

“HOW CAN I HELP YOU?”:
UNDERSTANDING HOW PEER TUTORING IN WRITING CENTERS
DEVELOPS COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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DEDICATION

To my dearest friend, Long Nguyen.

Thank you for being an unofficial peer tutor to me back then and helping me feel confident in my writing abilities when I did not. Rest in peace bud.

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PREFACE

This project came to fruition primarily from my experience as a peer consultant for the past two and a half years at the Texas State University Writing Center, specifically from a smaller project that completed my CRLA (College Reading and Learning Association) certification to be a peer consultant. In this smaller project, I presented an article that drew connections between a therapy session and a writing center session and I discussed how writing centers could learn from the author's comparisons. Through my job, I learned that writing is more complex than simply meeting the requirements of a rubric and developed a deeper admiration of being a peer consultant.

Working with students from all majors and learning about the craft of writing has been an invaluable experience. Because of my consultant experience and recent administrative role as a Lead Consultant, I felt additional inspiration to pursue this project and develop a deeper understanding of why the peer tutoring model in writing centers helped me and other writers grow more confident with their writing abilities. I noticed that my associations with writing changed from dread to confidence because of my writing center experience, which I also noticed with returning writers.

Besides my writing center experience, another contributing factor for developing this project was my own journey of honing my writing skills. I began my undergraduate career extremely shy about my capabilities as a writer and faced many anxieties about my writing. My dear friends prior to my undergraduate studies kept my confidence level afloat enough for me to feel capable of writing, but I still felt that I was incompetent. What really led me to where I am today were my visits to the Texas State University Writing Center. Each visit made me feel great, but I started believing that the success of my work was *only* because of the writing center and not also my inherent abilities. This unknowing confusion of what led to my success led to a jarring experience when the writing center staff started recommending me to join the team. *How could I possibly*

work at the writing center when my writing is shit? My second semester into my undergraduate studies was when I started developing a stronger sense that the writing center was not the end-all-be-all to determining my success, but my tutors played a vital role in helping me establish effective plans that aided my anxieties about writing and helped me achieve my goals. Thanks to the persistent push of my writing center tutors and guidance from my ENG 1320 professor, I finally felt that I was a competent writer who could help others facing similar writing struggles. Ever since I joined the team, I have seen how my abilities as a writer were already there, but just needed some guidance and reassurance to let it grow into the confidence I hold today.

My hope with this project is to provide a beginning ground for deeper exploration of peer tutoring in writing centers as well as peer tutoring in other areas of study through the research established in my project. There are various components about peer tutoring that I would love to study, but to get to that point there must first be an establishment of what a writing center is and how the work they do develops college students and eases their writing anxieties.

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ABSTRACT

This work explores how peer tutoring in writing centers develops college students' writing skills and eases writing anxieties. This thesis aims to provide an understanding of the goal of writing centers and how peer tutors, or peer consultants, are trained to make the service accessible to all writers. To achieve these goals, a literature review was conducted on the contemporary writing center philosophy, the strengths of the peer tutoring model, the way writing anxieties develop, and writing center tutoring practices. Contemporary writing centers place an emphasis on collaborative learning and teaching students that writing is a process. The peer tutoring model is most useful in achieving the goals of writing centers because of the consultants' transfer of learning and sense of low authority when working with students. Stemming from previous educational experience, writing anxieties, or writing apprehension, inhibit some writers' abilities to reach their full potential as academic learners. Research suggests that the interpersonal dynamic is a key concept behind effective peer tutoring in the writing center. Additionally, peer tutors utilize techniques rooted in politeness theory, motivation theory, and rapport building to craft safe learning environments. To ground the research on writing center practices, scenarios based on personal observations follow each section to apply the concepts into sessions.

“How Can I Help You?”: Understanding How Peer Tutoring in Writing Centers Works for College Student Writers

Writing is an intimate practice. It is one of the only areas in our lives where a perception of us is created only through the ideas we formulate in our minds and establish on pieces of paper. Writing provides a space for our feelings and personality to come alive, serving as an extension of ourselves. Whether this extension means crafting an artistic expression through poetry or maintaining a reputation through professional writing, our encounters with writing are specific to us.

For academic writing, college students often feel that essays and research papers are an extension to their academic abilities for others to perceive—mainly professors. This can create an anxiety-filled experience for students who strive to provide the best representation of themselves for their professors or peers (Murphy, 1989). As a peer writing consultant, I have witnessed how writers can get consumed by this pressure and exhibit constant worry over the clarity of their ideas and message. Receiving feedback on their writing, depending on how it is delivered, may be detrimental to the process of unleashing the full potential of students as academic learners. Yet through it all, students are invested in seeking out guidance through peer-to-peer writing services as they work through their academic degrees in their collegiate careers. Why do writers trust writing centers for guidance? What encourages them to continue seeking the guidance of strangers?

