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Peer Tutoring in a High School Writing Center: A Phenomenological Study

Thomas Jolly

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, PEER TUTORING IN A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CENTER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY, by THOMAS JOLLY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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PEER TUTORING IN A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CENTER:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By

TOMMY JOLLY

Under the Direction of Dr. Ewa McGrail, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

College-level writing center scholarship is an ever-increasing field of study (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011). Over time, high school writing centers have been established, often based on college-level writing center research (Fels & Wells, 2011). The problem, however, is that there is little, if any, empirical research studying the high school writing center and the experience of tutoring in one. The purpose of this phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2017) is to explore the experience of peer tutoring in a high school writing center. This study addresses the following questions:

- How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?
- How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?
- How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?

Writing center theory (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2011; Vandenberg, 1999/2011) and hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1975) provide a theoretical framework for considering this experience. After a review of the literature surrounding both college- and high school-level writing centers and peer tutoring, the researcher reviews the principles of hermeneutical phenomenology as the study of lived experience as a text to be interpreted (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher collected data through writing protocols, video elicitation, and interviews with participants who

volunteered as peer tutors in an HSWC. The researcher's analysis takes a hermeneutical and phenomenological approach (Gadamer, 1975; Grbich, 2013; Van Manen, 2014), analyzing and coding transcripts of the data sources as texts open to interpretation and containing distinct themes. The findings clarify how much the HSWC peer tutoring experience is comparable to peer tutoring in a college-level writing center, adding a more nuanced understanding of high school peer tutoring as a distinct phenomenon worthy of further study.

Peer Tutoring in a High School Writing Center:
A Phenomenological Study

by

Tommy Jolly

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DEDICATION

For Stacey, who has supported me more than I deserve.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I probably enjoyed [working in the writing center] most because most of my friends were also doing it—a kind of extended academic environment. It was just a good way to hang out with them. But I also, I think it made me a more confident writer.

—Eleanor, participant

Context

Writing is complicated. It is a process that requires deep thought, patience, and revision. Any product that emerges from the writing process is the culmination of a great deal of effort (Emig, 1977/2011; Murray, 1971/2011). Learning to write requires constant practice in an environment where students can talk through their work, sometimes with teachers, but also with each other as peer tutors (Graham, 2019; Graham et al., 2016; Kamps et al., 2008; Seung et al., 2010; Stenhoff & Lignuaris/Kraft, 2007; Thompson et al., 2009; Wexler et al., 2015). As with learning in general, when students (such as Eleanor above) learn and practice what they learn, they continue to refine their knowledge of writing based on their experience. They make meaning from their time engaged in learning (Dewey, 1916, 1938). Students benefit even more as learners, though, when they can engage in "verbal thought" (Vygotsky, 1962/2012, p. 94), allowing dialogue to become a vital component of learning and writing instruction (Bakhtin, 1981). A supportive environment for such dialogue, where students can talk and write in an iterative process, is important to writing development (Knoeller, 2004), and students can potentially hold peer feedback in high regard (Frankey, 2019). A potential context for experiencing this meaning-making, dialogic process in a rich environment is through peer

tutoring in a dedicated space for doing so—a place outside the traditional classroom. One such space for peer tutoring in writing is a writing center, which is the focus of the present study.

The history of peer tutoring in writing centers extends several decades back, and the body of research surrounding them includes conceptual pieces (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2011; McNamee & Miley, 2017; North, 1984), practitioner-related advice (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2014), recommendations for research (Mackiewicz & Babcock, 2020) and empirical studies (cf. Geller & Denny, 2013; Huang, 2011; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2018). From the conceptual pieces we learn that writing centers are not mere sites of remediation (North, 1984), but places where students work side-by-side at thinking through timeless ideas (Buserkus, 2017; Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2011). The advice for practitioners is straightforward in evaluating student writing, but also takes a gracious stance towards students who visit the writing center. Thanks to publications such as *Praxis*, *Writing Lab Newsletter*, and *Writing Center Journal*, there is also a consistent stream of studies examining more specific work in the writing center. In empirical studies, researchers have explored the effectiveness of writing centers (Bredtmann et al., 2013; Huang, 2011; LaClare & Franz, 2013), the tutoring process (Bleakney & Pittock, 2019; Bond, 2019; Bromley et al., 2013; Diedrich & Schroder, 2008; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013, 2014), and tutor identity (Bright, 2013, 2017; Fels, 2010; Friedrich, 2014; Grouling & Buck, 2017). The above studies are just a small sample of the ample research into writing centers over the past few decades.

Research Problem

Almost all of this research, however, has focused on university-level writing centers. Over time, many high school-level writing centers have arisen as well, although aside from a

map of self-reported high school writing centers maintained by a teacher in Virginia (Baran, 2015), there appears to be no firm statistic measuring exactly how many there are. The bulk of the literature on high school writing centers (HSWCs) is practitioner-oriented, with little empirical study or theorizing (Farrell, 1989; Fels & Wells, 2011; Kent, 2017). These guides are helpful in recruiting and training tutors and addressing the needs of specific groups of students who visit writing centers, such as English learners (Palacio & Dvorak, 2011) or those with learning disabilities (Neff, 1994/2011). Other research examines the process of initiating and designing a writing center (Greer & Trofimoff, 2013; Mulqueen, 2020; Plummer et al., 2019). Nevertheless, even this scholarship relies on writing center research focused on the university model. Theoretical texts on writing centers have contributed some rich (if idealistic) insights. Bruffee (1983) asserted that the business of peer tutoring is a thoroughly humanist endeavor that extends a millennia-old discourse into the present day and beyond. Lunsford (1991/2008) compared a few different hypothetical models for the writing center, including storehouses of knowledge and dens of romanticizing about the writing process, before encouraging greater collaboration between tutors and tutees within the center itself. Vandenberg (1999/2011) offered a corrective to what he perceived as idealism in some of the earlier scholarship, arguing that writing centers reinforce the hegemony of academic writing in the university. Tutors at the very least should be made aware of this fact. At the high school level, this knowledge may be even more eye-opening for peer tutors, who must work within a curriculum that may be more tightly prescribed and more driven by standardized testing (Hillocks, 2002). Theoretical pieces on writing centers (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Carino, 2003/2011; Lunsford, 1991/2011; North, 1984/1995) are so focused on the university that they lack consideration of these issues which affect HSWC's—and English instruction more broadly—more intensely.

The work of tutoring in the college writing center has been studied extensively in journals focused on the field (the aforementioned *Praxis*, *Writing Lab Newsletter*, and *Writing Center Journal*) and elsewhere, with varied results. Thonus (2002/2011) studied students and tutors in a university writing center, proposing a methodology that combined ethnography and conversation analysis towards discovering which interactions might get the most positive response from students. Griswold (2006) pointed out in a study of tutors that reading was a critical—and neglected—factor in writing center tutoring. The process of tutoring itself has proven to be a delicate one, requiring sensitivity in addressing the perceived flaws of a manuscript while also encouraging writers to revise their work effectively (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013).

Occasionally, studies of tutoring have yielded less-than-favorable results. In one German writing center, visiting students did not do as well in class as students who did not visit at all. The researchers speculated that the students who do not do well may have struggled to a greater extent than they anticipated (Bredtmann et al., 2013). Within tutoring sessions in another study, some student writers received more directed and more negative language if they were first-generation college students (Bond, 2019). LaClare and Franz (2013) discovered that the majority of business coming into a Japanese writing center was not from undergraduates, but from graduate students and faculty. Bell (2002) compared results from two studies and found that a professional tutor proved more successful than peer tutors in a writing center.

The results of these studies are important, but they do not spell doom for writing centers. Bredtmann, Crede, and Otten (2013), for example, note that the students visiting the center in their study may not have been well-prepared for the university to begin with, and the center in LaClare and Franz' (2013) study was still successful, even if the clientele were somewhat

unintended. In another study, Huang (2011) reported success in a writing center based on both survey results and learning-based outcome evaluation. Bromley, Northway, and Schonberg (2013) also revealed high customer satisfaction in a writing center. Thompson et al. (2009) reported similar satisfaction among visitors to a writing center, but they also recommended more fluid dialogue and instruction between both tutor and tutee. Training is important in providing skills for teaching students with differing needs, and can yield positive results (Bleakney & Pittock, 2019; Bond, 2019). At the university level, writing centers and their tutors are capable of accomplishing great things. The effectiveness of the center varies on a number of factors, including clientele and tutoring methods. Communication between writing centers and college writing programs also yields benefits (Miley & Downs, 2017; Myatt, 2017; Rendleman & Livingston, 2017). There does not appear to be a large-scale study of high school writing center effectiveness.

A few studies (Bright, 2017; DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Fels, 2010; Friedrich, 2014) have focused on tutor identity, again focusing on university-level tutors. In a study of 52 peer tutors from several different writing centers, Fels (2010) revealed that tutors often felt a need to comply with the goals of the academic writing stance of the university, even if they conflicted with their own writing philosophies. Friedrich (2014) studied the choices tutors made during tutoring sessions, examining the experience of tutoring phenomenologically and arguing for further work using the methodology. DeFeo and Caparas (2014) also used phenomenology, along with narrative analysis, to study tutor identity, concluding that tutors gained valuable leadership skills during the course of their work. Most of these tutors, however, were not aware of the long-term value of these skills until after they had quit working at their writing centers.

Together these studies point out the rich data that can come from examining both tutoring as a process and tutor identity. There are many conceptual pieces on writing center work, and there is also a growing body of empirical research (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Friedrich, 2014; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013). While there may be beneficial insights in university-based writing center scholarship (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2015; Vandenberg, 1999/2011), there is little if any evidence that the university model serves as an adequate one for HSWCs. Moreover, tutors in an HSWC may differ from university-level writing center tutors in their reasons for participation in the tutoring process. At this time, it is unclear why high school students tutor and how these students situate the tutoring process within their own literacy lives. It is also unclear exactly how the writing center itself facilitates this process.

Study Overview and Research Questions

This qualitative study aimed to discover how high school students experience and perform the peer tutoring process. In some of the landmark theoretical pieces on writing center work (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2001), scholars have promoted a somewhat idealized view of the purpose and practice of peer tutoring. Others have criticized this perspective as supportive of prevailing writing pedagogy in college composition programs (McNamee & Miley, 2017; Vandenberg, 1999/2011). Despite the debate, these researchers believe in the potential for writing centers to help students thrive in their school contexts. They advocate for what other educational theorists refer to as “human flourishing” (Evans, 2009, p. 75; Henderson & Hursh, 2014). Such an approach values both student and teacher contributions in order for everyone to be successful (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013).

The present study utilized a hermeneutical phenomenological design (Farrell, 2020; Van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2017). Data collection occurred through a writing protocol, video elicitation, and interviews with peer tutors who had worked in a high school writing center. In pursuing this study, I sought to answer the following questions:

- How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?
- How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?
- How do high school students perceive the peer tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?

With a phenomenological design, I attempted to understand the essential characteristics of tutoring in the context of an HSWC, interpreting data hermeneutically as textual in nature (Crotty, 1997; Farrell, 2020; Grbich, 2013; Van Manen, 1990). Participants were recruited through criterion-based sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). All participants in this study were individuals who worked in an HSWC at some point during their high school years. The particular HSWC where these tutors worked was one I co-founded with another teacher. These students had also studied in my English classes at their school, although all participants had graduated before I collected data from them. Interviews took place in a semi-structured format that included both video elicitation (Pauwels, 2015) and discussion of lived-experience descriptions (Van Manen, 1990), with hermeneutical phenomenological analysis to follow (Roulston, 2010; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Phenomenology is a methodology that focuses on particular phenomena, or experiences, as "things themselves" (Crotty, 1997, p. 97). A phenomenological study examines an experience through collecting the perspectives of participants who have lived it, but it does so without assuming that what has been said before about the phenomenon in question will still hold true

once new data has been collected. As Crotty (1997) writes, “Phenomenology is about saying No! to the meaning system bequeathed to us. It is about setting that meaning system aside” (p. 82). As a field in which experience is critical to flourishing (Dewey, 1938), education lends itself well to investigating the essence of different phenomena within it (Farrell, 2020). While much has been written about tutoring in writing centers, for example (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011), phenomenology states that this research does not necessarily hold true in every situation (and in this particular situation, the high school context). If writing center theory and research constitute a “meaning system” (Crotty, 1997, p. 82), then it is beneficial to set it aside for a moment, collect data from a different context, and examine it for what it is, that we might find new ways of describing the act of peer tutoring. The data resulting from the present study revealed nuances of the high school peer tutoring experience that add to and differ from previous thinking and experiences of others within the phenomenon. As a methodology in writing center research, phenomenology has precedent in the above studies by Friedrich (2014) and DeFeo and Caparas (2014).

I collected data for this study through interviews with writing center tutors, written reflections, video elicitation, and researcher field notes (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). First, participants completed written reflections, using the writing protocol for a lived experience description (Van Manen, 1990). Video elicitation consisted of viewing and discussion of prerecorded peer tutoring sessions taking place in a context similar to that of a writing center (Banks, 2007; Pauwels, 2015). The interviews were semi-structured (Roulston, 2010), focusing on the students’ identities as tutors and their work as tutors, but in the given format of the interviews, the writing processes of these students also came up (Dean, 2010). Analysis focused on the data within the context of the HSWC in the study. As part of the analytic phase, I derived

themes from the data, focusing on common traits of the experience in participants' lives (Saldaña, 2013).

This study took a hermeneutical approach to data analysis, interpreting the interviews as texts and considering the contexts in which these experiences occurred (Gadamer, 1975). According to Gadamer, a phenomenon and the participant who experiences it are situated between two poles. One represents the past, feeding our pre-judgments about a phenomenon. The other represents the present, and the phenomenon in light of the present may lead to the development of new pre-judgments. In the context of this study, the "past" pole is represented by previous research in writing centers. The "present" pole is represented by the experiences of tutors in the present study; data collected led to a new understanding of writing center tutoring, specifically at the high school level, modifying the judgments held previously by established research. Using the hermeneutical approach, I analyzed transcripts of the interviews with themed coding (Saldaña, 2013), wrote memos (Grbich, 2013), and evaluated the data against university-oriented writing center theory (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Lunsford, 1991/2011; North, 1984/1995) to determine if such theory was transferable to the HSWC. Through these methods, I hope I amplified the voices of the tutors (both past and present) who staffed this particular HSWC.

With my positionality in mind, I employed as part of my phenomenological analysis an autobiographical element, keeping field notes to document my own experiences as a teacher, researcher, writing center administrator, and tutoring facilitator (Grbich, 2013). As co-founder and co-director of this writing center, and as a teacher to many of my participants, data collection was ongoing not just through writing protocols, interviews, and video elicitation, but also through how I experienced the center. My field notes were a means of reflecting on my

perceptions of how the writing center operated; together with the interview data, the students and I were generating data together in regular transactions (Grbich, 2013).

Research Setting

The setting for this study was critical because it was different from the setting of much writing center research. In one of the only studies of tutors in an HSWC, Dean (2010) found that student tutors were perplexed by their roles. While they enjoyed the work of peer tutoring, they also began to rethink their identities in the process. They were no longer mere writing students; rather, their knowledge of both the tutoring and writing processes had given them a more critical perspective on school-sanctioned writing assignments and the teaching of writing. It is not clear how transferable Dean's findings are to other HSWCs. Further research into another HSWC will hopefully lend additional insight into any noticeable nuances of the HSWC model.

The site in particular is an HSWC in a high school in an exurban community near a major city in the Southeast. As of 2019, it had a student enrollment of approximately 1,700 students. 62% of the student body was White, 22% was Black, 2% was Asian, 9% was Hispanic, and 5% was Multiracial. 35% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Its 2019 graduation rate was 88.7% (State Department of Education, 2019).

The writing center at the school was founded in the spring of 2013, as my co-founder and I were participating in an advanced leadership institute through a site of the National Writing Project (NWP). In our personal experience, students had complained about the lack of extracurricular activities available to students who were not interested in athletics. Combining a desire to meet the students' perceived need for more to do and the need to engage in a leadership project as part of the NWP institute, we began a chapter of the National English Honors Society

(NEHS) and secured permission from our principal to occupy an unused classroom adjacent to the school's media center. After opening, the writing center served students from all grade levels in the high school with a variety of writing assignments, mostly from English classes. The writing center was originally open after school just a few days a week, but over time, those hours expanded. During the study, the writing center was open before school, after school, and during a midday class period every day. Two days per week, it was also open during the last period of the school day, when many seniors did not have class. Whereas originally, my co-founder and I were the only teachers volunteering in the writing center, we eventually recruited several additional teachers working there in order to cover all of the hours during which we were open. The work of the writing center grew from the vision of two teachers and a handful of students into the efforts of many more people.

Nevertheless, there were some growing pains. Over the next few years, the center had 10-15 tutors at any given time helping out in the writing center. Most of them were white and were recruited from honors and Advanced Placement English classes. According to Jeter (2011), this was not an ideal tutoring group; Jeter argues that tutors should come from the broader context of the student body. The group should be diverse not just ethnically, but also academically. Some years, a large number of tutors graduated, and although over time the number of tutors remained the same, we needed to recruit more in order to cover our expanded hours. As inevitable factors in a dissertation study, these issues complicated things, but they were not insurmountable problems.

By the time I began data collection, all participants had graduated from high school and moved on to college. Some had just graduated from high school, while others were as far along as their third or fourth year of college. The writing protocol, video elicitation, and interviews

were of the same semi-structured nature for all participants, with similar questions (Roulston, 2010), but the age variations allowed older participants to further comment on the work they had done as it had impacted them further on.

Significance

The writing process can be murky for students, and perhaps even for teachers (Applebee & Langer, 2011). What I hoped to accomplish through this study was an exploration into the essence of peer tutoring, specifically within the HSWC context. Through a phenomenological study, peer tutors reflected upon and discussed their identities as tutors, their experiences within their local writing center, and the role of the HSWC in facilitating such work. Combined with my own reflections as a teacher, researcher, and administrator, there is a data set ripe for analysis into what tutoring in a high school writing center is all about. Crotty (1997) writes that "[p]henomenology, it is often said, calls into question what is taken for granted" (p. 82). I submit that the HSWC model for peer tutoring is possibly taken for granted, given that it is little studied and heavily reliant on scholarship focused on university-level writing centers. In conducting this study, I sought to understand just how much we take the HSWC model for granted, and if so, to what extent. The results of this study show that HSWC peer tutors learn to work within a system that requires knowing not simply standard written English or effective composition skills, but also the demands of specific teachers within an overarching system reflecting state and federal policy. Being more aware of the factors influencing peer tutoring can lead writing center administrators and their tutoring staff to jointly pursue more refined training and develop a voice for whatever changes may be necessary in tutor training, classroom writing instruction, or district- or state-level curriculum standards. The experiences of these tutors yielded differences substantial enough to warrant further analysis, pointing to a basis for further research into how

HSWC peer tutors work, how policy affects the HSWC, and how both adults and students can work together to render the HSWC model more effective.

