concept of unconditional positive regard addresses this principle from a psychological perspective. Regarding therapists' relationships with their clients, Rogers (1992) defines unconditional positive regard as "caring for the client, but not in a possessive way or in such a way as to simply satisfy the therapists' own needs" (p. 829). Cuny, Wilde, and Stephenson (2012) argue that peer tutors must convey unconditional positive regard to establish an effective tutoring relationship with tutees. They suggest that nonverbal communication practices including "maintaining comfortable eye contact and pleasing facial expressions" increase unconditional positive regard (p. 253). These authors also recommend that tutors refer to tutees specifically by name and start and end their consultations on time (p. 253).

As the above discussion suggests, the process of constructing the tutor's credibility is grounded in the process of interaction between tutors and tutees. Since determining the audience's beliefs is the key to building credibility, ethos develops not only through what the speaker says but also through the relationship between the speaker and the audience as well. Consequently, ethos is grounded in identification, or the process of establishing common ground between the tutor and tutee. As Burke (1969) observes, "you persuade a man [*sic*] only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, [and] idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (p. 55). These communication strategies provide the "'signs' of character needed to earn the audience's good will" (pp. 55–56). Likewise, tutees may be convinced of a tutor's advice only when they believe that

the tutors understand and identify with them. Establishing identification occurs in the process of building positive relationships between tutors and tutees during a tutoring session.

Our desire to build identification with students visiting our peer tutoring center informs the language we use to describe staff and visiting students. We have decided to adopt the more traditional model of a "tutor-tutee" relationship rather than the corporate language describing one-to-one education in terms of "consultant-client" communication. In the process of making this decision, staff members commented that the language of "consultants" and "clients" implicitly suggested a hierarchical relationship between the educator and the student. They reasoned that "consultants" refer to specialists who provide their expertise for a fee to "clients." Alternatively, the labels of tutors and tutees foregrounded their mission of helping their peers through the process of interaction and the mutual exchange of ideas. Centers that use the language of consultant-client relationships may certainly be committed to educational development and student engagement. Our own decision should not imply strict rules or guidelines for determining language strategies used to establish ethos in tutoring centers; rather, these strategies require practical judgment that is rooted in tutors' and center directors' adaptation to the contextual factors that shape their interactions with students and others involved with the center. This approach draws upon the assumption of communication accommodation theory that communication is effective when interactants accommodate their communication behavior "to the interlocutor's perceived individual and group preferences" (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004, p. 136). The language a peer tutoring center uses to describe its mission and staff roles should respond to the needs and perspectives of its particular campus community.

Our effort to identify with students visiting the center also guides tutors' decisions to not enforce a specific staff dress code. Staff members typically wear clothing that they would wear to class in an effort to communicate approachability and to reinforce their peer relationship with tutees. Adapting nonverbal communication style including dress to mirror the tutor's behavior to the tutee's behavior may be useful to create and maintain positive personal and social identities in the tutoring center (Gallois et al., 2004). However, some of our newer tutors sometimes prefer to wear business-casual attire to communicate their credibility. Some sophomores comment that wearing slacks or skirts instead of jeans conveys their authority to juniors and seniors who might otherwise question the wisdom of their advice. These students echo findings that employees often select attire to manage impressions and self-perceptions in the workplace (Peluchette, Karl, & Rust, 2006). However, there are no universal standards for appropriate professional attire because different forms of dress convey different professional characteristics that are important to particular workplace situations (Peluchette et al., 2006). Although dressing professionally to increase ethos for younger tutors may make sense in some cases, in general we believe that efforts to identify with tutees through less formal attire has enabled our tutors to build rapport with students.

Generative Ethos

Just as goodwill is established through the interactions between tutors and tutees, tutors' wisdom is communicated in the context of the tutoring session. Corder (1994) suggests

that knowledge itself is not universal and does not exist somewhere a priori outside of human experience. "When we speak, we stand somewhere, and our standing place makes both known and silent claims upon us. We make truth, if at all, out of what is incomplete, or partial" (p. 128). Corder thus argues for a "generative" model of ethos that is constructed when a speaker "gives the hearer free room to live in" (p. 128).

For tutors, attention to generative ethos means recognizing that their own advice is drawn from knowledge that is a product of their particular location within the university. In other words, tutors' understandings of what constitutes appropriate communication and academic excellence depend upon their prior experiences and education. No one single strategy will work equally for each tutor, nor will one particular strategy be equally appropriate for every tutee. Training sessions and staff meetings provide an opportunity for tutoring staff to share different ideas for approaching specific tutoring situations with the understanding that each session will require some degree of adaptation and flexibility.