This thesis aims to understand how writing centers are influential to easing college students' anxieties about writing while also developing college students' writing skills. The goal of the study is to understand how writing centers approach writing anxieties by analyzing the philosophy of writing centers, understanding the use of the peer-tutor model, defining what writing anxieties are, and exploring how consultants utilize practices and concepts to foster an effective peer tutoring session. This thesis will

have three sections. The first section will consist of a literature review separated into four subsections: writing center philosophy, purpose of using peer tutoring, defining writing anxieties, and writing center practices. Research on writing center philosophy will be used to recognize misconceptions about the purpose of writing centers, outline the contemporary philosophy of collaboration, and describe how collaboration is the beginning of addressing writers' writing anxieties. The second aspect of the literature review will outline why the peer tutoring model is used and its effectiveness. The third subsection of the literature review will define writing anxieties to allow deeper understanding for the usefulness of common concepts and theories taught to writing center tutors in the fourth and final subsection of the literature review. Once the research is established, the second section will discuss limitations in research conducted for this thesis. The final section of this thesis will be used to call for more attention to be placed on valuing the work done in peer tutoring services for college students and outline future studies.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to clarify the philosophies behind writing centers and explore how peer tutors create nurturing learning environments that students want to come back to. By identifying writing centers' purpose, we are able to more deeply understand how peer tutoring in writing centers is effective at easing writing anxieties. The key concept in the first section is writing center models and their influence on students and consultants through their differing mindsets. The second section of the literature review focuses on answering why a peer tutoring model is used and what this model creates. The third section of the literature review focuses on defining what writing anxieties are and how they impact writers. Since the philosophy section sets the foundation for understanding the role of writing centers, the aim of the fourth section is to present techniques used by consultants for easing writing anxieties and creating a safe

learning environment. Key concepts for understanding how consultants ease writers' writing anxieties and develop writers are the importance of interpersonal dynamics, utilizing practices based on politeness theory and motivation theory, and establishing rapport. Overall, the information gathered for this literature review comes from seminal texts that set the foundations for writing center training and reading prevalent writing center literature that discusses the impact of peer tutoring. Using this information provides a way to understand where writing center teaching stems from, thus creating an understanding of how misconceptions are formed about writing centers and how writing centers approach the development of college students' writing skills.

Throughout this project there are key terms that are used interchangeably. Consultant and tutor refer to the experienced student who is employed at a writing center. They do have a distinction, but that is a deeper analysis for a different focus on using these words in the writing center. Consultation and session are interchangeable terms that identify the writing center's focus on being an appointment-based service. While not interchangeable, writer will be used frequently to distinguish the tutee and student will be used to mean either tutor or tutee.

What is the Philosophy of Writing Centers?

To best understand how writing centers aid in easing college students' writing anxieties, we must first establish what a writing center is not and what the contemporary philosophy of writing centers is. Writing centers are not fix-it shops for purely editorial purposes or a purely remedial space. In this section, we will learn how the misconceptions of a fix-it shop and remedial writing center came to fruition and understand that the contemporary goal of writing centers is to be a collaborative space promoting the development of writers over time.

Misconceptions

Writing centers have developed two commonly known misconceptions: the

writing center as purely remedial and the writing center as purely editorial. The remedial view of writing centers stemmed from the theoretical perspective of writing centers as Storehouses for knowledge, in combination with their early function as writing labs (Lunsford, 1991). Carino (1995) outlines that many writing centers prior to the 1980s were “labs” that focused on grammar and other local level issues, such as punctuation and spelling. Instructors gave one-on-one instruction to help students master certain writing skills in these lab settings and assigned groups of peers to learn from each other (Carino, 1995). In this initial setting, writing centers provided support to students needing remedial education and guidance for mastering grammar-specific content, generating consultations focused on analyzing local level issues such as punctuation (Clark & Healy, 1996). Additionally, this misconception was a reason writing clinics and labs became more popular in American universities. Faculty believed that writing clinics alone remove students’ writing deficiencies (Moore, 1950). The writing lab focus on providing knowledge to students reflects the theoretical view of writing centers as Storehouses, implying that knowledge is dispersed to writers (Lunsford, 1991). Suggesting that writers are essentially blank slates with the Storehouse view diminishes their academic capabilities and places the growth of skills only on tutors who are divulging writing information. These early goals addressed most of the needs of the first students utilizing writing centers, but did not provide the full scope of development that we see with the contemporary philosophy of writing centers.

A second misconception about writing centers is associating them as spaces that are purely editorial, or “fix-it shops.” This misconception stems from the theoretical view of writing centers as Garret Centers and writing as only a solitary activity (Lunsford, 1991). To understand the theoretical view of Garret Centers, we must first understand what Garret means. Garret refers to attic rooms, particularly dreadful and small ones, usually inhabited by *lone geniuses* who only sought inspiration themselves (Oxford

English Dictionary, n.d.; Teixeira & Cardozo, 2021). Considering this context, Garret Centers exemplify American individualism through their philosophy of learning as a private and individual search. Because this places all of the learning on the writer, they would use the writing center as a means for *cleaning up* their work and not providing an opportunity for collaborative learning. Thus, writing centers with this focus are looking to validate writers' knowledge that they already hold. With this model, learning in writing centers is passively placed on the writer, but contemporary understanding of writing centers aims for collaborative learning—learning placed on the consultant and writer.

Contemporary Understanding

The primary goals of contemporary writing centers are to teach writers that writing is a process, focus on being a collaborative learning environment, and help build long lasting skills. Part of teaching that writing is a process comes from consultants helping their writers understand where they are in their process and react accordingly in their diagnoses to build better writers (North, 1982; North, 1984). Writers are taught this because they tend to come into the writing center believing that writing is solely focusing on the end product instead of remaining engaged throughout the writing process (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2014). Thinking about the end product could stem from prior teachings of writing that focus on punctuation and grammar as studied faculty perceptions indicated that writing centers prioritized grammar and other local level issues, whereas the writing center staff perceived their work as prioritizing organization and other global aspects of writing (Hayward, 1983). Additionally, writers might carry this misconception because they do not understand what help is available to them and doable during sessions (North, 1982). This misconception of writing is something writing centers want to tackle, especially with beginning college students, to establish stronger foundations of writing for schooling past a bachelor's degree or entering the workforce.