Key Terms

The following is a list of terms I use throughout this study:

- Hermeneutics—the theory and practice of interpretation, initially of texts (Moustakas, 1994) and later of other phenomena (Van Manen, 2014).
- High school writing center (HSWC)—a facility operating on the basis of improving student writing through tutoring, often by peers (Fels & Wells, 2011)
- Peer tutoring—the practice of assisting one's equals through content from the same (or a similar) context in which one studies
- Phenomenology—a research methodology emphasizing study of the essence of a particular experience, pursued through data collection from participants who have been through the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014)

In the next chapter, I review the relevant literature for this study, touching on research in the writing process, peer tutoring, and writing centers. I also review in further detail the concepts of human flourishing and philosophical hermeneutics, which serve as theoretical frameworks for this study. In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodology in further detail, giving an overview of the principles of phenomenology and how I applied them in data collection, coding, and analysis. I share the results of the study in Chapter 4, including samples from the data and the relevant themes I developed. Finally, there is a discussion of the implications of these results in Chapter 5, along with suggestions for further research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The high school writing center is a hub of tutoring that is geared towards potentially improving student writing overall as students navigate the writing process. While researchers have pursued scholarship in the writing process over the past several decades (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Hillocks, 1986; Smagorinsky, 2006; Graham et al., 2016), it continues to require a sophistication from our students that can be challenging. To this end, writing centers provide the opportunity for high school students to help their peers.

As the field of college-level writing center research has grown over the past thirty years, there is also a growing body of practitioner-oriented research focused on HSWC's (Farrell, 1989; Fels & Wells, 2011; Kent, 2017). While this study was in progress, a new organization, the Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA), was founded and has begun to grow. This organization promotes high school-level peer tutoring in writing centers through free resources, an annual conference, and soon, a peer-reviewed journal. Such events point towards seeking a greater understanding of the experience of high school-level peer tutoring, to find what elements of this phenomenon might be hidden within it (Van Manen, 2014; Farrell, 2020).

There is a broad body of research on college-level writing centers (Barnett & Blumner, 2008; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011), but there is more to learn about HSWCs (Walker, 2010), particularly how they function within the broader high school setting and how the tutors might describe both their identities as tutors and the tutoring process. These factors may be phenomenologically different from the college experience. Within the context of an HSWC, this qualitative study aimed to discover how high school students experience and perform the peer tutoring process. The study utilized a hermeneutical phenomenological design

(Van Manen, 1990) through video elicitation, lived-experience descriptions, and interviews with peer tutors who worked in a high school writing center.

While peer tutoring research situated within writing centers has increased tremendously in recent years (Barnett & Blumner, 2008; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016), it is couched within a scholarly history and is influenced by other research fields. In addition to peer tutoring research, it is important to consider the writing process and writing centers more broadly. For that reason, components of this literature review include:

- An overview of the writing process and the benefits of peers helping peers, including influential articles and a review of research into the process focusing specifically on high school students;
- Empirical research on peer tutoring, including key studies affecting all levels of education;
- Writing center research, focusing both on classic texts and scholarship more specifically focused on high school writing centers and the peer tutoring experience.

This literature review was conducted by consulting anthologies of important research, searches in databases, and consultation with established scholars whenever possible. Essential writing center texts (such as those found in Barnett & Blumner, 2008; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; and Murphy & Sherwood, 2011) are influential enough to provide a general theoretical framework. In addition to these texts, I pursued the idea of human flourishing (Aristotle, 1953; Cherkowski & Walker, 2013; Hanley, 2009; Henderson & Hursh, 2014; Wolbert, De Ruyter, & Schinkel, 2015, 2019) as it plays out in the work of hermeneutical phenomenology (Gadamer, 1975; Van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2017). In this chapter, I discuss HSWC peer tutoring as it is

situated within scholarship in the writing process, peer tutoring, and writing center scholarship itself. There is also a discussion of a synthesized theoretical framework relating writing center theory and hermeneutical phenomenology to one another.

The Writing Process and Its Relevance to the Writing Center

The Writing Process and Peer Tutoring

The writing process and peer tutoring are inevitably intertwined. In recent decades, the writing process has been emphasized over the written product, and peer tutoring within and without writing centers has facilitated this process. Fitzgerald and Ianetta (2016) note that the work of Perl (1979), Flower and Hayes (1980/2011), and Lunsford (1979/2011) have all declared that successful writers are more cognizant of the writing process, and peer tutors can aid less successful writers in discovering the underlying methods of writing. Formula is not as important as the continual drafting and revision that begin in the mind and continue on the page.

The implication of much of this research is that peer tutoring must follow suit in its approaches to coaching through the writing process. Donald Murray (1971/2011) popularized the articulation of writing as a process as opposed to a product, writing more specifically that teachers must respect students "for the search for truth in which [they are] engaged" (p. 5) and that writing teachers "are coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments in which our students can experience the writing process for themselves" (p. 5). To "search for truth" and "experience the writing process" leans into a phenomenological stance whereby writers can immerse themselves in and eventually articulate the phenomenon of writing. These words can just as easily be written about peer tutors, whose work requires the grace and knowledge to address student writing from a variety of perspectives, for a variety of purposes, using a variety of methods (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). Writing as process as opposed to product is a critical

precursor to the work of peer tutoring. Peter Elbow (1973) wrote generously of how interaction with others was a necessary part of the writing process, even discussing the means of starting a "teacherless" (p. 76) writing class, a group in which friends and colleagues help each other in the same manner that peer tutors do. Along similar process-oriented lines, Emig (1977/2011) wrote of writing as thinking and of the need for the sounds of a classroom to be filled with more than the teacher's voice. Flower and Hayes (1980/2011) studied the writing process and developed a theory for how the mind processes what it is going to write. More recently, researchers have articulated that writing is a patchwork of activities that writers employ given the various purposes they have for writing and the disciplines in which they write (Graham, 2019; Graham et al., 2016; Klein & Boscolo, 2016). One study also examined peer tutoring in a high school writing class and found that traditional teacher and student roles impeded the tutoring process (Marsh, 2018), but peer revision can still be well-regarded by student writers (Frankey, 2019). Moreover, it is possible for students to participate not just in peer tutoring, but in classroom instruction towards stronger writing (Bayne, 2013). Again, peer tutors can aid in enlightening other writers about this process, one that is difficult to understand without continual practice and dialogue with someone who can help (Lunsford, 1979/2011).

If the mind works through writing iteratively, as Flower and Hayes (1980/2011) argue, then there is more to writing than what is on the finished page. Articulations of the processes of writing and peer tutoring grasp at the core of experience, but they do not center student voices in a way that gets at the essence of the phenomena of writing or peer tutoring (Van Manen, 2014). The influence of these scholars (Elbow, 1973; Emig, 1977/2011; Flower & Hayes, 1980/2011; Klein & Boscolo, 2016; Murray, 1971/2011) on writing at all levels is deeply felt, and writing centers are not immune to their ideas. In fact, their ideas are a big influence on the writing center

itself, a space where writers can get aid through the process and continue on their journeys (Lunsford, 1991/2011).

Writing, Feedback, and Revision

Some of the above scholarship in the writing process has been influential at various levels of education (Chapman, 2006; Durst, 2006; Graham, 2019; Graham et al., 2016; Hillocks, 2006), but its roots extend back further than the scholars' publication dates would imply. The work of teaching composition in the modern sense goes back to the work of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, particularly the work of George Jardine, whose work in the nineteenth century most resembles some of the methods that would become more widespread today, such as peer feedback, revision, and regular practice at writing (Gaillet, 1994, 1998). In the twentieth century, however, Jardine's practices were not well-known. The ideas of Fred Newton Scott (Gaillet, 1993) emphasized progressive ideas about the need for social interaction in the writing process, but by the time Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) published their overview of composition scholarship, Jardine and Scott's ideas had fallen out of favor.

In *Research in Written Composition*, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) emphasized quantitative empirical studies over qualitative research and numerical data over human experience. They decried the climate of English teaching at the time, writing that there was not enough discipline or consistency within the profession to decidedly promulgate best practices. The authors argued for some degree of uniformity in order to properly conduct research into determining the best methods for teaching writing. The effect of this legacy is sometimes felt in writing centers when they must reinforce what is taught in classrooms (Vandenberg, 1999/2011). While work in the writing center is immersed in the process of writing, there is still the looming prospect of a grade on the assignment, and more broadly,

progress in one's education. Braddock et al. (1963), do, however, conclude that there is value in revising writing with some degree of instructional supervision. Here, before Murray's (1971/2011) advocacy of writing as a process, is perhaps the seed for such a description of writing. The seed is planted, too, for the peer-assisted revision that would eventually take place in a writing center.

Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) advocated for consistency in research, reducing the variables to four: the writer, the assignment, the rater, and the colleague. In a later volume reviewing composition research, George Hillocks (1986) loosened these variables a bit, and he advocated for greater inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in composition research. He included the process writing research of Calkins (1986), Graves (1975/1994), and others. Graves and Calkins discovered that almost nobody writes in a rigidly linear fashion; rather, it is not unusual for writers to go back and forth between drafting, editing, and revision. Hillocks documented how composition scholars had become broader in how they approached tutoring and the writing process, understanding it to be more complicated than Braddock et al.'s reductive four variables suggested. Doing so allowed for a greater sense of what Van Manen (2014) might call wonder at the writing process as a phenomenon. Hillocks also discovered in a review of several studies that students do not generally learn to write better through written feedback from teachers. Students were likely to struggle to understand teacher expectations for their writing. Such findings indicate that the advocates of writing center research who came in the years after Hillocks' work (Bruffee, 1983/2011; North, 1984/2011) might bridge teacher instruction and student practice through writing centers focused on peer tutoring.

For writers who may not have been immediately qualified for college-level English, the struggle to meet teacher expectations has been deeper. Writers may require help in basic writing

skills (Baker, 2016; Shaughnessy, 1976/2011), or they may have a first language other than English (Myers, 2003/2011; Palacio & Dvorak, 2011), or their cultural backgrounds may be different from the methods or texts by which composition instruction is framed (Barron & Grimm, 2002/2011; Royster, 1996/2011; Villanueva, 2004/2011). As student bodies have become more diverse (American Council on Education, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), and as process writing has become more accepted, some composition scholars have responded by addressing the facets of writing instruction affected by these changes (Barron & Grimm, 2002/2011; Royster, 1996/2011; Villanueva, 2004/2011). Writing centers have followed suit in their methods, addressing language and cultural diversity as well as by moving beyond focusing too much on mechanics (Myers, 2003/2011) or by being willing to discuss issues of race (Barron & Grimm, 2002/2011). Writing centers have encountered the same issues as composition scholars in general, and they have responded accordingly.

Later research confirmed the value of conferencing (Smagorinsky, 2006). In Smagorinsky's anthology *Research in Composition* (2006), Hillocks (2006) reported of Sperling's (1990) study revealing that conferencing was of greater value than written feedback in improving writing. Fecho, Allen, Mazaros, and Inyega (2006) wrote as well of the value of creating a community of writers within the classroom. These researchers show that conversation between peers and teachers situates the writing process in an environment where students can flourish without the pressure of sharing writing with the teacher alone. Nevertheless, more rigid approaches to instruction persisted. In 2002, Hillocks wrote that state-mandated assessments continued to shape writing instruction, and he would also note later (Hillocks, 2006) the prevalence of the so-called "five paragraph theme" (p. 59), a format consisting of an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. This reductive format has persisted over

time (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham, 2019; Kohnen et al., 2019) and provides a context for how the HSWC might have to tutor in a manner phenomenologically different from a university writing center. The concerns of the high school student (tutor or writer) may be different from that of the university writer or tutor. In light of the work of Behizadeh and Engelhard (2011), the prevalence of the five-paragraph theme should be unsurprising, as they noted that writing theorists and assessment advocates rarely collaborated, resulting in assessments that have little if anything to do with how writers actually write. Applebee and Langer (2011) pointed out that writing at the secondary level was often assigned without being taught thoroughly, but students may flourish best with explicit instruction of writing strategies, the integration of reading and writing instruction with other disciplines (Johnston, 2020), and assessment of writing (Graham et al., 2016). These developments are the context in which writing centers operate today, with the continued dominance of writing instruction that is limited in focus, often to English classes (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Johnston, 2020). The recent histories of composition studies and writing center scholarship have therefore been intertwined, even as writing centers have increasingly become entities independent of English studies (Villanueva et al., 2006).

Writing Centers

University-Level Writing Center Research

The earliest iterations of the writing center were interpreted by some as places where students could find remediation for errors in grammar (North, 1984/2011), although more recent research has revealed that not all writing centers operated based on so blunt a purpose (Lerner, 2001/2016). In 1977, Muriel Harris, a professor at Purdue University, began reaching out to other writing center scholars through a new publication, the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. In addition to establishing a network of contacts, early issues gradually began to include short essays

considering how to assist remedial writers who may not have been adequately prepared for college level writing (Bator, 1978; Hill, 1978). Even at this early stage, though, there exists a desire to broaden a writing center's reputation as more than a place for proofreading (Dicks, 1978). In the 1980's, writing center advocates began to reassess what a writing center could and should do. North (1984/2011), for example, wrote of the writing center as more than a place for remediation or grammar instruction—it was a place where learning could be deeper than surface-level issues with writing, where tutors did not help improve papers so much as they helped improve writers. Indeed, a place could even be a basis for understanding the writing center as a phenomenon and peer tutoring within that space as a separate phenomenon (Olivier, 2017).

The discourse in writing centers has been upheld by some as aiming for great depth. Bruffee (1984/1995) wrote of peer tutoring as a continuation of a universal conversation:

> To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is, we must learn to converse well. The first steps to learning to think better, therefore, are learning to converse better and learning to establish and maintain the sorts of social context, the sorts of community life, that foster the sorts of conversation members of the community value. (p. 401)

Lunsford (1991/2011) wrote of the writing centers as sites where both student writer and student tutor could learn from each other through dialogue, turning the center into a salon of intellectual discourse. Years later, Busekrus (2017) would recommend refining these ideals to encourage a structure of conversation addressing questioning, metacognition, and choices in writing tutoring sessions. Harris (1990/1994) wrote about raising "the whole person" (p. 19) in the writing center. This holistic approach is indicative of the idealism that encompasses some of the conceptual work on writing centers. No longer was the writing center a place where only the most struggling

writers went; tutoring, in the eyes of the scholars (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Harris, 1990/1994; Lunsford, 1991/2011) at least, was for everyone, even the tutors themselves.

Some studies portray more mixed results of writing center work. In a German writing center, Bredtmann, Crede, and Otten (2013) found that students visiting a writing center were not as successful as students who did not (the authors caution, however, that students visiting the writing center may have been poorer students to begin with). Bell (2002) found that a professional tutor did a better job than the tutors in a writing center he studied, but he acknowledged that his study of the professional tutor may have been better designed than his study of a writing center. In a Japanese writing center, LaClare and Franz (2013) found more business coming from graduate students and faculty than from undergraduates. While these studies have yielded mixed results, they also highlight the fact that what happens in a writing center may not be the easiest thing to study. Sherwood (2007/2011) writes of tutoring as an art form, and that may not be a bad description of the deft verbal and written work that occurs in a writing center.

In some research, there appear to be benefits in promoting collaboration between writing centers and college writing programs, provided the two maintain a healthy, trusting, communicative relationship (Myatt, 2017). While their goals do not necessarily overlap completely, the aims are similar enough to promote what Miley and Downs (2017) call "collaboracity," (p. 40) a portmanteau of the words "collaboration" and "reciprocity." Writing programs and writing centers are different things (and comparing the two phenomenologically has not really been explored), but if the staff and faculty in the two can respect each others' distinct interests, then combined efforts towards shared goals (when those goals arise organically and are not forced) can be fruitful (Rendleman & Livingston, 2017). More broadly, Lerner and

Oddis (2017), in their study of citations in writing center research, argue that writing centers can become anti-disciplinary in their potential for promoting collaboration across disciplinary lines.

In contrast to this line of thought, Vandenberg (1999/2011) pointed out that there is a hegemony of academic writing in the university, and writing centers are beholden to it. In short, Vandenberg (1999/2011) argues that writing centers, intentionally or not, exist to reinforce the academic writing style supported and expected by the university at large. No matter what dialogue might take place between tutor and tutee, the goal is most likely a high grade on a paper. Vandenberg writes that it is possible for tutors to at least give voice to this concern within the confines of the writing center, but ultimately, the university will still impose a schoolwide standard for academic writing to which the writing center must submit. Fels (2010) reported on tutors who felt the need to comply with university policy on academic writing, but McNamee and Miley (2017) still envision the writing center as a potential space of radical resistance to existing power structures. Employing Critical Race Theory within writing center studies (Condon et al., 2020) or considering racism within the hermeneutics of space (Bernasconi, 2017) can lead scholars to explore what practices within writing centers reinforce these unfair power structures. This issue of hegemony between writing programs and writing center work shows no signs of going away (Blazer, 2015; Garcia, 2017; Naydan, 2016), but there is a possibility for positive collaboration between writing programs and writing centers (Miley & Downs, 2017; Myatt, 2017; Rendleman & Livingston, 2017). These opposing views reflect the continuing growth of both scholarship in writing center pedagogy and the development of extensive practical materials for training undergraduate and graduate students, who may then pursue both tutoring and research into becoming better tutors (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2014).

Studying in-depth the interactions of tutors with student writers has yielded insights in rhetorical moves that tutors make during the tutoring process (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al., 2009; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013). Thompson and her colleagues have shown repeatedly that tutoring is delicate work. One cannot be demeaning in evaluating student work, but one cannot be too generous in praising it, either. Student writers are willing to take criticism, though, as they expect it when they visit the writing center. It is also necessary to allow the visiting students to do as much of the work as possible. These studies (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al., 2009; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013) are insightful and appear to be rigorous in their methods, but they lack comprehensive theoretical frameworks. There is data collection, there is analysis, but there is nothing that describes the ideas behind the methodology. The lens through which the research is pursued appears to be missing. Without a clear theoretical foundation, it is difficult to understand exactly why the researchers pursue the methodology they do, and the results may be open to more interpretations than the researchers intend.

There is also research that in becoming tutors, the practice of tutoring affects students' identities. Exploring themes of tutor identity (although not in an evidently rigorous phenomenological study), Bright (2013) asserted that training undergraduate tutors to reflect on identity helped them become better tutors. Grouling and Buck (2017) discovered that participants in their two studies split into two groups: undergraduate tutors who embraced tutoring as part of their identity and graduate-level tutors who did not. While their undergraduate participants were eager to work in the center, the graduate tutors worked only because they were required to in order to fulfill the duties of their assistantships. Grouling and Buck raise the important point that tutors work in the writing center for differing reasons.

There are a number of studies of peer tutoring, thanks to the presence of *Writing Center Journal* and studies published elsewhere. *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, *The Peer Review*, and *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* have provided additional outlets for research. Nevertheless, few of these studies attempt to get at the phenomenological essence of peer tutoring.

Phenomenological Studies of Writing Center Tutoring

A phenomenological approach is helpful in its attempt to expose the essence of lived experience by examining and comparing specific examples of those experiences (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Farrell, 2020; Van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2017). While there are not many studies of writing center tutoring incorporating phenomenology, the following studies reveal how the tutoring experience has changed how individual tutors perceive themselves.

