Southern California Writing Centers Association Tutor Conference
Equity at the Center

I attended 4 sessions and the keynote talk.

1) Interdisciplinary Collaboration at the Center

This was a presentation by the tutors at a relatively small tutoring center at the University of LaVerne where STEM and writing tutor cohorts had "merged"--mainly for training of peer tutors and interdisciplinary collaboration. The stated tutoring philosophy behind their practice emphasized scaffolding, metacognition, and holistic learning. They identified success in collaboration that included the benefits of perspectives from other disciplines, stronger sense of equity (in this context equity was in providing similar experience for student tutors in different disciplines), an expanded and strengthened sense of community of co-workers. The writing cohort made up the majority of tutors in their center, but the collaboration focused more on tutoring as practice than content and writing as process not discipline.

2) Borrowing from the Field of Counseling: A Proposal for Group Tutoring

This session presented by a grad student in Psychology started with the idea that group therapy can be seen as a sort of model for group tutoring, a model which offers ways to maximize resources and increase student writers' access to benefits of one-on-one type tutoring. This program at Loyola Marymount University provides tutor-facilitated writing workshops in classes. Topics of workshops addressed area of need determined by university writing assessments of first year and seniors, as well as topics requested by faculty. This group work model was related to embedded and SI. The presenter emphasized that group tutoring focus is on facilitating thinking rather than teaching particular content, and that faculty play a role in encouraging students to participate in group sessions. The following are group facilitation skills that we discussed:

- Establish safety and trust
- Instillation of hope
- Universality (demonstrates connection, commonality of issues/concerns/experience)
- Create inclusive environment
- Clear communication
- Encourage participation (group work value is in the contribution of individual members)
- Empathy
- Active listening (facilitation is more about listening than having preset agenda)
- Questioning (to promote thinking and discovery)
- Goal setting (an important first step in practice of this model)
- Evaluating
- Linking (helping participants see/make connections)
- Suggesting
- Blocking (managing distracting or non-productive behavior)

Bad at Writing: Shifting the Fixed Mindset

This session was on a growth mindset approach to tutoring that focuses on process rather than product. The session was organized as a discussion circle and we talked about ways to bring the growth mindset into tutoring that includes praising student effort, emphasizing the power of "yet" and that a student is developing (not fixed). Suggested framing feedback as something to learn from, and avoiding a focus on grade, talent, or intelligence. Also suggested encouraging

students to save work to refer to later as a way to help them recognize their own growth over time.

Deconstructing Tutoring Practices Within Writing Centers: Creating Inclusive Tutoring Environments

This session turned out to be a discussion centered on reasons for and benefits of a merging of English Language Support Center with the Writing Center at CSU San Bernandino. It emphasized a translingual approach that recognizes the "difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening."

Keynote: "Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the Writing Center: Inclusive Tutoring Practices"

The keynote discussed how to make writing centers a welcoming space and normalizing diversity. A nice quote to reflect this: "Diversity is made of human difference, one that becomes a problem only when the environment or context treat it as such." UDL builds in options for accessibility rather than casting accessibility as accommodation. The term "academic hospitality" was used to describe a way of approaching students with questions such as "what works for you?" and "what do I need to know about you?" The speaker also suggested that it is possible to collaborate and co-create learning experience, and a shift from "Does that make sense?" type of question to starting with "Do you want to talk about...?" or "What do you know about...?" as way to let students have authority in the focus of a session and acknowledge/build on existing capability and knowledge. She stressed creating BRAVE spaces!