The contemporary practice of writing centers is to create a true collaborative space where consultants and writers have equal stance during sessions. Equal collaboration of learning between the consultant and writer is seen through the perspective that writing centers should function as “Burkean Parlors” (Lunsford, 1991). The term “Burkean” relates to rhetorician Kenneth Burke, who contributed to the idea of writing as unending scholarship (Burkean Parlor, 1988). The discourse, or metaphorical parlor, that a writer wishes to partake in has been in existence prior to their contributions, and with their contributions they are advancing their chosen discourse. Using Burke’s view of the importance of collaboration helps the writing center establish the strength in having learning come from both the consultant and writer, as well as demonstrating the process of writing. Overall, the current mission of writing centers is to participate in and observe the writing process of writers, so the practice of writing can be clarified and adjusted to produce writers over time (North, 1984). Considering this, what are peer tutors trained to do to meet this goal? What is peer tutoring in relation to writing centers?

Why Use the Peer Tutoring Model?

Now that we understand that a writing center is a collaborative space and strives to teach its students that writing is a process, why is a peer tutoring model used instead of employing tutors of a more professional background? In this section, we will address this common question and develop an understanding of what a peer tutoring model brings to the development of students’ writing skills.

Peer tutoring in higher education is believed to have early origins from its implementation in Harvard in 1636 to teach incoming students Latin (Sheets, 2012). This first form of peer tutoring was only available to the elite and wealthy who attended the school, with a mission to help them succeed in the school’s environment. While this introduction of the practice of peer tutoring was only meant for the elite, the goal of the

practice still shines through to the goals of peer tutoring in writing centers. New students attending Harvard in the 1630s needed to master the Latin language to fit into the culture of the school, causing anxieties to rise in students coming in from vastly different communities. Thus, peer tutoring eased these transition anxieties by providing inexperienced students support and knowledge that was unlocked with the help of returning students.

In writing centers, peer consultants ease worries about the writing process by being taught that the essential learning about writing occurs because of the process and not because of meeting end products, and also emphasizing on the collaborative nature that writing should be (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2014). Writing centers look for peer consultants who are not only primarily strong writers, but also that they have healthy ways of processing, problem solve in their everyday problems, and are highly reflective and aware of writing processes (Topping, 1996). Additionally, peer consultants understand that they are helping writers develop and easing their writing anxieties by serving and having a knowledge level that is in a place between student and teacher (Harris, 1995). Considering the contemporary collaborative nature of writing centers with regard to the role consultants play, we begin to see how a writing center consultation is built to be a uniquely tailored experience for every student who comes to the writing center that develops their writing skills and eases their writing anxieties.

Part of the uniqueness of the session stems from the abilities and skills that a consultant brings, as they disperse their distinct knowledge of approaching the writing process. This modern approach is helpful with retention and developing the skills of consultants because the goal allows writing centers to establish themselves as places where an individual's needs are met without being a repetition of the classroom experience (Harris, 1995). Goals set in writing consultations by the consultant and writer are meant to encourage and lead the writer to engage in and understand their writing

process (North, 1982). Through this engagement, consultants get a deeper understanding than most professors as consultants are seeing the writer's work accompanied with how the writer talks about their writing (often very casual), leading to a diagnosis based on the consultant's understanding of a writer's underlying feelings about writing (Harris, 1995).

Transfer of Learning

In "The Writing Center and Transfer of Learning: A Primer for Directors," Bonnie Devet introduces the concept of transfer of learning as a concept that explains the effectiveness of the peer tutoring model. Transfer of learning, or transfer, is the ability to take skills or concepts learned in one environment and apply them to another field. Transfer of learning helps students become better academic learners and stronger writers. Peer consultants exemplify two types of transfer: content to content and procedure to procedure (Devet, 2015).

Content-to-content transfer occurs when a peer tutor is teaching writing concepts to a writer based on the way a tutor first learned the concept. While transfer is a common concept in education, the difference between teachers utilizing transfer with their students and consultants using transfer with their writers is the consultant's way of understanding a given topic. By processing what they have learned and putting it into practice for another student to learn, a peer tutor demonstrates high efficiency in applying knowledge, while also opening the door for a writer to understand the material in a common way (Devet, 2015). Seeing how the consultant connects the dots and their mindset allows the writer to connect to a new level of understanding. For instance, teaching citation style rules based on a peer tutor's experience will help a writer better grasp the knowledge they have been taught in combination with the peer tutor's guidance (Devet, 2015).

Procedure-to-procedure transfer is applying similar set strategies based on what

has worked from past experiences to solve different situations (Devet, 2015). While similar to content to content, procedure to procedure is more peer-tutor centered as it defines their efficiency with structuring their consultations for all levels of writing. Things like making the writer feel welcomed through set greeting styles or having specific sets of questions to get the writer to discuss their work more deeply are repeated steps that a peer tutor uses because they led to a productive appointment in the past (Devet, 2015). These types of transfer are exclusive to the peer tutor as it develops their problem-solving skills to adapt to all writers. They take approaches they have made in their first consultations, understand what methods are most successful, and piece together a unique guide for future sessions that best support the learning and productivity of the writer.