Friedrich (2014) conducted a phenomenological study of tutors, highlighting the identities the tutors develop and advocating for deeper awareness of the instructional choices those tutors make. Acknowledging that tutoring centers may collect data on tutees and their requests, Friedrich suggests that in order for writing centers to pursue a more complete mission, they must also assist the tutors who work there. The resulting study used lived experience descriptions (LEDs) written by the tutors to explore how tutors make choices in their work and construct their identities as tutors as a result. The tutoring staff, over time, developed a "shared repertoire" (p. 54) of rhetorical moves to use in tutoring situations that was characteristic of the writing center more generally. DeFeo and Caparas (2014) used phenomenology and narrative analysis to study tutor identity as well, inviting their participants to reflect on their tutoring experiences after they had moved on from the profession. Their participants did not generally plan on becoming tutors; they simply fell into the work and continued it during their individual

educational careers. After graduating, they found work in other fields. In the end, all of the tutor participants were grateful for the work they did, even if they did not realize at the time that they would reap benefits from the experience in other career fields.

Both of these phenomenological studies are specific to tutoring in college-level writing centers, but their results vary. Friedrich (2014) discovers tutor identity through the actual work of tutoring, while DeFeo and Caparas (2014) learn more about how the work of peer tutoring adds to the skill sets of tutors as they find work in other fields. Friedrich's research, for example, uncovers tutoring principles that confirm the material of a practical guide such as Ryan and Zimmerelli's (2014). DeFeo and Caparas' work envisions tutor training as potentially transformative for the tutors in giving them future professional clout. However, there is little in either Friedrich's or DeFeo and Caparas' research that can be verifiably confirmed as transferable to the high school level. Furthermore, these studies, thus far, are the only two phenomenological studies I have found.

High School-Level Writing Center Research

Walker (2010) writes of high school-level writing center research as "limited" (p. 1). Nevertheless, there is a slowly growing body of practitioner-oriented work on high school writing centers. Farrell (1989) edited a volume of helpful essays on establishing and maintaining a high school writing center, and its advice, while published some time ago, is still useful in topics such as finding a space (Allen & Farrell, 1989), recruiting staff (Marcus & Farrell, 1989), and promoting the center (Upton, 1989).

The journal *Clearing House* in 2006 published a special issue just about high school writing centers. Again, all of these pieces were practice-oriented, adding primarily ideas for further research, as opposed to adding research itself. Tinker (2006), for example, profiled a

program for high school students at Stanford University's writing center; the success of their work suggested that the college writing center model might benefit high school students as well. Echoing earlier university-level scholars such as Bruffee (1984/1995), Nicolini (2006) framed the writing center as a space for thought first and foremost; this also echoes Emig's (1977/2011) view of writing as a mode of thinking. Morris (2006) pushed for the high school writing center as a place for students to get help with all academic writing, not just writing for English classes. This particular issue of *Clearing House* is full of articles such as these highlighting various facets of high school-level writing center work. These pieces present potential for future empirical studies of writing center research, even if they do not present empirical research.

Kent (2006; Rev. ed. 2017) has written a helpful volume on the means of establishing a student run high school writing center. The practical matters of writing center administration discussed in this work cannot be overstated. Kent is quite adept at advice on staffing the writing center and keeping data on visitors to the center. Such data in particular can be helpful in promoting and defending the center. While Kent's book includes helpful advice and resources on recruiting and training tutors, however, its basis in research is quite limited since it is more practical in approach.

Fels and Wells (2011) have edited an anthology entitled *The Successful High School Writing Center: Building the Best Program with Your Students*. This work, like those that preceded it, is without empirical studies, but it does present a stronger awareness of previous research. Rafoth, Wells, and Fels (2011) cite Vygotsky (1962/2012) and Bakhtin's (1981) work as vital in arguing for the social nature of peer tutoring. In Rafoth et al.'s experience, the work taking place in writing centers has been social and dialogical at the core—students learn successfully when they are able to discuss the writing process with each other. Just as Sperling

(1990) discovered some years earlier, conferencing can be a critical factor in student success in writing. Among other significant chapters in this book are Mulqueen's (2011) reflection on working with Stephen North at SUNY Albany (a key figure in writing center research), which connects the emerging scholarship of HSWC's with the legacy of earlier scholarship (North, 9184/1995); and Fels' (2011) discussion of a visit from an accrediting agency to the school where she operated a writing center. The accrediting agency's approval lent credence to the writing center's mission.

More recently, there has been a slight increase in scholarship regarding HSWCs, but it is still in the nascent stages. Greer and Trofimoff (2013) composed a narrative of a high school writing center founded by students and based on their own research. These students were interested in fun as well as tutoring, so the writing center became a school community hub for discussion of the more pleasurable aspects of writing. The success of the writing center described in Greer and Trofimoff's article is based in student-centered approaches to learning. The students took ownership not just of their own education, but of how they would approach the curriculum and instruction of the school itself. There is a valuable lesson here that might transfer to other contexts, namely, that maybe students will thrive when they are taken seriously. Writing as university academics tasked with helping administer an HSWC, Yoon and Stutelberg (2018) found their work complicated by the need to enforce school policies about cellphones and movement in the building. They valued their time working with students, however, and found that affect mattered a great deal—that is, establishing relationships with student writers and tutors and making the space comfortable, especially for the visiting writers. In the past few years, larger research bodies such as the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) have made room in their conferences for high school-specific writing center topics such as "Overlooked

Assets: The Best Intelligence from the High School Tutoring World" (Baran, 2017), "Beyond the Center: Leading-Edge Engagement in Local High Schools" (Campbell & Schlueter, 2018), and "Secondary Schools: The 'Write' Partners" (Modey, Blakeslee, & Austin, 2019).

There has been a great deal of writing about HSWC's (Farrell, 1989; Fels & Wells, 2011; Kent, 2017), much of it helpful in the phases of initiating and operating such a center. Nevertheless, there is very little empirical research into HSWC's, the peer tutoring experience being just one facet of potential further research. The new Secondary School Writing Centers Association (SSWCA) will hopefully remedy this problem.

Peer Tutoring

Despite the dearth of research into high school writing centers, there is a great deal of empirical research into peer tutoring at all levels. While some of these studies (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Hoogeveen & van Gelderen, 2013) span the entire breadth of K-12 education, others focus on specific levels of education (Kaufmann & Schunn, 2011; Kolba & Isaacs, 2009; Lai, 2010; Matropieri, 2001; Jacobson et al., 2001).

Peer Tutoring in General

Studies of peer tutoring spanning the breadth of grade levels and subjects in education have revealed the practice to be successful. In a meta-analysis of single-case peer tutoring studies spanning grades 1-12, Bowman-Perrott et al. (2013) found moderate to large benefits of peer tutoring "regardless of dosage, grade level, or disability status" (p. 39). Hoogeveen and van Gelderen (2013) also found peer response quite effective, although they recommended that future studies be more controlled in order to best isolate the most effective methods of peer response and evaluation. In a synthesis of 13 studies of math and reading intervention strategies for struggling students, peer mediation showed moderate to high positive effects on student

achievement (Wexler et al., 2015). Graham (2019) has also documented peer interaction as a helpful evidence-based practice. Together, these studies show that there is a lot of good that can emerge from various forms of peer tutoring at all levels of the educational system. These studies are wide-angle views of peer tutoring, however. They focus on the practical benefits of peer tutoring for tutees, but they do not focus on describing the peer tutoring experience in any way. These studies are also less concerned with where such tutoring takes place, and whether or not location matters, factors on which I will focus in the present study.

Peer Tutoring at the College Level

There is a lot of variety in how peer tutoring has taken place at the college level. This variety extends beyond methods to studies of various populations at the college level, focusing primarily on students, both tutors and tutees. Kolba and Isaacs (2009) used the writing center at a state university to train preservice teachers in tutoring adolescents. There was ample interaction between the students and teachers, and ample benefit for both groups as well. In a study of English learners in Taiwan, students preferred peer evaluation over evaluation from a computer (Lai, 2010). In a large survey of undergraduates from several universities, Kaufman and Schunn (2011) explored why students might be resistant to peer evaluation. Their study involved an online peer assessment tool and no instructor grading, so the students considered each other as unqualified to evaluate their writing. These results indicate that it might be important to train peer tutors to work as employees in a college- or high-school designated space. In their study, Kolba and Isaacs (2009), for example, discussed training K-12 teachers more than they do training K-12 students as tutors. In all of these studies, the work of peer tutoring is valuable, and to some extent, the image or identities of peer tutors get a boost from their professionalization.

Even in a high school writing center, such training may give peer tutors confidence in their work and elevate their reputations within the school community.

Peer Tutoring Among Adolescents

At the middle and high school levels, peer tutoring studies cover students of a variety of backgrounds, and students appear to enjoy the experience. In much of the literature, it is evident that students feel empowered when they are allowed to teach each other. Peer tutoring in reading, for example, has led to students' desiring that it become a regular part of their coursework (Mastropieri, 2001). Jacboson et al. (2001) took things a step further by having seventh-grade students write lesson plans of their own, which they redelivered to third-grade students. Effective implementation and consistent administrative support of ClassWide peer tutoring (a highly structured method, in which students switch roles repeatedly and maintain their progress) has also delivered positive results (Buzhardt et al., 2007; Kamps et al.; 2008). Kamps et al. (2008) found similar results. While not all of these studies focused significantly on student perspectives, it appears that peer tutoring is successful in these classroom settings, so there could be precedent for positive peer tutoring experiences in an HSWC as well.

There are a number of meta-analyses and reviews of literature covering the topic of adolescent peer tutoring. In their meta-analysis of studies of writing instruction, Graham and Perin (2007) reported a significant effect size of 0.75 for peer assistance in writing instruction. Graham et al. (2016) later recommended peer response in a U.S. Department of Education review of research. Seung, Ramirez, and Cumming (2010) also conducted a meta-analysis, and they found that cross-age tutoring, reading programs, and small tutoring programs were particularly effective in the broader literature on adolescent peer tutoring. Again, these larger

analyses of peer tutoring research confirm that it is worthwhile to pursue adolescent peer tutoring in the classroom—but they are not situated within the unique context of a writing center.

Additional studies examine the benefits of peer tutoring involving students with various disabilities. Roseth, Johnson, and Johnson (2008), in a meta-analysis, found that cooperative learning experiences between early adolescents were more beneficial to learning than individualized or competitive models. In a wide-ranging review of literature, Spencer (2006) found tremendous support for the effectiveness of peer tutoring with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, including when the students took turns being tutors and tutees. Stenhoff and Lignugaris/Kraft (2007) found similar results in their review of literature involving peer tutoring with students with various mild disabilities, although they added that there is not much research into peer tutoring when the students are from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Shortcomings in the Research

The success of peer tutoring, then, may be readily transferable to the setting of a high school writing center. What is needed is a study examining the tutoring as experienced by tutors themselves in such a context.

While many researchers have touted the benefits of peer tutoring (Graham et al., 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007; Seung, Ramirez, & Cumming, 2010), not all researchers are satisfied with the body of research in its current form. Driscoll and Perdue (2012) share a concern for making known and increasing the amount of writing center research that is replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD). In their review of the literature, they found that only 6% of research published in *Writing Center Journal* actually fit the RAD criteria they articulated. Driscoll and Perdue conclude that writing center scholars need to develop RAD research methods, make connections between important issues in the field, change expectations for what

writing center research can be, and sponsor further RAD research. There is more work to be done with peer tutoring research as a whole if RAD research is to be the standard. It also would not be surprising to see resistance to the call for more RAD research. Fels (2011) has gone on record in saying that the writing center community cannot let such research become the standard for all studies to come. Part of the writing center's appeal, Fels writes, is the fact that the peer tutoring work there is not often quantified, and that it should not be quantified. As more research into writing centers develops, it will be important to navigate between these two extremes, seeing the value in the variety of methodologies available to researchers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Perhaps quantitative data can offer a wide-angle view of the overall business of the writing center, while qualitative research can remind the writing center community of the personal conversations and writing that are fundamental to earlier advocates for writing centers (Bruffee, 1983/2011; North, 1984/1995). Navigating a middle road may be difficult, though, as evidence-based practices can too often lead to a rigidity in which research ultimately has sway over not just the writing center community, but also the broader educational research field (Biesta, 2007).

There are challenges in the body of recent writing center research as Lerner (2014) reported in his review of issues of *Writing Center Journal*. Lerner found that there is a great deal of insularity in writing center scholarship, and in that journal in particular. Lerner discovered that authors relied heavily on too many of the same literature—North (1984/1995) alone was cited in roughly every third article—and that there was a lack of both rich theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. In a later follow-up study, Lerner and Ollis (2017) found that there is not a lot of overlap in the expertise of many authors in Writing Center Journal. While such a finding may indicate that knowledge within the field of writing center studies has not consolidated, it also presents an opportunity for scholars within the field to share their disparate knowledge and

collaborate for the improvement of the discipline. Over the past thirty years, writing center research has grown, but it is couched within a scholarly history that does not expand much beyond think pieces. In addition, there does not (as of this writing) appear to be much more phenomenological work done within writing center research. This shortcoming is unfortunate, as phenomenological study would provide the opportunity to understand the tutoring experience more readily from the tutor's perspective (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Farrell, 2020; Van Manen, 2014, 2017). Through studying specific lived experiences, we can gain deeper knowledge of the tutoring life.

There is a growing body of research surrounding writing centers (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Friedrich, 2014; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al., 2009; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013) and peer tutoring (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Hoogeveen & van Gelderen, 2013), but there is still much to be done in building a body of empirical studies of peer tutoring as it occurs in high school writing centers. This gap is significant because there is no guarantee that what has been discovered about college-level writing centers is readily applicable to the high school level. The tutoring experience was different for high school students than it was for undergraduate and graduate students. More fundamentally, the experiences of students at these two levels of schooling was different as well, which will be apparent as I share to develop my conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

Education should have a purpose that leads not simply to the acquisition of knowledge, but to something deeper. Aristotle (1953) once wrote of the purpose of life as *eudaimonia*. Translations of this word are tricky; Thomson (in Aristotle, 1953) calls it "happiness" (p. 30), while others (Evans, 2009; Henderson and Hursh, 2014) refer to the concept as "human

flourishing" (Evans, 2009, p. 75). The latter is a fitting translation, as Aristotle himself declares that people report happiness as "living well or doing well" (p. 66). *Eudaimonia* is the idea that humans thrive best when they are given opportunities to pursue happiness in their work and other achievements.

Peer Tutoring and Human Flourishing

Not many writing center theorists cite Aristotle, but in some of the most recognized literature in writing center scholarship, the desire for human flourishing is present (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Lunsford, 1991/2001; North, 1984/1995). Some of this scholarship developed out of frustration with oversimplification of the writing center mission as correcting mistakes (North, 1984/1995), while other advocates expressed ideals of elevated discourse within the context of tutoring for academic writing purposes (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2001). If Bruffee can write encouragingly of writing center tutoring as extending a great conversation, and Lunsford can write of dialogue in a writing center as indicative of the experience of intellectual discourse in a parlor, then there are fundamental ideals that are of appeal to at least some scholars.

While this idealism fueled the discourse of writing center scholarship for a time, North (1994/2011) later critiqued his own earlier idealism (North, 1984/1995), comparing some writing center scholarship to the film *Dead Poets Society* (Haft, Witt, Thomas & Weir, 1990). The Robin Williams-starring film is about an English teacher who inspires the students at a New England prep school, but North critiques it for a lack of realism in depicting a small class that is motivated, but never seems to do much work. North argues that his own earlier influential essay (1984/2011) also reflects an unfulfilled idealism. He acknowledges that not all writers are passionate, one cannot study tutoring with clinical detachment, and that the writing center itself

gets a look at the "seamy" (p. 64) underside of teaching. The writing center can be a nexus for university discourse, but a small one, unrecognized by many at the university.

The role of the writing tutor in producing flourishing writers is another locus of debate. Trained writing center tutors possess a level of expertise that students visiting the center do not necessarily have—students, after all, presumably visit the writing center to seek help with their writing. There has been some debate over how best to use this expertise, typically between those who are more directive (Carino, 2003/2011; Shamoon and Burns, 1995/2011;) and those who are less so (Brooks, 1991/2011; Ryan and Zimmerelli, 2010). Advocates for direction in tutoring are not advocating for authoritarian control over student writing, but they do acknowledge the expertise of the tutor. Carino (2003/2011) recommends embracing this expertise and using it benevolently, not denying authoritative instruction is taking place. According to Carino, nondirective peer tutoring, while popular and perhaps ideal, doesn't always seem to work. It is best, then, that tutors know when to use power and authority to the tutee's advantage.

Contrasting with the directive approach is the idea that tutors should work to have the student writer perform as much of the work as possible. Brooks (1991/2011) believes in improving the writer over improving the text. The writing center's existence is an acknowledgement that teachers can't do everything, so peer tutors make up for that reality. Brooks writes that the student is the expert, but at the high school level, students have less power and may not feel so expert. In their training manual for writing tutors, Ryan and Zimmerelli (2010) also assume a less directive stance, stressing rhetorical moves and body language that are accommodating of visiting students but may leave a writer wondering what to do. The tension highlighted by these scholars between exercising one's authority as a tutor and identifying with the tutee as a peer is one that has been explored (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Friedrich, 2014;

Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013), but not always with a strong theoretical framework, and not in an HSWC.

Adding to the discourse is the difficulty of conveying the skills that lead to successful writing. Sherwood (2007/2011) contends that tutoring is an art that can only be mastered through experience. He distinguishes between the work of the artist (who is creative) and the artisan (who merely replicates what has come before) and applies this model to writing. Sherwood's thought reminds one of Dewey's (1916) habitudes, in which students develop habits that they can eventually adapt to novel learning situations, and of Polanyi's (1967) idea of tacit knowledge, knowledge that is not transferable through any means but continued practice. Writers can develop a capacity for producing work that adheres to a definite formula, but the best writing transcends formula (Elbow, 1973, 1981; Murray, 1971/2011). There are two competing models of writing here: teaching to follow rules vs. teaching to compose new rules when necessary. Sherwood's vision is for artistic tutors who know the rules and apply them, but improvise when necessary. They should be ready to be surprised when work brought to them does not fit a mold, or if the advice they give does not adhere to a script.

As this conversation over tutoring styles continues, some have concluded that nondirective tutoring can easily become the law of the land to the same extent that directive tutoring can, as inflexible as no one wants it to be (Shamoon & Burns, 1995/2011). Shamoon and Burns recount one instance in which Burns experienced heavy editing of an assignment at the hands of a tutor. In retrospect, she found the experience helpful, even transformative, to her writing. Perhaps directive tutoring can be effective in a particular time and place as a potentially successful means of showing students what is expected in field-specific discourse. Shamoon and Burns appeal to the models of master classes and studio seminars, during which aspiring artists

learn their art by imitating the masters in front of them. Such models are blatantly hierarchical, but they can also be quite helpful, especially for those who may not know how to access the hierarchies around them. Shamoon and Burns propose three strands of research (development of expertise, subjectivities, and academic literacy) as focal points for developing models for tutoring.

The debate continues, then, over the role of tutoring in writing centers. It is important to be flexible in the writing center, addressing student writing needs using means that best suit a given rhetorical situation (Sherwood, 1997/2011), and also being mindful of the influence of the powers that be in the university (Vandenberg, 1999/2011). All of the above sources in this section refer specifically to university-level writing centers, and not to HSWCs. The peer tutoring experience in HSWCs has not been explored to the extent that it has in the university.

