"*Some Tutorials Were Only Scarily*"
Students' Perceptions of Teacher-Learner Conferences Within a Japanese University ELP Program

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In the English Language Program (ELP) at International Christian University (ICU), teacher-learner conferences called "tutorials" for reading and writing classes are an important part of the current ELP curriculum. Tutorial hours are built into instructors' schedules and the average student attends 16 to 18 conferences of approximately 15 minutes each during the first year. This paper reports the results of a recent survey conducted for the purpose of evaluating and improving the effectiveness of the tutorial system at ICU. Responses were received from 81 students and more than 90% of respondents indicated they felt tutorials were useful for improving their reading and writing skills. However, at the same time, many issues emerged as well, including 1) the need to explain tutorial systems and policies to students more effectively, 2) the need to reduce student anxiety toward tutorials, possibly by flexibly using group tutorials and Japanese language in some cases, and 3) the need to improve the integration of tutorials into the long-term development of students as autonomous life-long readers and writers. Based on an analysis of the survey results, some ideas for improving the effectiveness of teacher-learner conferences at ICU and other college ELP programs are proposed.

Today, individual or small-group conferencing has become an important part of both writing and reading instruction in many learning contexts. In primary and secondary schools in the United States, for example, a "workshop" type instruction method that extensively utilizes teacher-learner conferences has been gaining acceptance as a way for teaching for both reading and writing skills (Anderson, 2000; Atwell, 1998; Graves, 2003; Rich, 2009; Serravallo & Goldberg, 2007). At the university level, individual instruction of writing through tutoring in writing centers has become commonplace, and has been the subject of several research reports documenting how interaction between tutors and writers can lead to effective writing skill improvement (Bardine, Bardine & Deegan, 2000; Thonus, 2004; Williams, 2004).

Harris, founder of the writing center at Purdue University, defines conferences as "opportunities for highly productive dialogues between writers and teacher-readers" and argues they "should be an integral part of teaching writing" (1986, p. 3) based on the following potential benefits:
1) improved writing by students due to personalized, scaffolded instruction,
2) time saved by the instructor for writing extensive feedback comments,
3) better quality and comprehension of feedback when explained face-to-face,

4) a transformation of the teacher from an authority figure to a personal collaborator, and

5) facilitation of critical thinking skill development through the dialectic between instructor and writer.

The benefits of conferencing mentioned above have been recognized and built into the English Language Program (ELP) at International Christian University (ICU) in the form of individual teacher-learner conferences known as "tutorials" for reading and writing classes for several decades.

As set out in the *ELP Staff Handbook*, tutorials are a required component of the three core courses of the ELP. For example, in the Academic Reading and Writing course (ARW) for first year students, which meets for three 70 minute class periods per week, the instructor is required to schedule the equivalent of two periods (140 minutes) per week outside of class time to meet with students individually (p. 24). Since each class typically has 20 students, this allows the instructor to potentially have a 10 to 15 minute tutorial with each student every two weeks. In the Reading and Content Analysis course (RCA) for first year students and the Theme Writing course (TW) for second year students, which meet for two periods per week, the instructor must schedule one additional period for tutorials (p.10, p. 32). These tutorial hours are built into ELP instructors' schedules by contract and are advertised to potential students as a unique part of the ELP curriculum where individualized instruction (*kojin shidou*) is provided as part of ICU's commitment to a highly personalized liberal arts education.

The purpose of tutorials is explained to students in ARW and RCA course descriptions of the *The ELP Student Handbook*, which states "Tutorial periods are scheduled to give you time to talk individually with your ARW/RCA teacher about specific problems or questions you have about your writing assignments and what you have written" (pp. 6-7). In addition, students are given a number of "points to remember" regarding tutorials in a booklet titled *The Student Guide to Writing in the ELP* (p. 7). These include points such as how "teachers may have different procedures for arranging and conducting conferences," and advice that students should "not come to the conference expecting to sit and listen," and should bring all necessary materials and prepare specific questions in advance and arrive on time.

As pointed out by Nicosia and Stein (1996) as well as Edwards and Miyajima (2004) in their examinations of the tutorial system at ICU, there are few specific rules besides the guidelines mentioned above, and tutorials are held by instructors in a variety of ways as the instructor sees fit to meet the needs and schedules of the students. To list just a few of the variations, some instructors make tutorial attendance mandatory, while others see them as the students' choice. Some instructors require students to come in groups, while other instructors prefer to conduct individual tutorials. Some instructors see tutorials mainly as an opportunity for writing or reading instruction, while others are also open to discussing personal issues if the student has that need. Some allow students to speak in Japanese, while others do not. Different instructors may have different beliefs about the purpose of tutorials and what ought to be achieved within those 10 to 15 minutes, and more discussion seems needed within the ELP as to what beliefs and practices can lead to the most effective use of this valuable individualized instruction time.

