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What is a Tutor?

An Essay on Authorship, Writing Education, and Native Speakerism

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This paper discusses the challenges and possibilities within the tutorial system at Hitotsubashi University, first by examining the interrelated issues of authorship, writing education, and native speakerism, and then by identifying potential improvements based on tutors' experiences. In particular, it suggests co-constructing a shared understanding of "tutoring," creating a place of support for the tutor community, and expanding the tutorial system to include multilingual and mutual services.

Academic writing is an empirically collaborative activity, but one must identify particular authors for publication. In the social sciences, teachers, colleagues, and proofreaders are very rarely included as authors, even though these contributors are essential to the writing process and product. However, the boundaries of what counts as authorship vary depending on region, age, and discipline. For example, university writing centers in North America have emphasized individual authorship, and by training tutors, they have refined a system that fosters "independent" writers. In contrast, Hitotsubashi University's tutorial system has been located within the realm of "international exchange," and the conception of "tutoring" and its methods have not been articulated and shared. In this context, tutors themselves confront dilemmas, most notably "the violation of authorship." Hitotsubashi's tutorial system assumes that "Japanese" student-tutors will merely "native-check" the Japanese-language writing of "foreign" students. As such, these tutors are not supposed to engage with the content of tutees' texts or provide tutees with Japanese language education; instead, they are expected to give tutees supplementary and friendly support by simply "correcting" the language. Yet in practice, it is far from obvious what the boundaries actually are between content and form, ideas and their expression, and writing education and language education.

Because academic authors are shaped by the recognition of other members of academia, inquiring into what an author is is inseparable from inquiring into how one conceptualizes personhood, which itself is also shaped through relations. Rethinking the role of the tutor, who is closely related to the author, thus becomes a question that implicates a core task of the university: how to imagine and realize an academic community.