THE MISCONCEPTIONS, ANXIETIES, AND EXPERIENCES OF FIRST TIME

WRITING CENTER PEER TUTORS

by

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DEDICATION

To Zack, the love of my life, and the person with whom I wish to share my existence.

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I want to thank first and foremost, my mother and father, Roger and Barbara Bayley, who have always provided me with support, both financially and emotionally. Their love has been unconditional, and I am proud to be their daughter.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

When I first started working as a peer tutor in a writing center, I thought of it as nothing more than another part time job. As a strong English student, and with the university paying almost twice as much as my previous employer, the whole thing seemed like a dream. This was a job that I thought would be easy and lucrative.

The actual work was nothing like I imagined. My early career as a peer writing center tutor was plagued by questions and uncertainty. I found the work emotionally exhausting, ethically confusing, and rife with unpredictable, and often disastrous, tutorials. My desire to serve the students who came to see me for help conflicted with worries about doing the work for them or appropriating their paper, behaviors I had been warned against in my peer tutor education course. Trying to create a tutoring persona for myself that would let me be perceived as both a sympathetic listener and a qualified source of knowledge made me stretch my interpersonal skills to the limit.

However, I also found myself deeply invested in the work, especially in helping the students I met and tutored in the writing center. I began to find myself interested in what I was doing in my tutorials and in finding ways to improve my tutoring style in order to better help the peers I was tutoring.

It took over two years of experience for me to feel comfortable in the job, to feel as though I had seen and experienced enough sessions to be ready for almost any tutoring scenario. With my newfound confidence in myself as a tutor, I was able to develop a

distinct tutoring style focused around compassion and individuating my tutorials based on student needs.

More than five years later as I look to my future as a writing center administrator, I have found myself confronting the challenge of how to create curricula and prepare new writing tutors. The emotional highs and lows, the uncertainties, the concerns—surely I am not the only person to have those experiences in my process of growing as a tutor. The research I have found on this topic covers basic tenets for writing tutors to keep in mind and best practices in tutor training; however, little exists that speaks from a peer tutor's perspective, and the reflective pieces by tutors that I have found tend to be short and limited in scope (see the coming literature review). I have found no systematic, case study investigation chronicling tutors' experiences as they evolve from novices into confident, experienced peer tutors. Furthermore, much of the current work in the field is concentrated on talking about tutors, not speaking with them. In particular, I wanted to hear them talk about their experiences as first time writing center peer tutors. This constituted my overarching question: "What is the experience of a first-time writing center peer tutor?" I broke down that question as follows:

- What kinds of emotional, intellectual, or pedagogical concerns does a first-time peer tutor face?

- How does tutor acculturation occur?

  o What are first-time peer tutors told about writing centers?

  o How does this discourse affect or shape them as writing tutors?

- How do first-time peer tutors negotiate their position in the academy and craft a definition of themselves as a peer tutor?

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o How does this acculturation develop over time?

One of my research goals is to encourage rigorous conversation with and about peer tutors in the writing center. In other words, I want to *listen* to tutors, opening up writing center studies to actual discourse with its tutors, a facet of writing center research that is so often forgotten or pushed to one side.

In order to accomplish these research goals, I conducted interviews with three different writing center peer tutors following a four week training session that I taught and for which I created the curricula. In part, I ran the tutor training course with a heavy focus on collaboration and conversation, opening up every session by allowing tutors to talk about good and bad sessions, and then sharing my experience with them. I wish to incorporate this ethos into the summary of my findings. I want to give peer tutors a voice—my participant tutors and my younger self included. I also examined reflective pieces and other writings that these developing peer tutors were required to complete during the course.

In addition to the interviews I conducted and the written pieces I reviewed, I wrote narrative accounts of my own experiences as a first time writing center peer tutor. I want to do this to add a personalized touch to this research, and to also set up my experiences in conversation with the experiences of my research participants. More importantly, the use of narrative also allowed me to use my personal experience as a form of research.

This research has both immediate but also long-term value. Recording the experiences of individual tutors generates a resource that can be used by writing center staff to spur reflections, develop tutor training best practices, and foster a sense of

community among the writing center staff. For example, within the context of a tutor training course, one could ask tutor trainees to reflect on and respond to the cares and emotions of peer tutor participants in this study. Tutor trainees could talk about how they agree or disagree with the opinions of the peer tutor participants, sharing whether they hold the same concerns or anxieties. Such reflection could normalize emotions for tutor trainees, reassuring them that they have a shared bond with their fellow peer tutors and a shared place in writing centers.

In the course of this study, patterns emerged within tutor experiences that revealed areas within tutor training practice and standard writing center pedagogy that likely need to be revisited. Three notable patterns were observable from my research:

- All participating tutors shared a misconception based around the way they conceptualized the definition of tutor to imply someone who is both directive and who helps those students who are remedial.
- All participating tutors (barring myself) shared the same types of anxieties
- All participating tutors experienced an evolution in how they perceived and interacted with students, an evolution that was influenced most powerfully by accumulating experience within tutoring sessions

These themes were frequently interrelated and interacted with each other in various ways that could be obvious or incredibly subtle. The interplay between these themes also suggests areas both for further research and for changes in tutor training curricula and best practices.

<u>Definition of Terms</u>

Although definitions of key terms used in this thesis vary in literature, I will be using the following definitions:

- *Peer tutor*: an undergraduate tutor who is taking classes and tutoring at the same university as the students he or she tutors. Peer tutors may not necessarily be similar in age, ethnicity, or economic/social class to their tutees, but they do share the same college context. Undergraduates rather than graduates are more likely considered to be peer tutors because their experience and classification is more likely to reflect the experience and classification of those that they tutor. Unlike professional tutors, peer tutors are not professors, teachers, or administrators either at the school they tutor at or at any other school.

- *First-time* is defined as someone who has never tutored writing before in the context of a writing center.

- *Acculturation* is defined as adjustment to and acceptance of the norms of both the particular writing center that peer tutors work in, as well as the norms implicit in writing center orthodoxy at large.

- *Writing center orthodoxy*, a term first used by Shamoon and Burns, is defined as "not only the material evidence to support student-centered, non-directive practices, but also codes of behavior and statements of value that sanction tutors as a certain kind of professional" (134). In my research, the material evidence of this orthodoxy will primarily consist of Stephen North's "Idea of a Writing Center" and Muriel Harris' "SLATE

Statement: The Concept of a Writing Center," with the majority of the emphasis being placed on North's piece. Boquet and Lerner point out that North's piece "has...controlled the discourse that surrounds writing center theory and practice more generally" than any other article (175).

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Reflective practices are frequently encouraged within tutor training programs (Bell; Hall; Mattison; Okawa et. al). Usually, prospective tutors are assigned to write about a session, analyzing aspects that went well and aspects that could be improved. However, such reflective pieces by tutors are largely absent in the field's research. In writing about their Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project, Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail note that much tutor-alumni research is unpublished, existing as "rich….collections of surveys…serv[ing] an important function in local writing center assessment" (19). Similarly, I believe that somewhere there is a desk drawer filled with thoughtful reflective essays from peer tutors, assigned for a tutor training class, graded, and then filed away. Near it perhaps are tutor evaluations, interviews, and other pieces of research, kept for the records and benefit of writing center directors or institutional studies. I believe that there is room in the field of scholarly research for this kind of information to reach a broader audience.

There have been calls in the field of writing center studies to engage in research on the experience of first-time writing center peer tutors. *The Writing Center Journal's* March 2012 issue is dedicated to research done by undergraduate peer tutors. In the introduction to this piece, Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald hold up the "Tutor's Column" and National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) as

commendable examples of how writing center theory engages with peer tutors. Both authors encourage more peer tutor research, writing,

> If we pay attention to the peer tutors whose research is collected in this issue, for example, we stand to learn a great deal—about tutors' informed and informing perspectives on the conversations of writing center studies; about what tutors believe should be next for the field and for the practices of writing centers, writing fellows programs, and writing classrooms; and most important, about what their fellow student writers need. (10-11)

My research project will allow me to tease out the "informed and informing perspectives" of peer tutors, specifically as they *become* peer tutors.

There are also several discrete types of literature that complement the research that I have conducted. I have categorized this literature as writing center orthodoxy and texts that examine this orthodoxy; tutor training manuals; research about tutor trainings manuals; and research about tutor acculturation.

<u>Writing Center Orthodoxy and Recent Challenges to This Orthodoxy</u>

As previously mentioned, I am defining writing center orthodoxy in terms of Stephen North's seminal piece and Muriel Harris' SLATE Statement. However, for my purpose here, both of these foundational pieces lack the sort of investigation into tutors' experiences that I seek. North's work focuses on the work of tutors, and, more specifically, what tutors *do not* do. He fails to talk about the experiences of tutors, defining only their work; North also focuses far more on the expectations of others rather than talking about tutor training or other tutor related avenues of research.

Harris, on the other hand, provides more in-depth discussion of tutors. Harris gives a rudimentary outline of who tutors might be, what their jobs are, and what strategies tutors might use. Harris offers advice for tutor training further into her SLATE statement, briefly outlining typical topics of training. However, again, the focus is on the work of the tutors—talk of training is secondary, and there is no exploration of a tutor's experience.

Beginning with Nancy Grimm's 1999 book *Good Intentions*, writing center scholarship began a long, slow process of research that began to challenge and overturn traditional writing center orthodoxy. As many of my research questions are focused on how writing center orthodoxy affects peer tutors, scholarship that problematizes writing center orthodoxy is very important. However, even these counter-narratives tend to lack extensive discussion of the experiences of first-time writing center peer tutors.

In *The Everyday Writing Center*, Geller, Eodice, Condon and Carroll explore writing centers in a way that embraces unique and unpredictable aspects of writing center work. To this end, the authors provide reminiscences from tutors, best practices for tutor training, and some examples of tutor trainee writing. However, although the tutor writing is the kind of reflective writing I will be analyzing, it is not triangulated, the specific writing center context is not explained, and the writing is not the sort of in-depth case study I have conducted. In *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, Grutsch-McKinney indulges in an extended musing on how a hypothetical outsider, like a television producer, would stereotype tutors. However, when Grutsch-McKinney moves to counter such stereotypes, she focuses not on peer tutors, but on writing center administration, and the way that writing centers present themselves and their staff within scholarship. Indeed,

writing center peer tutors, their training, their thoughts, and their experiences are mostly

absent from this book, leaving the "peripheral vision" of the first-time writing center peer

tutor un-examined. Elizabeth Bouquet goes further towards problematizing specific

occurrences in tutoring sessions, as well as training practices in *Noise from the Writing

Center*. Bouquet also provides an interesting case study in a tutor training program put on

by tutors for tutors, but even though some of the thoughts and experiences of the tutor

trainees are provided (particularly Donna's Story), this section primarily focuses on the

tutors who are crafting and giving the training program (107-09). Some quotes from

tutoring narratives written by the trainees are shared as well. However, this research does

not fully explore the experiences of these tutor trainees. It does not ask the students to

engage with existing writing center literature or discuss the evolution in their conceptions

of writing centers.

