Did you know that the correct way to pronounce the name of the town we live in is "Frederick." or that the railroaders in the western part of our county live in Bruns-ick? That to exclaim displeasure with the appearance of your car is to say "This car needs cleaned?" Parents say to their children "Let it on the table" or "Leave go of that." Where do these terms come from?

[Young people now say: "We seen 'em jes' las' night when we was at the mall." Or, "That don't matter none."

   It does matter. Limited English skills limit opportunity.

   Good grammar and diction, correct usage and pronunciation help our graduates achieve success in college courses, in job interviews, and in business and social situations.

The teaching of formal grammar has negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on improvement in writing.

These three passages—the first two from letters to the Frederick (MD) News Post, the third from Richard Braddock, Richard LloydJones, and Lowell Schoer's Research in Written Composition—illustrate a serious dilemma for teachers of writing. On the one hand, they face pressure from a skeptical public and vocal conservatives who decry what they perceive as a decline of literacy. On the other hand, many compositionists, like Braddock, LloydJones, and Schoer, have reservations concerning the influence of grammar on writing instruction. Other compositionists have begun to look for ways to
teach grammar within the spirit of the process approach. In this chapter we will argue that the writing center, not the writing classroom, is the context where grammar instruction and writing instruction meld together.

Compositionists typically identify three distinct kinds of grammar:

grammar 1. The formal, internal patterns of language.

grammar 2. The linguistic science concerned with description

grammar 3. Linguistic etiquette or "school grammar."

Those supporting instruction in grammars 2 and 3 often argue that it improves writing by making the student aware of grammatical resources and by providing students and teachers with a common vocabulary for analysis (Kolln; Williams). Of course, this justification begs the question of whether grammar instruction makes better writers or thinkers. In fact, the justification that instruction in grammars 2 and 3 improves student writing remains unsubstantiated, and, as Patrick Hartwell suggests, "it may well be that the grammar question is not open to resolution by experimental research" (1985, 107). The justification for teaching school grammar, the kind of grammar this article will address, is that it makes students "appear" educated (Tubbs; Tabbert). As the second letter writer put it at the beginning of this article, good grammar helps "achieve success in college courses, in job interviews, and in business and social situations."

It's hardly surprising that this pragmatic argument has not washed well with modern compositionists who advocate a process approach to composition. Grammatical correctness has taken a back seat to the "making of meaning" for practitioners who emphasize invention, revision, audience, occasion, and collaboration. While composition process theorists are correct in assuming that no link exists between traditional grammar instruction and learning to write well, they ignore a more fundamental issue: the link between understanding grammar and writing proficiency. Learning to write well through a better understanding of grammar means addressing the growth and development of the whole person, since writing is a way of coming to know—the self, others, and the world. Through an understanding of grammar, as opposed to rote memorization of forms, students can begin to see the connections between grammatical choice and audience, and, more important, they can begin to understand what these choices say about themselves as writers and as human beings.

Mina Shaughnessy recognized this difference between grammatical understanding and grammatical correctness. The goal of teaching grammar, she argued, ought to be a "shift in perception which is ultimately more important than the mastery of any individual rule of grammar" (129). For Shaughnessy, having the right answers is less important than having grammatical reasons for what a writer does, because "grammar is more a way of thinking, a style of inquiry, than a way of being right" (129). In other words,
the development of grammatical understanding enables a student to
build a paradigm through which to view the world and act in it through
language, a paradigm that a student can apply in a variety of contexts. By
extension, approaching grammar as a way of thinking, as a style of
inquiry, and as a way of seeing the world, means approaching
grammatical questions within the larger context of audience and
purpose.

A number of studies over the past decade have argued for such
contextuality. Eleanor Kutz has advocated classrooms "that encourage
risk-taking [and] reward experimentation with new forms versus the
production of errorfree papers" (390). Robert de Beaugrande has called
for a "learners' grammar" rather than a "teachers' grammar." "The
further grammar is removed from natural communication," he writes,
"the more likely average people are to lose control of it" (67). If
grammar is taught as a dualistic exercise in finding correct forms,
students will likely see it as something that has little or no relevance to
their lives. If, on the other hand, grammar is taught within the context of
its personal, moral, and political implications, then it's an opportunity for
discovery, growth, and even liberation.

Unfortunately, there are significant pragmatic obstacles to the
classroom teaching of grammar as a way of thinking. It's very difficult
to imagine teaching contextually to classes of twenty or more students.
There are simply not enough hours in the day to explore the grammatical
implications and possibilities in a traditional classroom setting. If
grammar instruction becomes a required component of courses, as it
often is, it will likely be relegated to workbooks and, perhaps,
computerassisted instruction. While the practical problems are daunting
enough, they are subsumed by the larger political obstacles as instructors
weave their way through the competing demands of students, the
profession, and the public.