Tutoring and Flourishing in the High School Context

There are those who argue that human flourishing is the purpose of education (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013; Evans, 2009; Hanley, 2009; Henderson & Hursh, 2014; Wolbert et al., 2015), and the expertise of the writing center can be a part of that (Carino, 2003/2011). K-12 schools, in order to properly educate their students, must work towards flourishing in all its forms, using the best knowledge of what has come before (Evans, 2009) and creating schools that promote sustainable learning through a positive lens, as opposed to imposition of teaching practices with a dictatorial stance that assumes teachers and students are perpetually at fault (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013). The theorists cited above believe that the current educational climate is not conducive to human flourishing. Henderson and Hursh (2014), for example, argue that neoliberal emphases on test scores and evidence-based practice are altering the end of education to the assessments and a rigid curriculum supporting them, distracting the schools

from promoting human flourishing. Hanley (2009) appeals to the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment—the same era that produced the progressive composition instructional practices of George Jardine (1825)—to remind readers that while thinkers of that era may have valued efficiency, they also valued virtue and liberty. Evans (2009) hearkens to the traditional ideas of liberal education, promoting broad study in order to prevent education from becoming reductive in its methods. Cherkowski and Walker (2013) are more comfortable with more mainstream ideas of school improvement, but even they add that there must be talk of schools as sites of greater compassion in order to promote flourishing. From a few different philosophical viewpoints, human flourishing is a going concern. Models of human flourishing require deliberate thought and effort in order to succeed (Wolbert et al., 2015, 2019), and according to Kristjannson (2016), benefit from giving students the opportunity to cultivate a sense of wonder as part of their learning.

The time to develop this sense of wonder requires unstructured time, such as that found in the idea of leisure promoted by Josef Pieper (2009), who reminds us that the word "school" originates from the Latin word for "leisure." Leisure, then, is not lollygagging, but a state of being in which we learn more comfortably. Leisure is active, and perhaps it should be the default for our so-called best practices. Perhaps we should provide for a school environment where students do not live under the constant threat of standardized testing (Ravitch, 2013), but where learning can take place in a more relaxed, less pressurized environment. If the above thinkers are right, then school is supposed to be a place where we learn to think and do from a place of leisure for the purpose of human flourishing. School is not a place to be tested relentlessly, but a place to learn through talking with others, students and teachers alike, in a unique situation and place (Cole, 1996; Dewey, 1938). It is where we learn who we are meant to be. A teacher can

even “embody leisure in the classroom and make it part of his or her daily practice” (Ildefonso-Sanchez, 2019, p. 175). Regardless of what we learn, of what skills we acquire, we are inclined towards flourishing. And peer tutors in a dedicated space for their work are potentially agents of human flourishing.

This does not mean that all people have always been permitted to experience such flourishing. As Freire (1970) and later hooks (1994) note, there is still much work to be done with regard to treating all with the justice necessary to allow students to learn without societal impediments. Their voices must be included as well. Their destinies must be allowed to unfold without being impeded by others more powerful than they are, and they must be allowed to pursue their own goals and education. Students need the space and time to talk to each other, where they can teach each other how to read the word and the world, and to contribute to the world through their own writing based on their own interests. High school writing centers can be a place where students discuss their work freely with each other in just such a context that will allow them to flourish.

All of this does apply to peer tutoring. In tutoring, the students turn to each other for guidance. As Bruffee (1983/2011) suggests, there is a great conversation continuing in the writing center. But also, as Vandenberg (1999/2011) argues, the conversation in writing centers is not without the taint of reinforcing hegemonic practices. There is the potential for human flourishing, and there is the looming hegemony. Peer tutors, whether they realize it or not, exist in this tension. While the research cited above in the discussion of peer tutoring reveals that tutoring is successful (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Hoogeveen & van Gelderen, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2001; Kaufmann & Schunn, 2011; Kolba & Isaacs, 2009; Lai, 2010; Matropieri, 2001), the question still remains: how might peer tutoring experiences in an HSWC add to this body of

research? Without discussing the whole purpose of education, it is too easy to miss the learning in schools for the testing that supposedly enforces it. Writing centers can promote an ethos outside of traditional disciplinary structures (Lerner & Oddis, 2017) that is more accommodating to those who might not typically visit a writing center (Salem, 2016), but again, not every aspect of education supports the ideals that can potentially be embodied there.

K-12 schools, for example, generally have specific standards for academic writing; in many public schools, these standards are those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) (2015). The application of these standards has varied among the states that have adopted them, but their perceived import works its way down to the school and classroom levels, where instruction and assessment are expected to work towards these standards (Applebee, 2013). The consequences of emphasizing such standards have been debated and criticized (Jolley, 2014; Ravitch, 2013; Van Tassel-Baska, 2015), and there are lingering doubts about the evidence-based practices behind them (Biesta, 2007). There is little to offer in this approach to education other than a rigorous, tightly controlled management of everything that happens in the classroom. It is a system that has more in common with the military than with the nurture of a democratic populace. Whether the curriculum in place is the CCSSI or any other framework, to manage it in such a manner is unjust.

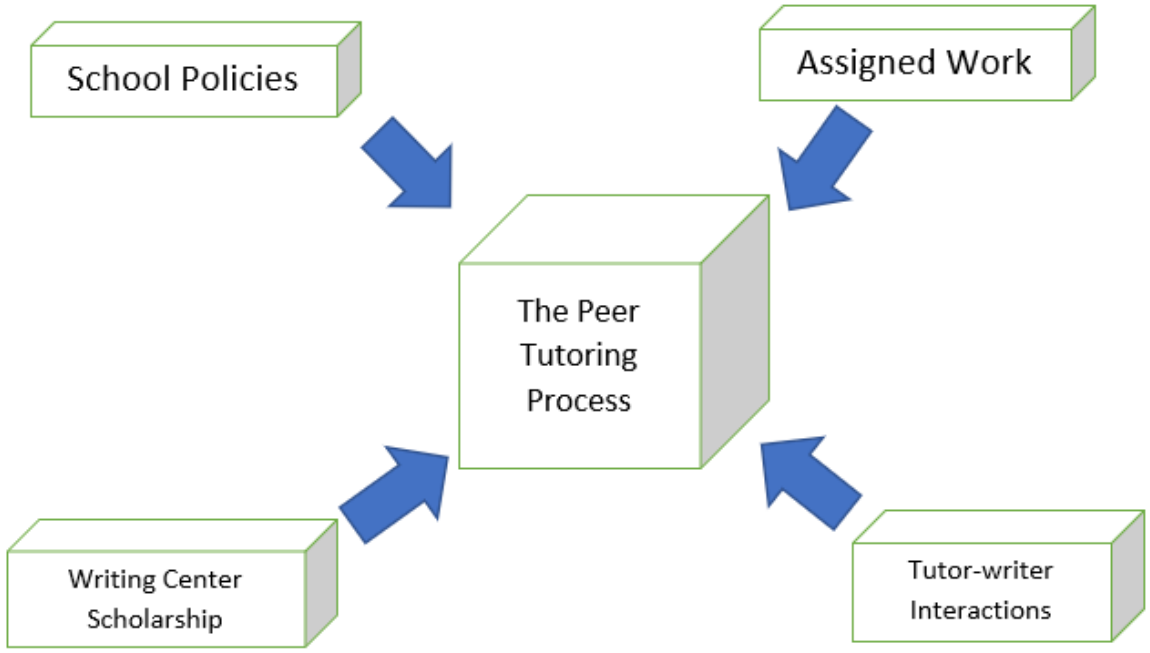
It may be, then, that Vandenberg (1999/2011) is right about the hegemony. But that does not mean that we should give up on the visions of the more idealistic advocates for writing center pedagogy. Writing center administrators can respect the ideal and prepare for the nonideal (Wolbert et al., 2019). There is potential in the writing center experience for deep learning in a relaxed space if we encourage free dialogue among peers and teachers. Even with tightly

prescribed assignments, there is reason to believe that writing center staff can help their fellow students through dialogue.

A lot goes on in a writing center, and there are many roles to play. There are students who enter the writing center for help, teachers who supervise the center, the role of the space itself, and the peer tutors. Figure 1 illustrates the work influences on the peer tutoring process. Tutors and student writers interact with each other, and the tutor shares an expertise that the writer may or may not possess. Writing center administrators and peer tutors are likely influenced in some way by writing center scholarship (Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011). While teachers and students volunteering in the center might exert authority over operations, there are other factors at play. Assigned work can potentially come from any department or any teacher in the school. The writing that students bring into the center requires flexibility from tutors and affects the direction of any dialogue that may occur over student writing. Perhaps even more affecting than assigned work is the influence of school policy. Beyond any department's particular pedagogy, the school administration, the school district, and the state may advance policies that ultimately affect the writing center. This study focused on the experience of peer tutoring in this context, but the above conceptual framework is important in understanding where the tutors worked. They were not just in a room on campus that happened to be available; they were also working within a system that valued high-stakes testing as a means of measuring a school's (and ultimately a student's) effectiveness.

Figure 1

Influences on the Peer Tutoring Process



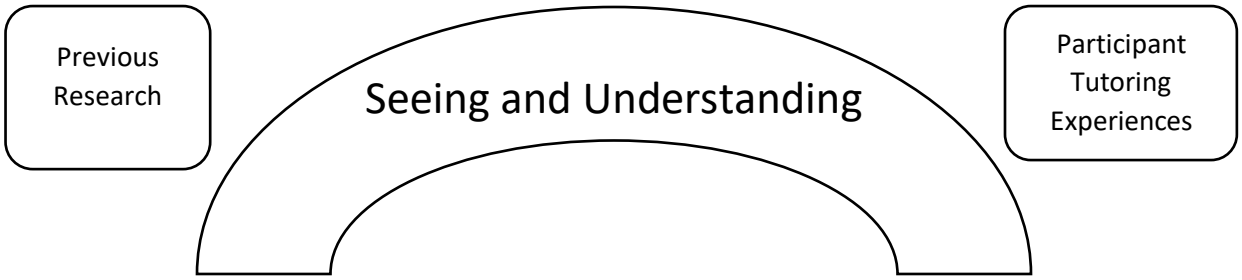
Peer tutoring is an example of how learning is social (Vygotsky, 1962/2012), so learning to write is social (Knoeller, 2004). The need for a social component for learning means that human flourishing is best promoted through "verbal thought" (Vygotsky, 1962/2012, p. 94) and dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981), so there is also a sociocultural component to the peer tutoring experience (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Carino, 2003/2011; Lunsford, 1991/1995). Bakhtin writes that "we must deal with the life and behavior of discourse in a contradictory and multi-languaged world" (p. 275). The dialogue present in peer tutoring is a big component of the experience as well.

Finally, the phenomenon of peer tutoring is reflective of the writing process as it bears out in the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990) of drafting, dialoguing, and revising. This experience, like any other, reflects what it means to be human; these experiences are

"impressively unique … and primordially meaningful" (Van Manen, 2017, p. 819). Van Manen's approach utilizes hermeneutical phenomenology, which views the past and present of a given experience as opposite poles between which we constantly navigate. We are influenced by the history behind an experience, and we engage in new experiences informed by that past. The lived experiences of the tutors serve as texts to be interpreted (Crotty, 1997; Gadamer, 1975) (See Figure 2). For the purpose of this study, the past pole is writing and writing center research up to the point of the study—theory (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011), empirical studies (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2006), and practitioner literature (Fels & Wells, 2011; Kent, 2017). The present pole is the experiences of the tutors, which are the heart of the present study of the peer tutoring experience in an HSWC. The experiences given and the interpretation in this study are influenced by previous research. The present study hopefully leads to understanding, "a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 304). The writing center serves as a hermeneutical community (Moss, 1994) where the experiences of tutoring are interpreted by students and teachers alike for the benefit of the writing center staff, and indirectly for the benefit of the school as a whole, which hopefully benefits from the writing center's work. Such a community offers necessary feedback to writers and is a necessary corrective to the imposition of large-scale, single sitting writing assessments prevalent in K-12 education (Behizadeh, 2014; Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011).

Figure 2

The Opposing Hermeneutical Poles of Writing Center Research in the Present Study



Note. The process of seeing and interpreting both poles (Previous Research and Participant Tutoring Experiences) leads to refining one's understanding of a given phenomenon. A deeper discussion of this approach is given in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

While peer tutoring is important work with myriad studies supporting it (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; Hoogeveen & van Gelderen, 2013; Jacobson et al., 2001; Kaufmann & Schunn, 2011; Kolba & Isaacs, 2009; Lai, 2010; Matropieri, 2001), its success in writing centers is well-documented only as it pertains to the college level. Studies of the work of tutors and their identities have been performed at the college level, but not at the high school level. High schools themselves (including the site for this study) are subject to policies and mandates not present at the college level. These differences may impact the work of the writing center, and more specifically the roles of the peer tutors working there. The next chapter gives an overview of the methodology employed in this study. This will include a discussion of hermeneutical phenomenology and its application to study the participants' tutoring lives within the context of a particular writing center.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014) through interviews with peer tutors who had worked in a high school writing center. In pursuing this study, I explored the following questions:

- How do high school peer tutors articulate their lived identities as peer tutors?
- How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?
- How do high school students perceive the peer tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?

There have been only a few phenomenologically oriented studies situated within college-level writing centers (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Friedrich, 2014). The present study used phenomenology to examine the peer tutoring experience within the HSWC. Like DeFeo and Caparas (2014) and Friedrich (2014), it engaged peer tutors from a writing center, exploring aspects of the peer tutoring experience. The difference, however, lay in the exploration of the peer tutoring experience in an HSWC. While DeFeo and Caparas' (2014) participants may have become tutors to earn some extra money, the HSWC tutors in the present study were not compensated for their work. The tutors found some degree of benefit from their volunteer work in the writing center, primarily by having a unique service-oriented item for a college application. Some participants did benefit in other ways. As will be seen in the data, Friedrich's (2014) affirmation of phenomenology continued to be a valid methodology for this research.

This study keeps these studies (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Friedrich, 2014) in mind, and this chapter details how I designed a similar study. I introduce the theory behind the methodology of hermeneutical phenomenology. Then I describe the participants and setting for

the study, as well as give an overview of the data collection I pursued. In any qualitative study, it is necessary to bracket oneself in order to set aside one's personal experience and biases (Farrell, 2020; Van Manen, 1990, 2014), so I also detail that process through my own writing protocol and self-interview. After sharing my bracketing, I discuss how I coded and analyzed participant data. Finally, I share how I addressed ethical concerns, quality control, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

Education is a field that lends itself well to studying experiences, yet as Farrell (2020) writes, "What often deters or curtails such efforts is often a lack of methodology—knowing *how* to learn from the experiences of others" (p. 1, emphasis in original). In the interest of hearing the experiences of others, this study of the peer tutoring experience in an HSWC utilized a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is a methodology in which the researcher attempts to get at the essence of what is characteristic of a given phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This takes place through the study of a number of individuals who have experienced the particular phenomenon. As Van Manen (1990) puts it, phenomenology is how one studies lived experience; it is therefore a human science. More specifically, it is the science of inquiring what a particular experience is like, the study of the irreplaceable in human life, "the curriculum of being and becoming" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Human consciousness, as opposed to strictly external reality, is the basis of this experience (Farrell, 2020). Phenomenology is also prereflective, studying experience in the raw, before it can be reflected upon (Van Manen, 2014). Once enacted, "phenomenological inquiry proceeds through an inceptual process of reflective wondering, deep questioning, attentive reminiscing, and sensitively interpreting of the primal meanings of human experiences" (Van Manen, 2017, p. 819). As a methodology employed in

empirical studies, it is scientific and systematic, but it is also self-critical and intersubjective, acknowledging the role of the researcher in ascertaining meaning from participant experiences. Nevertheless, since there is also the possibility of differences between these participants and for the researcher, there is a need to evaluate potential biases and other factors relating to positionality.

Van Manen (1990) advises that researchers should be mindful of both objectivity and subjectivity. One is mindful of the former by being "true to the object" (p. 20)—that is, the phenomenon being studied, while one is mindful of the latter by being attuned to the unique and personal. In this respect, phenomenology is not about finding material to generalize across a field of study; rather, it is about the essence of an experience, the characteristics of which may be, but are not necessarily, transferable to other contexts. In this study, this means that commonalities in the experiences of HSWC peer tutors were evident in the data. These commonalities are not generalizable; I cannot assume that the common characteristics will be presumable for all HSWC peer tutors. It should not surprise us in the future, however, if similar characteristics are present in other tutors.

This development in interpretive philosophy does not mean that the meanings of broadly defined texts (tutors' lived experiences) are easy to pin down. Philosophically (Gadamer, 1975) and methodologically (Farrell, 2020; Van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2017), interpreters can never really separate themselves from the meaning of a text. All experiential knowledge is prejudicial; that is, pre-judgments are present before the experience takes place. It is also subject to tradition, "the historical authority that infuses and influences our thinking and acting" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 132). In order to know the text more fully, they must take up the tradition from which the text originates. For the purpose of this study, this means that I, as the interpreter of these tutors' lived

experiences, must take in the writing center tradition, immersing myself in the research and participating in tutoring beside them. Hermeneutics lends itself to research done from within the interpretive community being researched in this manner. This understanding of hermeneutics ventures beyond merely avoiding misunderstanding to developing an interpretation that fully acknowledges the community and culture in which these texts originate. Taking the hermeneutical approach to phenomenology, Van Manen (1990, 2017) views this methodology as a means of questioning how we experience the world.

Gadamer (1975) sees the interpretation of said "texts" as situated between two poles (Crotty, 1997). At one end is the past pole (the tradition), towards which one finds pre-judgments of a phenomenon, including previous recorded experiences, commentaries on the experiences, and anything else that has been said or done about the phenomenon previously. At the other end is the present pole, which is the point-of-view of the interpreter. As one considers the experiences of participants in the phenomenon as it is studied, the two poles fuse, the past influencing the present, the present leading the interpreter to re-interpret the past (Crotty, 1997).

In the experience of peer tutoring within a writing center, the past pole includes previous research into the phenomenon (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Lunsford, 1991/2011; Mackiewicz & Babcock, 2019; North, 1984; Vandenberg, 1999/2011). The body of work cited above consists of important texts about writing centers and the peer tutors who work within them. These texts are widely influential, and some continue to influence the field decades after they were published (Lerner, 2014). The present pole in this instance is the current study. As I collected data, analyzing them as soon afterward as was possible, I considered my interpretation of the tutors' work in light of previous research in peer tutoring and writing centers, such as the work cited earlier in this paragraph. These scholars

influenced my thinking throughout the study, and the data I collected aided me in both adding to and re-interpreting the body of scholarship on this particular phenomenon. Hopefully, a new understanding of the essence of peer tutoring in a high school writing center will be evident in the data.