Research on Tutor Training Programs

As mentioned in the above section, best practices for tutor training have been

suggested by a variety of scholars. However, a specific subset of research has been done

that focuses on what information is transmitted to tutors through training and how this

information may affect them. These studies include July Gill's "In-House Tutor

Handbooks and the Problem of Negative Rhetoric" and Steven Corbett's "Negotiating

Pedagogical Authority: The Rhetoric of Writing Center Tutoring Styles and Methods."

Gill's article specifically talks about how many tutor training manuals and in-house

tutoring handbooks devolve into "thou shalt nots" (11), while offering up the idea that

training manuals instead focus on policies and procedures, leaving the tutoring

information for in-person training sessions. Furthermore, Gill decides to incorporate

student voices into tutor training by adding pieces written by student tutors into the handbook (13). Gill fails, however does not use the kind of case study methodology I employed, meaning she does not focus on the student tutors to the same depth that my research does. Corbett's piece reveals that what tutors are told about the directive/non-directive debate can influence their tutoring style, for better and worse. He also argues that both styles are needed. Both of these pieces examine the rhetoric that is commonly reproduced for tutor trainees. However, these pieces generally leave out the response that tutor trainees have. I plan to dig deeper and seek tutor trainees' responses at different stages of their process of becoming peer tutors.

Tutor Training Manuals

Some assumptions and insights necessary to examining the peer tutor experience can be found in documents specifically designed for new tutors. If tutors read them, these documents provide a likely means of acculturation, defining for new peer tutors what the writing center is about, as well as expectations for the tutor and tutee within the writing conference. Even if they do not read these texts, it is likely that the writing center director with whom they work has read these texts and has organized writing center practice around these ideas. The following tutor training texts that I discuss have been chosen because they are the most popular search results on Amazon.com for the term "writing tutor."

The earliest example of a tutor training manual is Muriel Harris' "Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference." The manual builds on many of the ideas present in Harris' SLATE statement, translating them towards practice and fleshing out the ideas where necessary. More recent tutoring guides can be divided into a few distinct styles:

those that focus chiefly on theory, those that merge theory and practice, and those that focus primarily on practice. Both *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors* by Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood, as well as Ben Raforth's *A Tutor's Guide; Helping Writers One to One,* primarily concentrate on writing center theory, with the Murphy and Sherwood text providing reprints of influential journal articles that talk about writing center orthodoxy (see definition in Chapter 1), while the Raforth piece has articles written expressly for the book, although these are generally still aligned with the orthodox practices.

 The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring spotlights both theory and practice, although the theory section emphasizes composition theory rather than writing center theory, making it slightly unusual for writing center handbooks. *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* by Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli and *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* by Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner both focus on practice. Notably, the Ryan and Zimmerelli text has a more informal, joking tone, while the Gillespie and Lerner text opts to talk about tutor training in a more serious tone. *What the Writing Tutor Needs to Know* by Margot Soven provides an outlook on tutor training that is emotional while also being practical. The Soven text mostly uses writing center theory as a way to casually justify information, while focusing heavily on likely scenarios. All of these books tend to speak about tutors in the abstract sense, or just tell tutors directly what they should do. For a field in which communication is valued, there is a distinct lack of dialogue in these tutoring handbooks between tutors and texts.

 Other, less popular, handbooks that are interesting to note, not because they are popular, but because they more closely align with the ethos of my study, are *Working*

with Student Writers: Essays on Tutoring and Teaching and *Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Students. Working with Student Writers: Essays on Tutoring and Teaching. Working with Student Writers* includes pieces written by actual peer tutors, and was originally designed for a writing center training program with a manual that lets peer tutors read the authentic writing of other tutors. The book evolved from that goal into a book that offers generalized tips about teaching composition in varied settings—not just as a writing tutor, but also as a TA, in a classroom, or while focusing on social justice issues. Perhaps for this reason, it is not a popular book in tutor training, but I find it noteworthy because of its contributions from actual tutors. However, the book offers pieces from tutors that are more scholarly than reflective.

<u>Tutor Acculturation</u>

Some research has been done on tutor acculturation, another facet that I will explore in my research. In "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" John Trimbur tentatively investigates how tutors construct and negotiate identity in the writing center while in "We Don't Proofread, So What Do We Do? A Report on Survey Results," Ellen Schendel offers a few definitions of what tutors go over in tutorials. Schendel's work is interesting because in some ways it runs counter to writing center orthodoxy. The piece explores where theory and practice might differ. Jane Cogie's "Peer Tutoring: Keeping the Contradiction Productive" responds to Trimbur's piece by using a case study to address some of the issues that Trimbur raises. Linda K. Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns' "Labor Pains: A Political Analysis of Writing Center Tutoring" examines assumptions about writing center work in terms of forces from within and from outside of

the writing center, including university faculty and staff and theorists of writing center scholarship. In "Got Guilt? Consultant Guilt in the Writing Center Community," Jennifer Nicklay examines conflicting emotional feelings caused by contradictions between writing center orthodoxy and actual practice. Finally, Steve Sherwood's "Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist" talks about the lessons tutors will need to learn that cannot be found in books. These pieces serve to problematize the definition of a peer tutor and the work that a peer tutor takes part in, offering up unique perspectives.

More importantly, these pieces begin a conversation about peer tutors that I plan to build and expand upon in this research, exploring more what tutors personally think about the acculturation process and how they interact with the culture of the writing center to create a tutoring persona. Furthermore, I do not want to just look at tutors at the beginning or some unspecified time in their process of tutor training or acculturation. I want to ask tutors at a specific during their training processes how they think acculturation is affecting them, ideally charting any changes in their conception of both the writing center and their self-concept as tutors.

<u>Research and Narratives Done By Peer Tutors</u>

Some peer tutors have shared narratives that touch upon the experience of a first-time writing center peer tutor. *The Writing Lab Newsletter's* "Tutor's Column" offers up a few such narratives. While most of these articles focus on specific incidents within tutoring sessions, a few more in-depth pieces have addressed the personal experiences tutors go through during training. Rasika Welankiwar's "There Must be a Mistake" reflects on growth and changes during the tutor training process, but from the perspectives of a high school, rather than a college, writing center peer tutor. Other tutor

narratives portray the writing center acculturation process through the eyes of diverse groups of students, such as non-traditional students, foreign students, minority students, and veterans (Houser; Kim; Saluney; Tremblay). My sample set for this study concerns traditional students. Furthermore, the experiences of these students will be covered at greater lengths and over a greater period of time than these authors explore.

Other common sources of tutor narratives include the narrative about a tutor visiting the writing center for the first time (Raisanen), the narrative detailing the process of constructing a distinct tutoring style (Honaker; Honigs; Kedia; Stein), and the narrative that focuses on the differences between the way tutors view themselves vs. the way they view other students, making it clear that the tutors do not view themselves as identifying wholly as other students (Gschwend; Knickmeier). Other tutor narratives discuss ways in which their day-to-day experiences differ with theory (Brawn, Patterson, and Abst; Honigs; Pate) and how they form inter-personal relationships with other tutors (Cunningham and Foust; Fleming-Powers). While insightful, these narratives are frequently brief and not in-depth. I plan on complementing these articles and the research done by peer tutors with my case study and analysis in order to create a fuller picture of the first-time peer tutor experience.

Although there has been a greater call in recent times for undergraduate peer tutors to participate in research and conferences in more "official" venues than just the "Tutor's Column" (Ianetta and Fitzgerald), much of the research that has been conducted by undergraduate peer tutors in these venues does concern personal experiences during tutor training. The research usually focuses on tutoring methods or on trying to answer

problems that the peer tutors discovered during the sessions. The research rarely, if it all, focuses on the tutors themselves. I plan to turn the spotlight onto tutors with my research.

<div align="center">List of Chapters</div>

Chapter 1 (Introduction) will includes my literature review and the general overview of my research questions, their relevance to existing research, and a brief preview of both my methodology and my findings.

Chapter 2 (Methodology) describes in detail the subjects in the study, the institutional setting, the participants, and the nature of their written assignments, as well as the specifics of the process I used to analyze the interviews and the written works of the peer tutors, and the theory behind narrative inquiry.

Chapter 3 (Results and Findings) covers in detail the three major themes that I discovered in my research and the interrelationship between these themes by sharing the words and experiences of first time writing center peer tutors.

Chapter 4 (Conclusions) speculates what my study means for the way writing center peer tutor training is conducted and the way writing centers themselves are defined and presented in scholarship. This chapter will also discuss limitations of this research and make suggestion for further research.

II.   METHODOLOGY

I set out to address the following questions: "What is the experience of first time writing center peer tutors?" That question was further explored through the following clarifying questions:

- What kinds of emotional, intellectual, or pedagogical concerns does a first-time peer tutor face?

- How does tutor acculturation occur?

    - What are first-time peer tutors told about writing centers?

    - How does this discourse affect or shape them as writing tutors?

- How do first-time peer tutors negotiate their position in the academy and craft a definition of themselves as a peer tutor?

    - How does this acculturation develop over time?

To address my research question, I conducted interviews with three peer tutors, following a four week tutor training course that I presided over. The training course was based off of the guidelines for tutor training provided by the College Reading & Learning Association (CRLA) for their CRLA Level I certification. CRLA Level I requires that a minimum of 10 hours of tutor training is given, a minimum of 6 of which must be supervised by a tutor-trainer and should consist of a workshop or discussion, either in person or online. The remaining four hours of CRLA I training is discretionary, allowing for training to take place outside of a more standard classroom environment. The set-up for this tutor training course was that the trainees met for two hours on four consecutive Fridays. Assignments outside the class, including readings and assigned writings, took up an estimated 2-5 hours of the tutors' time.

