



Prioritizing the Magical: Reflections on a Sustained Tutor-Tutee Relationship

by Sarah Fischer

“Wow, you are like magic.”

While this is the kind of positive feedback any of us would love to hear as a writing tutor, when L*, a graduate visual arts student I had been working with all semester, said these words to me, I felt especially joyful.

L and I had nearly ten appointments together this semester. When we began working together in January, she was extremely concerned with the grammar of her prose, especially since English is not her native language. As the sessions progressed, however, and we moved away from grammatical concerns and took on a content-oriented approach, I was able to see her semester-long projects develop, her ideas coalesce into (literal) art, and—most importantly—her confidence flourish.

During one of our final tutorials together near the end of the semester, L and I were working on a particularly challenging sentence for the both of us. She and I knew the wording felt off, but neither of us felt immediately confident about how

to fix it. Adopting one of the popular strategies from the WTS Spring Retreat, I asked her to verbally tell me what she was trying to say. As she spoke, I directly transcribed her words onto paper—refraining from changing the construction. Then, I read them back to her, and she whispered, “Wow, you are like magic.” Though I was initially proud of myself, I quickly responded by reminding L that these words were exactly what she told me and that I merely wrote them down for her. After hearing this, L paused, looked down at her paper, and smiled a soft but accomplished smile. She and I were both proud of how far she’d come.

While reminding L that the magic belonged not to me but to her might seem like a small act, I believe the potential effects of it are immense. Through her appointments at WTS, L learned that her words have value, and by extension, she learned that she has value. This magical agential empowerment has the capacity

to transfer out beyond WTS and beyond the university. L might now recognize herself as the important, valuable, and magical person that she has always been – even before she came to WTS in January. At the end of our last session together, L confidently invited me to her end-of-the-year art showcase where she will display her art and the value she has learned to find in herself and her work.

Though tensions often abound with tutees between what they think we do and what we actually do, between what they want to work on and what we want to work on, between their words and ours, I believe there is transferable power in honoring the students’ agency—power with the potential to help students navigate their lives as empowered and magical writers, thinkers, makers, dreamers, and doers.

**Name shortened for student privacy.*