Thus, for the purpose of evaluating, reflecting on, and improving the effectiveness of the tutorial system at ICU, this paper reports the results obtained from a questionnaire and a series of interviews asking second year students about their tutorial experiences in their first year of the ELP. The following research questions guided our investigation:

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1. What are student's perceptions of tutorials in the ELP?
2. What issues or problems seem to exist?
3. What are the areas that can be improved further and how?

Literature Review

As mentioned above, teacher-learner conferences can offer a variety of benefits for reading and writing instruction. However, as Conrad and Goldstein (1990) note, writing conferences with second language learners "do not necessarily do what the literature claims they do" (p. 456). For example, for conferences to be successful, active participation and negotiation of ideas is needed, but not all second language students are able to actively participate in conferences due to language barriers or cultural influences in their perceptions of the roles of students and teachers (Ewert, 2009; Thonus, 2004; Williams, 2004). Also, even if students actively participate in conferences, their revisions can tend to be limited to mechanical and other surface-level changes unless extended discussion regarding revision takes place (Conrad & Goldstein, 1990). Despite this need for the student to be actively involved in the conference, research shows that native speaker tutors, at least within the context of writing centers in the United States, often take a relatively dominant and authoritative role in conferences with non-native speakers (Haneda, 2004), giving directions rather than waiting for the less fluent or articulate non-native speaker to try to express their intention behind the drafted text. Thus, such obstacles and issues must be considered when conducting reading or writing conferences with second language learners.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that for conferences to be successful, the teacher or tutor must keep the development of the learner in mind rather than minute details of the piece of writing or reading involved. In one study, Bardine, Bardine and Deegan (2000) investigated students' understanding of and response to teachers comments on students' papers and recommended that teachers should focus on the writer's ideas and try to give positive and specific feedback for students' writing development as well as for their self-respect. Atwell (1998) adds that "our decisions must be guided by 'what might help this writer' rather than "what might help this writing (p. 228)."

As for teacher-learner conferences in Japan, Strong (2002) has introduced how writing conferences are conducted in writing courses in the English Department of Aoyama Gakuin University. He revealed that students "preferred conferencing...to either peer responses or an exclusive use of teachers' written comments" (p. 236). In general, however, Japan EFL-focused literature on using conferences for academic reading and writing instruction is still limited in scope. A number of Japanese universities such as Osaka Jogakuin, Waseda, Sophia and University of Tokyo have writing centers with tutoring available to a certain extent (Hansen, 2009; Johnston, Cornwell, & Yoshida, 2008; Yasuda, 2006). However, few details about the effectiveness of conferences within those writing centers seem available. In addition, Waseda University has created a new program titled "Tutorial English" which provides small group language instruction, usually at a ratio of four students to one tutor. The Tutorial English website shows that classes are available for a variety of English and Chinese language skills ranging from daily conversation to technical writing in the sciences, but whether the content is a personalized teacher-learner conference or not is not clear and may depend on the class.

At ICU, tutorials have been built into the curriculum for several decades, and the following two explorations of the effectivness of tutorials in the English Language Program have yielded valuable insights.

Nicosia and Stein (1996) studied student perceptions of writing tutorials and showed that students largely felt tutorials to be very helpful opportunities to receive advice on their writing. At the same time, however, they observed that a certain "conflict of expectations" (p. 308) between instructors and students was the most revealing aspect of the survey. While instructors emphasized writing skills as the main priorities of tutorials, the students' priorities showed that "communicative, interactive, and affective factors are closely intertwined with a desire to improve writing skills" (p. 308). Based on this finding, they argued that communicative interaction such as listening and speaking skills, and affective factors such as encouragement or praise should play a more important role in writing tutorials.

Edwards and Miyajima (2004) followed up with an expanded survey of ELP students including questions not only about the writing tutorials they do with native speaker instructors, but also the reading class tutorials, which are done with Japanese instructors. Overall, they found that most students were satisfied with their tutorials, but they also found that tutorials in the ELP often involve a surprising amount of discussion of personal issues, especially when meeting with Japanese instructors and using Japanese language. One of the main recommendations from this study was for further investigation into the role of Japanese language use in tutorials and for recognition and clearer guidelines with regard to the different types of individual support that students need for reading, writing, and dicussing personal issues.