To some extent, Corder's (1994) interest in the position of the speaker parallels standpoint epistemology's attention to the ways in which knowledge is structured by one's social location. As Jarratt and Reynolds (1994) argue, ethos is informed by our position within asymmetrical social structures such as race, class, and gender from which we speak. They conclude that "the ideas of place, position, and standpoint in feminist theory offer us a way of reconceiving ethos as an ethical political tool—as a way of claiming and taking responsibility for our positions in the world, for the ways we see, for the places from which we speak" (p. 52). Tutors and tutees are positioned "within networks of gender, class, and power" that structure the university (p. 57). Thus, peer tutors should recognize that their own educational experiences may differ from other tutors and tutees depending on their age, race, class, and gender. This information should guide tutors in providing responsive feedback without showing partiality to any particular tutees.

Another aspect of generative ethos is the mutually constitutive nature of knowledge construction that emerges through persuasive communication. Corder (1994) writes that, "generative language seeks to . . . stretch words out beyond our private universe" (p. 128). When tutors and tutees exchange ideas, both speakers and audiences' worldviews expand. Within the tutoring context, both tutors and tutees should expect to have their perspectives changed through their interactions during a tutoring session. Generative ethos is critical to the tutor's role as a facilitator of student learning. Rather than provide answers to questions, a tutor's job is to provide feedback that helps tutees develop new insights and arrive at their own conclusions.

This perspective on ethos aligns with Cuny et al.'s (2012) emphasis on empathetic listening as a critical tutoring practice. Empathetic listening requires the tutor to understand the tutee's point of view. Drawing from the work of Stewart and Logan (2002), Cuny et al. describe focusing, encouraging, and reflecting as three competencies of empathetic listening. Focusing refers to the full attention that tutors should give to tutees. Encouraging involves motivating tutees to elaborate on their ideas by asking them "clarifying and open questions" (p. 252). Reflecting refers to the tutor's ability to articulate and respond to the tutee's perspective through "paraphrasing the speakers' words or adding an example that the peer tutor believes illustrates the speakers' perspective" (p. 252). Because ethos construction is a process by which both the tutor and tutee's worldviews are transformed,

effective tutors should not only convey openness to their tutees' communication and goals, but also reflect on their own experiences and draw lessons from them. Tutors should expect that their own communication and advice will develop over time as they learn from their experiences.

Communicating Ethos during the Tutoring Session

In the following discussion, we elaborate on specific strategies that tutors at our particular center use to build ethos during tutoring sessions. Because ethos construction depends on effective audience adaptation, we provide a brief discussion of our student body to contextualize our strategies. Our institution is a mid-sized private college located in a large city in the Midwest. Although 2.8% of the student body is international, the majority of our students grew up in the Midwestern United States, 59% of our students are female, and 82% are White. Our peer-to-peer tutoring center is staffed exclusively by undergraduate students who are representative of the demographics of the larger student body (although approximately 50% of our staff is female). Our recommendations represent those strategies that we have found useful on a consistent basis. However, we also recognize that these strategies also reflect the social norms and expectations of the demographics of our student body.

Constructing Ethos during Session Introductions

The first minutes of interaction during an initial tutoring session are crucial to establish ethos because this communication sets the tone for the rest of the session. Our tutors recommend a couple of strategies to generate goodwill early during sessions. Their first recommendation is to build rapport. Tutors could begin their sessions by engaging tutees in brief conversations about subjects unrelated to their reason for visiting the center such as weather conditions, events on campus, other projects they are working on, or semester schedules. Tutors could also observe points of commonality between themselves and the tutees. These conversations often create a welcoming environment and ease potential discomfort tutees might have in seeking advice and help from a peer for the first time.

It is often helpful to inquire about how students are feeling when they visit the center because this also helps tutors determine how to approach the rest of the session. For instance, if a student reports feeling apprehensive about the assignment, tutors could provide strategies for approaching the assignment that may help to reduce this anxiety. However, sometimes students who appear apprehensive or disengaged express concern about issues unrelated to the session, or report feeling physically unwell. In these instances, tutors could offer strategies to help them focus or, in some cases, recommend rescheduling the session.