Even though phenomenology aims to find commonalities among participants, it is also what Van Manen (1990) calls a "theory of the unique" (p. 7). It is in this tension that there is a poetic dimension to this methodology (Crotty, 1997). Poetry represents a unique voice, and the "poetizing" of a phenomenological study "is thinking on original experience and is thus speaking in a more primal sense" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 13). The experiences of the participants in the present study are by definition poetic; they are primal in that they are essential. To over-interpret, to analyze too deeply, would distance the meaning of the experience too much from the person who experienced it (Van Manen, 1990, 2014). A phenomenological study is rooted in human experience. While people may have similar experiences, and it may be valuable to discuss those experiences together, standardizing those experiences dilutes them of their power. This poetic principle inherent to phenomenology illuminates further the need for more studies of HSWCs in particular and writing centers in general. All writing centers are situated in different contexts. The experience within these spaces is poetically unique and cannot be generalized. There is rigor in the methods the phenomenological researcher employs, whether that be interviews, document analysis, or something else. The researcher hopefully finds commonalities among participants' experiences in an attempt to get at the essence of the phenomenon in question. I set out to do exactly this by situating the present study in the setting that follows.

Setting

Pine Forest High School (a pseudonym) is in the Southeastern United States. It is exurban, on the fringe of a major metropolitan area, lying outside the suburbs closer to the city. As of 2019, it had a student enrollment of approximately 1,700 students. 62% of the student body was White, 22% was Black, 2% was Asian, 9% was Hispanic, and 5% was Multiracial. 35% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Its 2019 graduation rate was 88.7% (State Department of Education, 2019).

The faculty of the school was divided into nine departments (English, Science, Social Studies, Mathematics, Fine Arts, Special Education, Foreign Language, Physical Education, and Career and Technical Education). During the years the study participants worked in the writing center, there were 11 teachers in the English department (myself included). Levels of experience in the department ranged from a first-year teacher to over twenty years of experience. Four teachers in the department had worked in some capacity with the same National Writing Project (NWP) site where I had had the formative teaching experiences that led my co-founder and me to start the writing center. Turnover in the English department was infrequent—just two retirements and two resignations—an average of one vacancy per year—in the years (2013-2017) the participants actively volunteered in the writing center.

In the years leading up to and including the time of the study, the policy climate included an increased emphasis on standardized test scores that reflected a similar emphasis found nationwide at the time (Ravitch, 2010, 2013). At the time, the state in which the school was situated had developed a new system of standardized tests based on the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015), a curricular framework intended to increase the rigor of classroom instruction. In response to this initiative, the school district

appropriated sample curricular units provided by the state and required English teachers to implement them in their classrooms and professional learning communities. Each unit (four in each grade level) focused on an extended text (a book-length work) and contained required summative writing assessments. District English teachers were not consulted prior to the adoption of the units. In addition to the curriculum laid out in these units, the school implemented a senior capstone project requiring students to research careers, write ten-page research papers about them, and deliver short presentations before a panel of volunteer judges (parents, teachers, and other stakeholders). These developments in national, statewide, and local school policy reflected a push for greater rigor in instruction and assessment which (due to the district's failure to involve teachers from the beginning) did not please everyone involved, but the changes may have aided my colleague and me in giving us a reason to convince our school's administration to let us take over a long unused classroom and turn it into a writing center.

The writing center began after my colleague and I were involved in a site of the National Writing Project (NWP). During the 2012-2013 school year, we participated in an Advanced Leadership Institute at this NWP site, and the capstone for the Institute was to be a literacy-promoting project of some kind pursued through a local school. Having wanted to provide a space for our students to study reading and writing without the high stakes of our then-current educational policy climate (Ravitch, 2010, 2013), we proposed turning the more-or-less dormant career lab at our school into a writing center. The NWP site, the local state university writing center at which the NWP site was based, and our high school administration were all very supportive of the idea, and we opened our writing center in the spring of 2013. To staff the writing center, we also founded a local chapter of the National English Honor Society. Our charter members became the first peer tutors in the center.

The classroom that became the writing center was adjacent to the school's media center. It was accessible through the media center or through a door that led outside. Signage outside the door (self-made on paper the first year, with permanent signage provided by the school starting the following year) identified the space. In previous years, the room served as a career lab, where students could obtain information about various colleges. There was very little about the lab, however, that might lead students to research careers; in my experience at the school, I had never known of anyone using the room for that reason. The cinderblock room, its walls painted white, was roughly 400 square feet. Along one wall were the last vestiges of the career lab: bookshelves full of college pamphlets, with college pennants hanging on the wall overhead. There were approximately 32 desks in the room, divided into groups of four to allow for tutoring to proceed in groups when necessary. There was one "teacher desk" at the front and center of the classroom, which served more or less as an administrative post. This desk had a large touchscreen computer and scanner with a white board behind it and a digital projector above it. The presence of the desk at front and center was perhaps the most traditional classroom element in the writing center. Along two of the walls were tables with computers, about ten of them, which students could access at any time the writing center was open.

We promoted the writing center through fliers posted around campus, the school's morning announcements, and word-of-mouth among teachers and students. Initially the writing center was open just three days per week. As the center got a little busier, we expanded our hours, opening for five days per week starting in the 2013-2014 school year. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, we were open more than ever: before and after school and during 4th period (when most students eat lunch) five days per week. The 4th-period hour was staffed by two peer tutors who opted to take an English course that consisted partly of being available for

peer tutoring. When they were not peer tutoring, they were pursuing individualized writing projects that served as capstone projects for the course. We marketed the writing center to all students and departments, and I offered to help any teacher with expanding writing instruction within their discipline. Despite repeatedly stressing that we were open to help any student with writing for any class, I found that most of the writing center's business came from students seeking tutoring for English assignments, particularly essays in various modes (exposition, argument, etc.). Occasionally, students might bring in projects from outside the English department, such as Eagle Scout projects for the Boy Scouts. Creative writing was also common; there was usually a creative writing group meeting at the writing center on a regular basis (although study participants were not part of those groups). Table 1 displays some of the kinds of writing tutors would encounter in the writing center.

Table 1

Common Writing Genres in the Writing Center

Genre	Description/Examples
Formal academic essays	Argument writing, expository writing
Guided questions	Open-ended questions corresponding to a reading assignment
Longform writing	Senior capstone projects, Eagle Scout projects, other research-supported papers and projects; occasionally includes PowerPoint slides
Narrative	Personal narrative, short fiction
Poetry	Independently written verse; may or may not be part of a class assignment

I shared duties with other teachers in opening or closing the writing center and supervising peer tutoring. Unless I arrived at the writing center before our 8 a.m. opening time, the tutors and I usually arrived simultaneously. Once we were settled in, the tutors were available and did the work of welcoming students and assisting them at various writing tasks. I assisted only when asked for advice on a particular aspect of a paper, or if more student writers were

present than there were peer tutors available to tutor. Occasionally during 4th period, a teacher would bring a class to the media center, and the peer tutors would be available to assist individual students from that class. From my observation, visits to the writing center tended to fluctuate with the beginnings and ends of grading periods. The first few weeks might be quiet; then visits would slowly tick upward. The writing center was busiest at the end of specific grading periods (the midpoint of the semester, for example), at the end of the semester, and when seniors were completing the written components of their capstone projects.

The staff grew to approximately 15 peer tutors and 8 teachers, including my co-director and me. Students were eligible to become peer tutors once they qualified for membership in the local English Honor Society, which required a 3.0 grade-point average and at least one passing English class. Once they joined, peer tutors might serve anywhere from 1-3 years in their high school careers. They volunteered for shifts in the morning, during 4th period, or in the afternoon, after the regular school day had ended. In addition to my co-director and me, the teachers scheduled their regular tutoring hours in the writing center, which allowed them to facilitate operations. We also discovered that maintaining the writing center in this fashion provided a centralized location for English department tutoring, so the teachers participating in the writing center were able to shoulder a shared burden and maintain their tutoring schedules more efficiently. Sustained involvement among individual teachers could be longer than the 1-3 years individual students could tutor. Nevertheless, aside from my co-director and myself, teachers were not active in writing center administration.

The writing center was open for assistance with any writing assignment for any class, but for the most part, the tutoring facilitated by the writing center consisted of English coursework, with the occasional visit from students seeking help with writing for a non-English class. I

reached out, with some success, to teachers in other departments to assist them in providing the resources for teaching writing across the curriculum and in assuring them that our tutors were capable of assisting students with any kind of writing. Finally, the writing center held events intended to promote extracurricular reading and writing. This included a few different writing contests, a book club, and a creative writing group. These activities were conceived, planned, and facilitated by writing center staff.

Participants

Creswell (2013) recommends the participant body for a phenomenological study may have anywhere from 5 to 20 members. For the sake of gathering rich and plentiful data, I hoped to recruit more than 5 participants, but no more than 10 total. For their studies of writing center tutors, DeFeo and Caparas (2014) recruited 8 participants, while Friedrich (2014) recruited 12. Given the scope of the study and the time required to transcribe, code, and analyze data, recruiting more than 10 participants may have resulted in a study that was bigger and more unwieldy than it needed to be. I ultimately found 9 participants who completed the writing protocol and sat for an interview. The participants in this study worked in Pine Forest High School's writing center sometime between the years 2013-2017. By the time the students completed the writing protocol (the first phase of data collection) all of them had graduated from Pine Forest High School[1], the setting for this study. Descriptions of the participants are in Table 2.

[1] The names of participants and institutions given in this study are pseudonyms.

Table 2

Study Participants

Participant Name	Gender	Race	Description
Cora	Female	White	Cora graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2017. She worked in the writing center during her sophomore, junior, and senior years and upon graduating, attended a major research university in the Southeastern United States.
Darcy	Female	Biracial	Darcy graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2016. She worked in the writing center during her junior and senior years and upon graduating, attended a major research university in the Southeastern United States.
Eleanor	Female	White	Eleanor graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2015. She worked in the writing center during her senior year and upon graduating, went to a state university in a major Southeastern city.
Gabrielle	Female	White	Gabrielle graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2016. She worked in the high school during her senior year and upon graduating, went to a small liberal arts college in the Southeastern United States.
Kyle	Male	White	The oldest of the participants, Kyle graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2014. One of the writing center's founding staff members, he worked there during his junior and senior years. After graduating, he attended a major research university in the Southeastern United States, where he became an undergraduate teaching assistant in the biology department.
Lynn	Female	White	Lynn graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2017. She worked in the writing center during her sophomore, junior, and senior years and upon graduating, went to a local junior college, where she studied journalism.
Owen	Male	White	Owen graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2015. He worked in the writing center during his junior and senior years and upon graduating, went to a state university in a major Southeastern city.
Terence	Male	White	Terence graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2017. He worked in the writing center during his senior year and upon graduating, attended a major

			research university in the Southeastern United States.
Tricia	Female	White	Tricia graduated from Pine Forest High School in 2015. She worked in the writing center during her junior and senior years and upon graduating, went to a state university where she majored in English and worked in the writing center there. She also found employment in a local publishing company. She currently works as an editor at a medical research journal.

The ages of these participants ranged from 18 to 21 years old. Six of them were female, and three were male. The ethnic makeup of the HSWC peer tutoring staff has mostly reflected the demographics of the school, with the majority of the staff being white. The participants for this study were mostly white, with one biracial participant. At the time of data collection, the briefest length of tutoring experience among the participants was one year.

The recruiting process sought both current and former tutors of the writing center. Six of the nine participants had graduated at least one year prior to their submission of the writing protocol. One graduated just before receiving an invitation to participate. The remaining two joined the study while still students at the school but did not contribute any data until after they had graduated. The recruitment of older, previous tutors for this study is rooted in the study by DeFeo and Caparas (2014), who discovered valuable insights from former tutors who had found their skills useful in a variety of fields, especially outside the context of the writing center. These tutors, particularly those who had been out of high school for over a year, provided retrospective thoughts adding to my understanding of the peer tutoring experience (Van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2017).

Data Collection

This study utilized four forms of data collection: written reflections (protocol writing) by participants about their tutoring experiences (Van Manen, 1990), video elicitation using video recordings of tutoring sessions (Banks, 2007; Pauwels, 2015), semi-structured interviews with participants (Roulston, 2010; Seidman, 2014), and a researcher journal (Van Manen, 1990). Table 3 correlates these forms of data collection with their respective research questions. Following the table is a description of how I collected the data.

Table 3

Data Sources for This Study

Research Question	Data Source
How do high school peer tutors articulate their lived identities as peer tutors?	Protocol Writing Interviews Video Elicitation
How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?	Protocol Writing Interviews Video Elicitation
How do high school students perceive the peer tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?	Protocol Writing Interviews Video Elicitation Researcher Journal

Writing Protocol

In his phenomenological study of college writing tutors, Friedrich (2014) asked his participants to write lived experience descriptions, a method he derived from Van Manen (1990). This protocol involved the participants' writing descriptions of specific experiences as they lived through them, without analysis or retrospection. For the present study, I asked the participants to write descriptively of specific instances in which they tutored their peers in the writing center, using prompts such as: "Describe the thought process that led you to become a peer tutor" or

"Describe your role in the context of the operations of the writing center." Additional prompts are listed in the Appendix (see Table A1). Participants completed their writing protocols on their own time and submitted them via email. Based on the results I received, the participants were able to describe (to the best of their memories) their lived experiences as writing tutors within the context of the writing center. I could also ask participants to elaborate on their responses during the subsequent interviews. Table 4 includes the amount of data collected from each participant measured in page lengths of the writing protocols and interview transcripts. Interviews (including the video elicitation portion below) averaged about an hour in length. There was no specific page limit or target imposed upon the participants for length with regard to any form of data submitted.

Table 4

Participant Data Sets

Participant	Writing Protocol Length (pages)	Video Elicitation/Interview Transcript Length (pages)
Cora	5	34
Darcy	4	37
Eleanor	4	25
Gabrielle	3	16
Kyle	3	43
Lynn	4	32
Owen	5	27
Terence	4	22
Tricia	5	37
Total	37	273

I coded and analyzed the descriptions as the documents they were (Grbich, 2013; Saldaña, 2013), and I used copies of the descriptions in the interview process to allow participants to have the opportunity to expand on their descriptions.

Interview Protocol

The interviews for this study were semi-structured and reflective of a phenomenological approach (Seidman, 2014). Phenomenological interviewing involves asking participants to speak at length about specific experiences, including probing questions that encourage further reflection. This particular study included interviews encouraging HSWC peer tutors to discuss their lived experiences, using the descriptive writing protocol (Van Manen, 1990) and video elicitation (Banks, 2007) as supplemental data.

Interview questions were based on my research questions and focused on the peer tutoring experience. Roulston (2011) recommends that phenomenological researchers use open questions. For these interviews, questions focused on both elaborating on what participants wrote in their lived experience descriptions and acquiring more insights into the peer tutoring experience. Questions included the following:

- What is a peer tutor? How do you define a peer tutor?
- How do you perceive your work as a peer tutor in relation to the work of teachers?
- What has been the students' response to your work as a tutor?
- How has the presence of the writing center affected you personally?

A more complete list of questions is available in the Appendix (see Tables A2 & A3).

With my research questions in mind, I was able to draw out of the participants' descriptions of their experiences with the peer tutoring process, along with reflections on how the experiences affected them as peer tutors. Tutoring was formative for them, and yielded

benefits beyond the context of the HSWC. The participants were open about their successes and struggles as tutors. Getting participant definitions allowed the meaning made through the experience to become clearer during data analysis. As I listened to the participants share their tutoring experiences, I used probing questions to inquire as to more specific details in how they described those experiences (Roulston, 2011). These details varied depending on the participant, but there were also some commonalities concerning constructs such as how students defined peer tutoring, how they pursued their work, and how they perceived the writing center as a space for tutoring.

These interviews were not superficial inquiries focusing strictly on chronological events in the tutoring experience. Rather, they were opportunities to encourage participants (as well as myself) to think deeply on how this phenomenon is part of the uniqueness of life among those who work in the writing center.

Video Elicitation

In video elicitation, the researcher uses footage shot on film or video to prompt comments from participants in interviews (Banks, 2007). This footage may have been made previously in a context outside the study, or it may be footage filmed by the researcher or participant, either alone or in collaboration (Banks, 2007). Using such footage is helpful in prompting interview participants to reflect more deeply on a given topic (Pauwels, 2015). In video elicitation studies of teachers commenting on video footage of sample lessons, researchers have seen success in eliciting insights that might not have emerged from purely verbal interviews (Ross & Gibson, 2010; Powell & Lajevic, 2011). As part of the interview protocol, I asked tutors to view a tutoring instructional video produced by Texas A&M University (2014).

This instructional video takes place in a brick room, furnished with just a conference table and chairs. It depicts two tutoring sessions with the same student writer, whose name is Rebecca. A narrator describes and occasionally comments on what happens in the video. Rebecca is not in the room as the tutors first encounter the paper. The first tutor, Megan, begins reading the essay aloud, makes minimal proofreading comments (changing "eager seeing," for example, to "eager to see" [Texas A&M University, 2014, 0:24)), and thinks aloud that the students writing has "long and confusing" sentences (Texas A&M University, 2014, 0:49), but ultimately leaves Rebecca's writing alone. The narrator faults Megan for focusing more on grammar than organization and "the overall effect of the paper" (Texas A&M University, 2014, 1:20). The narrator concludes that Megan is "reserving criticism … for fear of hurting her friend's feelings" (Texas A&M University, 2014, 1:30). Lauren, the second tutor, reads the paper aloud and makes more extensive comments about how Rebecca begins the paper. Regarding the opening of the essay (which reads, "It was Christmas day" [Texas A&M University, 2014, 1:38]), Lauren declares that "Some descriptions could really make this come to life" (Texas A&M University, 2014, 1:42). Lauren makes proofreading corrections where prudent (including the same one Megan makes above), but she also addresses style. The video then uses time-lapse photography and music (a rock recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee") to show the extent to which Lauren provides written feedback on the paper. The narrator affirms Lauren's work addressing a combination of grammar, description, and organization, saying, "She just spent more time thinking of ways to help" (Texas A&M University, 2:50).

Next, Rebecca enters the room and meets with each tutor. Megan says the paper's flaws are "just a couple of things … not much at all" (Texas A&M University, 3:02). She repeats her concern about long sentences, but she also immediately downplays the same concern, saying,

"You know what you mean, so that's okay... Never mind, you don't need to change anything" (Texas A&M University, 3:20). Overall, Megan's feedback is minimal. Lauren's feedback is reflective of her earlier comments—both more comprehensive and more specific. She points out where she proofread the paper, but also points out repetitive language. Lauren also asks questions of Rebecca to attempt to understand the content of the paper and what clarifying details she might add or what existing details she could rearrange. The narrator states that Lauren's peer response is more helpful "in what she wrote and her explanation to Rebecca. Her explanations were very thorough, and she gave reasons to back them up" (Texas A&M University, 2014, 5:48). Finally, the narrator concludes that peer tutors need to "remember to focus on the big picture" (Texas A&M University, 5:59).

After viewing the tutoring video together, I asked the participants questions inviting them to describe what happens in the video, to consider peer tutoring identity, the peer tutoring process, and the role of the writing center in peer tutoring, all in light of what happened in the videos and comparing the footage to their own experiences. I also asked the participants to evaluate the tutoring in the footage based on their experiences. Questions included the following:

- How does this writer present himself or herself to the tutor?
- Describe the tutor's body language, including how the tutor situates himself or herself physically in relation to the writer.
- What role does the writing center as a space play in this video?

These questions and others are listed in a table in the Appendix (see Table A4).