The study below was designed to further explore student perceptions of tutorials at ICU, focusing more closely on possible differences in student perceptions toward varying approaches to tutorials. Also, since in both of the ICU related studies above, surveys had been given to first year students at the end of their first term, just ten weeks into their freshmen year, we felt a need to obtain detailed survey results from second year students who had completed all three terms of their first year and could reflect on the effectiveness of various types of tutorials done with different instructors in their reading and writing classes.

Methodology

The questionnaire (Appendix A) for this study consisted of 20 items including five background questions, seven open-ended questions and eight closed questions regarding ARW and RCA tutorials conducted in the 2009 academic year. The closed questions asked about the number of tutorials students actually attended, the number they wanted to attend, the degree of usefulness of tutorials, and the types of activities they prefer during tutorials. The open-ended questions were included to draw out more detailed descriptions of the students' feelings which are difficult to obtain from quantitative data alone (Dornyei, 2003). Also, at the end of the survey, a question asking students' willingness to come to an interview was included.

The questionnaire was administered in April 2010 to all sophomore students by the sending of a Google Form by email. Responses were received from 81 students in time for consideration in this analysis. In addition, open-ended interviews were conducted with six students in order to gain a further understanding of students' perceptions and preferences of tutorials. In particular, students were asked to elaborate their feelings on their various experiences

in tutorials during their first year, the extent to which tutorials should be mandatory or optional, whether the choice of using Japanese should be given, and whether solo or group tutorials seemed more effective for them.

Students had a choice of language on the survey and and in the interviews, so most responses were in Japanese. Japanese responses introduced below have been translated into English by the authors. English quotations are presented with grammar uncorrected.

After obtaining the responses from the survey and the transcribed content of the interviews, each researcher analyzed the responses individually to identify key themes and patterns from the data. Then, the three researchers compared the results of their respective analyses and worked together to select the most prominent of the themes and patterns. These findings are presented in the Results section below.

Results

Profile of the Students

Of the 81 respondents of the survey, 28 (35%) belonged to Program A (TOEFL 463 on average), 47 (58%) to Program B (TOEFL 512 on average) and 6 (7%) to Program C (TOEFL 594 on average).

As for students' self-reported ability to speak with their native speaker (ARW class) teachers at the beginning of the spring term, 11 (14%) respondents chose "no problem," 36 (44%) chose "a little difficult, but I managed," and 34 (42%) chose "very difficult."

In response to the survey item asking their expectations about tutorials prior to starting their study at ICU, most students recalled being excited about tutorials because they are a unique point of ICU's education. At the same time, many were worried or nervous about their ability to communicate, using words such as *"nervous", "scared", "worried", "afraid", "hesitated to go",* and *"reluctant" (to go to tutorials)*. Some had no clear idea of the intended purpose and thought tutorials were just for speaking practice or fun chatting. Others thought the tutorials would be teacher-centered, with one student recalling: "*I had an idea of the tutorials where everything was proposed and given by the instructor."*

Regarding RCA

In terms of frequency of RCA tutorial attendance, 50 students (62%) said they attended three to six tutorials a year, or roughly one or two times a term. 26 students (32%) attended seven to ten tutorials a year. The number of times students "wanted" to attend tutorials was slightly higher on average than the number they actually attended.

The majority of the students felt RCA tutorials were either "Useful" (60 students, 74 %) or "Very useful" (11 students, 14%). Nine students, or 11% chose "Not very useful" and only one student (1%) chose "Not useful." The reasons most commonly cited by students for their reactions are introduced below:

Positive reactions: Due to the difficulty of the texts used in the RCA class, most respondents found it helpful to have the chance to ask teachers detailed questions during tutorials.

As one student wrote, "*Tutorials were useful because they were the best opportunities to make sure what I could not fully understand in the class*." Another student explained, "*Because the texts for RCA were difficult and hard for us to finish assignments, it was very helpful to get advice during tutorials*." Some elaborated that they learned other things such as "*how to approach certain paragraphs*" or "*the meaning and usage of unusual phrases*" in addition to understanding the text itself.