CRLA I requires that a minimum of eight topics should be addressed in the training. CRLA I recommends 14 topics to be discussed, but it also gives a fair amount of leeway by including a 15th "other" topic. In accordance with that, a variety of different topics were discussed. The agendas for each of the four tutor training sessions are attached in Appendix C. Specifically, topics that were discussed that were suggested by CRLA I training included: definition of tutoring and tutor responsibilities; basic tutoring guidelines/do's and don'ts; techniques for successfully beginning and ending a tutor session; adult learners/learning theory/learning styles; role modeling; active listening and paraphrasing; critical thinking skills; compliance with the ethics and philosophy of the tutoring program; and modeling problem solving.

As part of the course, there were several required readings: Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center," Andrea Lunsford's "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," Steven Corbett's "Tutoring Style, Tutoring Ethics: The Continuing Relevance of the Directive/Nondirective Instructional Debate," and Steve Sherwood's "Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist: Lessons No One Can Teach." North's piece was chosen because it is easily accessible to students who might have never read theory before in their life and because it sketches out the definition of writing centers that most centers still adhere to today. Lunsford's piece does a good job of describing the directive/nondirective debate without necessarily assigning guilt. Lunsford also emphasizes collaboration, something that I stressed in my course as I believe it fosters more successful tutoring sessions. Corbett's piece is a good complement to Lunsford's piece and fleshes out the nondirective argument without resorting to the strictures of something like the classic Brooks article. Finally, Sherwood's piece does a good job of

introducing the concept of a tutoring persona while further emphasizing both

collaboration, and another concept that I find to be essential to tutoring, the concept of

flexibility. Sherwood does a great job of explaining how different students might have

different needs, explains some key concepts of rhetoric in easily digested ways, and adds

a sense of whimsy to the whole discussion.

In addition to the readings, reflective writings were assigned including pieces that

discussed required readings, reflective pieces about tutoring sessions they observed,

reflective pieces about tutoring sessions in which *they* were the ones being tutored, and a

final piece which asked them to reflect upon the course and their overall development. I

admit that at first I assigned the reflective pieces because it just felt like something you

did in tutor training courses. The reflections on the readings also had the ulterior motive

of making sure that they had done the readings. However, it became clear that these

pieces genuinely helped students evolve a tutoring style and reconsider and re-evaluate

techniques they tried in sessions or that they saw peers using in sessions. I asked the

tutors to reflect on a session where they were a student in order to get a better perspective

of how their tutees must feel. The reflective pieces proved so successful that I ended up

assigning a last piece that asked them to analyze their development during the course,

which proved fruitful both for my study and for their growth as tutors.

Much of the rationale of my tutor training course was designed as a reaction to

what *did not* work for me during my personal tutor training. I aimed to provide the tutors

with a brief foundation in writing center studies, while simultaneously not overwhelming

them with theory. I aimed to focus not on the directive versus non-directive paradigm, but

to concentrate on collaboration and adaptability. I aimed to provide practical information

for specific ways to help students in sessions. Perhaps most importantly, though, I aimed to let tutors have time to discuss with me and with their fellow tutors, what worked and did not work in sessions. An essential part of each session of the course involved me opening the floor up to the tutors, asking them if they had a particularly good or particularly challenging session they wanted to talk about. Tutors would share their experiences, and we would talk about what went right and wrong, and how we would have done it differently. I tried to give them frank advice, sharing similar stories from my tutoring experiences. In part, I want my thesis to reflect upon this ethos; the words and the experiences of the tutors will ideally intermingle with the words and experiences of my younger self.

After the course, the abovementioned interviews were conducted. Following the interviews, I also looked at various reflective writings that were assigned throughout the duration of the course. I analyzed the written pieces and the interview transcripts, finding repeated patterns, both in terms of key concepts and in terms of key words. I further narrowed these concepts into three main themes to be discussed in the results section. Following the fleshing out of my main themes, I interwove my own narrative experiences into my findings, where appropriate, and careful to state when and where my experience differed with that of my subjects.

<center>Research Site</center>

Texas State University - San Marcos is a state university in Texas and in 2013 enrolled 35,546 students. Classified as an emerging research institution, the university houses undergraduate as well as graduate courses of study, offering terminal PhD degrees. Texas State is located between Austin and San Antonio, and hosts a group of

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culturally and ethnically diverse students. Its population is 54% White, 31% Hispanic, and 8% African American who mostly come to Texas State from within Texas itself (College Portraits).

The Texas State University Writing Center was established in 1984 with the stated goal of "student academic success and empowerment" (Texas State Writing Center, "Mission Statement"). Originally located in Flowers Hall, which houses the English Department, the Writing Center moved in 2012 to its current location in the Academic Services Building-North. The Writing Center had 5,417 appointments during 2012-2013, and will probably surpass this number for 2013-2014 with 3,244 appointments in Fall 2013. The Writing Center's demographics are reflective of university-wide demographics, with the center's clients being 28.1% Hispanic and 9.8% African American (Writing Center Student Service Fee Report).

The current iteration of the Texas State University Writing Center focuses on one-on-one tutoring provided by peer writing consultants. The center also offers a variety of other programs, including writing workshops, veteran-to-veteran tutoring, thesis and dissertation help, classroom tours/visits, an essay contest, handouts, and online tutoring (Texas State Writing Center, "Mission Statement").

<u>Participants</u>

The participants in this study were three undergraduate peer tutors who had no prior experience with tutoring in a writing center. The tutors interviewed will be known pseudonymously as Jane, Joe, and Samantha.

Jane is a 25 year old sophomore majoring in English. She was the most non-traditional of the tutor trainees, a bit outside of the range in terms of age of the typical

undergraduate. As a student within the course, she was a bit lackadaisical and valued conversation the most as a way of learning, sharing experiences with others to clarify her own thoughts.

Joe is a 20-year-old sophomore majoring in philosophy. His tutoring style was more geared towards the emotional. As a student in the course he proved to be someone who very much learned by doing. His reflective writings genuinely showed him iterating and reiterating his tutoring methods.

Samantha is a 19-year-old, classified as a junior, even though she was only in her second year of school at Texas State University at the time of the study. She had taken a lot of dual-credit and AP classes in high school and had a major leg up in college. Her major is in Athletic Training with an English minor. Samantha was a very fastidious student, and she proved detail oriented in both the way she completed her assignments and the way that she

The sample set for this study was chosen as a matter of convenience, as I had access to these tutor trainees, and I also happened to be teaching their training course. Despite the fact that the sample was a matter of convenience, I was lucky enough to have tutors of a variety of different ages, backgrounds, and majors. All tutors were working in the Texas State University Writing Center while completing training, so they were tutoring students over the course of these four weeks.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I will also occasionally be referring to myself as a fourth, almost shadow participant. For the events described, younger peer tutor Cresta was between the ages of 19 and 21, majoring first with an Associate of Arts in General Studies, and later with a Bachelor's of Arts in History, emphasis on European

history. I have tried to provide further information about the institutional contexts of the writing centers I was working at as the contexts come up in the course of the narrative.

Interviews

Interviews of the participants were conducted in May 2014. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews were conducted from a list of questions (Appendix D), derived in part from the research questions discussed in Chapter One, but left free enough so that clarifying questions could be asked and answered. The questions focused primarily on what the students thought about certain writing center topics both before and after the training course, in an attempt to chart their development. The questions also asked tutors to recount their experiences with the training course and writing center scholarship and their anxieties.

Interview was chosen as a methodology because it allowed me access to the words of real tutors. The intent of this whole project was to give a voice to the tutors, so the ability to quote them becomes essential.

Likewise, the examination of the tutors' reflective works also gave me access to their thoughts, words, and experiences.

Analysis

Both the transcribed interviews and the written works were analyzed for thematic patterns and similarities.. I identified and color-coded four different through-lines of similarity that I found in the pieces I analyzed. The through-lines were as follows: anxieties, misconceptions, the tutors' conceptualization of the tutor-to-student relationship, and discussions of flexibility. I also quantified the use of some words in the interview transcripts; terms like "flexibility," "help," "confidence," and "comfortable"

were used by all three participants in their interviews. Based on these through-lines and repeated words, I began to look for relationships. In the process of the analysis it became clear that three factors had the greatest impact on the tutors: misconceptions, anxieties, and the role that experience played in the evolving tutor-tutee relationship.

<u>Narrative</u>

As I value the words of my participants, I also value the words of my younger self, and want to incorporate those words in some way. I do not have journals or notes from my time tutoring at the various centers that I have worked at, but I do have sessions that stick in my mind to this day and shape who I became as a tutor. To this end, I have used narrative inquiry methodology within my thesis to explore my own thoughts and experiences and to converse with the thoughts and experiences of my participants. I have made this decision, because, as Candace Spigelman says, a "blended approach creates useful contradictions, contributes more complicated meanings, and so may provoke greater insights than reading or writing either experiential or academic modes separately" (3).

It may be tempting to dismiss narrative inquiry as imprecise and not academically rigorous. There is also the point to be made that as stories are told and retold they become codified, manipulated, and taken out of the time and place in which these experiences existed. Further, narrative is by its very nature subjective. There is also a post-modernist conundrum inherent in narrativity; if there is no one truth, and truth can change at any moment depending on context, then what is the use of sharing experiences narratively? David Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz state that narrative "compels us to care about people's lives in all their complexity and often moves us to action" (1). I want to harness this

unique power of narrative within my work. Furthermore, Schaafsma and Vinz also have

an answer for the post-modernism conundrum, by defining narrative as poststructuralist.

And, "If postmodernists destabilize assumptions about the coherence of narrative,

poststructuralists identify and reveal the complex ways in which forms, discrepancies,

and pluralities in narrative lead to more nuanced understandings of the mutability of texts

and discourses" (Schaafsma and Vinz 24). By remembering and constructing narratives

of my time as a first time writing center peer tutor, I found myself confronting the

similarities and the differences between what I had experienced and the experiences of

my participants that opened up a conversation and enriched my findings.

III.   RESULTS AND FINDINGS

<u>Misconceptions: The Writing Center as Remedial and Hyper-Directive</u>

At the start of a peer tutor's career, a major misconception shapes their thoughts and ideas of the writing center. This misconception centers around the writing center as a place for the remedial, a place to cure the ills of bad writers. North says in his seminal piece, "The Idea of a Writing Center," that "[i]n [certain people's] minds, clearly, writers fall into three fairly distinct groups: the talented, the average and the others; and the writing center's only logical *raison d'etre* must be to handle those others—those…with 'special problems'" (34). In all the peer tutors I talked with, and in myself when I began as a tutor, the perception of the writing center varied, but all perceptions featured a general sense that writing centers were for unprepared or struggling students, students who did not write well.