Reflective Journal

Van Manen (1990) writes that reflection is not introspective, but retrospective. In the interest of acknowledging my role in the founding and operation of the writing center, it was

prudent to keep a reflective journal on a regular basis during the study. Van Manen recommends writing one's own lived experience description before asking others to do so, so I did exactly that. This journal included occasional written reflections on my time in the writing center. Writing lived experience descriptions of my own helped me gain a better understanding of how hermeneutical phenomenology works, and the reflections aided me in data analysis.

Van Manen (1990) also writes that in phenomenology, the research is in the writing. By writing about my experiences in the writing center, I came to a better understanding of this study and my place in it. While the tutoring sessions in the center may have exhibited sophisticated thought, the operations were rather simple. For the most part, the writing center staff (teachers and tutors alike) was left alone to work, with few disruptions. The media center director was very accommodating of the writing center. The media center clerk (who assisted the media center director) was initially nervous about students working in the writing center room, but once she saw that the tutors and visiting student writers conducted themselves responsibly, she was supportive.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred according to each form of data collection, as explained in the table below (Table 3). By keeping writing center theory in mind (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Lunsford, 1991/2011; North, 1984; Vandenberg, 1999/2011), I was able to interpret the data I collected as texts, whether written or spoken (Van Manen, 1990). I drew on Saldaña (2013) and Grbich (2013) to assist me in coding and analysis.

If I was going to explore the thing itself—peer tutoring in a high school writing center—I needed to apply the principles of hermeneutical phenomenological analysis with fidelity. Grbich (2013) lists five components of phenomenological data analysis:

- bracketing out your own experiences;
- entering a dialogue with individual participants (or engaging with an existing text);
- reflecting on what you have gained through reading and re-reading and through journaling your thoughts, including any questions and responses;
- identifying the major themes from the narratives/texts using processes of preliminary data analysis and/or thematic analysis of the block and file variety;
- questioning the data and any emerging assumptions so that new descriptions and new conceptualisations are then more likely to arise (p. 96).

I pursued the study using these same steps. What follows is a discussion of these steps: bracketing, dialogue, reflection, identifying themes, and questioning the data.

Bracketing

I first bracketed by undergoing the same data collection process I intended to use with my participants. I completed the writing protocol; then I underwent an interview from a colleague, who used the same questions I wrote to use with my participants. Performing these steps helped me collect my own thoughts and allowed me to refer back to them while I analyzed participant data. The writing protocol and interview also gave me a record of preconceptions of writing center operations and the tutoring process.

Some of the themes and preconceptions that I developed during bracketing repeated what I have already written regarding the history of founding the writing center. But some themes were perhaps unique to my experience as co-founder and co-director of the center. Since I did not compose the writing protocol or interview questions with myself or my role in mind, I found myself reflecting on my own experience and speculating a bit about how my participants may

answer the questions. I include some of my reflections here in order to reveal my own perspective before data collection and to allow the participants' voices more prominence in Chapter 4. Aside from having written the questions some weeks prior, I had not prepared for the interview. I wanted an unvarnished perspective to surface so that I might better know my biases and bracket them properly (Farrell, 2020; Van Manen, 1990).

With regard to the first research question (How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?), I imagined in my writing protocol that peer tutors saw themselves as positive change agents. In my experience, students were excited to be peer tutors. They appeared to me to believe that they were a part of something exciting, and they were enthusiastic about that. In the interview, I also stressed that tutors and writers were "on the same level," that the tutor and tutee "have something in common." In this case, what they have in common is their status as students in the same school, who had to perform as writers in that school, sometimes with the same teachers and tasks. This was a piece of lore that I held true because in my own experience as a student writer, I had teachers who seemed to appreciate different elements of writing over others.

I believed that part of my job as director of a writing center was to work with other faculty in the building. In the self-interview, I said, "as director of a writing center … I'm a teacher, but I'm also working alongside potentially any other teacher in the school building … At least that's how I position myself." In my field notes, I saw myself as someone who could be "a liaison between the writing center and the rest of the school." I stated that our tutors see themselves that way as well, "making a difference in the school as a whole." They enjoyed helping others, and although there were longer-term benefits (such as the privilege of adding a line of extracurricular activities to a college application), they enjoyed tutoring as well. I

supposed that students enjoyed being a part of a program that gave them more say in how that program operated. It was my original intent that students run the center as much as possible.

With regard to the second research question (How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?), I was making comments as an outsider to the tutoring process itself. I believed that

> The stakes are lower in a tutoring session than they are in the classroom … A teacher, looking at a student's work, has a grade somewhere down the road that is going to be assigned to that piece of writing, whatever that is.

Peer tutors do not issue grades; a teacher looking at a student's work will grade it. In peer tutoring, the pressure is not there to please the teacher—not directly, anyway: "Intimidation is not there—although it could be a different intimidation. Sharing your work with a peer can be intimidating in a way that sharing your work with a teacher is not, but the stakes are definitely lower." Consistency in tutoring a writer is important. I said that "the students, especially given a certain teacher … will have to make sure they know how to write to please that teacher. That's going to be really important."

Most students believe talking about their work has been very helpful, and they believe in being hospitable. "We ask our tutors to be very inviting," I said, to make sure everyone is welcome. "We try to put as much of the—I don't want to say the burden on them—we need to hear from them … not just to say what the assignment is, but what they struggle with." Despite any attempt otherwise, I use the word "burden" to describe how visiting students know what to work with. We (teachers and peer tutors) wanted visiting writers to be able to self-advocate for what in their writing needed work. Of course, we would gladly help students who needed help

understanding how they needed help, but we hoped that questions about their writing would develop "organically."

Students typically needed help with literary analysis, but "given the season," I said, "it might be supporting writing with research." I said this in reference to a major senior research project that was due every spring. That would typically be our busiest time of the year. About literary analysis essays, however, I said

> The literary analysis essay is something that students seem to write only when they're in school. I don't want to say that there are no long-term benefits of that kind of essay, but it's just not the kind of writing that they might automatically think of as authentic or directly applicable to what they need to do in life.

Students struggled with analysis (particularly with avoiding simple plot summaries of content and supporting their interpretations with evidence), MLA formatting, and supporting writing with research.

Generally, I believed, tutoring sessions in the writing center went well. "The only time it gets weird," I said in the interview, "is when a student is clearly unprepared to visit the writing center." My interviewer asked what happens when a student shows up who cannot articulate what is wrong with their writing. "They just know that they're going to fail this thing" he said. "Can you help that student?" I replied, "Even if they have nothing, or if what they have is just not going to pass, we can still talk about mapping out the essay according to what the teacher wants, according to what the writing prompt and the rubric say." I discussed an instance when I was helping a student who needed help finding textual evidence to match a claim. The student's claim and evidence did not line up, but the evidence could support a claim that answered the writing prompt. I suggested to the student that he needed a claim that better suited the evidence

he had found. He was relieved that rather than rewrite the body of his essay, he would just have to make a few changes, including writing a new claim. His revision earned him a higher grade.

With regard to the third research question (How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center [HSWC]?), I wrote and spoke that I believed the students worked hard to keep the center running and enjoy themselves. Speaking as a teacher and not a peer tutor, I shifted my conversation to the idea of working with and for other teachers. Communicating with teachers was essential, especially when we hoped teachers would collaborate with us. Aside from English teachers, who promoted the writing center and volunteered to help staff it, teachers from other departments did not visit as often as I would have liked. This may have affected how often students visited for help with writing in other classes. I said of this problem,

> Sometimes [students will] come when they have a paper due, a bigger paper due in another course, you know, history or science. Especially this year we looked at some students' work-based learning[; they] were completing capstone projects that involved a lot of technical writing, but we still don't communicate with teachers as much as we could.

This was an ongoing flaw in my management of the writing center, but I believed there was a lot of potential growth in that area.

> If no one shows up I'm still glad we're there. I know students can be discouraged sometimes, especially early in the year when maybe nobody shows up for the first week or two. There are definitely times during the school year when it seems traffic in the writing center ebbs and flows. Somehow teachers get a lot of essays due on the same cycle, and then things will slow down for a bit.

The end of the semester was slow, and the beginning could be slow. I tried to stress with students that it was a win-win for them. Either they could serve their community, or they could get some extra time to do homework or chat.

The space, I believed, did serve an important role in facilitating peer tutoring: “The writing center is the space where it happens, physically speaking, and it’s hopefully a safe space for addressing writing issues … It’s in a convenient space, too, next to the media center, not far from the cafeteria, so students can visit during most lunches.” I was proud of the presence of the center, saying, “I think the fact that we are allowed to have that space reflects on the school’s priorities as far as writing is concerned.” Other honors societies started after ours, and although those newer clubs had not asked to share the space, I said I was willing to do so.

The bracketing interview gave me an opportunity to understand my own perspective and preconceptions of the writing center I co-founded. My written and spoken words revealed pride in what my co-founder, the staff, and I had done in starting the center. I was told that the writing center was the second high school writing center to be founded in the state, but I also acknowledged that my own knowledge base for the writing center came out of a leadership institute at a site of the National Writing Project. Even though I was pursuing a dissertation study of a high school writing center, I was relatively new to the field. Listening to my own voice in the interview recording, I felt like I spoke with authority, but in reality, I did not feel like I had it. I was a teacher simply doing something in his spare time, and hopefully what I was doing was helpful to the school community.

The video elicitation portion gave me a record of what I thought of the training video I intended to use. Naturally, I believed the video was appropriate for the study, or I would not have selected it. Thinking through the questions I intended to use was useful, though, because I knew I

would not necessarily get the same responses from the participants. I agreed with the video that Lauren, the second tutor, was a more thorough evaluator of Rebecca's paper than Megan was. I didn't think too much about positioning and body language in the video. The tutors sat at the conference table in an appropriately welcoming manner. In the moment, I did not overthink what was happening.

Van Manen (1990) writes that "All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already *transformations* of those experiences" (p. 54, emphasis in original). By the time I speak or write about my experience, the record of it has already gone through change. It is at best a version of what I experienced. I knew this reality heading into this study, and by putting myself through a data collection process similar to that of the participants, I was able to recognize how I thought of the peer tutoring process in a high school writing center before collecting (already transformed) experiences from others. I had high esteem for the writing center staff, believed the process was beneficial in helping students understand how teachers evaluate writing, and was proud of the fact that we—my co-founder, the students, and I—pulled off the opening and operation of the center. I have personally benefited from the existence of the writing center, up to and including the opportunity to pursue this study. None of these realizations were lost on me as I completed it.

Dialogue, Coding, and Analysis

After bracketing (Husserl, 1913/2004; Van Manen, 1990), I began the data collection process. The participants first filled out writing protocols and sent them back by email; then I scheduled a time to sit with each one for video elicitation and additional semi-structured interviews. I uploaded writing protocols into Nvivo as I received them and coded them shortly

afterward. Before interviewing, I reread the writing protocols and took notes based on what I read to better prepare for the video elicitation and interview. After collecting all data from a participant, I transcribed it and uploaded it into Nvivo. Once I began interviews, the processes of transcription, coding, and analysis all happened simultaneously, as I was collecting data from different individual participants. This made the process recursive, so I was always looking at different stages of the coding and analysis process concurrently.

As I transcribed interviews, I coded and analyzed the data. Coding started with reading. The participants' descriptions of their experiences were full of details worth noting. As I read, I adopted words or phrases reflecting themes I perceived in the data, first in the writing protocols, then later in the transcripts from the video elicitation and semi-structured interviews. These words and phrases became my first codes. When coding, I looked for anything—words, phrases, or passages—in the writing protocols or interview transcripts that might become a theme. According to Saldaña (2013), "a theme is an *extended phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (p. 175, emphasis in original). Van Manen (1990) defines a theme as a focus of experience, a "knot" (p. 90) around which the phenomenon of peer tutoring comes together. Themed coding (Saldaña, 2013) allowed me to develop phrases and sentences to describe the knots that defined the peer tutoring experience for the participants. As I continued this process, I analyzed the experiences of the participants and the meanings they had made of them in order to interpret them. Common themes, which I address in the next chapter, included (among others) Peer Tutors as Unique Writing Agents, Opportunities for Self-Improvement, and Developing Community. These themes were based on words and phrases employed by the participants during interviews.

Themeing the data, then, is the search for themes in the codes one determines represent what the data might mean (Saldaña, 2013). Since the writing protocols and interview transcripts yielded over 250 pages of data, there was a long list of initial codes and themes. I frequently found myself going back and looking at data I had coded earlier to compare it to what I had coded more recently. Gabrielle, for example, said that being a tutor led her to "work harder on [her] writing," Tricia said that "tutoring helps you become a stronger writer," and Cora wrote that peer tutoring was "a way to further [her] writing skills." Statements and phrases such as these appeared to be focal points (knots) for their tutoring experiences, so based on my coding, I developed a theme of self-improvement. Other recurrences of common sentiments based on the participants' experiences led to additional themes.

Themeing lends itself well to phenomenology, the methodology seeking to gain "a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). As I sought a deeper understanding of the tutoring process within a high school writing center, I read through the data, looked for themes that corresponded with the search, and developed codes that corresponded with the themes. Table 5 displays how tenets of my theoretical framework corresponded to steps I took in coding and analysis.

Table 5

Application of Theoretical Framework to Data Analysis

Tenet of Theoretical Framework	Application in Analysis
Human experience consists of various phenomena that can be interpreted textually (Gadamer, 1975); among those who experience a given phenomena, there may be commonalities (Van Manen, 1990).	• Close reading of writing protocols and interview transcripts for common and unique themes embedded in phrases and sentences • Themed coding of lived experience descriptions of peer tutoring roles in search of common and unique experiences in the tutoring process

Peer tutoring in a writing center is a phenomenon with unique characteristics (Bruffee, 1984/1995; DeFeo & Caparas, 2014; Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016).	• Understanding that peer tutoring is distinct from teacher-student tutoring • More specifically, looking for how tutors describe their own experiences of the tutoring process in common ways (with regard to each other) and unique ways (with regard to their own experiences
Writing centers provide a space where peer tutoring is experienced (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016).	• Understanding that writing centers are situated within schools and are influenced by faculty, curricula, policies, and school schedules • Bracketing my administration of the writing center, which influenced its operation and the participants' experiences

Essentially, in hermeneutical phenomenology, I had to understand how life experience could be interpreted as a text. Through writing protocols and interview transcripts, I literally had text in front of me delineating the experiences I had to interpret. Among the participants' experiences, there were some common events and sentiments that lent themselves to coding for themes in those experiences. There was also a rich body of research into peer tutoring in writing centers (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011). It was important to distinguish peer tutoring from teacher-student tutoring and how participants described those experiences. The broader context of writing center tutoring (schools, faculty, curriculum, content standards) would be important as well. Together, the theory behind hermeneutical phenomenology (Gadamer, 1975; Van Manen, 1990) and peer tutoring in writing centers (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011), combined with the peer tutoring experiences described in the data I collected, would all help increase my understanding of peer tutoring in a high school writing center as a distinct phenomenon. In the next section, I will elaborate further on how the codes and themes I developed aided me in my reflection and understanding.

Reflection and Identification of Themes

Interviews, transcription, coding, and memoing all happened at the same time. Everything was recursive, so at any time, I could be doing one of these four elements of data collection and analysis. In the interest of pursuing phenomenology faithfully, I kept this process open-ended, knowing that new themes might appear to me at any time.

In coding, however, the themes I found are not the be-all and end-all of what a lived experience means. Again, as Van Manen (1990) puts it, "phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (p. 90). Themes are foci of experience, but they are not the whole of experience. They allow those who live an experience and those who interpret it the ability to think more deeply about it. They give us a place to pause and reflect.

These themes "have phenomenological power when they allow us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 90). I realized as I began coding that I was looking for, to use Van Manen's term, the "knots" around which I could read and interpret participant experiences. In DeFeo and Caparas' (2014) study, the participants were not aware of the skills they acquired and transferred until they thought of them retrospectively. They did not necessarily see the knots or themes as they experienced writing center tutoring. Reading through the data, I began to wonder the same thing about the participants in the present study. Saldaña (2013) writes that participants construct meaning when answering properly constructed questions. The questions I presented to the participants in the writing protocol and interviews gave them the opportunity to describe their experiences. The knots would appear in their words (Van Manen, 1990).

I coded using Nvivo (QSR International, 2019), a qualitative analysis software. After uploading transcripts into Nvivo, I created codes and tracked them through the software, reviewing data repeatedly as I developed new codes (Figure 3). Eventually, some codes merited heavier use than others.

Figure 3

Codes and Their Frequencies of Use

Nodes

Name	Files	References
Dialogue	17	132
Tutoring Characteristics	18	93
Feedback	13	79
Self-Improvement	13	65
Conventions	14	63
Space	11	54
Confidence	11	51
Receptivity	10	43
Transfer	8	41
Reluctance	12	41
Teacher	14	40
Teacher-tutor Distinctions	11	39
Camaraderie	10	38
Reflection	9	37
Peer Advantage	10	37
Extracurricular	15	32
Idea Development	11	32
Revision	13	30
Word of Mouth	14	29
Community	7	26
Style	4	24

Participants spoke and wrote a great deal about dialogue in the tutoring process, but self-improvement was also a prominent theme, as was space, that is, the role of the writing center space in the tutors' experiences. There was a lot to process. Using these codes, I began writing notes about what to do with them, including this bulleted list I composed in a memo:

What am I supposed to do with this? Just make sense of it, I guess. I need to interpret it through my theoretical framework. What am I finding? What's the story behind the data? I need to write that story. Using the codes, this is a story about

- Dialogue. Students benefit from talking to each other about their work.
    - Dialogue is the most prominent code in my data thus far. Students need to talk through their work. Consider Bakhtin's (1981) idea of polyphony as a driving force behind incorporating nine distinct voices (along with the research and theory).
- What it means to tutor. Who are tutors, and how do they do it?
- Feedback. We know it works. How do peer tutors deliver it?
- Self-improvement. Among both tutors and student writers.
- Conventions. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling still hold a lot of sway.
- Space. Why dedicate a room to peer tutoring?
- Confidence. Who gains it in this experience, and how?
- Transfer. Peer tutors can take their skills into other places.
- Receptivity. How do student writers respond to feedback?
- Reluctance. Not everyone visiting a writing center wants to be there. How do tutors respond?

I asked myself a lot of questions in order to make some sense of the codes and analyze the data properly. It felt overwhelming at times to process everything I was reading, but by asking myself these questions, I was able to get a grasp on what the data was saying—not all of what it was saying, but some of the important commonalities between participants' thoughts.

Thinking along these lines naturally led to defining the codes and allowed me to realize that some of these codes could be more specific. Admittedly, a code like "dialogue" is vague. In my coding, the term referred to speech acts between peer tutors and student writers, typically concerning writing and tutoring processes. Unsurprisingly, tutor-writer dialogue was always about something, and I needed to unpack what that was. Many times, when I marked that code, I was coding something else, such as Feedback, Conventions, or Receptivity. I had to define these codes as well. I defined Feedback as critique of a piece of writing as delivered by a peer or teacher (Sommers, 2006); Conventions as aspects of writing focused on language conventions, including grammar, syntax, and usage (Myers, 2003/2011); and Receptivity as a writer's appearing to accept a tutor's feedback (Thompson et al., 2009). These more specific codes allowed me to express the nuances of dialogue more fully.