Grammar instruction is more than anything a question of power. It
suggests a classroom where the teacher actively hands out grammatical
truth to the passive students; it suggests a classroom where instructors
must choose between teaching grammar and using the process
approach; and it suggests an academy forced to choose between
pedagogical effectiveness and a public demand to return to the "basics."

First, grammar instruction, at least the way it is normally
employed, threatens to undermine process writing by allowing power to
remain in the hands of the instructor. Hartwell, referring to the work of
Janet Emig and others, writes that "the thrust of current research and
time is to take power from the teacher and to give that power to the
learner. At no point in the English curriculum is the question of power
more blatantly posed than in the issue of formal grammar instruction"
(1985, 127). Instead of transferring power from the teacher to the
student, grammar instruction often does the opposite.

Second, grammar instruction is hampered by a power struggle
within the discipline of composition studies. As Hartwell argues, those
who dismiss
Glover and Stay, 132

grammar "have a model of composition instruction that makes the grammar issue 'uninteresting' in a scientific sense." Those who defend the teaching of grammar often "tend to have a model of composition instruction that is rigidly skill-centered and rigidly sequential" (1985, 108). Few who embrace the process approach to composition want to be associated with those who teach "skills."

Third, grammar instruction reveals the power struggle between a public demanding "back-to-the-basics" instruction and a resisting educational establishment. In each of these three power struggles the student loses. In the first case the student is treated like a vessel into which teachers pour acontextual grammatical rules. In the second case the student becomes lost in the struggle between competing pedagogies. In the third case the student becomes a pawn in the struggle between correctness and personal and intellectual growth. Despite these obstacles, we wish to suggest that grammar can be taught effectively as long as such instruction is seen as a tool for empowerment and not as merely a rite of passage to the world of the educated and that such instruction must occur within full view of the power implications described above. We call this a "grammar of discovery."

Writing centers offer the best place to teach such a grammar of discovery because they allow learning to occur contextually within a framework of personal, moral, and political growth and because one-on-one instruction can mitigate the political obstacles of the classroom. Writing center instruction ought to address the issues of power clearly and honestly. Writing center tutors have an obligation to make students aware of the implications of the grammatical choices they make, whether pronoun or verb choice, active or passive constructions, or agreement. In a one-on-one tutorial a peer tutor can say, "I understand what you mean here, but your readers may make some assumptions about you and about your subject that you don't want them to make." Thus, the focus of the tutorial can shift from "correctness" to "implication." It's not unusual for writing center tutorials to close with open-ended discussions of politics, power, and the correct use of the semicolon.

Opening up the study of grammar, a one-on-one tutorial not only circumvents political obstacles, it can even become politically liberating. While the back-to-basics movement is usually identified with public pressure from outside the profession and conservative traditionalism inside it, a renewed emphasis on basic grammatical skills need not be allied with any competing political agenda. As Donald Lazere has pointed out, this back-to-basics movement might be a "force for liberation—not oppression—if administered with common sense, openness to cultural pluralism, and an application of basics toward critical thinking, particularly about sociopolitical issues, rather than rote memorizing" (9). The resistance of the educational establishment, particularly those on the political left, to the renewed emphasis on standard English, according to Lazere, diminishes an opportunity for liberatory education. Learning to take a measure of control of academic language could be a tool of liberation:
Teachers may unavoidably have to "coerce" students and "lay on" academic culture and standard English in the cause of showing that they contain the potential to be a force for either conformity or nonconformity. For teachers to use this opportunity to empower students ultimately to decide for themselves which ends they should use their education for would seem to be a pedagogical endeavor that is legitimate from any political viewpoint. (20)

If, as Lazere argues, there are sound social and political reasons for grammar instruction, we still need to find effective ways to teach it. The writing center is not only effective in teaching traditional grammar concepts in non-traditional, personal ways, but it also allows the instructor to consider the larger personal and political implications of grammar. As Christina Murphy observes, writing centers have the capacity to operate as a bridge between competing educational philosophies and political ideologies on campus. According to Murphy, this intermingling of rhetorical communities gives writing centers the potential to become "agencies for change" within the academic world "by extending and redefining the dialogue on literacy education" (284). Grammar instruction, redefined and recontextualized in the writing center, can bring this same transforming power to the relationship between student and tutor.