Furthermore, in all participants, and in my own experience, there was a baseline assumption that writing centers were focused on editing. North's idea of a fix-it shop still proliferated in the minds of these first time peer tutors.

Each tutor came to work at the writing center in different ways and had different levels of knowledge about the writing center starting out. Jane had never come to the writing center before, but a professor wrote a recommendation to the director suggesting that she be hired. Joe had only heard of the writing center from his freshman composition course. His composition professor had suggested he both go to the writing center for help and apply to the writing center for employment. He never utilized the writing center, but did apply for a job at the writing center "a couple semesters" later. Samantha had attended a workshop that took place at the writing center and expressed interest at

applying her to the assistant director. This had been the first time Samantha had visited the writing center.

Despite different ways that they came to the work at the writing center, all of the tutors harbored misconceptions about writing centers. Jane was very frank about her misconceptions, stating that "I had the mentality that it was more of like, hand over your manuscript, a tutor will make edits, and then you take it and revise, and then you go get your better grade, type of situation." Jane expressed that her misconceptions came primarily from students who had never been to the writing center and from professors who offered "misguidance" [sic]. In the course of my interview with Jane, she used the words "edit," "edits," "edited" and "editing" a total of 6 times, primarily to discuss her original misconceptions and others' misconceptions about the writing center.

Joe had never used the writing center as a service "out of disinterest" and because "[he] only heard about it from a teacher…never heard anybody who had used it before." He claimed that he "used different tutoring services, so [he] didn't have a misconception about…essay versus writer, as far as what the main focus was to improve upon." However, Joe later stated that before working at the writing center he believed the tutor's responsibility was to "just fix mistakes, scratch out parts, [and] refer to grammar books," indicating that he might have claimed to be immune to this misconception to appear compliant with writing center orthodoxy. In Joe's original conception, he also saw the tutee as having "a role [in the session], but not an active role. They were the examined." Joe in the interview later explained that his main experience with being tutored was in a tutoring program offered in high school that was to help him write college admission

essays. He stated that when he attended these sessions he "thought there was a specific thing that [he] could put into my essay to be accepted into any college."

Prior to working in the writing center, Samantha knew very little about the center, and what she did know she knew primarily by walking by it and reading the advertisements written on the windows. Samantha stated that she had never come to the writing center because she "hadn't had an English class at Texas State yet," but she had known people who had come here, mostly freshmen. Samantha also stated that she "assumed [writing center tutoring] was just to help students with their papers…someone comes in and needs help editing." Samantha elaborated, "I thought a tutor was just someone who was going to answer questions, and I probably thought a tutee was someone almost remedial?"

Interestingly, although my participants talked about their misconceptions in their interviews, these misconceptions were barely present in their written work. Only Joe touched upon these misconceptions and only by discussing how the misconceptions played out in the behavior of a student writer in a session he observed. Joe wrote, "[The student] did not come in for any specific question or problem he was having; he wanted his paper read over and picked apart for any surface, grammatical mistakes it contained."

It is possible that the relative reticence about the subject of misconceptions in the peer tutors' written work had to do with the questions asked; most of their assignments focused on the day-to-day activities of a tutoring session, focusing on the present and not on earlier recollections. However, the final assignment in training revolved around reflecting on what tutors had learned during the course, talking about the ways they had

grown and changed. It seems odd that the tutors would not touch upon the evolution of their conceptions of the purpose of writing centers.

This reticence mimics in some ways Nicklay's findings in "Got Guilt? Consultant Guilt in the Writing Center Community" where writing center tutors felt guilt about acting directive in sessions (22). Perhaps the thought of the original misconceptions tutors held spurred such guilty feelings, causing it to be an uncomfortable topic to reflect upon. Likewise, this might explain Joe's claim that he knew what writing tutors were supposed to act in a more non-directive fashion, before he later contradicted his statement, talking about how there was "a specific thing" he thought tutors could tell him in order to make a perfect piece of writing.

My experience with these misconceptions were similar, although I had the unique feature that the first writing center I ever worked with actually encouraged directive tutoring, to the point that editing was considered good tutoring practice.

The first writing center I ever worked at was the center at Coastal Community College (CCC). Coastal Community College (CCC)[1] is a mid-size community college located along the Texas gulf coast, midway between Houston and Galveston. During the time I attended (2007-2010), it served about 3000 students. Founded in 1967, CCC was a bit of a mainstay of the area; both of my parents had actually taken continuing education classes there. The college offers Associates degrees and various professional certifications, continuing ed. and adult basic education programs, GED and duel-credit programs, as well as a Collegiate High School program that allowed junior and senior high school students to graduate from high school with an Associate's degree, as well as

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[1] In order to avoid "naming and shaming," I have changed all names of people and colleges in the narrative portion of this thesis. However, information about the schools is accurate—though for obvious reasons I am hesitant to cite the sources, as they identify the schools.

a high school degree. CCC served a relatively small subset of the suburbs south of Houston, surrounded as CCC was by competing community colleges, community college systems, and universities. Generally speaking, CCC's students primarily came from cities located in a 12-15 mile radius around the campus.

Students at CCC were generally non-traditional students; at the time I was attending, many were returning to college during the Great Recession in order to open up job prospects, facilitate a career change, or improve their qualifications to make them less vulnerable to lay-offs. Most degree-seeking students sought AA's or AS's in general studies (some with the goal of transferring to a nearby university). Because the surrounding areas had many medical centers and oil refineries, many people were seeking certificates in the health care professions or in the petrochemical industry

The general population of CCC was divided roughly 50/50 between non-traditional students (aged 25+) and students under 24 who included both traditional college students and high school students enrolled in college classes.

In terms of demographic make-up, most students were from a working-class background. Roughly half the students were white, 25% were black, and 25% Hispanic. This demographic breakdown mirrors the population of the students who I saw in the writing center.

I do not know the age of the CCC writing center itself, but I assume the center's history stretches back to at least the mid-90s, although some of the outdated practices (of which, more later) makes me wonder if there was an antecedent to the writing center that had much older roots. At one time the center had been staffed by adjuncts, and before that, by forcibly conscripted tenured and tenure-track professors.

The director of the Writing Center, whom I will call Sharon, was a technical writer by training and had worked originally in medical writing. She had been teaching composition for the past 25 years, save for a few years when she had briefly gone into retirement.

Sharon was a very old-school, current-traditionalist when it came to teaching writing, and this was reflected in how she ran the writing center. There were walls and walls of books containing grammar drills and worksheets along with multiple floppy disks (which I finally transferred to a flash drive while working there) full of grammar handouts. These handouts and worksheets were frequent mainstays of the center's tutoring.

I was not a natural tutor. I made good grades in writing, but at 19 I was both fully convinced that I was smarter than everyone and cripplingly shy. Working in writing centers changed this quickly, but it was still an unexpected path for me to take. I figured that all you needed to be a tutor was to be good at writing, and I also figured, from all that my surroundings told me, and all that the students expected, that the center's remit was to edit.

I received virtually no training at CCC. The first day at my new job, I was given a binder filled with print-outs from various websites discovered when you typed "peer tutor" into a search engine. This manual gave me some conflicting messages. It said *not* to edit. I had a six-hour shift on that first day, and I spent four hours reading this "manual." The last two hours of my shift, I had to tutor because more students had come in than Sharon could tutor on her own. First day on the job and I found myself bouncing between four different people who wanted help from the center. From then on, I hit the

ground running, and Sharon, for the most part, left me with the whale's share of the tutoring.

One specific event occurred while I worked at the CCC writing center, an event that would shape my tenure at that writing center and would shape my experience as a tutor.

Two or three weeks after I had started working at the writing center, a student came in whom I will call Donna. Donna was in her late 30s or early 40s and returning to school in order to get a new job. At this point, Donna had already gone through the two levels of developmental English before first-year English. However, she had passed them with D's. Donna was a really good example of a student who had fallen through the cracks, and she was passed on through the developmental sequence, all the way to English 1310, with no suggestion from an adviser to retake any of her developmental sequence. She had taken both parts of the developmental sequence from a single professor and had rarely received more feedback than just a grade.

She found herself in 1310, impossibly confused, but hopeful that I would be able to help her do better in on-level composition than she had done before in her developmental classes.

Her writing was very basic, and she was trying to code-switch between Standard Academic English (SAE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). At the time, these were two phrases I had never heard, and I had no experience with reading the writing of developmental writers, or really anyone's writing other than my own.

Writing was not Donna's only problem, however. Donna also struggled because she was taking a hybrid online/offline course and had little computer experience. She did not have a computer at home, and the computer she used at her work was focused around

working on a proprietary system. She had little-to-no experience with Windows, the internet, or desktop publishing. As a tech-savvy person, I was shocked that someone would lack these basic computer skills.

The essay was also a research essay, a concept that had not been discussed in her developmental classes. I had to find a way to help her understand computer basics, writing basics, and research basics in two weeks. For two weeks, Donna came to the writing center Monday-Thursday when I worked. We would spend about an hour together talking about the paper and her work, and then she would spend the four hours left in my shift typing at one of the computers, periodically calling me over to answer a question, read a paragraph, or help her save or format her document.

At this point, I was still trying to figure out how to tutor, or even what a peer tutor was. Sharon wanted me to edit students' grammar and mechanics without writing a student's paper for them, the "handbook" told me to help facilitate student learning and avoid editing, but my innate idea of what a tutor did was shaped around very directive principles, based in part on French and Math tutoring I received in high school.

Almost instinctively, I felt uncomfortable tearing Sharon's paper apart. If I just edited a students' paper, the paper would frequently still be very bad; a paper that has flawless grammar and mechanics but no thesis, no point, and no organization, is by no measure an A paper. The editing made students happy, but I was not going around changing word choice or re-writing sentences entirely, so it was not really "improving" the paper. Besides, I could see that even as I tried to explain how to edit that my information was going right over the student's head.