Looking back over my codes, I determined that these more specific codes fit in where I had initially coded just for Dialogue. The results I received from later participants also prompted me to revisit data from earlier participants to check the consistency of my coding. During video elicitation, Kyle (the seventh participant I interviewed) referred to perceived flaws in the training video on the part of both tutors. He commented on dialogue between the tutors and the student writer. Kyle believed Megan was "unhelpful" by "just sticking to grammar," but he also accused Lauren of "stripping some of the … author's identity, and just taking way too much creative control." Kyle's observation was more than simply a description of speech acts (Dialogue); it was also a description of the kind of dialogue taking place (Feedback). Kyle was also evaluating the feedback of the two tutors.

Something similar was evident between Dialogue and Receptivity, so I looked back at an earlier participant. Cora (whom I interviewed fifth), for example, during video elicitation said

that “One of the first writer’s fears is that she was scared of hurting her feelings, and that should not be the way that a, that peer writing should be done, but to make sure that their … writing is getting through to the person.” She also advised that a tutor must “make sure that you’re not offending the person, but you can’t be scared of—like you have to make sure that any concerns that you have are voiced.” In making these comments, Cora described how tutors should strike a balance between giving an accurate account of what writers can do to improve their work and sharing that information in such a way so as not to crush writers’ spirits.

Then there was Lynn (whom I interviewed sixth), describing the papers students would bring from a particular teacher: “She would fix like, commas and stuff, and then she would write out what needed to be fixed. So I guess I just kind of helped them like, how to fix, how to fix what she was talking about.” At this point, I coded for Dialogue because Lynn was talking with student writers, but a couple of other details were important. First there was the subject matter, commas, which led me to code for Conventions. I could not overlook, however, that Lynn described the written feedback from the teacher as “talking.” The teacher gave feedback, so it was worthwhile to code for that, but coding the use of the word “talking” as Dialogue was important as well. Doing so was in the spirit of Bakhtin’s (1981) idea of dialogism occurring not simply in speech acts, but also in writing. Codes such as Conventions, Feedback, and Receptivity fit both within a broader theme of dialogue and within my second research question. Dialogue was important, but the other codes were more specific, so while I continued to code for Dialogue, I also coded for more specific subject matter. Leaning into the recursivity of transcription, coding, and analysis allowed me to check for consistency and code more specifically.

Other codes, I realized, applied to the other two research questions. Self-Improvement was a code that worked well unto itself (requiring no significant adjustment or recoding) and fit within the first research question, but Teacher was a vague one. Initially, I gave that code to any mention of interactions with teachers or distinctions between the roles of teachers and tutors, but it became clear rather quickly that such a code was too broad to be of any use. After looking over data with this code, I created some more specific codes to represent the themes that I deveoped. Teacher-Tutor Distinctions still stood out and fit within the first question. Most of the tutors believed they had an advantage over classroom teachers, but Terence was more nuanced in how he expressed it. Referring to how he compared his work to that of a teacher, he said, "[T]he teachers are actually certified, but the peer tutors can definitely help add knowledge that the people they're tutoring might not know to help them make their papers better." Terence's reference to a teacher's certification was worth noting, as it was a reference to the system that signifies qualification to be in the profession.

Codes such as Space and Community fit within the third question. My third question yielded less data overall, and I did not find myself questioning the codes as much as I did for the first two questions. There were distinctions in Space with regard to the necessity of a dedicated space for the writing center. Participants such as Tricia and Owen were clear in their support of a dedicated space, but Eleanor said the space was "slightly flexible." It was easy to keep track of these differences. Community within the center tended to be with regard to the staff, and sometimes with regard to specific teachers. Lynn, for example, worked with one teacher in the writing center who later turned out to be her yearbook teacher, and that was reassuring. As I revisited my research questions, I saw how these codes could be organized, but I also recognized

a need to put these in a visual form. Table 6 includes the resulting themes, distributed according to the research questions where they fit best.

Table 6

Themes Organized by Research Question

Research Question	Themes
How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?	Unique writing agents Flexibility in response to student needs Working with the willing and unwilling Includes discussion of enervation and identity Peer tutors as teachers who are distinct from teachers Advantages of the peer tutor-student writer relationship Tutor self-respect and respect for clients
How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?	Opportunities for self-improvement Dialogue-based process Characteristics of feedback Errors in dialogue Positive and negative receptivity to feedback Resistance and dissatisfaction Gratitude for their experiences
How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?	Community space Mission and purpose Physical space Working with teachers Extracurricular activity Community service Familiarity with each other

During the analysis stage, I refined these themes and organized them for a more organized and detailed report in Chapter 4.

Questioning the Data Through Hermeneutical Analysis

Hermeneutics as a discipline originated with the German theologian Friedrich Scheliermacher and was developed further by the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (Moustakas, 1994). The original aim of hermeneutics was to interpret the Bible in order to avoid a misunderstanding of meaning; as time passed, the discipline was expanded to include other texts

(Moustakas, 1994). But over the past century, the field of hermeneutics has expanded into myriad approaches depending on the philosophical underpinnings of the researchers, and the texts are no longer just printed media, but virtually anything (Van Manen, 2014). For the hermeneutical phenomenologist, lived experience is itself a text worthy of study and interpretation (Crotty, 1997; Grbich, 2013).

At this point, I had bracketed my own perceptions of the tutoring experience. As a writing center administrator, my experience differed from the experiences of the participants in the study. This reflective process kept my thoughts in check as part of what phenomenologists call *epoché*, or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The process also helped flesh out some of the other operations of the writing center. After transcribing, coding, and analyzing my interview data, I also wrote memos on a regular basis throughout the data collection and analysis phases (Grbich, 2013).

With the participant data, I wanted to make sure that I could summarize and reflect on what the participants wrote and said. My goal was to articulate their experiences in written form for the purpose of presenting their experiences accurately and understanding what themes undergirded their articulation of their experiences. I also wanted to record my impressions of the interviewees and how they carried themselves; doing so would help me remember the conversations better. Gabrielle, my first participant, was "soft-spoken" and appeared "pretty humble overall." I was hesitant to assume anything from her low-key demeanor, but she was polite and comprehensive in her answers. Tricia, I noted, "answered my questions at length," and with her experience in both high school and university writing centers, she had "a unique knowledge base" compared to the other participants. I also wrote that Tricia's "thoughts gave me a little more confidence in my abilities." Since Tricia spoke so readily and completely in

response to my questions, it was easy to converse with her. I wrote of Cora that she "spoke easily of her time as a tutor and was not afraid to share her opinion." Of all the participants, Kyle was the most outspoken. I wrote that he was "funny, talkative, and clearly proud of what he had done in the writing center." I did not wish to assume too much from how participants behaved during interviews; Van Manen (2017) writes that "Phenomenological reflection should refrain from theorizing, conceptualizing, abstracting, and objectifying; it is a nonobjectifying reflection" (p. 819). Nevertheless, writing these memos aided my memory of the data collection process, and the participants' demeanor also colored how students described their experiences.

While memoing, coding, and analyzing concurrently, I would go back and forth between transcripts and memos, sometimes (as I wrote earlier) revisiting and revising codes. In their memos, I attempted to summarize their thoughts so that I could think about them more clearly and globally. In my memo on Lynn's data, I noted that her "dialogue [with visiting writers] would sometimes include consoling students who did not like the grades they received." I was attempting to summarize what she said in order to gain both a better understanding of Lynn's thoughts and a means of referring back to the transcript more easily. Having read through the transcript and written these thoughts in the memo, I returned to Lynn's words to examine this instance in the interview more intently. There was certainly a theme that Lynn's clientele was focused on grades, and that she responded by helping them better understand how teachers graded. I wound up coding this excerpt for Peer Advantage, which reflected comments I saw in the data that referred to how tutors might have advantages over teachers of record in helping students improve their writing.

Later, during video elicitation, I wrote that Lynn believed the dialogue in the training video to be interesting, but that she thought Lauren "corrects perhaps too much without

explaining." Later, while transcribing Darcy's interview (which came later), I found a telling comment about Darcy's formative years as a writer. When she was younger, she received no explanations (as far as she could recall) for the underlying principles that made grammatical errors wrong. As a young writer, she was particularly fixated on commas. She said,

> I never felt like I knew what was going on, so as soon as I learned at the beginning of ninth grade, the actual rules and how to apply them, doing it over and over really made me feel better about knowing it, and I guess that's because when I was younger I really didn't know.

In both Lynn and Darcy's comments above, I found it interesting that the lack of explanation of errors stood out to them, whether in the training video (in Lynn's case) or in her own writing life (in Darcy's case). This realization led me to code these exchanges not just for Peer Advantage. With Darcy, I also coded this excerpt for Conventions, since it pertained to the subject of commas. For both Lynn and Darcy, I coded for Specificity, referring to the underlying principles of standard written English that student writers might not understand.

There was so much data that I did not want to forget its content. Consequently, I continued writing to summarize what participants wrote or said. Terence, for example, discussed a broad range of tutoring characteristics in his interview. In this excerpt, he describes his experience as a writer and how it informs his tutoring practice:

> I haven't done too bad on papers, so I just kinda go in with the mindset each time, you know, we're gonna go over what there is, and I'm going to write about it, and then look back over what I wrote, so that's the same kind of process I use with them. So, it just, it's always worked out for me, so if I can translate it to possibly work out for others, I don't think any, I was never told of any failing papers because of my own…

Responding to the above in a memo on the resulting transcript of my interview with Terence, I wrote,

> Tutoring characteristics include helping students improve at writing. Terence wants writers to be better when they leave than when they came in (p. 6). He often asks for a rubric first, hoping that he can help them properly understand the assignment (p. 7). Peer tutors should start by introducing themselves (p. 7). Small talk is a big deal for him; he believes it "helps them ease themselves more into where they're at" (p. 8). Terence tries to be consistent in how he proceeds through a tutoring session (p. 9). He borrows from his own experience in tutoring students: he thinks through everything in a commonsense manner (p. 9). His thinking and method remind me of Polanyi's (1966) concept of tacit knowledge.

I included numerous page references for ease of returning to the transcript when necessary. By composing a memo like this one, I was able to recall content easily. At the same time that I was summarizing, I would muse about how I might interpret Terence's description:

> What do I mean by "a commonsense manner"? Why am I referring to Polanyi (1966)? Terence's plainspoken demeanor leads him to describe the tutoring experience very matter-of-factly. At the same time, Terence appears to place great weight on learning through experience. This apparently worked well for him when he was tutoring.

In my thinking through the transcript, I engaged in "reflective wondering" (Van Manen, 2017, p. 819) and interpreted that Terence's thinking reflected the idea of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966), that learning comes not simply through abstract thinking through an experience, but by pursuing the experience itself. Terence's learning by experience served as a "curriculum of being and becoming" (Van Manen, 1990, p.7). He became a better tutor by being a tutor, which led

him to become a better tutor. The learning process was recursive and allowed him to continually improve.

When discussing the needs of student writers, Owen would mention a few different tasks that fit into existing codes. Students sometimes did not understand writing prompts, so he would explain them; I coded this as Interpretation. He mentioned the need to help students generate ideas for their work, which I coded as Idea Development, and he helped students improve completed drafts, which I coded as Revision. Given the three different tasks within Owen's description of tutoring, it was evident that he had to be flexible. Gabrielle, too, spoke of helping "students who were struggling with grammar" (which I coded Conventions) one minute and "com[ing] up with new ideas" (which I coded Idea Development) the next minute. This passage I also coded for Flexibility, and that became a more prominent theme of my analysis as I found more examples of tutors having to address a variety of elements of student writing.

How receptive students were to feedback was another theme with specific facets to it. While I initially coded a number of passages for Receptivity, student responses to feedback were not always positive. Cora shared this concern, saying, "[Y]ou have to make sure that you're not offending the person, but you can't be scared of—like you have to make sure that any concerns that you have are voiced." She made comments in two directions with regard to receptivity. With one, she considered the possibility that a student was forced to visit the writing center: "I feel most of them were pressured to go there by their teacher." I coded a comment like this for Reluctance. Cora also commented that at times, writers were glad to get the feedback they did: students would sometimes be "very stressed out, they're considering quitting and you don't want that to happen, but you can help them, and by the time you're done, they're both very grateful

and very happy because they can get this down." When comments like this occurred, I would code them for Gratitude.

While no two participants seemed to have the same experiences, the most commonly used codes led me to find elements of the tutoring experience that were shared among multiple participants. Five participants, for example—Cora, Tricia, Kyle, Eleanor, and Terence—believed that their status and practice as tutors made them de facto teachers. When I found such common reflections and experiences, I set aside coded excerpts from their data for later use as I wrote up the findings. I also looked at less commonly used codes to see what outlier experiences might also give a greater understanding of peer tutoring. Darcy's aforementioned formative experience in her childhood (when a teacher went beyond identifying mechanical errors in a paper and explained to her the rules behind why the errors were errors) is revealing in how it resonated in her life. It led her to wonder why other teachers did not do the same and gave her a resolve to help her peers by giving more in-depth feedback than she might otherwise have done. This experience is worth writing about even if she is the only one who had it. I wanted to validate everyone's experience, even if aspects of an individual's experience found no correlation in anyone else's.

In this study, using hermeneutical analysis opened the participants' experiences to an interpretation that allowed for a clearer understanding of the essence of peer tutoring in an HSWC. Finlay (2014) in particular emphasizes the need for researchers to both bracket their own experiences (taking account of them in the interest of preventing unnecessary bias) and at the same time avoid striving to eliminate all perspectives. Analysis and explication are intensive and deeply descriptive in hermeneutical phenomenology. Researchers must portray the lifeworlds (lived experiences) of participants richly, fully acknowledging that such descriptions by

definition do not cover every last detail to be found in a lifeworld (Van Manen, 1990). While examining participants' experiences, the researcher searches for common themes between them, using those themes to discuss the experience more broadly (Saldaña, 2013). Through hermeneutical analysis of the data, including the examples above, I found both common and unique experiences in peer tutor identity, the peer tutoring process, and the role of the writing center in facilitating peer tutoring across the data I collected.

To reach these conclusions, I had to think and write constantly. Constant writing is an essential part of the phenomenological research process (Van Manen, 1990, 2014). The memos were a record of thoughts on aspects of the research and writing process, including the participant data, the methodology, and initial findings. It is from these experiences that I gained a deeper understanding of what it is like to peer tutor in a high school writing center.

While I took seriously my role as co-director of the center and routinely asked peer tutors how things were going and how they could be improved, the retrospective nature of this study provided a chance to take a longer view of the writing center's history and impact. Founding this center was not an impulsive act. It took some planning and research, and I gained in knowledge reading up on writing centers and the practice of tutoring within them. That is not to say that I did not have a lot of other work to do. The writing center was an extracurricular activity for the peer tutors; for me, it was a little more complicated. For the most part, its operations took place before and after school, and I enjoyed being there. Nevertheless, my classroom was at the opposite end of the building, and I still had a regular schedule of classes to teach, along with all the planning and grading that typically came with them. Such busyness meant that I could not come close to devoting myself to the writing center full-time—most of my job was as a classroom English teacher. Everyone, from the peer tutors to the volunteer teachers, worked hard

to keep the center operating. Time passed quickly, and it could be difficult to stop and think about how things were going. Having graduated and moved on from high school, the participants in this study could think back, describe their experiences as they remembered them, and share with me what writing center work was like from their perspectives.

Their data changed my thinking about writing centers and peer tutoring. The participants worked hard to help students write their way through high school, but I had not previously thought about how the context for student writing shaped how the tutors interacted with their peers. The participants' desire to thrive and help others to thrive was there, but as will be apparent in the next chapter, this desire had to coexist with satisfying teachers by giving them what they wanted in a writing assessment. I also was not necessarily expecting the students to love the writing center as a space as much as they did, but they took ownership of it in a way that gave them agency within the school. Finding these themes in the data required writing memos that initially seemed (at different points) disjointed or informal, perhaps relying (I initially thought) too heavily on summarizing. Early drafts in the writing process, however, do not have to be perfect. As I wrote earlier in reference to Van Manen's (1990) work, the research was in the writing. The more formal, academic style of a dissertation appeared only after a lot of thought (Emig, 1977/2011; Van Manen, 1990) and revision. Conducting research into the writing process made me reflect on my own for the better.

Although this study did change my thinking and writing, the findings are limited to the participants, and they may point us to future research in peer tutoring, either in a high school writing center or more broadly. Through the coding process I developed themes that reflected to those findings, and hermeneutical analysis helped with understanding them.

Ethical Concerns and Quality Control

While pursuing this study, it was important to be mindful of ethical issues that could arise in any empirical study with human participants, but this study had some particularly unique ones that required bracketing (Husserl, 1913/2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Researcher's Role

Reflexivity is inevitable in hermeneutic phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). When my own presuppositions and biases are properly bracketed through an interview (more on that later; cf. Kramp, 2004; Roulston, 2010), my proximity to the HSWC in this study and the participants who work there has been an asset in this study. Having rich personal knowledge of the site and people involved allowed me to describe the site more fully and the participants with greater empathy. Such interpretation is not a hindrance but is reflective of the realities of researching within the context of an HSWC community and the interpretive community of language and literacy scholars (Moss, 1994).

I investigated peer tutoring in a high school writing center which I co-founded. I do not refer to the writing center as "my" writing center, but I am proud of the work that the students, teachers, and I did to keep it open and grow its influence. We all took ownership of whatever successes it had, and whenever problems have arisen, I tried to address them in a timely and effective manner. I continue to be co-director of the writing center and will continue in that role for the foreseeable future. I was also the instructor of record for the 4th period peer tutoring class, which existed from 2015-2019. My research, then, is a reflection of (and ultimately, will likely impact) how the writing center operates.

My role in the writing center is really plural in nature. For fifteen years, I was an English teacher at the school in question. For three-and-a-half years, I served as Chair of the English

department. Recently, I moved into a new position as a literacy coach at the school, which means that I work with teachers in all disciplines to integrate reading and writing pedagogy across the curriculum. I am not currently working directly with students in an official, curricular capacity. I am also a doctoral student in Language and Literacy Education at a large public research university. This multi-faceted role has aided me in implementing research in my classroom, sharing it with my colleagues, and using my learning to influence the operations of the writing center. I am currently co-director of the writing center, along with a colleague. In this administrative role, I coordinate volunteer hours among the peer tutoring staff and advise our local chapter of the National English Honor Society. Alongside my co-director and student staff, I helped maintain the physical space, provided tutoring training and resources, and planned outreach events. Initially, my co-director and I were very busy maintaining the writing center with our students. These roles intersected in all kinds of ways all the time, so keeping track of them has been helpful in illustrating the day-to-day events in the writing center in this study.

Ethical Concerns

The participants for this study were previously my students. As the recruitment phase wound down, all of the participants had previously taken Advanced Placement English Language and Composition with me, and one of them had enrolled in the peer tutoring course as well. His work as a peer tutor was assigned a grade at the end of each semester. By the time I interviewed the participants, all of them had graduated from high school. Three had just graduated a month or two prior. The other college students I interviewed were my students at one time, but I had not taught any of them directly in at least one calendar year.