Many students also seemed to appreciate the fact that RCA teachers were willing to use Japanese or let students use it when necessary. It appears that being allowed to speak in Japanese in RCA tutorials provided students some form of anxiety relief. One student noted, "*Ms. A* (name withheld) *would accept my questions in Japanese when I had trouble expressing myself in English*." However, at the same time, there were some who expressed desire to keep it to English or have teachers more insistent on keeping it. More details are presented in the "On the Use of Japanese" section below.

Notably, students who did not attend tutorials very much wrote that they regretted that they did not take advantage of tutorials more. One student said, "*I should have attended more, communicated more with teachers and improve my overall English abilities.*" Another said in an interview, "*I regret that I went to RCA (and ARW) tutorial only once in spring term. I should have gone more but I couldn't.*"

Dissatisfaction and issues: As for points of dissatisfaction, the few students who chose "Not useful" or "Not very useful" for RCA tutorials mentioned that they did not feel a need for tutorials in RCA since it was not a writing class. Others pointed out that there were some differences among teachers as to the level of their explanation and the way they handled students' questions. One student wrote: *I felt a little confused because there was a gap among teachers regarding how deeply they understood the texts*." Another wrote:

> *For both classes and tutorials, there were big differences among teachers. Some of them not only explained the points I brought up in details during tutorials, but also challenged me with good argument. But there were others from whom I could not get satisfying explanation.*

Many students also said each tutorial session was too short and wished for longer sessions, though they understood it might be difficult to do.

Regarding ARW

In terms of frequency of ARW attendance, 36 respondents (44%) attended seven to ten tutorials a year, which is roughly two or three times a term. 18 (22%) attended eleven to fifteen times a year, and 16 (20%) attended three to six tutorials a year. At the top of the scale, three Program B students attended 20 or more ARW tutorials during their first year. As in the case of RCA tutorials, the number of times students wanted to attend tutorials was slightly higher on average than the number they actually attended.

Positive reactions: The vast majority of the students said the tutorials were "Very Useful" (38%) or "Useful" (54%) and that they appreciated the chance to talk about their essays and receive advice on logic, organization, references, grammar, and expressions. Another reason why

they liked ARW tutorials was that they were able to ask specific questions concerning writing. The majority of the students commented that their writing skills improved because of the tutorials.

Finally, it was interesting to note that several students had experienced "mixed tutorials," a type of open session conducted by a certain teacher that included interaction with students from other classes, and all comments on this format were favorable. They commented that they learned from other students and they felt motivated by hearing about others' work. One student stated:

> *...this was greatly helpful to develop my essay and I made a lot of friends who are not my section-mate. Therefore, it might be better to spread his style of tutorials in order to make students feel tutorials are wonderful opportunities. In [this teacher's] tutorials, students were required to share what they write in their essay.*

Dissatisfaction and issues:

Six students, or 8% chose "Not very useful." In terms of issues, the following four were mentioned most frequently.

1) Different styles of tutorials between teachers: First, several students mentioned that there was a large gap among ARW teachers in terms of how teachers conducted tutorials, the quality of the sessions, and their policy for tutorials. One student said, "*the idea for the tutorial are different from teacher to teacher*." Another student wrote:

> *There is a huge gap among ARW teachers, more so than RCA teachers. In order to bring up the level of quality over all, perhaps the minimum standard should be set as to what should be done by teachers [in tutorials].*

2) The friendliness and openness of teachers: Second, there were concerns regarding how teachers treated them during tutorials. One student said, "*I received a lot of advice mainly on essays. However, in some cases, teachers did not conduct tutorials in a friendly way.*" Another student commented, "*Generally tutorials were very useful for me, but some tutorials were only scarily* [just scary]. *Not useful.*" Yet another student said, "*Teachers should not say they are so busy because many students are kind...and try to not bother them.*"

Third, students expressed frustration for many reasons, one of which deals with language difficulties. Because of their insufficient speaking ability, some students felt they were not able to utilize the tutorials as effectively as they wanted. As one student put it, "*I did not have enough English speaking ability to tell my teacher what I wanted to say, and as a result, I could not receive advice in the areas that I needed.*"

3) Frustration with getting detailed advice in desired areas: In some cases, the frustration seemed to derive from their expectations not met for quality of support from teachers. One student said, *"I could not get detailed advice."* Another said, "*Some teachers did not provide advice that helped the essay become more persuasive. They just read through, and if it seemed mostly good, that was it, unless I had some questions. It was not fully satisfying.*" Another said, "*Some teachers tried to 'direct me to a higher level of writing' while others just taught me the expected level to get an A.*"