I was self-taught when it came to writing, so it was hard to use my experiences with teachers to help tutor someone else. In fact, my previous teachers were better models of what *not* to do. In my freshman year of high school, I had a teacher who demanded that we write a literary criticism research paper, complete with thesis, organization, and evidence, basically from scratch. I got a D. I did not understand why, and all the teacher had told me was that I needed more of my own thoughts and better MLA formatting. She said that to tell me more would be pointless, because I would not learn then. I had to work out what worked for me in learning writing, all the while realizing that what worked for me might be different for others. I just threw things at the wall until they stuck, basically.

Donna came a long way over those two weeks I worked with her, but it just was not enough. She did learn some grammar and mechanics, as well as some computer skills, but overall she still was not a very good writer. She also still used a lot of AAVE, although when prompted she was more frequently able to identify and correct incidences of inappropriate conjugations and fix subject/verb agreements.

One morning, a week after Donna had turned in her paper, I walked in for my shift in the writing center to find Sharon in her cubicle talking with Donna.

"Sit down," Sharon said, peering over the cubicle, and pointing to the lumpy couch just outside the cubicle. "We need to talk."

The cubicle walls did not do much to insulate the conversation taking place, and I could tell that Donna was very mad, and Sharon was doing her best to be diplomatic. Donna was almost in tears, saying that I had not helped her at all on her paper, and she

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had gotten another "D." Sharon said something I did not quite catch, and then Donna walked out of the cubicle and the center.

 "Come here," Sharon said in a tone that meant business, pointing me to sit down opposite her desk behind the cubicle.

I felt sick to my stomach, my nerves immediately getting the best of me. I sat down and failed to stop myself from fidgeting.

Sharon asked me what I had been working on with Donna. I tried to explain that I had been working on *everything*. Sharon then asked why, if I had really been working with Donna, she had received a "D" on her paper. I admitted that Donna was not a very good writer, even with the help I had given her.

Sharon told me that if that was the case, I should have fixed her paper. I was confused; I was not supposed to write a student's paper. How was "fixing" it different? What was I supposed to do here?

"There shouldn't be any serious grammar or mechanics errors in a student whose paper has come through the writing center," Sharon said.

Sharon then explained that Donna had not brought her paper with her, but if it turned out that Donna's poor grade was due to my lack of editing, then my employment at the writing center would end.

I am not sure I can actually put into words what I was feeling at this moment. I went to the bathroom, cried for five straight minutes, threw water on my face, and then came back. Donna was back by this time with her paper. I went to the computer and pretended to do some class work, really just blankly staring at the screen.

Sharon and Donna did not spend much time talking at all. I was unsure whether this was good or bad. Five or ten minutes passed before Sharon asked me to come over. She had a Xeroxed copy of Donna's paper with professorial comments on it. All he had really marked off were grammar mistakes and all those "mistakes" he marked were *not actually mistakes*. Her punctuation, at least, had been solid, although there were plenty of mistakes that the professor had not marked. My job was safe, but Sharon told me that this sort of thing could not happen again.

My greatest regret is that Donna never came to the writing center again, dispirited that I had not helped her, unable to see the progress that I saw. That still bothers me to this day. I wonder if she passed 1310, if she achieved her goals. I worry that she did not. I wonder what I could have done if she kept coming to the writing center. I wonder if I was even experienced enough to have made a difference.

I worked six months at the CCC writing center. The way I ensured that "this sort of thing" did not happen again was by carefully managing expectations of the students, trying to be flexible, and striking an uneasy balance between some editing, coupled with some instruction.

Many of the tutors I found myself working with in CCC's writing center were similar to Donna—remedial. Even as I struggled with the editing conundrum, it never occurred to me to question the assumption that writing centers were for "bad" writers. Teachers referred bad writers to this center, much as one would refer a patient to a specialist. Moreover, grammar drills re-enforced the idea that students at the writing center were missing something basic about writing.

The general pattern seems to indicate that prior to working at the writing center, the tutors I studied were inclined to think of the center as more directive and product-based then the non-directive, process-based method that tutors are encouraged to practice. There is also the attitude that the writing center was for "other" students; Joe had not met someone who had used the writing center before, and Samantha thought tutees were freshman, in English classes, or "almost remedial."

In Grutsch-McKinney's *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers,* she problematizes the grand narrative that writing centers "tutor." Grutsch-McKinney explores ideas about tutoring versus teaching and the writing center as remedial. My results indicate the necessity of a further problematization, particularly when it impacts tutor training: what does tutoring *mean* to the uninitiated peer tutor? My research finds evidence that the base assumption peer tutor come in with is that centers are directive and remedial. For none of the tutors, this assumption did not come from a professor who suggested the writing center or even a peer who visited the writing center, but it was an assumption based around other, non-writing tutoring experiences, or just basic assumptions. In other words, this was not necessarily an institutional problem; it was not a matter of merely a dysfunctional writing center (although in my case, that certainly contributed), a failed writing center advertising campaign, or even the misguided assumptions of professors (as North and other early writing center scholars may suggest). The idea of writing centers as both directive and remedial are base assumptions that existed outside even the concept of a university for these novice peer tutors.

If these beliefs are very widespread, overcoming misconceptions about writing centers would thus become an ongoing process. Even with a university wide culture that

reinforces non-directive, collaborative practices as being the focus of a writing center, this idea must be brought up again and again, as a new freshman class matriculates every year.

Most tutor training manuals spend a fair amount of time explaining that a peer tutor is not an editor, explaining how the ethics of writing centers demand that tutors be non-directive. Gillespie and Lerner state in *The Longman Guide to Peer Tutoring* that "when [they] remind you that writers should own their texts or that tutors shouldn't simply clean up writers' texts and then hand them back as if they were dry cleaners, we show certain values and responsibilities that imbue writing center work" (44). While my research indicates that there is definitely an initial uncertainty about the tutors' role, I worry that overemphasis of a non-directive ethos could do more harm than good to first time peer tutors. This could set up peer tutors to grapple with guilt, as described by Nicklay, in her study "Got Guilt? Consultant Guilt in the Writing Center Community":

> Consultants indicated that they most often felt guilt for being directive in sessions focused upon lower order concerns, but all also indicated, when queried about their methods, that directivity was an appropriate method to use in those very same sessions. **In other words, consultants felt guilt for using a method they realized was appropriate.** (22, emphasis mine)

A tutor training program that focuses excessively on the non-directive could thus stunt a peer tutor's growth, and do a great disservice to the students with whom the peer tutor works with. This becomes evident when considering my experiences and uncertainties, but also in the way that my participants were reluctant to talk about their original

misconceptions in their written reflective work. Joe's glossing over of his misconceptions in the interview also hints at this sense of guilt.

Findings: Misconceptions Persist

There is a tendency in writing center studies to either dismiss the mistaken idea of the writing center as directive and remedial as something that the field has moved long past, or to hyper-focus on it, mainly in the context of the opinions of administrators. My research indicates that this misconception is still a real problem, but a problem that can be located at the cultural, university, faculty, *and* peer tutor levels.

Tutoring seems to have gained a meaning in our culture that is antithetical to the way that the word is used in writing centers. Tutors are people who have one correct answer and will impart it to their tutees. Tutors are people that are needed because there is some deficiency in the student they are helping. There is a perception that people who are good at something do not need tutors.

Writing centers are clearly not well served by using the word "tutor" to describe their staff. However, words like "consultant," "coach," or "mentor" all have their own problematic connotations. Trying these words in a writing center might prove useful in revealing whether or not tutors come in harboring misconceptions when their job is described in different ways.

Until a better word is found, the best course of action is to keep in mind the connotations that the word "tutor" has and to deconstruct that word with prospective peer tutors. Training that focuses on what writing centers define as tutors should be one of the first aspects of centers that should be covered.

A Pervasive Sense of Inadequacy

It is not a great revelation that first time peer tutors would experience some anxieties or fears. However, it is interesting to note that my peer tutor participants shared the same anxiety—a feeling of inadequacy. Jane stated that the first anxiety she experienced was fearing that "a student [will ask] a question that I don't have an answer to." Complicating Jane's fears was the fact that she did not initially see her fellow, more experienced, peer tutors as potential resources but saw them more as adversaries. Jane stated that she feared asking another tutor a question in case they thought "'you should already know this,'" or "'this is why we hired you.'" Likewise, Joe worried that he was not "as qualified as a lot of my peer tutors…I've never attempted to teach anything really." Joe stated that he slowly got over that as he began to focus more on the ways he was helping the students, but he still had fears that he did not always know "what books to look at when I need information that I don't already know." Samantha felt similarly, feeling that she was not "the strongest, most powerful leader, tutor, in the cubicle" until she "didn't feel like [she] had to be like some fearless leader." Samantha also talked of her confusion when she was tossed into a session with a grad student, recalling herself as thinking, "'What is this?'"

This finding in my research was the first moment (but certainly not the last) when my participants showed me something unexpected, something that did not cohere with my personal experience. I had never worried about knowing enough. Likely due to my naïve know-it-all attitude, I never doubted my own knowledge about any given topic. What I doubted and what caused me great fear was that I would do something that would irrevocably mess up the students I was tutoring. This "messing up" the student could

have been caused by wrong information, but in the mind of my own fears, it was more likely to involve some nebulous psychic damage to a student. I always had a sense that I would inadvertently crush the ego of a student.

In part, my anxiety of breaking a student was driven by my roots in a directive driven writing center. I worked at CCC's writing center for six months, moved to a full-time job at a law office, and then, when I graduated with my AA from CCC, took a break from working and matriculated into South Houston University (SHU) in order to complete my Bachelor's. SHU was a satellite school of a much larger university, and it was unique in that it was the last upper-division college in Texas that focused on the upper two years, along with select MA and PhD programs. The idea of upper-division colleges was a popular one when SHU was established in 1976. These colleges were designed to partner with community colleges, ensuring community college graduates had an easier time transferring, and providing a nice alternative to regular universities for non-traditional students. Upper-division colleges fell out of favor during the 90s and 2000s, and now only a couple exist in the United States. SHU itself was ordered by the state of Texas to turn into a four-year university, and in Fall 2014 it matriculated its first Freshman class.

SHU had originally been created to help further education for NASA employees at the nearby Johnson Space Center. The university was much more convenient than a regular four-year university for many NASA employees, plus it was significantly closer to the NASA area then the other four-year universities in Houston.