Goals of Peer Tutoring

In addition to transfer, there are set goals that help distinguish the guidance received from a peer consultant and guidance received from an instructor. The main goals of peer tutoring are to not act as authoritative figures, help writers realize where they are at in their writing process, and model problem solving. One of the ways peer tutors begin exemplifying their non-authoritative status is to work with students by aiming to nurture their writing abilities, as the consultant knows that these abilities are in the process of maturing (Vygotsky, 1978). This thought is echoed by Murphy (1989) who posits that writers have inherent writing abilities to succeed as academic learners, but are blocked by writing anxieties. Understanding this perspective of developing students, allows the consultant to focus on a strengths perspective that ultimately empowers the student, as they feel that they are not being perceived as incompetent, thus making them feel more comfortable talking to someone who they can more closely relate to. With the second goal of peer tutoring, writers are taught the principle of writing, understanding not only that learning is a process, but that the learning happens

from this process and not because of meeting the end product (O'Sullivan & Cleary, 2014). This helps to demystify to writers the misconception that writing is always product-focused.

The third goal of peer tutoring, modeling problem solving, really helps peer consultants shine. It is through this role modeling that students are inspired by a peer consultant, as they more closely see themselves in their consultants (Topping, 1996). This is one of the beginning factors that helps writers become motivated to continue reaching for success or feel that they can achieve success as a peer tutor may relate to situations that the writer faces, especially when the writer's full potential is being blocked by writing anxieties.

What are Writing Anxieties?

This project aimed to understand why college students especially benefit from the guidance of writing centers, while also addressing underlying anxieties writers have about writing. To understand how peer consultants help with this problem, we must first understand where writing anxieties comes from and how they impact writers.

College students come to their universities with prior educational experience that shapes their perceptions of writing. Whatever their experience ends up building to, some students develop writing anxieties based on what they have encountered prior to their college education. Drawing on the empirical research established by John A. Daly (1977), Susan McLeod (1987) argues that writing anxieties, in general, are negative and apprehensive feelings about writing skills, the writing situation, or writing task that disrupts the writer's writing process. For instance, writing skills would mean writers are negatively impacted by their built perception of their ability to form arguments or provide synthesis of material. Feelings about the writer's writing situation, like the time frame for writing a project or the writing environment of the writer, are some instances that would lead to writing anxieties. Lastly, feelings about the writing task would be a

writer's confusion of what is being asked of them for an assignment or having a free-range topic that would lead to a writing anxiety. All of these instances combined with writers' previous experience have created the writing anxieties that debilitate their abilities that are treated at writing centers.

When diagnosing the client, a therapist will know what kind of "hurt" the client is. Is the client suffering from negative feelings, interpersonal problems, or inadequate and unsatisfying behaviors? This analysis helps a therapist understand how to approach the client and help them on their journey of recovery (Rogers, 1957). A peer consultant follows a similar approach, except the kind of "hurt" and diagnosis is more centered on the writer's previous experiences with writing. Murphy (1989) describes the majority of students who use writing centers as writers who carry the weight of past negative experiences. Writer's block and high anxiety will arise in these students as they dread the impending evaluations from other students and their teachers. It is important to note that writing anxieties are framed as debilitating objects that block the potential of all students, as they are all intellectually capable of accomplishing their tasks, but have difficulty completing them because of the writing anxieties (McLeod, 1987). Thus, writers should not be labeled as deficient in skill or lacking abilities as writers. Instead, they are writers and academic learners who can only exceed their expectations in a specific kind of learning environment (Murphy, 1989).

How Peer Tutoring Addresses Writing Anxieties

Writing anxieties are highly detrimental to the progress of a student's writing skills, but can be addressed at the writing center. We now know that writers utilize writing centers as places of development, and writing centers serve to instill long term development. To understand how college students' writing anxieties are addressed and how consultants teach longevity of writing skills, it is necessary to explore the complexities of techniques used for peer tutoring. Delving into the pedagogical aspects of

training peer tutors and looking into the techniques used in consultations will be the main themes of this section. With these themes, we will understand how consultants empower students and prevent long-term hindrance of students' writing and learning abilities.

Scenarios, based on my general knowledge and observations as a consultant, will follow after each section to give a stronger understanding of the practice. The scenarios will not give any identifiable information and will instead focus on themes of writers coming to the writing center with negative experiences, consultants who utilize politeness theory, and writers who are motivated by their consultant.

The Interpersonal Dynamic

One of the initial aspects for managing writing anxieties in writers is through the interpersonal dynamic between a peer tutor and a student. As Murphy argues in their article, "Freud in the Writing Center: The Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well," the one-on-one setting of a writing consultation is similar to the one-on-one setting of a therapy consultation. Writing consultations allow a peer tutor and a student to work on interpreting cognitive strategies that the student possesses (Murphy, 1989). Writers will come to writing centers with all kinds of writing experiences, from negative experiences with instructional feedback to strong foundational support. A consultant is trained to analyze their writer's written work and also the writer's writing behavior.

Murphy (1989) states the analysis done by a therapist and analysis done by a consultant are nearly one and the same. This is mainly because the quality of any interpersonal relationship determines the success of the interaction between two people, therapist and client or peer tutor and writer. Building an interpersonal dynamic with a client results from empathetic understanding and unconditional positive regard, which entails having concern and a desire to help (Murphy, 1989). Together, the peer consultant and student writer unveil the set of conditions for a writer to succeed. The

interpersonal dynamic creates a space for writers to feel comfortable sharing their experiences as they do not view their consultants as authoritative figures.