In other instances, students felt there was a gap between what they wanted and what teachers wanted to provide: "*Several times I faced the situation where what I wanted to discuss and what the teacher wanted to discuss were different.*"

Furthermore, some students pointed out the preparation on the part of the teachers. *"Reading the essays on the spot and giving a grade was not very nice. (On the other hand), some teachers gave very effective advice on ideas and grammar, respectively."*

4) Not enough time: Fourth, as in the case of RCA tutorials, several students felt time (usually 15 or 20 minutes) was too short. *"It was difficult to obtain enough time so I don't recall having a meaningful time."*

Individual vs. Group Tutorials

Regarding their preference for solo or group tutorials, students' opinions were almost evenly divided. Some had good experiences with group tutorials, while others expressed strong views against them. The benefits and issues with group tutorials mentioned by students are summarized below.

Benefits of Group Tutorials:

1. Understanding readings more deeply, especially in relation to group projects such as those in RCA with making maps or posters about the text, was the main benefit mentioned. Students wrote that one student's question about some part of the text often led to further understanding of the text by other students. For example, one student wrote: "*Although it is true that I cannot ask as many of my own questions as in an individual tutorial, the questions of other students led to unexpected benefits because they made me realize that I actually did not understand certain parts of a text*." That feeling was echoed by several others. Another student wrote: "*For talking about essays, individual tutorials are better because we can have plenty of time (to discuss our own essays), but for asking questions about readings, I think doing it in groups is more effective*."

2. Exchanging ideas about their essays with other students. For example, one student who experienced a tutorial that included students from other sections commented: "*I got ideas I had never thought about, and it was very stimulating*." Several other students who had group tutorials about their essays also mentioned that they were stimulated by the exchange of ideas.

3. Reducing anxiety, especially in spring term or for students with weaker speaking abilities. One student put it this way:

> *In the beginning (of the term), I was scared of going alone, so I remember feeling relieved that I could go as a group of two or three. As I got used to things, however, I started to choose individual tutorials because I could take more time with the teacher to receive detailed advice.*

Another student commented that *"In a group tutorial, I felt that I could talk about ideas more actively. For students who have trouble speaking in class (like me), going as a group seems better.*" Thus, for some students, group tutorials were less intimidating and more fun, considerably reducing anxiety some students felt about having the sessions in English.

Issues with Group Tutorials:

However, other students preferred solo tutorials because they felt group tutorials sometimes limited teachers' attention to each individual student and deprived them of the

opportunity to ask particular questions and discuss the points they are interested in. To them, group tutorials resembled regular class in this case and did not serve their intended purpose. They presented conflicts of interest among group members and some of the weaker students could not lead the session as they desired and even the choice of the language was lost as they had to follow majority decisions. Further, several students pointed out coordinating time among group members was hard.

*1. **Domination by one student.*** Sometimes, dominant individuals would take over the sessions and others were reduced to silence: "*When we went as a group, only certain individuals would talk and others didn't.*" Another student related his experience as follows:

> *The hardest thing I felt when we had group tutorial is that one of the students and the teacher got in a heated discussion about a certain topic and they kept on talking about it for almost an hour. As I was not interested in that particular topic, I felt like leaving. I thought for group tutorials, there should be strict time limit as there are other students involved as well.*

One student spoke of her reservation for speaking up during tutorials out of hesitation for bothering others. Her experience offers some cultural perspectives and might call for attention:

> *I could not participate in group tutorials because I felt if I started speaking in my poor English, I would stop the flow of discussion. I often could not follow what was being discussed during group tutorials, so I always made sure to go to the teacher later on my own to ask her to clarify the content of the discussion we had just had.*

*2. **Differences in student goals and interests***. Another problem mentioned by students was the differences of goals and interests among students who were forced to come as a group. One student said, "*Even when we went as a group, it was like one-on-one tutorial because when one of the students spoke with the teacher, the rest of us were not talking, and I felt like we were killing our time*." Another student echoed similar sentiment. "*(I prefer solo) because I believe the benefit of the tutorials lies in the fact that you can ask [your own] basic questions to clarify them. You can't really talk and ask if there are others involved.*"

Moreover, one student pointed out the problem of choice of language, saying, "*I wanted to discuss in Japanese but had to go along with other students who were good at speaking in English. It was hard for me as I could not express myself in English well.*"