Once tutors believe that they have established rapport, they could seek information about the tutee's reasons for visiting the center and ask questions to discern the tutee's attitude toward the visit. In order to respond empathetically to students' concerns, tutors might find it helpful to start by having a conversation about what tutees want to accomplish. Likewise, tutors could ask students to identify aspects of their assignment they feel

confident about and aspects of their assignment that they would like to refine or develop further. Tutors should discuss the assignment with the tutees to determine a primary goal for the tutoring session.

From there, tutors should invite the tutee to work together to build an agenda and allocate time for each item that builds toward that goal. When an agenda is set, "the phases of the tutoring session are made explicit so that there's a better chance for mutual input and understanding" (Macauley, 2005, p. 3). The tutor should refer back to the agenda often to properly allocate time and stay on task. It is often the case that the tutor is not able to address all of the points identified on the agenda. When this happens, tutors could encourage tutees to continue working on the agenda on their own. As Macauley (2005) notes, an agenda is almost more important for a tutor's success after a session has ended because it coaches the student to learn to work successfully without the tutor's help.

By asking tutees to articulate their own goals, tutors help students develop their academic voice. In order to develop their communication skills and intellectual abilities, tutees should take ownership of their learning process. Providing an opportunity for tutees to discuss their own investments in their learning gives their own "room to live" (Corder, 1994, p. 128). By asking tutees what they want to accomplish, tutors indicate that their role is not to provide instruction but to explore how students might expand on or revise their own skills and understanding.

Tutees' explanations could also provide useful information for tutors to respond to in order to effectively communicate practical and generative wisdom. Students' comments about their own goals helps tutors determine how much effort to put into encouraging tutees' participation during the session. A students' goal orientation influences the amount of time and the quality of their engagement in learning (Ames, 1992; Butler, 1987). Students primarily concerned about mastering material tend to be more involved in the learning process than students who are most interested in receiving high grades (Butler, 1987). Thus, students who express interest in learning may be more involved in the session than students who express an interest in getting a better grade on an assignment. In these instances, a tutor might anticipate spending more time providing constructive criticism with them.

Frequently, students' first visits to a tutoring center have been required by a faculty member to complete a class assignment. Although most students who visit our center arrive to sessions with positive attitudes, students who are required to visit the center sometimes seem reluctant or disengaged from the process. Students provide a variety of reasons for being disengaged. For example, some students do not believe that their school work requires any additional development or improvement, some students dislike or are apprehensive about the subject matter, and some students dislike the instructor who gave the assignment. In these circumstances, we recommend several strategies to elicit tutees' involvement. Tutors could encourage them to discuss their feelings of discomfort and then invite them to elaborate on the content of the assignment itself. By allowing tutees a moment to vent their frustrations, tutors establish their role as empathetic listeners.²

After a tutee has had a moment to describe his or her concerns, tutors could respond by expressing their interest in assisting the tutee and in providing a positive learning experience. For instance, one tutor worked with a student who believed that her instructor's

teaching style was the primary impediment to her receiving a good grade in the class. This tutor responded by suggesting, "Let's figure out how you can demonstrate responsiveness to what your professor had to say." Another tutor once worked with a student who initially suggested that the tutor would not be able to offer any useful feedback. This tutor responded by sharing an anecdote about a previous session in which a reluctant student gained new insight about an assignment. By recounting previous positive interactions with tutees, the tutor communicated wisdom and goodwill toward the tutoring process and prompted the tutee to anticipate a productive experience.

Another useful approach is to ask students to explain what he or she thinks is meaningful or interesting about the assignment topic. If tutees have chosen the topic for a written or speech assignment, asking them about their decision can generate enthusiasm toward the session. Having an informal conversation about the assignment topic helps students realize their passion for a subject and encourages them to improve upon the assignment. If conversations about the merits of students' topics fail to elicit responsiveness from the tutees, tutors could appeal to more instrumental motives for student participation in the session such as getting a good grade or completing the course. One tutor frequently appeals to students' goals outside of the classroom when they express disdain for their instructors by discussing how completing the assignment might help them meet their professional goals after graduation.

Constructing Ethos while Providing Feedback

The process of providing appropriate feedback during a tutoring session also involves the tutor's demonstration of goodwill and wisdom. To maintain goodwill, tutors should strive to provide feedback that is responsive to the tutee's own goals. They should also offer feedback that demonstrates specific knowledge about tutees' assignments. Since many instructors require students to visit the center as part of their coursework, tutors could familiarize themselves with those assignments in advance. During the session, many tutors at our center recall the assignment criteria from memory; if they are uncertain, they refer to copies of instructor's assignments that are kept on file (even though we would prefer that students take ownership of their education by bringing copies of their assignments to the sessions themselves). By communicating specific understanding of the assignment criteria, tutors demonstrate their competence in the subject matter. Referencing assignment criteria also promotes generative ethos because it sometimes encourages tutees to take a more active interest in their sessions.