Besides analyzing the writer's abilities, Murphy (1989) also discloses that a peer consultant has a responsibility of nurturing a writer's skills. While daunting, each session is built to provide student writers constructive feedback that will give them the tools for advancing past the stage from when they came in. Jim W. Corder (1984) expresses that psychoanalysis and rhetoric are essentially the same, as they both rely on the power of words and the meaning behind each word. From a rhetorical perspective, psychoanalysis is the *talking cure* as a peer consultant works to bring out the potential in each writer so they develop towards self-enhancing means (Corder, 1984). Peer consultants share the power of language and inspire creative thought through their engagement in the material brought by the student writer. Explaining grammar rules, asking thought-provoking questions, and helping the student realize their potential are all ways in which a peer consultant is similar to a psychoanalyst. Both have the same end goals: help the client be more effective in problem-solving, increase the client's self-regard, and guide the client to being more expressive and open to experiences (Corder, 1984).

Scenario 1 - Negative Experiences. A student schedules an appointment at their writing center for their introductory English course. Their appointment form states that they want to work on clarity and flow of ideas, pointing out that they have a habit of being unable to focus their writing and stick to their prompt. In the consultation, the consultant notes that the writing is consistent and organized to follow all components of the rubric. The student's work also has strong grammar and punctuation. When the consultant delivers positive feedback to the writer, the writer is shocked and does not seem to fully believe that their work establishes clear claims. The writer expresses that they are used to receiving negative feedback that has demoralized them over time and made them think poorly of their writing skills. To empathize with the student and ease

their panic, the consultant will remain engaged in the situation by presenting areas in the written work where the writer excelled their most. Multiple instances are pointed out to validate the writer's writing prowess in an effort to help the writer understand their writing ability and possibly help them reach their full potential.

Analysis of Scenario 1. In my time as a lead writing consultant at the Texas State University Writing Center, I have noticed that negative experiences in college students manifest from education prior to entering university and can create self-doubt of writing skills and a general fear of writing. They each arrive with their own experiences with writing, but they are all the same in the way their experiences have affected them. Hearing constant remarks of what an assignment is failing to do, without providing ways to grow, is incredibly damaging for a developing student. For a student to grow in their writing, they must know how to improve their weakness, not just that they have weaknesses. In the scenario, we do not get a full understanding of the experiences of the student, but we know that the effect has followed them and impacted their writing capabilities. As mentioned by Murphy (1989), writers will come with their "hurt" to peer consultants and can start to be healed through constructive feedback. Students do not lack abilities to write, their prolonged exposure to destructive feedback and lack of resources for developing their skills keeps them from reaching their full potential. These barriers of anxiety and self-doubt are the only thing stopping a writer from their potential and consistently fulfilling their writing tasks.

In this scenario, the intimacy of an interpersonal dynamic is an underlying component of a consultation. Building trust and rapport is essential for a consultation to be successful and ensure that the writer gains confidence in their work. This interpersonal dynamic found between a consultant and writer is unique, as the peer-to-peer work is entirely different to the faculty-student dynamic. Writers can be inspired by the work done with their consultants due to consultants serving as a model for students

in the ways they organize their thoughts, engage with material, and establish problem-solving skills. Writers are also impacted by this interpersonal dynamic as they view their peer tutors without the authoritative presence of a professor, but with the understanding that their consultants hold strong writing experience. Thus, feedback, positive and constructive, serves as a pathway for guiding writers through their healing processes and eventually making them strong independent thinkers.

Creating a Safe Learning Environment

To directly address writers' writing anxieties and promote longevity with learning, a tutor establishes rapport and utilizes techniques derived from politeness and motivation theory. These combined teachings allow a consultant to structure a nurturing learning environment where the writer is comfortable disclosing their honest thoughts and feels safe in developing their writing skills. This section will focus on understanding how the learning environment in writing centers is created and how it uniquely develops writing skills. Similar to the previous section, a scenario based on my general observations as a consultant will put this section's content into practice for deeper understanding.

Applying Politeness Theory. In "Politeness Theory and Effective Tutoring and Mentoring," Bell et al. (2012) focus on communicative patterns, specifically how politeness can be a useful tool for peer consultants so they can productively guide a writer through revisions and feedback. Politeness has two components: positive and negative. Positive politeness is used to validate a writer's work and bolsters a sense of comradery when a tutor gives feedback with this strategy, while negative politeness is used for suggestions that do not impose on the freedom of thought of a writer (Bell et al., 2012). Bell et al. (2012) argue that negative politeness is an essential tool needed by consultants to put the decision making over feedback in the student's hands, while also developing the students to be individual thinkers.

Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013) present a similar connection between politeness and peer tutoring, but they instead focus on how it is a way of building motivation in writers through motivational scaffolding. Motivational scaffolding, in the context of writing centers, is defined as a consultant structuring tasks for their writers to accomplish and motivating them to do it or doing certain parts so the writer can focus on doing tasks they can do (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013). There are also five types of motivational scaffolding: *praise*, focusing on a student's performance on specific things in their work; *statements of encouragement or optimism for students' success*, building confidence and/or reducing a writer's stress; *demonstrations of concern*, being engaged by asking the writer questions about their welfare and written work; *expressions of sympathy and empathy*, understanding the difficulty of the written work and expressing similar experiences; *reinforcement of students' feelings of ownership and control*, increases a student's self-regulation and confidence in their work (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013). Politeness, positive and negative, is similar to motivation scaffolding as they both work toward developing a writer's skills and designing a safe and effective learning environment.

Utilizing Motivation Theory. Acee et al. (2012) discusses how the training of peer tutors should involve motivation theory to give tutors this tool to further develop writers' skills after the consultation has finished. There are three theories of motivation that peer tutors need to understand: expectancy-value, attribution, and goal orientation.