*3. **Scheduling***: Many students expresed the difficulty of coordinating schedules for group tutorials with comments such as: "*(Group tutorials) would take longer time so it was hard to deal with it when we were busy.*" To make group tutorials successful, it was necessary to prepare among themselves. As one commented: "*I experienced group tutorials for group works. I sometimes thought we should have discussed before tutorials.*"

On the Use of Japanese

The majority of students (45) said they experienced tutorials in Japanese and thought they were helpful, saying they appreciated the availability of Japanese in RCA tutorials. They can

understand more if they can ask questions in Japanese and teachers answer in Japanese. Some students wrote that all teachers, if possible, should offer a language choice of English or Japanese. However, 23 students said tutorials should be conducted in English, while the other 13 students thought that tutorials in Japanese should be allowed only in certain cases.

One of the students who appreciated the use of Japanese said, "*it was really nice that we were allowed to speak in Japanese. It put my mind at peace and made me feel I really understood.* Others talked about another merit of speaking in Japanese, saying, "*In spring term, my RCA teacher talked in Japanese, so I could talk with her freely and she gave me some advice about the campus life, studying and so on. It was really helpful for me that I could speak in Japanese!*"

However, some students seem to feel adamant about speaking in English and insisted that Japanese should be prohibited: "*Some RCA teachers prefer talking in Japanese, but I refused using Japanese because we were talking about an English text and I thought it was more precise to discuss it in English.*" Another said: "*I think we should avoid Japanese as [much as] possible. Making ourselves [understood] in English sometimes takes a long time, but I believe ELP teachers will try hard to understand us.*"

Some other students think Japanese should be allowed in certain cases as a last resort:

> *I think it's important that we should make an effort to communicate coming up with different ways to express our thoughts even if we don't know the exact words. However, (being allowed to use Japanese) would be useful as an emergency method when we really cannot convey our ideas in English with our limited ability.*

Students' Requests and Suggestions to Improve ELP Tutorials

Finally, questions were asked to elicit students' requests and suggestions for improving tutorials in general. Their responses can be basically divided into four types.

1. Suggestions for making the system of tutorials easier to understand. One point frequently mentioned was the uncertainty about whether tutorials are part of the grade or not. For example, one student said he was not sure if attending tutorials was a part of the grade: "*I heard from a senior friend of mine who took ARW from the same teacher that he received a lower grade because he didn't go to tutorials. Because he is a good student, I thought tutorials are important to get a good grade.* " Another student said if tutorials are part of the grade, teachers should say so clearly in class.

Also, some students were confused because of the various approaches taken by teachers and said it was difficult for them to adjust to different styles of sign-up systems and expectations for preparation. One student said that there should be guidelines for tutorials. Another issue concerns whether or not tutorials should be mandatory or optional. Several students say tutorials should be mandatory at first and later made optional after they understand their value. One student said, "*to make students understand what tutorials are, it should be mandatory in spring term.*"

2) Requests for making tutorials easier to sign up for and attend. Some say it is difficult to reserve tutorials because of their own busy schedule. Some desire tutorials without appointment or a more flexible reservation system, where it is potentially possible to make appointments any day of the week. In some cases, students were confused as to whether making

appointments was necessary or not. *"Some teachers said to me, 'you should make appointment' but other teachers said, 'you are always welcome!' So I was really confused."* Also, as for the sign-up method, many students said they prefered an online sign-up system.

Another point raised by some students is how friendliness or lack of it on the part of the teachers affects them in terms of signing up for tutorials and their attitude during tutorial sessions. One student said that teachers should not act too busy because it makes them feel like they should not bother teachers even when they have questions.

3) Requests for making tutorials more effective in terms of content. Some students wanted teachers to require students to prepare for tutorials before coming, especially if it is a group tutorial: "*If students are not ready, tutorial is of limited value.*" Others wrote that the teachers should not keep explaining, but listen more carefully to students' questions. To make tutorials more effective, many also desired longer tutorials if possible.

Discussion

Making the System Clearer

The survey results seem to show that a significant number of students felt confused by the different policies and systems that their teachers had in terms of how to sign up for tutorials, how often to sign up, how to prepare, and how to make the most of the tutorial time. In particular, there was confusion about whether tutorial attendance was required or not, and whether it would affect a student's grade in some way or not.