However, with the then-recent disillusion of the space shuttle program and continuing cuts in NASA funding, NASA employees were no longer the main students at

the university. Rumors that SHU was going to be forced to either merge more directly with its sister university or participate in downward expansion were also rampant, and in the middle of my junior year in 2011 the state legislature signed a bill forcing the university to become a four-year institution.

Although students attending due to NASA were in short supply, SHU was still incredibly popular with non-traditional students. Its MA programs in particular attracted those who had spent a long time in the work force, but who wanted to get a higher degree in order to enter a new pay bracket. This was particularly true of teachers, for whom an MA guaranteed a raise. However, SHU also had a large portion of non-traditional students seeking a BA. Most SHU students had transferred from the local community colleges immediately following receiving their AA or AS, but some were returning to school after a break or transferring from another larger university.

SHU had a large education program, partnering with local schools to facilitate student teaching, and with an extended teacher internship. SHU also offered MAs and one of its few PhDs in education, so a high proportion of SHU students were education majors. After education, SHU's computer science program held the most plentiful students. Many of SHU's computer science students were International students, predominately from India. SHU did a lot of advertising in Indian universities, and Houston's existing diverse population and large Indian community made it an attractive site for many international students to pursue a second
 BA or a graduate degree.

In terms of demographics, SHU students tended to have an average age in their 30s and the school was overwhelming female, with more than 60% female students. SHU

had the distinction of just recently becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) right around the time I began attending it.

The writing center mostly served international or ELL students, students enrolled in Advanced Writing—a mandatory writing course for all humanities majors, and students in technical writing or business writing classes. The occasional student would come in looking for help with graduate papers, but it was fairly rare to help with a student's thesis or dissertation itself. Many students relied on their advisors for help with that.

The SHU writing center itself had been established in 1993 and had always been run by the same director, a woman I will call Dr. Bennet. Dr. Bennet was a tenured professor in English who also was in charge of SHU's rhetoric and composition specialization for their English MA. Keeping a tight ship in the writing center was important to Dr. Bennet, and to that end, there was a 3 credit hour course required to work in her writing center. Students could get out of the course if they had worked at a writing center before with a director she was familiar with through local writing center organizations, a director who could vouch for them, but in general, the course was required. Following the traditional writing center model of non-directive, process-based methods was very important to Dr. Bennet, and she used her training course to maintain her high standards. Taking the course did not guarantee employment: temperament, grades, and employment needs factored in.

With recently having to quit my full-time job after enrolling at SHU, as SHU had very few online courses, unlike CCC, I was again looking for a job. I had enjoyed helping the students I had tutored at CCC, so I decided to apply to the writing center at SHU. I

was disappointed that Dr. Bennet required a course to work there, but nonetheless, I figured the course might be interesting, so I enrolled. The Tutor Training Practicum course was a stacked course, open to both graduate and undergraduates. Originally I found this intimidating, but I soon found it was not as terrifying as I had anticipated. Graduate students had more stringent course requirements and extra readings, but as the only undergraduate enrolled in the course that semester, I found myself doing their extra readings in order to keep up with class discussion. In fact, I really enjoyed the readings and began falling in love with the subject of writing center studies.

One of the main course books in the class was *The Bedford St. Martin's Guide for Writing Tutors*, and I read the whole book, not just the assigned readings for either the grad students or for myself. I found it amazing to see how much of the standard writing center pedagogy went directly against what I had been taught before. I also was really taken by what I perceived as the altruistic goals of writing center studies. My enthusiasm for tutoring was reinvigorated.

The course was set up so that the first four weeks were reading and about backgrounds. The last four weeks was when the tutor trainees began tutoring in the writing center, with Dr. Bennet observing us. After the first four weeks, I was eager to get back to tutoring again, excited to try my hand at implementing some of the tips and tricks I read. I am not sure Dr. Bennet was as excited. I had told Dr. Bennet my story about Donna and talked a little bit about the atmosphere at my previous writing center. Since then, I had noticed Dr. Bennet treating me with a bit of suspicion. After class she would talk with me about tutoring, and how wrong my other writing center had been. Combined with the tone of some of the readings we had been assigned, I started to internalize some

guilt about my previous writing center experiences. How could I have done such a thing to the students? I had not followed the rules of writing centers! I had not worked at a "proper" writing center. I had obviously immeasurably messed up the students I had worked with, and I was obviously *corrupted* as tutor. How could I be a proper writing center tutor when I had worked so long—*a full six months*—at a center that was the very antithesis of everything I had read about?

Nicklay's guilt was a very real concept to me, though it obviously played a lesser role in the minds of my participants. Likewise, Gillespie and Lerner's guide was the tutor training manual required in SHU's writing center course, so its discussion of the ethical obligation of non-directiveness haunted me. Messages like this litter tutor training handbooks. Similarly, Capossela says, "if you get carried away, the paper WILL become yours—and as your contributions become tangled with the writer's plagiarism will become harder and harder to avoid" (2). Perhaps the piece of writing center scholarship that most influenced my fear of hurting a student was Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring," who says, "When you 'improve' a student's paper, you haven't been a tutor at all; you've been an editor. You may have been an exceedingly good editor, but you've been of little service to your student" (128).

I avoided sharing this guilt with my peer tutor participants by cultivating what they read. Jane, Joe and Samantha did not read Gillespie and Lerner or Capossela. They did not read Brooks' non-directive diatribe, and while they read North, they did not seem to think much of him. While I couched their reading of North in terms of describing him as a foundation of writing centers, or someone who set out the basic ideas behind writing centers, my participants characterized much of the older writing center scholarship whole

cloth as "jaded" and "broody" (Jane) or "more negative than it would be now of [sic]

those written currently because a lot of these articles have been written decades in the

past" (Joe).[2]

The remainder of their required reading—Corbett's "Tutoring Style, Tutoring

Ethics: The Continuing Relevance of the Directive/Nondirective Instructional Debate"

and Sherwood's "Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist: Lessons No One Can Teach—were

chosen in order to emphasize the idea that flexibility in practice is a good thing, and that

there is no one right or wrong way to tutor (ie: there is no value behind either directive or

non-directive, except situationally). I think their lack of anxiety surrounding the

particular subject of instructional guilt proves that I was successful in allaying those

fears, although it remains to be seen how I could further allay their fear of inadequacy

through instruction.

The reason that the fear of inadequacy was so pervasive is patently obvious,

however. When all the participants were operating under the assumption that a tutor must

be an all-knowing figure who provides the right answers to a lesser student, then any gap

in a tutor's knowledge becomes a fatal flaw. I think it is likely that had my institutional

context not changed so drastically, or had I not been so bloody-minded and arrogant, I

too would have shared a similar primary anxiety.

One key part of helping to counteract inadequacy lies in the education of the true

purpose of the writing center. The peer tutor needs to know that they are not expected to

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[2] While neither student specified what articles they were talking about in responding to this question, the two oldest articles we read were North's "Idea…" and Lunsford's "Collaboration, Control and the Idea of a Writing Center." I think that the negative implications they got from North's piece are self-evident, but I was originally puzzled by their interpretation of Lunsford, as I had always seen that piece as more a celebration of collaboration that worries less about the directive/non-directive binary. However, upon re-reading, I see how the participants interpreted the different kinds of centers (the parlors and the storehouses) as potentially grim and fatalistic.

know everything. In fact, working in the writing center will likely teach first time peer tutors much. And indeed, it appears that a tutor's lived experience is where they learn the most.

<u>Findings: Overcoming Anxieties</u>

I have no doubt that many of the anxieties that my participants experienced come directly from their misconceptions. If a tutor has all the answers and is meant to be a corrective, then a tutor must know as much information as possible. A gap in information becomes a major issue; a tutor can't fix a student if they do not have the right "equipment."

The first step to overcoming this anxiety, then, is again to help tutor trainees understand what is meant by "tutor" in the context of a writing center. In fact, defining tutor as something that explicitly accounts for and dismisses the anxieties so frequently found in first time tutors will both help tutors better understand their job and help allay some of their fears.

In my research, these anxieties have not ended up being crippling to any of the tutor trainees, but they are pervasive. That their root cause is so intertwined with the most common misconception that tutors held actually makes overcoming these anxieties a relatively easy affair once the realization of the misconceptions are accepted.

<u>Evolving As Tutors: Conceiving of Tutoring Through Personal and Shared Experience</u>

For all three tutors, several key words came up again and again during my interviews while they described their experience with the students they tutored, although to a lesser extent in the written work. This was unique, because I had not made a particular emphasis on these key terms in my training, and the required readings did not

necessarily emphasize these terms either. The three words they most commonly used

were "confidence," "help," and "different," although each tutor used them to varying

degrees.

Table 1. Frequency of Key Words Used Within Interviews			
Tutor	*Jane*	*Joe*	*Samantha*
Confident/confidence	2	7	4
Different	9	5	3
Help (and derivatives like helping, etc.)	17	10	22

Confidence or making a student feel confident was used by the tutors to describe

the purpose of a tutorial, or what they would do in the tutorial, and though Joe used it the

most, it is interesting to note that all three tutors identified it as an important end result of

a tutor/tutee relationship. Different was used to describe the situation of each tutorial,

each session, and each student, indicating a preference towards flexibility in tutorials, and

an avoidance of a one-size-fits-all tutoring style. Finally, help was defined as another key

goal of a tutoring session or as another purpose of a writing center. Tutors described how

the tutorials needed to be helpful, to help students in learning.

Although the frequency of these specific words may be insignificant themselves,

the pattern of thought that they indicate was significant enough for me to include them.

For example, although Samantha did not use the specific word "different," she did

emphasize that a good tutor "takes each case individually." Similarly, although she only

used the words "confident" or "confidence" four times, she stated that it was important

"to try to keep that in mind as I'm working with the students that I want them to leave feeling like they can write better without help in the future." Jane's seeming de-emphasis of "confidence" or being "confident" is also complicated by her emphasis upon comfort, which she used six times. Jane stated that she saw comfort as an essential step towards ensuring that a student "open up." She further saw comfort as being key to making sure a student does not "feel insecure or inferior in the process," which I believe goes hand-in-hand with confidence.