Expectancy-value theory encompasses the student's perception of their ability to succeed based on prior experience of completing goals successfully (Acee et al., 2012). The more a student builds success, the more they feel empowered and motivated to tackle new obstacles and hardships. However, if students experience less established success, then their expectation to accomplish tasks and goals is severely lowered, thus impacting their ability to meet their goals. To address this, a consultant sets

performance-related goals for their writer to accomplish, starting from low-difficulty to a higher difficulty. An initial task that the consultant can give is for the writer to schedule recurring appointments. This not only establishes a weekly opportunity for the consultant to congratulate the writer for being self-determined with their recurring appointments, but also helps the writer to experience the process of writing. A next-level task can be a consultant setting goals for what content should be covered in the next appointment, such as bringing sources that back the writer's claims or points of discussion that the writer wants to use. Following this task, the higher-level task that would require more from the writer would be to begin writing analyses of their content. But, the success that has been accomplished to this point allows the writer to feel more confident in producing this work and meeting the goals for the following consultation.

Attribution, the secondary component to techniques derived from motivation theory, relates to the writer's understanding of what causes certain outcomes (Acee et al., 2012). In the context of writing and writing centers, attribution would help a writer understand what methods of studying or organizing led to a successful completion of a goal or task. The reason a consultant uses this technique is to get the writer to analyze how they met or did not meet their goals and understand what works for them and what does not. For instance, a consultant would ask how the writer met a goal and the answer may be maintaining a writing schedule or preparing an outline before drafting, prompting them to associate these methods with success and continue to use them. When a writer does not meet their goal, a consultant will ask them to think about what choices led to this outcome, helping the writer understand that writing needs time and organization. Through this technique, consultants build the independent thinking skills of their writers, which continues past writing and transfers to different areas of their lives.

Goal orientation is similar to expectancy-value, but the goals focus on mastery

instead of completion, so a writer understands that knowledge is modifiable and not fixed (Acee et al., 2012). Teaching that writing is a process comes especially into play with this aspect of motivation theory, as we want to educate our writers on retaining information of the concepts behind their work and go beyond working to check the boxes of the rubric. This can be done with a slight change of wording when explaining a prompt, such as *you are being asked to demonstrate your knowledge of this concept* versus *you are being asked to complete an analysis of this topic*. Through this focus, writing consultants can ensure that writers are thinking of their assignments as concepts that will be applied past their time in the class, prompting them to have long-term development.

Acee et al. (2012) argues that beyond teaching these theories of motivation, peer tutors need to understand that motivation is multifaceted as students come with different kinds of experiences towards academic tasks. Thus, a peer tutor is most effective when they set goals for writers to accomplish and inspire them to fulfill them and feel that they are capable of accomplishing them.

Rapport Building. Alongside motivating their writers and empowering them, an additional and vital part for creating the target environment in a session is for the consultant to build rapport. Establishing a supportive and trustworthy environment at the beginning of the session is essential for quelling a student's writing anxieties and makes them feel comfortable sharing their work (Poon, 2010). The key aspects of building rapport with a writer are 1) establish an attentive connection and 2) utilize interpersonal skills. An attentive connection can be made through the use of questions, engagement, and organization. Questions that a consultant must use are open-ended questions and clarifying questions. Utilizing these in a session indicates to the writer that their consultant is a genuine support for their writing, while also achieving the goal of building a more self-driven thinker (Poon, 2010). Open-ended questions especially help

in the writer's ability to think their way through solutions, creating foundations for their critical thinking skills outside of writing and the writing center.

Engagement encompasses many aspects. Poon (2010) outlines engagement as problem-solving, active listening, and maintaining an organized session. To the best of their ability and knowledge, writing center consultants work towards guiding their writers through the issues they have with their writing or questions that they have. When writers do not understand grammatical concepts and it is a recurring issue in the work being analyzed during a session, a consultant must adapt their knowledge of that concept and break it down for their writers to understand in their own way. Connecting this way allows for the writer to gain confidence in their ability to learn and comprehend writing concepts.

Organization is another aspect of maintaining an attentive connection during a session. Sessions must have a structure to best achieve the writer's goals and address any underlying writing concerns they may not notice. Without maintaining a structure or adhering to some form of a priority list, a writer would have a negative experience from the lack of focus to their needs, prompting a distrust in a consultant's ability to help and the genuineness of a consultant's guidance. Things to keep in mind for maintaining organization are to set priorities and help demystify issues by breaking them down into manageable tasks (Poon, 2010). When setting priorities, this encompasses acknowledging goals that the writer wants to achieve during the session, assisting a writer in identifying their most pressing problem, and distinguishing an emphasis on when to focus on global issues over local issues. Untethering the confusion a student may have over what they are writing on will lead to valuable moments of clarity for their work to shine, while also prompting the consultant to mentally arrange plans for how to make things clear for their student to understand. Writing can be daunting, especially for writers who feel overwhelmed and lost by what is being asked of them. Breaking things

down into small and manageable tasks (i.e. identifying what the overall question of the assignment is or brainstorming through an outline) not only makes the writing process less daunting, but it also quells the writer's anxiety and lifts their trust in a writing center consultant.

Aside from an attentive connection, rapport building is established through a consultant's use of interpersonal skills. As established earlier, the writers who come to the writing center with debilitating writing anxieties have their potential as academic learners blocked (Murphy, 1989). Writing center consultants apply interpersonal skills such as active listening and relationship building techniques in their sessions to quell writing anxieties (Poon, 2010). Active listening is important for a writer to see in their consultant, so they know that their ideas are being understood and taken seriously. Demonstrating this level of attention is vital for a student to confide their ideas and reveal their writing insecurities to a fellow student learner. This allows for the consultant to participate in a deep conversation with the writer and provides them a space to share their own experience with managing writing stresses.