Before providing feedback to students, tutors should ask tutees to explain any specific feedback they might have received from their instructors. Instructors teaching the same or similar courses sometimes evaluate assignments using different criteria or by weighing criteria differently, so learning about the feedback that tutees have received from their instructors enables tutors to provide responsive and adaptive comments and suggestions. They also help tutors avoid undermining or contradicting the instructor, which is necessary to maintain the center's credibility with both the instructor and the tutee after the session has ended.

In order to provide encouraging feedback, tutors recommend what they refer to as a "critique sandwich." During a session, a tutor could initially respond to the tutee's work by identifying the tutee's strengths. This approach communicates positive regard for the tutee and could build the tutee's morale. Then, the tutor could point to aspects of the tutees' work that could use improvement. The types of suggestions for improvement could vary depending on the assignment and the tutee's expressed goals for the session. Tutors could conclude the feedback session with a reminder of the strengths of the assignment in order to generate the tutee's enthusiasm for the remaining work to be done.

Finally, to maintain rapport and identification, tutors could offer feedback that reflects the tutee's level of enthusiasm and communication style. If students demonstrate an interest in having a longer conversation about their performance or want to bounce some ideas around during the session, tutors could ask more probing questions about their ideas; however, if a student expresses a desire to leave the session early, they could choose not to pursue further conversation. Letting tutees direct the length of the session promotes generative ethos by reinforcing the importance of the tutees' own goals and investments in learning outcomes.

Constructing Ethos during Session Conclusions

Several communication strategies to end a session can reinforce tutors' wisdom and goodwill toward students. We believe these strategies contribute to students' decisions to make repeat visits to the tutoring center. Although students' first visits to our center are usually required by an instructor, many students voluntarily return for follow-up appointments. Some students also return to the center in following semesters. Tutors should announce the end of a session by asking tutees what they learned from the session and what they plan to work on later as a result. We recommend that tutors ask tutees what they learned, rather than remind them of what they worked on for a variety of reasons. Asking tutees to summarize what they learned reinforces the center's identity as a space for collaborative learning. By asking tutees to assess their own progress, tutors emphasize the tutee's ownership over the knowledge generated during the session. Finally, tutees' responses can help tutors assess their own effectiveness in communicating advice. If tutees are unclear about what they learned from the session, tutors could then summarize two or three central recommendations for improvement.

Before students leave the center, tutors could remind tutees of the days that they work in the center and encourage them to schedule follow-up appointments for additional feedback. They could also remind tutees of their strengths and the feasibility of meeting their goals. Tutors could also mirror the rapport-building behaviors that they used to introduce the session. For example, tutors could end the session with a brief reference to the small talk that opened the session in order to demonstrate an interest in the student's general well-being and happiness. Such rapport-building reestablishes identification between the tutor and tutee and reinforces the tutor's unconditional positive regard for the tutee.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by asserting that tutors must communicate their ethos to effectively fulfill their roles. As the rest of the chapter elaborated, a tutor's ethos is constructed *through* a tutor's interaction with a tutee. Communicating ethos is not something a tutor does in addition to other tutoring activities during a session but is inextricable from the process of listening to and providing feedback to tutees. Wisdom is communicated via tutors' abilities to demonstrate familiarity with the subject matter at hand and through their adaptation to the particular circumstances of the session. Goodwill is established through tutors' expressed interests in helping students' achieve their own goals. Because no two students share the exact same goals and perspectives, no single approach to establishing ethos will be fitting for every tutoring session. Our emphasis on generative ethos foregrounds a collaborative model of education in which people generate greater awareness of themselves and their social worlds through deliberation with others. Corder (1994) notes that generative ethos brings a listener "into a world that he or she can live in, that has living space and time" (p. 128). For Corder, a speaker's generative ethos issues to audiences "an invitation to a commodious universe" (p. 128). By giving tutees a room to live in, tutors expand their own perspectives. Generative ethos creates environments in which tutors and tutees alike might identify solutions to their academic puzzles and recognize underexplored resources to face their challenges.

Notes

1. See Troillett and McIntyre (2012) for a discussion of best practices recommended for tutor training and training assessment.
2. However, we do not want to suggest that we encourage tutors to mirror students' dissatisfaction with a particular instructor or assignment.

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