Interestingly, although they all expressed similar ideas, each individual tutor favored a certain key word to describe important facets of the tutor-tutee relationship. I do not fully know what it says that "confidence," "difference," and "help" became favored by individual students, but I believe it may have to do with tutoring styles. In observations of them, Joe's tutoring style seemed to be much more geared towards an emotional aspect of tutoring, and he readily identified this as such in his interviews, and in his written work. Samantha stated in her interview that one of the areas she still felt uncertain she could help with was in lower-order concerns, and felt she needed more grammar and mechanics knowledge, in addition to training on helping with the PUG. Her more mechanical based concerns could have led her to favoring the more directive term of "help." Jane's emphasis on "difference" and the "different" is a bit harder to pin down. At the risk of sounding like a psycho-babbler, I wonder if Jane was not projecting. In the end, Jane never ended up tutoring at the writing center, pulling out at the last minute due to a conflict with hours.

How the first time peer tutors came to these conceptions is an even more interesting topic to consider. One of the key points I emphasized in the tutor training

course was the idea of flexibility, and while it could be easy to say that this was borne out in the student's identification of "different" being an important concept of consideration in a tutoring session, it is further interesting to note that only Joe used the term "flexible" at all. The evolution of their conceptions of the tutor/tutee relationship is more likely to have hinged on their individualized experiences.

The process of talking about, having, and sharing experiences as tutors is something that all three participants identified as the most important and informative facet of their tutor training. Experience was something held as valuable in the tutor training course, and the tutor trainees and I frequently shared stories about sessions. I suspect that this value was spread to the tutors I trained. I feel experience was more helpful in my acculturation than any "book learning."

Jane came to value experience a lot, including listening to the vicarious experiences of other tutors, stating what she wanted more of in tutor training was "just hearing, you know, like your personal experience. Maybe setting aside, making sure that we have some time during the session to like, really, you know, just pose—open the session to questions." While I did that at the beginning of the session, I think Jane would have liked a more extensive amount of this, perhaps a whole class session devoted to it, or a format that was not based around tutors asking questions that were based on particular sessions, but more general questions. Jane also talked about learning through experience, and further, shadowing, indicating that "just really…forming this personal, personable sort of you know like demeanor with the students" was an important part of tutoring. In other words, creating a tutoring persona was important, and she could only really create that persona through practice.

With Joe, while discussing shared experiences was not as important to him as to other participants, he learned primarily by doing, taking part in tutoring sessions. Like all the participants, Joe was required to write a reflective essay about a tutoring session he conducted. He chose not a successful session, but an unsuccessful one as the subject of his essay, despite there being no specific requirements. Joe talked about a session that he had where he ended up working backward with a student—lower order to higher order: he started by discussing grammatical errors, moved on to organization, and then talked about adding in a counter argument. In doing this, he completely ran out of time to talk about APA formatting, which was what the student had explicitly asked for help with, and he found out that the student's references page was just a series of URLs. Following this, Joe became worried that accidental plagiarism might occur. Joe stated that he "felt that [he] neglected my responsibilities as a tutor by not putting more emphasis on this important problem." In the essay, Joe reflected that "While there isn't a specific [academic] source to help me better prioritize my sessions, I now know that there are certain problems…that should take precedent over others." In his interview, Joe stated that most of what he learned about the purpose of a writing center, and the responsibilities of a tutor came from "just doing it wrong in sessions before," either "totally dictating…and totally being hands off; I've been at both extremes." Joe identified in both his writing and interviews that it was these learning experiences that were more helpful than anything. Joe talked of moving from a paradigm where he "didn't really have a strategy coming in," to one where he moved to address "macro-problems to micro." He moved to that place over the course of seeing students and presiding over sessions.

In our interview, while Samantha primarily talked about her desire for more mechanical learning and feedback, her writings showed that she placed a high value on experience as well. Indeed, her respect for the importance of experience was also still present in her interview, albeit less enthusiastically than in her written work. In her reflective essay, Samantha discussed how she worried she was too directive with a student who was too eager to grasp on to her suggestions as though they were the final word. Samantha decided, "I think the best way for me to improve in this area will be by receiving feedback from [various tutors] after an observed session," showing a growing eagerness to share experience. When discussing the development of her tutoring style, Samantha wrote that "flow will come with experience. The more I practice my approach to each session, the better I will be at delivering the tutee the services they need, in the way that will resonate with them the most," displaying a practice-makes-perfect ethos. In her interview, Samantha said she relied on thinking back to "personal experiences outside the Writing Center...I guess classroom experience, too, 'cause I am assuming like a teacher-ish type role," when initially trying to figure out what her responsibilities were in a given session. She also built on her experiences with observing other tutors, trying a strategy she witnessed, but then deciding it did not work for her. Quickly, Samantha found herself "Taking it a session at a time." Samantha also valued the reflective assignments, thinking of them as helpful to her development of a tutoring persona, another method of learning from experience.

While most peer tutoring manuals talk a lot about tutoring, they do not necessarily emphasize the importance of the experience of tutoring. Almost all manuals have a section where fictional scenarios are talked about and advice is given on how to deal with

these "problem" students (Gillespie and Lerner; Capossela, Murphy and Sherwood, Harris). Observations and reflective essays are also emphasized as important; asking questions and sharing experiences with other students encouraged. Only Murphy and Sherwood really address the creation of an "informed practice" that peer tutors must construct (7). Even then, informed practice is positioned as being highly reliant on reading the tutoring guide, which will "serve as a source of information and insight…[to develop] a sufficiently broad interpretative frame" (7). Perhaps this is just an attempt so sell books, however.

From all that I have seen, first time peer tutors have found learning through experience incredibly helpful. By emphasizing the importance of this, tutor training courses would provide a better rationale for reflective practices, and encourage tutors to place real value in their work. The act of tutoring becomes a source of learning and a site of ever-evolving practice.

Findings: Early Experience

It would be a mistake to throw a peer tutor into a session without any context or training at all. The result would undoubtedly prove harmful both to tutor and student. But my research indicates that a lot of crucial knowledge comes from witnessing and conducting tutoring sessions. This knowledge is frequently, in the eyes of tutors, more valuable than lessons taught in seminars or read in books. Witnessing a more experienced tutor conduct a session will better explain the purpose and ethos of a writing center than any article can. I would recommend that following a few hours of training that provides information about the concepts inherent in working in writing centers and that outlines

and debunks the misconceptions and allays the anxieties I have discussed above, that first time peer tutors should have the opportunity to sit in on sessions as soon as possible.

Watching more experience tutors will help build a culture where tutors can talk to each other and seek one another out for advice. The experience will also further remove anxieties and misconceptions as first time tutors will be able to watch experienced tutors model behavior like asking for help and looking up material alongside students and other tutors.

It is ironic that a field that prides itself so much on collaboration should so often neglect collaboration in its training. Experienced peer tutors should be invited to participate more in actual tutor training sessions or seminars, as presenters or even as just spectators who add commentary or share thoughts. When novice tutors do begin working with students, following a period of shadowing, sessions where inexperienced and more experienced tutors tutor together could also prove helpful. Collaborative tutoring might also shape up the hierarchy of the tutor-tutee relationship in productive ways.

IV.   CONCLUSIONS

Limitations

The results of my study are limited, yet still promising. My sample size was small, with just three tutors, and I only covered them for a limited amount of time, although I do have some information about future success. Jane ended up not tutoring at the center. She was offered a job, but she declined three weeks before classes started due to scheduling conflicts, and graduated the next year. Joe and Samantha both became leaders at the center, earning the titles of Lead Tutor, two of only four tutors with that distinction. Lead tutors have the responsibility of guiding younger tutors, participating in special staff meetings, and informing the director and assistant director of the happenings and any problems in the center. I do not think I can credit my training with creating these exceptional tutors, so this might make my sample size even more atypical than an average cohort of first time writing center peer tutors in a training course. Joe in particular has a strong network of friends within the center, and has built some particularly strong relationships.

A more longitudinal study should be performed, perhaps tracking tutors over the course of multiple months, with follow up interviews and reflective pieces solicited. Further, these tutors were taking a course designed to provide them with CRLA I certification, so it might be interesting to follow a sample size that participated in training based on CRLA I, II, and III standards. A larger cohort, or cohorts from multiple writing centers with multiple institutional contexts will also provide more information on the subject. However, there was no study of this kind existent in the literature, so this study

serves as a good, albeit flawed, place to begin a conversation with tutors about their experiences during the period when they learn how to be tutors.

Limitations may exist within my pedagogical methods of conducting the course. I have a strong bias towards collaborative learning, away from the directive/non-directive binary present in some scholarship, and the importance of tutors experimenting to develop their own style. Naturally, I taught these principles in the course, and it influenced how my participants felt. However, I think that there was a sufficient variance in their ending conceptions of the course, their developing tutoring styles, and their use of vocabulary in describing their experiences that indicate that the tutors did not wholly adopt my outlook towards tutoring, as I have tried to detail above.

Replicability is a weakness of this project, but not an impossibility. My reading list for the course, my assignments, and my general outlines are replicable, but my individual biases and the experiences I shared with the trainees, obviously, are not. I also let the trainees shape their experience to some extent, focusing on the problems they had, and questions they asked, meaning that my lesson plans are incomplete, further making replicability difficult. A repeat of this type of study might be even more valuable *because* of a change in the curricula, however, and not in spite of it. Broader patterns might develop that reveal assumptions that exist amongst peer tutors isolated from what they are taught in training.

<u>Recommendations</u>

First and foremost, I would recommend that further research be done that encourages peer tutors to talk about their experiences, not just at the earliest level of their

training, but at every level. I think that peer tutors have valuable points of view when it comes to their needs in terms of training and the creation and evaluation of best practices.

In terms of peer tutor training curricula itself, focusing on correcting misconceptions has proven itself to be very important. I am hesitant to encourage correcting these misconceptions by focusing overly on non-directive tutoring, jointly because of my biases, the fear of encouraging the phenomenon of tutor guilt, and because my participants themselves did not necessarily find the paradigm useful, but the misconceptions do need to be dealt with efficiently and quickly, as they seem to be the source for the chief anxiety that first time peer tutors harbor.

The anxiety of inadequacy is one that training programs should be mindful of, and there are other ways that this problem could be addressed, beyond just defining and re-defining a writing center's purpose. Teaching tutors to ask other, more experienced tutors for help, and to see them as allies, rather than rivals, is important to building both tutor confidence and good relations in the center. Teaching tutors to ask for help and to look for information alongside students is a key skill to reinforce. Reminding tutors of some basic skills, and doing some more teaching on citation styles may also foster confidence and provide a first time tutor with knowledge that can be accessed within sessions. Most tutors are good writers, but they may not be conscious of how they came to this skill, or the actions they take to produce quality academic writing. A discussion of the writing process might help tutors learn to help students replicate good writing.