One of the final ways to establish rapport is to role model good researching skills and serve as a bridge to seek additional guidance outside of the writing center. A good consultant recognizes their knowledge limits and understands where to connect their writers for additional guidance for their gaps of knowledge (Poon, 2010). In this guidance to available sources, the consultant demonstrates research skills of how to find useful and credible information for their given question. A consultant demonstrating the range of their knowledge helps for a writer to understand that it is okay to not know everything there is about writing, but they must know how to find solutions to their questions. This practice also helps establish that writing in particular is a skill that requires continued education to continually master the evolving craft. Additionally, consultants can be a guiding hand on how students can communicate with their

professors (Poon, 2010). Students can be intimidated by meeting their professors one-on-one, so the consultant can build up a student's confidence in approaching that visit. Consultants can use their own experiences of meeting professors during office hours as a way to encourage seeking additional guidance or clarity on ambiguities the student may have.

Scenario 2 – Techniques. A writer goes to the writing center for a consultation on an assignment they need to turn in the following day. They state in their appointment information that they are having a hard time completing their work but are confident in the sections they have completed. As the consultant reads through the writer's work, they notice that the writer has some inconsistent sections that are not connected to the topic at hand. The consultant then uses positive politeness to distinguish where the writer is excelling and negative politeness to soften the suggestion to reevaluate their work in certain areas. This negative politeness gets the writer to think about the suggestions made by the consultant on how to improve their work, but they are having trouble trying to put the revision into words. Seeing this struggle, the consultant sets a goal for the student to accomplish with the remainder of the consultation. The goal is to take a certain amount of time to write everything that comes to mind and then check in after that allotted time is done. Before the writer can start, the consultant will remind them of the areas that the writer succeeded in and ask them thought-provoking questions to get the writer to reflect on how they approached writing those sections. The writer is then allowed to complete their writing task and checks in with the consultant on the progress made during this time.

Analysis of Scenario 2. In training, consultants are instructed on techniques they can use to accomplish the goals of collaborative learning: make the writer aware that the final decisions are their own and help build a more independent thinking writer. For this scenario, the consultant applied politeness and motivation theory to make their

writer more cognizant of their inherent abilities and guide them in revisions without demoralizing the student's writing skills. Making the writer more cognizant of their inherent abilities was done by the consultant's praise of the work with positive politeness. This technique can be carried out by saying phrases that indicate the consultant understands the points being made by the writer, thus making the writer feel confident in the material they have.

To guide the writer through revisions or suggestions, the consultant had to use negative politeness, which is carried out by the consultant asking questions about an unclear section that indirectly points out the lack of clarity. For instance, the scenario stated that certain sections veer off course of the overall narrative, so the consultant in this instance would ask, "I like this point you made, but I am not sure how it fits with the assignment. What was your thought process for including this?". This puts the misunderstanding on the consultant and not directly imposing the lack of clarity as a result of the writer's skills. By doing this, the writer clarifies the section to their consultant, while not imposing on the writing skills of the writer. Further conversation may elicit an important *aha* moment for the writer to realize that they included something that does not align with the assignment or allow the writer to explain the section in a clearer way.

Additionally, the formation of task-oriented goals and emphasis on praise allows the writer to regain confidence in their abilities. This motivation tactic was seen with how the consultant handled the remainder of the consultation. They presented the writer with an attainable goal and reinforcing that they have the abilities to get through the task. Reminding a writer of their previous success in the work and getting them to think about how they worked through that process is an important way of getting a writer out of a writing block or building motivation. Once they see that they can complete the assigned task, writers will have gained knowledge on how to apply this concept to other

pending tasks.

Limitations in Research

The initial goals of this thesis aimed to analyze why peer tutoring was especially influential to the development of writing skills and research through a multidisciplinary approach to explain the significance of interpersonal dynamics found in writing sessions and counseling sessions. This led to a broad scope that needed to be refined to make the project plausible for the time being. Goals were then changed to solely focus on understanding how tutoring from writing centers works, putting an emphasis on the philosophy behind writing centers. Because of this decision, initial ideas fell through on what would be researched for this project.

One of the first aims of the thesis that was not completed in this project was to analyze the difference between peer tutoring effects across different subjects. In an effort to answer the first research question of how peer tutoring for writing was the most important use of peer tutoring, research needed to be conducted on the effect peer tutoring had across all subjects. While pursuing this aspect of the research, it seemed outside of the scope for the intention of this project, which is to understand how writing centers work to develop writing skills and ease writing anxieties. Thus, the thesis lacks specific information on any potential effects that peer tutoring has on other subjects or areas of study such as mathematics and science. The research conducted focused more on the background of how writing centers train their peer consultants for peer-to-peer sessions.

A second, but vital, limitation to the study was the focus on seminal texts for peer tutoring in writing centers, leaving little room for expanding on or conducting more current research about writing anxieties. This project needed to lay the groundwork for a potential further investigation into writing anxieties and writing apprehension. The literature used identifies in broad terms what writing anxieties are and what they usually

originate from. What is not fully discussed is the deeper impact these writing anxieties may have on writers. Is there empirical data that supports or suggests that a writer's college experience is negatively impacted by their writing anxieties? Are writing anxieties also equivalent to other academic worries or anxiety itself? Providing answers to questions like these will be essential to unlocking a deeper understanding of how to deal with college students' anxiety with college learning and writing.