Writing center peer tutors can facilitate empowerment and self-actualization in a number of ways. Consider, for example, the use of verb choice as an occasion for both grammatical and personal understanding. In a recent study, psychologists William McGuire and Claire McGuire point out that individuals tend to use verbs of action to describe in concrete terms what they do but use static verbs (verbs of state) to describe in "abstract dispositional terms" what others do. Individuals generally think of themselves as "dynamically changing" and think of others as more static. Thus, they use becoming verbs to describe themselves and being verbs to describe others. McGuire and McGuire further observe that our propensity to see ourselves as more introspective than others hampers interpersonal communications: "These failures to appreciate that others have as rich an interior life as oneself, and particularly that their interior life is as full of likes and dislikes as one's own, may account for some of the insensitivity and inconsiderateness in interpersonal relations" (1142). The research of McGuire and McGuire, although it addresses spoken rather than written language, is important to writing instruction because of its potential to redirect grammar studies away from a justification of social mobility toward a justification of interpersonal responsibility. Our use of grammar indicates more than our social/political station in life; it indicates how we see ourselves and others.

Not unlike verbs, pronouns also can promote discovery and change in both grammatical and personal ways. Repeated uses of "he" as a referent to both male and female subjects constitutes a lack of rhetorical sensitivity, if not an error in the modern grammatical use of the pronoun. This lack of
grammatical sensitivity creates the occasion for student and tutor to explore together not only a more inclusive use of pronouns, but also to examine ways in which language both mirrors and shapes the forces of alienation in our society (Scholes 768-769).

A writing center tutorial enables the tutor to carry the grammar of the pronoun one step further. Following the work of Martin Buber, it can be argued that every use of the pronoun "I" implies one of two possibilities: "I-Thou," or "I-It." I-Thou is grounded in relationship, dialogue, and mutual respect; I-It suggests depersonalization and alienation.

Understanding I-thou relationships is important for grammar instruction not only because of its usefulness in revealing student-audience relationships but also because it informs student-teacher relationships. Just as students can be victimized when they become vessels for grammar instruction, they can also be victimized when they fail to be seen as partners in the learning process. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed Paulo Freire recasts the issues in terms of "banking" and "problem posing" education. In the banking model, like the "I-it" relationship, the teacher pours knowledge into the "it"—the patient, passive, receiving students (57). One might call this the "grammar of oppression." By contrast, in problem-posing education, like the "I-thou" relationship, the subject-object dichotomy is broken apart—"the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world" (71). In seeing the world in a process of transformation and in becoming a part of that transformation themselves, students and teachers "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" (7571). In this case the transformation from "I-it" to "I-thou" might be termed a "grammar of liberation."

The relationship of teacher and student in the teaching of grammar raises a number of ethical and philosophical questions, one of the most serious of which is the instruction of basic writers. Not only are these writers far more likely to have fallen victim to well-meant but stultifying grammar instruction, but they are also likely to embrace a more rigid stance toward grammar instruction (Hartwell, 1984, 58). Basic writers have traditionally seen themselves in I-It relationships to grammar and to the world. These students, who most need to learn and experiment and take chances in the writing process, are the ones most likely to be assaulted by the rigidity of grammar instruction. They feel depersonalized, alienated, and victimized, not only by grammar but also by the larger political structures of the university and of society in general. In other words, weaker writers relate to language and the world as the "it" of the "I-it" dichotomy. If we work with these students in traditional error-based instruction, we run the risks of counterproductivity identified by Braddock. But if we teach such students grammar within the context of self and other, we open up new possibilities for instruction. Rather than teach students that commas never function as sentence boundary markers, we might teach them that punctuation is a dynamic, negotiated signal between writer and reader that
establishes expectations that are either followed through or thwarted. The peer tutor and student thus become partners in looking at the audience, a partnership that is itself a dynamic negotiation, helping students gain a position of control over their language and their world.

Writing centers can help to alleviate the problem of rigidity and depersonalization by teaching grammar in the context of students' own papers. Muriel Harris has written extensively about the potential of writing center grammar tutorials. "The conference setting is particularly appropriate for working on grammar as an editing skill," she writes, "because specific errors evident on the page make up the agenda for discussion" (120). Her strategies for teaching grammar are particularly helpful since she avoids much of the traditional rule-based language in favor of more immediate and focused responses. Since writing centers focus attention on individuals as well as on texts, they occasion discussions of meaning in full view of author, audience, and purpose. The question of grammatical structure in a one-on-one tutoring session is completely different from workbook grammar. The writing center session, since it is already highly interactive, allows student and tutor to focus on the intersection of grammar and meaning.

Teaching the grammar of discovery is no easy task, inside or outside of the writing center. Even in the collaborative, process-oriented, student-centered classroom, it is difficult for teachers to sacrifice the classroom agenda for the grammatical needs of each individual student. On the other hand, the situational nature of grammatical error makes the writing center better suited for the teaching of grammar. Since grammar instruction is most effective within the context of the moment, the writing center provides the situation for tutors to respond to the specific needs of each individual student according to the demands of each paper. But the teaching of grammar ought to be more than merely teaching about words. It is about empowering students. It is about helping students come to know themselves, others, and the world around them. It is about teaching students the possibilities and responsibilities of transforming themselves and the world through language.