Finally, nothing teaches a tutor better than experience, whether it be the recollection other tutors share with a novice tutor, or the experience that tutors gain as they go through sessions and reflect upon what happened in them. It might be productive

for tutor training programs to set aside more time to have experience tutors talk about what they have learned in sessions. Scenarios that are found in many tutor training manuals are good, but it seems that actual scenarios shared one-on-one are even better. And again, this encourages good relations between tutors.

Towards this end, reflective assignments and tutor observations are also important. Reflective assignments have been generally accepted as a best practice in a training program for a while\but with the importance of shared experiences, it might be worthwhile to keep a supply of actual reflections and recollections, scrubbed of identifying details, that can be shared with each new class of tutor trainees. Greater emphasis on the importance of experience might also enable tutors in training to realize the true importance of reflective assignments.

And, of course, it is clear that it is important that a first-time peer tutor actually participate in tutoring sessions in order to learn more.

<u>Surprises</u>

This study evolved, as all studies seem to, in unexpected directions. My original interest in coming in this topic stemmed from the potentially negative ways that writing center scholarship might impede tutor trainees. I had two chief concerns about the scholarship; one problem was that as a burgeoning peer tutor, I never found the voices of other tutors in the articles I read. It was a bit isolating to find myself reading merely about theories and hypotheticals. Another problem I had was that scholarship could be theoretically overwhelming for an undergraduate, and not necessarily reflective of what the experience was like "in the trenches." But this latter assumption came from

assumptions based around my own anxieties when I came into peer tutor, anxieties

centered on guilt at what I may do to a student whom I was to tutor.

When it finally came time to begin interacting with my participants, they stopped

being participants, and started to become people. I found myself quite invested in helping

them to learn a subject I enjoy and a vocation that I find fascinating. It occurred to me

that I had always wanted to run a tutor training program, and this was my opportunity.

These participants actually came from the second set of tutors I trained, and I found

myself making small changes to the curriculum of my training program even before the

systematized study. Improving the way in which I taught tutor trainees was something I

had a great deal of intrinsic investment in, and I think this study has given me useful

avenues of research that I plan to incorporate as I begin to seek out a career as a writing
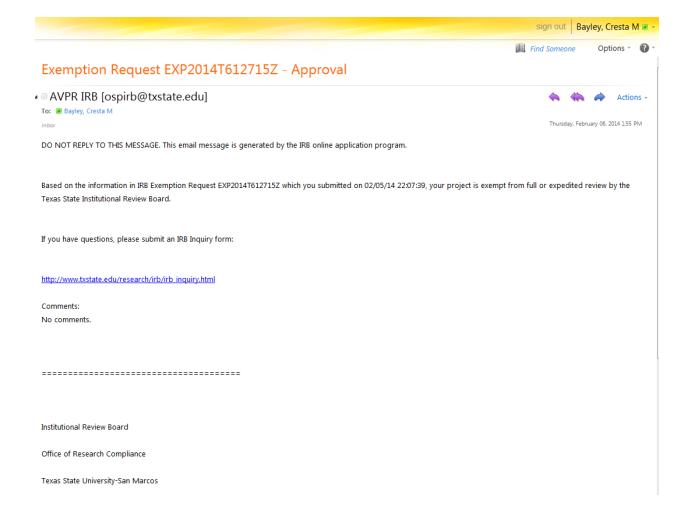
center administrator.

I want to end with the words of my tutor-participants themselves, to let my

participants have their own say. I hope that more researchers will begin to ask questions

of peer tutors, to give them a voice in some way. I continually found myself pleasantly

surprised at the depth of compassion and imagination that my participants expressed.

This was not necessarily something that easily fits into the study, as it does not

necessarily build towards a greater understanding of tutor training efficacy, but I would

be remiss if I did not provide at least a hat tip to the genuinely-felt emotions that the tutor

trainees expressed when it came to working with students. Their words themselves could

prove to be great resources in tutor training. My participants' definitions of what tutors

and writing centers do were inspiring. Jane said a good tutor was someone who could

say, "You can ask these questions, and…I'm here to help you, and I genuinely want to

help you, and you don't have to feel ashamed." Joe stated that "Writing Centers are to help cultivate this…almost just a sense of confidence in one's personal writing…[A] lot of it is confidence building, and a lot of it is a nudge in the right direction…[I]t's mostly about building this relationship with your own style of writing." Samantha defined a good tutor as, "someone who is not too bossy, who's comfortable to work with, who knows their stuff, who treats everyone with respect, takes each case individually, and shows interest in the students' work." Not to get maudlin, but the fact that tutors I trained harbor these beautiful nuanced relationships towards their work and the students they help is frankly something that reassures me that I have chosen the correct field of study.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Exemption Request EXP2014T612715Z – Approval

▴ ☐ AVPR IRB [ospirb@txstate.edu]   ↩ ↩ ↪   Actions ▾

To: ▪ Bayley, Cresta M

Inbox   Thursday, February 06, 2014 1:55 PM

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE. This email message is generated by the IRB online application program.

Based on the information in IRB Exemption Request EXP2014T612715Z which you submitted on 02/05/14 22:07:39, your project is exempt from full or expedited review by the Texas State Institutional Review Board.

If you have questions, please submit an IRB Inquiry form:

http://www.txstate.edu/research/irb/irb_inquiry.html

Comments:
No comments.

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Institutional Review Board

Office of Research Compliance

Texas State University-San Marcos

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Cresta Bayley from Texas State University-San Marcos. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the experiences of first time writing center peer tutors. The research gathered for this project will be utilized in Ms. Bayley's Master's Thesis and potentially presented for publication or presentation via other venues.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by Ms. Bayley. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions. Interview data will only be stored in the audio recording device and on the hard drive of Ms. Bayley's personal computer. Following the completion of the study, my interview data will be deleted. Additionally, I have the option to choose my own pseudonym.

5. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University - San Marcos (IRB Reference #EXP2014T612715Z). This project has been granted exemption from IRB. For research problems or questions, please contact Ms. Bayley at cmb233@txstate.edu or (832) 359-0501.

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Consent for Participation in Textual Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Cresta Bayley from Texas State University-San Marcos. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the experiences of first time writing center peer tutors. The research gathered for this project will be utilized in Ms. Bayley's Master's Thesis and potentially presented for publication or presentation via other venues.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I give consent for Ms. Bayley to look at pieces I have written as assignments in my peer tutor training program. I understand that I will not be referred to by name in any discussions of what I have written. I understand that my writing might be quoted from or shown to others, but I will not be identified.

3. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from my written pieces, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions. Additionally, I have the option to choose my own pseudonym.

4. Faculty and administrators from my campus will not be informed of my participation. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University - San Marcos (IRB Reference #EXP2014T612715Z). This project has been granted exemption from IRB. For research problems or questions, please contact Ms. Bayley at cmb233@txstate.edu or (832) 359-0501.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Appendix C: Course Agendas

Agenda

March 28, 2014

I.   Introductions

  a. Tutor experience discussion

  b. Getting to know everyone

II.   Administrative Concerns

III.   Tutor Training

  a. Ideas behind being a tutor/philosophy of writing centers and peer tutors

  b. Role of a tutor

    i.   Some Dos and Don'ts

      1. Handout

      2. Freewrite

    ii. Handling a session/constructing a tutoring narrative

      1. Handout

IV.   Questions and Concerns

    i.   What concerns have come up in your sessions? What do you want

        to talk about in future training?

V.   Assignments for Next Week

  a. Observation

  b. Readings: North, Corbett, Lunsford

Agenda

April 4, 2014

I.   **Warm-Up**

    a. Sharing Tutoring Experiences

    b. Talk about Observation Assignment

    c. Questions/Concerns

II.   **Reading Discussion**

    a. Freewrite

    b. Talk about writing

III.   **Style Guides**

    a. Basics of three main style guides

    b. Practice

IV.   **Assignments for Next Week**

    a. Introduction of training observations

    b. Reflective Essay

    c. Cite a journal article in all three style guides

Agenda

April 18, 2014

I. **Warm-Up**

    a. Sharing Tutoring Experiences

    b. Share and discuss drafts

II. **WAC**

    a. Basics

    b. Determining "specialities"

III. **Diversity**

    a. Defining diverse populations

    b. ELL basics

    c. Discussion

    d. Activity

IV. **Resources and Support**

    a. Activity

    b. Discussion

V. **Assignment**

    a. Completed Tutoring Style Piece

    b. Final Wrap-Up Assignment

Agenda

April 25, 2014

I.   **Warm-Up**

    a. Sharing Tutoring Experiences

    b. Talk about Tutoring philosophies and readings

II.   **Scaffolding and Active Listening**

    a. Introduction to scaffolding

        i. Activity

    b. Active Listening

        i. Handout

III.   **Looking at First Year Composition Writings**

    a. Small group discussion

    b. Whole group recap

    c. Connecting to what we've learned

IV.   **Resources and Support**

    a. Discussion

V.   **Assignment**

    a. Completed Tutoring Style Piece

    b. Final Wrap-Up Assignment

Appendix D: Interview Questions

How old are you, what year are you in school, what's your major

How did you become a tutor?

What did you know about the writing center before you became a tutor?

What did you think the purpose of a writing center was?

What do you think the purpose of a writing center is now?

Based on what you've read of writing center scholarship, what would you summarize the general message as being?

Do you agree with the writing center scholarship you've read? Why? Why not? What do you agree/disagree with?

What shaped your idea of what a writing center was before you started working here? What shapes it now?

What did you think was the responsibility of the tutor before you started working in the writing center? What do you think is the tutor's responsibility in a session now?

What did you think was the tutees responsibility in a session before you started working at the writing center? What do you think is the tutee's responsibility now?

What do you think of your tutor training? Is there anything you feel like you don't know/need help with?

What do you think a tutor should do in a session? What should they not do? What do you think a tutee should do in a session? What should they not do? Where did you get these ideas?

What sorts of anxieties and concerns have you had since you started tutoring? Did you have worries at the beginning that you don't have now? If so, why do you think those worries have diminished. Have new worries come up? What have you done to try to combat those anxieties/concerns?

How would you define a good tutor? Has that changed over time?

What strategies do you employ to be a good tutor? Have those strategies changed since you started tutoring?

Would you like to add anything about your experiences?

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