A third limitation in the research would be the generalization of the populations seen at writing centers. The literature provided generalized information on the effect writing centers have on students and how consultations are held for students. The current work fails to address the diversity in the kinds of students seen at the writing center. When thinking of this gap, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and adult learners are the first that come to mind for student populations that would be outside of this generalization of knowledge. What differences are seen? Are the researched concepts still applicable to populations outside of this generalized information? Writing centers strive to be a supportive place for all students, thus making it essential to find answers to similar questions and provide improved empirically-proven support.

A final limitation in the research would be the generalization of writing centers as a whole. While the philosophy section establishes the goals contemporary writing centers aim for, there is still an overall focus on applying teachings to *ideal* centers. Writing centers without the same resources as others are not addressed in the literature. Are these teachings still applicable to all writing centers or is it another generalization that does not consider a difference in available resources? Additionally, writing centers in universities focused on subject areas outside of an English department are not mentioned. What are the prospects of writing centers at schools that are primarily focused on subjects such as engineering? Understanding the impact other writing

centers outside of the ideal center would give a better indication of the effect writing centers have on the development of writing skills and reducing writing anxieties.

Conclusions: Future Studies and Applications

Writing centers foster safe and nurturing learning environments where writers, both student and tutor, improve their writing skills past their assignments, ease their writing anxieties, and become stronger and more independent problem solvers. All writers' needs can be addressed through the guidance of peer tutors at the writing center, not just writers who struggle with writing. Consultants are taught to empower their writers and help them become effective problem solvers, so they develop themselves alongside their writing skills. This longevity is all thanks to the collaborative philosophy of writing centers and their mission to provide knowledge for consultants to create the perfect learning environment for each student they see. These individualized learning environments ultimately depend on the interpersonal dynamic formed between the consultant and the writer, as it fuels the process for determining how the session will function.

Future Studies and Applications

Based on the current findings from reviewing writing center literature, it is understood that peer tutoring is an effective resource for the development of writing skills and for managing writing anxieties in students. This project serves as the foundation for seeking out the original broader ambitions I had in mind. Establishing a literature basis will lead to more in-depth empirical research studies that involve observations and addressing gaps in the current study's research.

A possible future study would be to study consultations at the Texas State University Writing Center, focusing on what techniques are being used by consultants throughout sessions and identifying the longevity of a consultant's impact on a student's writing skills. Studying locally at our writing center would serve as essential primary

structuring for future studies to be coordinated with other writing centers. The goal of this future study would be to put the literature researched in the current study into practice and gather empirical data outlining a student's progress past a semester of review. In my experience with returning students, they tended to come with the same issues but identified more ways to adjust their writing and confided in me to reassure their decisions. Studying this empirically would be beneficial in providing a more established reasoning besides my general observations made from my two and a half years as an undergraduate consultant.

Another possible future study would be to study the effect from the difference between peer tutoring in other subjects. The current project only reviews the effect of peer tutoring at the writing center, thus providing a way to see how different areas of tutoring (i.e., math tutoring or science tutoring) approach peer-to-peer services and if there is a specific subject that benefits more from this tutoring model. I originally envisioned researching this aspect of peer tutoring for the project, but the scope proved to be difficult from the lack of studies conducted. This study should be accomplished because it would help lessen the misconceptions writing centers face with helping college students' writing assignments. As discussed earlier, faculty and students hold two large misconceptions about writing centers: the writing center as a fix-it shop and the writing center as a purely remedial space. Writing requires development of the self, so the writer is able to build their knowledge and be able to harness this knowledge past their appointments to guide them with all kinds of writing. I suspect that this would be the same with other disciplines, as students cannot solely depend on their tutor to complete assignments, but would need to develop their knowledge in the subject area to have a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught to them and use this knowledge past the assignment. Finding a potential answer to this would not only provide needed contributions to the discourse of peer tutoring, but would also satisfy a curiosity that I

had on how peer tutoring is approached for different subject areas.

A third potential future study would be to look deeper into the comparison between therapy counseling sessions and writing center consultations. This was another initial goal I was unable to be met for the final project, but I remain curious on finding a solution. Analyzing the reasoning behind effective tutoring for this project stemmed from my CRLA project of analyzing an article by Murphy (1989), who provided a connection between the peer-to-peer relationship in writing consultations and client-to-therapist relationship in therapy sessions. Further research into this area would provide more discourse on what peer consultants and writing centers can learn from counseling practices. Perhaps for peer consultants this could involve updated or new training techniques, especially for deescalating writing anxieties. For writing centers, learning from studies like this proposed future study would lead to methodological changes to how some writing centers want to work to better meet the needs of students.

A final potential future study would analyze how writing center practices could be adopted into the high school setting. While this is a shift in the currently researched population, providing more resources to the development of students' writing skills from high school would impact services given in universities or how those are approached. This future study would test the current writing knowledge and strategies taught at high schools, providing an initial guide of what writing education is prior to students studying at universities. Once this process is done, a test group of peer consultants could be used to track improvements in writing confidence or knowledge throughout the semester, as well as longevity into the beginning of college. For me, this idea stems from personal experience of being insecure with higher level writing that required more analysis within a timed setting. Helping students with similar worries would be beneficial for helping all students succeed in upper level high school English classes, while also setting up strong foundations for further development in college or better preparing students to have

strong writing skills in the workforce.

Writing centers are an essential tool for college students' success in college, as well as past their undergraduate and graduate studies. They are invaluable in the contributions they make as a campus service with their impact on students and student staff. Setting the foundations of what writing centers aim to do and how they develop students is a necessary precedent for further exploration of peer tutoring and advocacy of the service.

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