On one level, ELP instructors may need to make sure that their systems and policies are clearer to the students. This can be done by indicating tutorial policies on the syllabus and sign-up sheet as explicitly as possible. Also, the *Student Handbook* and *Student Guide to Writing* currently contain some explanations about tutorials, but teachers may need to direct their students' attention toward those pages or tell them how their policies are different from those in SGW. Having gone through the traditional Japanese school system, the majority of students are not used to a Western style approach to learning where they are expected to take the initiative, especially in the case of tutorials. This point should be clarified with some practical approach. In fact, Nicosia and Stein (1996) recommend offering introductory tutorials to students in groups to help them become familiar with the process of signing up and attending tutorials. Together with a list showing what will take place during tutorials and what is expected of them, such hands-on instruction might prevent students' needless confusion.

On another level, ELP teachers may need to communicate with each other more in order to learn about other instructors' policies and systems, and to adopt better practices if a better way seems to exist. For example, when a section is passed on from one instructor to another in a new term, the instructors should share the tutorial systems and policies that they used or plan to use.

Reducing Student Anxiety

Some students seem to feel anxiety toward tutorials due to a perceived lack of their communicative abilities and misconceptions about tutorials. Several students mentioned their

"*limited confidence,*" particularly in speaking English, and their uncertainty of the content of tutorials: "*I feel nervous because I thought tutorials were like oral examinations.*"

Based on the investigation of learners of Japanese at two universities in the United States, Kitano (2001) argues students' fear of "negative evaluation" (p. 549) is one of potential factors to cause anxiety in foreign language classrooms. He points out that students feel intense pressure when their performance, especially speaking, is evaluated by their teachers. Since most tutorials are conducted one-on-one in the teacher's office, uneasiness of students with limited English proficiency can be very high. As Nicosia and Stein (1996) accurately point out, in order to lower their anxiety, instructors need to assure students that teachers' primary roles in tutorials are advisors or collaborators, not evaluators of students' performance. Teachers' efforts to encourage students is obviously necessary. One interviewee remarked how appreciative he was about one teacher showing him respect for his effort and ability writing in English:

> *One teacher said to me in Japanese, he could not write in Japanese what I wrote in my paper. So I felt I was respected. I really appreciate his understanding. Students try really hard to express things in their foreign language. So I hope teachers understand and respect our effort.*

We should be aware that this gesture of conveying our respect to students provides them with successful experiences that are necessary for constructing "a positive social image even during the often face-threatening task" (Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008, p. 58) and further propel students' motivation.

On a practical basis, measures such as making the first few tutorials mandatory in spring term, making it possible for all students to sign up within the first two weeks, and allowing group tutorials and possibly Japanese use as a choice for intimidated students, may be useful to create an open, collaborative atmosphere. Instructors should be aware that when they fail to show friendliness and encouragement, they will lose some of the sensitive, less confident students, who are arguably the ones who need tutorial time and personal support more than the others.

Being Supportive vs. Fostering Learner Autonomy

One student commented that she was shocked when she was told by her teacher to "check it yourself" when she had carefully prepared questions to ask in the tutorial. In contrast, one comment by a another student who identified tutorials as being "not useful" was "*The instructor talked too much and did not try to listen and understand my own interpretation of the text*." These quotes show the difficulty of finding a balance between promoting students' autonomy by requiring independent thinking and resourcefulness on one hand, and being supportive by telling the students as clearly as possible what they seem to need to know.

Autonomy can be promoted by encouraging, or possibly requiring, the student to be more in control of the conference. However, at the same time, some students must be provided with support such as explanations or explicit directions for improvement when they are unable to take the initiative in the conference. The variations are complex, and the instructor's choice to be supportive with instruction in the tutorial, or focusing on autonomy by encouraging students to find their own answers must most likely be flexibly made on a student-by-student basis.

Many students may be capable of taking charge of the tutorial, asking questions and having teachers listen to their ideas. Spoon-feeding or being excessively "directive" in conferences with such students will put them in a passive receiving role and may lead to a loss of initiative among students (Bardine et al, 2000). However, at the same time, less capable students may end up being more confused and disempowered rather empowered by the lack of direction if teachers give them complete control in the tutorials and do not support them with suggestions and instruction (Corbett, 2008).

Clearly, a balance must be maintained even while the ultimate goal is to move the students toward independence as effective academic readers and writers. The only way to find that balance may be to keep a degree of flexibility in how tutorials are conducted and refrain from absolute views of how tutorials should be conducted. In other words, while it is important that instructors in conferences aim for promoting autonomy, it is equally important to be ready to provide sufficient support and direction when that seems necessary.

