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Cultivating Potentials for Social Change Through Writing Center Talk

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This week I invite you to join in a discussion I'm facilitating through the Madison Area Writing Center Colloquium. On Tuesday, April 6th (5:30-7:00pm, Helen C. White Hall 6176, the University of Wisconsin-Madison), I'll be facilitating a workshop titled "Cultivating Potentials for Social Change," and throughout the week, I'll be responding to and inviting readers to discuss these questions:

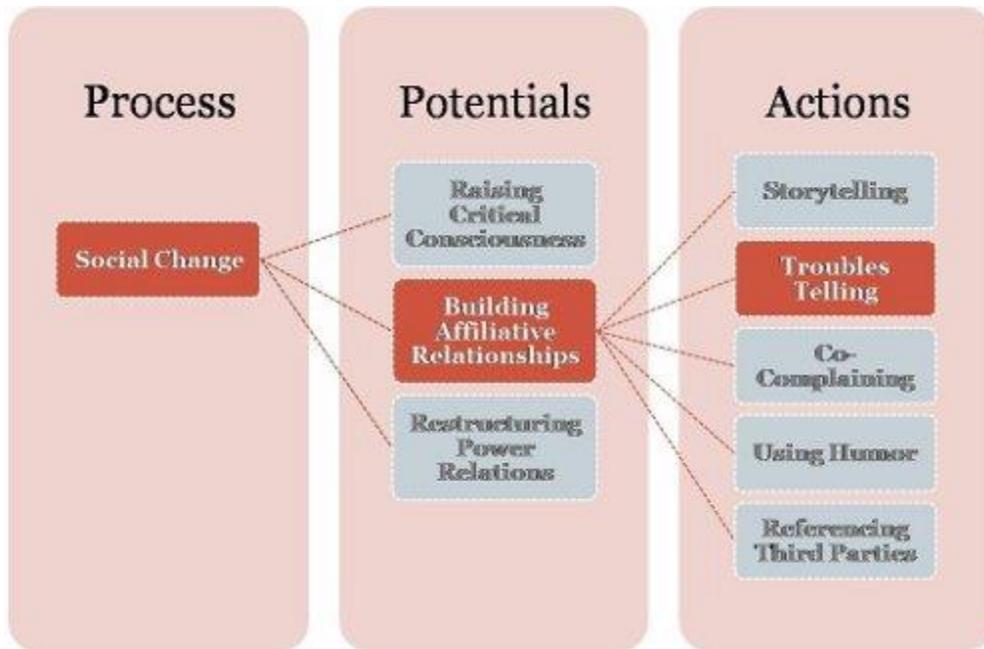
- ▶ Why do you value writing center conferencing, and what do you see as exciting possibilities in this talk?
- ▶ What might "social change" look like in a writing conference?
- ▶ Have you, for example, through writing center conferencing, built a cross-racial relationship, come to better understand and redistribute power, come to think more critically or with commitment about issues of injustice and equity?

My research is aimed at identifying and documenting empirically social change *as a process*, occurring *in the moment, through talk* about writing. Based on close analysis of interaction, I suggest strategies for cultivating social change in our teaching and tutor education.

Although social change is often thought of in terms of large-group efforts and wide-reaching social movements, I see that there is potential for making change through sustained and deeply intimate interactions as writers work together over time. This process of social change arises in talk about writing, which invites views into writers' everyday circumstances and allows writers to practice more equitable ways of interacting with others.

In this sense, writing collaborations can be understood as occasions with the capacity for social change, for tapping into at least three potentials: (1) raising critical consciousness, (2) restructuring power relations, and (3) developing affiliative relationships—all of which emerge as writers identify with and come to understand others' lived experiences and material realities.

For the colloquium, I address the potential of building affiliative relationships, which may arise when writers develop close, collaborative relationships, if not friendships, through storytelling and caring for each other over time. To hone in even further, I describe just one way I see writers enacting this potential, and that's through what conversation analyst Gail Jefferson calls "troubles talk."



At the colloquium, I'll present a case study of just one tutor and writer's relationship to illustrate how I'm analyzing hours of videotaped writing conferences I've recorded in three sites: our campus writing center, a satellite of the writing center housed in the Multicultural Student Center (MSC), and the Community Writing Assistance (CWA) program in the public library.

Through this blog, I hope we can continue the conversation started during the colloquium, and if you're in Madison and are interested in attending a future colloquium, consider coming to the next scheduled event: **Tuesday, April 27, 2010, 6:00-7:30pm, Sarah Johnson, Field Trip to the New Madison Area Technical College Writing Center.**

You can also learn more about the Madison Area Writing Center Colloquium online through the web page: <http://writing.wisc.edu/colloquium.html>

I look forward to continuing the conversation and hope to see you at a future colloquium event!

Beth Godbee
Writing Center Instructor