Recommendations for Improving Tutorials in the ELP

Based on the issues identified in this study, this final section aims to highlight and reiterate some of the main recommendations for possible improvements of the tutorial system in the ELP.

For Making Tutorial Policies Clearer:

1. Modify the descriptions for tutorial periods in the *The ELP Student Handbook (pp. 6-7)* to mention that tutorials are not only for writing, but also for questions about readings or other issues in the students' learning. Also, refer students to *The Student Guide to Writing in the ELP* (p. 7) where more detailed information about tutorials is given.
2. Have a standard section on ARW and RCA syllabi in which each instructor explains the aims, policies, and systems of tutorials.
3. Include a larger section in the Staff Handbook that recommends how tutorials should be set up and run, including references to relevant research regarding teacher-learner conferences.
4. As Nicosia & Stein (1996) suggest, provide a tutorial role-play or demonstration in class or online with a video file to mitigate students' anxiety in spring term and also to reinforce the idea of students taking the initiative in tutorials and asking prepared questions.

For Helping Students Take More Initiative:

5. Have a standard form, on paper or electronic, that students fill out prior to arriving at tutorials. The form could ask students to write out what they want to discuss and take away from that tutorial.

For Using Tutorial Time More Effectively:

6. Keep in mind that tutorials are ultimately for motivating students to become effective life-long readers and writers rather than for fixing a short-term problem with a reading text or essay.
7. If using Japanese is an option, give the students a choice of language at the beginning of the tutorial as well asking in an open-ended way what the student wants to discuss.
8. Use group tutorials if students seem to have anxiety about coming alone, or if several students need guidance on very similar content. Avoid group tutorials that just make other students sit and wait while individual issues are discussed.

To Follow-Up After Tutorials:

9. Ask students to email a summary of what they learned in a tutorial or create a blog entry.
10. As an instructor, keep brief notes of what key point was discussed in the tutorial and try to follow up to see whether the student was able to understand.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

To conclude, the main issues that emerged from our survey of ICU sophomores' perceptions regarding their tutorials in their first year included 1) the need to explain tutorial systems and policies to students more effectively, 2) the need to reduce student anxiety toward tutorials, possibly by flexibly using group tutorials and Japanese language, and 3) the need to improve the integration of tutorials into the long-term development of our students as autonomous readers and writers. We hope the recommendations above will be helpful for ELP instructors at ICU and other univesities to make each tutorial with each student as valuable as possible. In future research, through periodic surveys and interviews of students and instructors, and possibly more detailed analysis of transcriptions of the exchanges that are conducted in tutorials, we hope many of the issues raised in this study can be investigated further. Individual instructors can do this on an action research basis in each of their classes, and more systematic research as a program will be valuable as well.

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Appendix A
The Survey Questions (Click to see Online Form)

Part I. Profile

1. What program were you in? (in April last year) Program A, Program B or Program C?
2. What is your gender?
3. What was your TOEFL score in April? (approximately is OK)
4. In April last year, how was your ability to speak with your ARW instructor in tutorials?
5. Prior to April, what were your ideas or expectations regarding tutorials?

Part II. About RCA Tutorials

6. In total during your first year, how many tutorials did you go to for RCA?
7. How many tutorials did you WANT to go to for RCA during your first year?
8. How were your tutorials in RCA? Were they useful for improving your reading/writing skills?
9. Please explain why you thought so above. If you have different feelings about Spring, Fall and Winter terms depending on what your teacher did or didn't do, please comment on each term separately.
10. What were your favorite activities or aspects of tutorials?
11. If you have any other impressions or comments about RCA tutorials, please write them freely below.

III. About ARW Tutorials

12. How many tutorials did you go to for ARW ?
13. How many tutorials did you WANT to go to for ARW during your first year?
14. How were your tutorials in ARW? Were they useful for improving your reading/writing?
15. Please explain why you thought so above. If you have different feelings about Spring, Fall and Winter terms, please comment on each term separately.
16. What were your favorite activities or aspects of tutorials? Choose as many as you like.
17. If you have any other impressions or comments about ARW tutorials, please write them freely below.

IV. Final General Questions

18. Did you experience group tutorials as well as solo? How was that experience?
19. Did your teachers use Japanese in tutorials? Did you feel that was useful for you compared to tutorials in English? Why or why not? Also, if you didn't have any tutorials in Japanese, did you want that chance?
20. What suggestions or requests do you have for your ELP instructors to improve their tutorials? (Length of time, frequency, activities in tutorials, sign-up systems, required attendance, etc.)