Students who volunteered in the writing center were diligent and loyal. In the past, however, the writing center staff has not had a problem with critiquing how the writing center

operated, especially when prompted. Some of the training they underwent as tutors was a result of issues they perceived as a school year progressed. The writing center is a work-in-progress, so I welcome criticism from anyone who sees a problem with operations. It is better to own flaws than to deny them, so long as effort is exerted in addressing those flaws.

There is no question that in the context of this study, I have been a complete participant (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), meaning that I was fully immersed in the community where the participants experience the phenomenon to be studied. While I am an administrator in the writing center and serve as a teacher in the school, I am often tutoring alongside the students and reflect on my role as a teacher/administrator/tutor on a regular basis. In my role as a doctoral researcher, I am also a student, and that role requires me to complete work just as the students at this high school do.

Throughout the process, I ensured that any peer tutors who were current students at the high school did not feel pressured to participate in the study. A few of the participants showed an interest in the study while they were still students at the school, although by then, they were no longer my students. A number of the participants had completed at least one year of college. Anyone could have withdrawn from the study at any time; aside from a time commitment, no further burden was placed upon the participants.

Quality

Grbich (2013) writes that bracketing will not be necessary in this kind of study, but given my positionality, I am inclined to disagree. The *epoché* process, which I carried out through my own writing protocol and bracketing interview, was important in setting aside whatever preconceptions I may have had about the experience of peer tutoring in an HSWC (Moustakas, 1994). This does not mean that I fabricated doubt concerning everything about my roles in the

writing center. It did mean, though, that I needed to set aside my preconceptions of what it was like to be a high school student tutoring his or her peers in a writing center. That is an experience about which I have conducted research, but before this study, I had not heard from the high school students' own constructions of the experience.

As part of the *epoché* process, I had to bracket out my teaching experience at this particular school, my role in the writing center, and my work as a doctoral student. Once I had written my own lived-experience description (Van Manen, 1990) and finalized my interview questions, I had a colleague, the co-founder of the writing center, conduct the aforementioned bracketing interview (Kramp, 2004; Roulston, 2010) with me using the questions I wrote to use with the participants. This interview, details of which are reported earlier in this chapter ("Bracketing"), allowed me to reflect on how the participants might perceive the questions, but it also brought to the surface my own interests, convictions, and biases regarding the phenomenon to be studied.

My biases about the writing process, peer tutoring, and writing centers were generally optimistic. I believed peer tutoring sessions allowed students to have an easier time talking about their writing by discussing it with their peers. I hoped that students would appreciate receiving such help from their peers. Most of the time, I thought tutoring sessions went well, as long as students visited willingly and were prepared to discuss their work. Being prepared did not necessarily mean that students had to be fully conversant in rhetoric, language conventions, style, research methods, or anything else pertaining to the writing process. They simply had to be ready to talk and open to feedback from fellow students. My positionality as a teacher and writing center co-director was unique among teachers in the school. I wish more teachers from other

departments had taken up the opportunity to work alongside us. Maybe I could have promoted that better.

As it turns out, while there were some confirmations of my preconceptions of peer tutoring and writing center operations, the participants did not always confirm what I believed. Lynn and Terence appreciated when students would return after tutoring sessions with higher grades. Terence believed that was a positive means of evaluating his success at tutoring: "If they take [the assignment] and they bring it back in, I can see the improvement. But if they don't, then I kind of don't know if they followed the advice I gave them." But Lynn also sometimes doubted her work when student writers spurned her advice, asking herself, "Why am I—like why am I here?" Darcy told of a student research paper with a compelling topic (how to make a knife) but which needed so much revision her feedback could be discouraging. Looking back on the tutoring session, Darcy said, "[I]f it was me, I don't even think I would have gone back to change it all, if I had found that out after I had done it all." Peer tutoring could be messier in practice than it was in my own head, and I did not account for this reality in my writing protocol and interview. When sharing results, I was certain to let these student voices demonstrate more fully than my own thoughts what peer tutoring was like in practice. My experiences may have informed my work in this study—according to Gadamer (1975) and Van Manen (1990), it would be impossible to root them out entirely—but I also worked to let the participants' unique voices come through. These beliefs were not detached from the reality of the writing center's operations, and the data that resulted from the study offered opportunities for correction. These differences between my preconceptions and the participants' experiences are taken up in Chapter 5.

I have already referred to Van Manen's (1990) assertion that "All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already *transformations* of those experiences" (p. 54, emphasis in original). I recognized as I worked to recognize participant voices that the end result, regardless of my efforts, would go through de facto transformations in the research process. The resulting write-up did not have to be invalid, however. Being a complete participant did not simply bring disadvantages. My experience in the research setting did allow for contributions of my own experience to the quality of the study, including my knowledge of the school environment, my knowledge of the histories of the student participants in the study, and the ease of recruitment (since I worked with many of the current students on an almost daily basis).

All data collected from participants was subject to member checking (Roulston, 2010). I shared transcripts of interview data with each participant in order for them to have the option of verifying what they wrote and stated as accurate. Of all the participants, only one, Tricia, offered a correction to her transcript. In an email, she referred to a passage where I had typed "[????]" because I could not discern what she had said in the recording. The context was a discussion of how Tricia perceived that teachers could not spend as much time with students and their writing as peer tutors could. The transcript of her interview reads

> So like, the teacher would be like, the last person who is going to pass final judgment on this paper, but we can offer them more of our time, perhaps with less reward for them we're not going to give them the grade like [????].

To clarify this passage, Tricia wrote,

> Where you wrote [????], I meant that despite spending more time with us, we aren't the ones grading their work. Adding onto that, sometimes peer tutoring was difficult because I might think a student's work was great, but their teacher would have issues with it that would really impact their grade on that paper.

After receiving this reply, I took Tricia's clarification into account in Chapter 4. Her comments deepened the discussion of teacher and tutor feedback by adding tension to the differences between the two. Other participants discussed their work in a manner generally supportive of teacher pedagogy, but Tricia saw potential for conflict in positively evaluating a paper that might not receive such evaluation from a teacher.

Limitations

This is a study of a group of peer tutors whose work was situated in a particular high school writing center. By definition, phenomenology is the study of unique experience (Van Manen, 1990), so it is important when conducting this study to know that the experiences of these tutors are unique to the context of this particular HSWC and the school in which it is situated. The results of this study are not generalizable, but they may be transferable, based on the commonalities that appeared in the course of the study.

The participants in this study are not a particularly diverse group. Almost all were white, and all but two were female. One female participant was biracial, and another was of Middle Eastern descent. Nevertheless, the students were reflective of the student body of the rural area where the school was situated. All of the students also had strong academic records and were highly motivated—enough to volunteer their time outside of their own academic responsibilities. Such students had a valuable perspective to provide as both student writers and peer tutors. They were also on staff at the writing center at different times. One (Kyle) was there at the founding,

while others' experiences overlapped over the following few years. Having students who worked at the writing center at different times over a four-year period allowed the study to account for a broader range of experiences over time.

Timeline

Initially, data collection was supposed to take place over the course of three months, but this timeline became stretched out due to IRB approval, the availability of participants, and a number of unforeseen events that arose. Data collection took more time than expected. While I found enough students to collect data, communication with them was challenging. The participants did not always respond to emails in a timely manner, and when they received the writing protocol via email, a number of them took a long time to complete and return it. Most of these participants were already enrolled in college, led busy lives, and were gracious to participate at all, so I do not blame them or hold any grudge against them for how long it took to receive the completed protocols. The wait, however, did delay scheduling interviews for approximately six months.

Eventually, however, ten participants returned the writing protocol, and of those ten, nine sat for interviews (one of those participants did not respond to requests for an interview, and one additional participant consented to the study but withdrew due to time constraints before completing the writing protocol). The total length of time for data collection, from the first invitations to participate in the study to the last interview, was approximately eleven months.

Since all participants worked in the same writing center and had worked with me personally as both their writing center director and their English teacher, we were already familiar, and it was important in the data collection process to ask for honesty from them. Nevertheless, my positionality in this study is informed by my previous role of authority over

them, as well as the fact that we all worked side-by-side in running the writing center. Being a part of the writing center community alongside the participants meant that I could recall experiences of my own and give insight to teachers and students alike who may wish to be involve in peer tutoring in the future. Engaging in reflective wonder (Van Manen, 1990) was simply an extension of my membership in an interpretive community (Moss, 1994). As I coded and analyzed the resulting data, I worked to keep these factors in mind. Transcription, coding, and analysis of the interviews took several months.

Conclusion

It may appear precarious to study one's own writing center for the purpose of dissertation research. My figurative fingerprints are all over the research setting for this phenomenological study of peer tutoring in a high school writing center. Nevertheless, there is no shame in studying one's own work and study environment. Studying one's own practices and setting is common in action research (Aldridge et al., 2020; Buckley-Marudas et al., 2021), case studies (Conrad, 2015; Schechter & Bell, 2021), and ethnography (Hernández-Hernández & Sancho-Gil, 2017; Sandelli & Cunningham, 2019). Doing so as a participant observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) has helped me gain insights into the experiences of these students that an outside researcher may not be able to. Having a previous teaching and working relationship with the participants aided in facilitating data collection, and the participants did not shy from being accurate in their descriptions or frank about how the writing center functioned. There is always a tension between the texts of life experience and the interpreter of those texts, no matter the positionality of the interpreter (Gadamer, 1975; Spence, 2017; Van Manen, 1990, 2014). I am a researcher of high school writing centers because I helped start a high school writing center, and I was eager to better understand the experiences of the peer tutors who worked there. There is a tension

embedded in this study between my previous and current participation in the setting and my attempts to study it, but I had no choice but to embrace the tension. If phenomenological research is all about taking up a tradition (Van Manen, 1990), then there should be no shame in having been a part of that tradition previously. I simply had to remember to be self-critical in my own judgment and fair in listening to the students share their experiences. The next chapter shares samples of the data and the themes I saw in them.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Van Manen (1990) writes that "Ordinary language is in some sense a huge reservoir in which the incredible variety of richness of human experience is deposited" (p. 61). The written and spoken words of the participants in this study reveal a wide range of reflection on work that is in the participants' past yet continues to influence their actions in life. Reflecting that reality, the findings presented here include a great deal of the participants' own words—not to the voluminous extent or organized narrative of oral history, but to an extent that presents both the commonalities that appear in the data and the unique experiences that nuance them.

In response to my research questions, I interpreted a few distinct themes, which I discuss below. First, peer tutors articulate themselves as distinct from teachers, flexible in their approaches, and willing to accommodate any student. They know that their advice is nonbinding, but they believe in their role and persevere even with resistant students. Second, the peer tutoring process encompasses mutual listening, authentic feedback, and benefits for both tutor and writer. These participants believe that what they have to offer is the opportunity to receive feedback that may be more accessible and more specialized than what students may get from their teachers. Finally, the high school writing center is a vital space for developing community and hosting extracurricular activities. The participants took pride in staffing and sustaining a physical space where they could serve the school community.

How Do High School Peer Tutors Articulate Their Identities as Peer Tutors?

There is a broad body of research discussing peer tutors and writing centers. Landmark research by Perl (1979), Flower and Hayes (1980/2011), and Lunsford (1979/2011) established that writers can learn to improve their writing from their peers. As writing centers proliferated in

colleges and universities, scholar-administrators articulated what these centers were best at (Bruffee, 1983/2011; Carino, 2003/2011; Lunsford, 1991/2001; North, 1984/2011), and critics argued that writing centers reinforced university-driven curriculum at the expense of writer and tutor autonomy (Fels, 2010; Vandenberg, 1999/2011). This legacy of research, however, does not necessarily mean that tutors articulate their work in the same way. They may have read some of the research themselves, or they may have had it filtered through the training they received from teachers. Hence, peer tutors may express themselves and articulate their identities in unique ways distinct from how writing center scholars (Bruffee, 1983/2011; Carino, 2003/2011; Fels, 2010; Lunsford, 1991/2001; North, 1984/2011; Vandenberg, 1999/2011) may describe these identities. It is worthwhile to understand how that research is communicated to tutors. Also important is how tutors retain that information and possibly merge it with other practices and knowledge. Their reflections—both written and spoken—serve as texts worth exploring and interpreting (Van Manen, 1990). This section—in response to the first research question—seeks to discover how participants define tutoring and their roles as tutors. Using the data I accumulated, a number of characteristics became clear in how peer tutors articulated their tutoring identities.

Peer Tutors: Unique Writing Agents

Peer tutors are students, just like their clients. They communicate with student writers as equals, because they are also student writers. Kyle put this observation simply and effectively. When asked how peer tutoring distinguished him from his peers, Kyle said, “It doesn’t and I think that’s the beauty of it.” For this reason, he wrote that peer tutors were “more approachable” than their teacher counterparts. Kyle and his fellow participants articulated ideas of peer tutoring through both similarities and differences between themselves and their peers. Many of these

characteristics would fall into a couple of broad categories. On the one hand, participants emphasized a need for flexibility when working with their peers. Students visited for all kinds of help and expressed that need differently, depending on the stage of the writing process, the teacher who sent them, or the willingness to visit the writing center in the first place. The peer tutors in this writing center had to be ready for anything.

On the other hand, participants largely established themselves as distinct from teachers. As Kyle did above, they recognized that they did not wield the same authority as the certified professionals in the building. This seemingly reduced status was not necessarily a disadvantage. In a number of instances, participants believed their roles as tutors gave them a distinct advantage over their teachers. Nonetheless, whatever students thought of themselves, they worked within a system that valued their flexibility insofar as it supported the school and district's overall writing pedagogy (Vandenberg, 1999/2011). Participants generally spoke of themselves as innovators in their schools. Years after graduating from high school, Kyle still characterized himself as "at the ground level" of the writing center, proud to be a founding staff member. Eleanor, too, said, "I think it's really cool that … it was started while I was there and I helped with the initial … floating. I wasn't there at the very start, but I felt like I had a supporting role. I'm kind of proud of that." But they were also aware of the realities of working within a system. Darcy described part her job was to "enforce" what was being taught. On further reflection, she changed the term to "reinforcing" what was taught in the classroom. Nevertheless, she spoke as one who worked in a larger system of pedagogy. Lynn believed the writing center was comfortable because it had no "strict teachers." As we will see, her comments and others' will demonstrate how the system of writing instruction she perceived as inherent in the school was another example of how tutors believed they worked within a system.

What follows are characteristics of tutoring that participants articulated in their writing protocols and interviews. I show that the tutors created for themselves internal foundational beliefs that guided their work. They believed their experience gave them insider knowledge that they could share with their peers for the purpose of giving them an advantage when writing and revising. Most of them fell into broad categories of flexibility to address a variety of writing needs and distinction from certified teachers.

Peer tutors are flexible. The participants believed that they were required to address a variety of issues relating to student writing. They needed to notice what might be necessary in order to help their peers and communicate with them effectively so that these writers might be successful in their work. Peer tutors need to be ready to work with writers in any stage of the writing process. They encounter what Sherwood (2007/2011) calls tutoring's "four elements of artistry: (1) surprise, (2) circumstance, (3) improvisation, and (4) flow" (p. 99). The tutors in this study refined their "artistry" by working with all students in many situations.

Some students walked in with completed drafts that only needed proofreading, while others came in with nothing but a writing prompt. By one participant's estimate, Owen claimed that roughly half of visitors needed help generating ideas, and 10% of visitors needed proofreading. He also stated that 40% of visitors needed help with "explaining confusing concepts." This speculation reflects how Owen formulated the essence of tutoring in his mind, and it also reveals the need for Sherwood's four elements. Gabrielle also spoke of helping students "who were struggling with how to kind of structure their ideas or come up with new ideas for their paper." Circumstance often led to a need to clarify; this need became a critical component of the tutoring experience. Students did not always understand what teachers were asking of them (a theme that occurs when discussing a few different aspects of the results), and

this confusion was not necessarily the students' fault. In this sense, tutoring begins to look like an effort to expand upon the work of teachers of record. In Owen's mind, it should be concerning that a number of students had trouble understanding writing prompts. Whether students or teachers were responsible for this lack of understanding was unclear, but there are implications worth considering which I will take up in the next chapter.

Flexibility is important to tutor identity when helping students get started. Gabrielle and Owen both found themselves aiding students in generating ideas; without necessarily seeing a prompt beforehand, they had to improvise. Generation of ideas is foundational to the whole writing process. Students need to dialogue with a trusted peer in order to produce their writing. By visiting the writing center, they are seeking a partner in verbal thought (Vygotsky, 1962/2012). Talking things through is important in successful writing. While Owen and Gabrielle's recollection is hardly hard numerical data, it does reflect a perception that tutoring can begin in the earliest stages of the writing process. It also justifies Emig's (1977/2011) assertion that thinking is part of the process.

The flexibility required of tutors could also lead to innovation. Sherwood (2007/2011) compares improvisation in peer tutoring to jazz and beat poetry, and the metaphor is appropriate to how some participants described their experiences. Student writers would visit with different assignments and needs, and some participants found that they were able to address these needs in ways they may not have expected. Student writing needs required a patchwork of reading, thinking, and practice to inform tutoring methods. Gabrielle believed that to be a good peer tutor, she had to be "open to new ways of writing and new ideas." Among these ideas was an acknowledgement that tutoring required an awareness of what she perceived as different means of learning and communication:

> [N]ot everybody's learning methods are the same, and I learn in different ways than other people do, and I needed to understand that in order to properly help them, and sometimes, when somebody isn't getting a point that you're trying to get across, it gets frustrating but when you, when you get super frustrated and snap it doesn't help anyone, so … But exercising patience, it helps both parties move on.

Gabrielle brought with her a certain lore (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016) that she carried into her tutoring work. Her idea that people learn differently is a belief that became the basis for how she helped others. She asserted her individuality in learning and supported the idea that others also had an individual form of learning. Working on such a basis was a challenge for her; she felt "super frustrated" when her learning style and someone else's were, as she perceived, too distinct.

For Gabrielle, the remedy for such frustration—especially when one must be flexible—was patience. It is a virtue borne out in the ability to wait, to stop and think about what approach might aid a student writer. A few other participants also expressed sentiments corresponding to a need for patience. During video elicitation, Owen said there was a need to speak up in order to address issues affected by a piece of writing. Faulting both tutors in the video, he said

> they didn't really ask the student any questions about what they were thinking as they were writing the paper, getting their ideas of what is, of what their thoughts were, or even of the prompt itself, or like how they started to write the paper, because sometimes that could be helpful.

Owen appeared to be frustrated with how the tutors interacted with their clients. Without paying direct attention to the writer, the tutoring is not mindful of either party involved. For Owen,

engaging in patient dialogue with writers was essential to understanding how writers perceive their work and their struggles with it. In describing how one evaluates another's writing, Darcy said, "[Y]ou really only see it through your own eyes as far as how you came to understand how this works better than this and stuff like that." With flexibility and patience, the tutors recognized that they must be especially careful in order to comprehend someone else's writing and communicate what that writer needs.

Gabrielle also believed this patience was a requirement to be a successful and flexible tutor. "Both parties move on," Gabrielle said, when the tutor patiently aids the writer in a manner that accommodates perceived learning style differences. Eleanor, too, would ask lots of questions to diagnose issues with writing; she described this step as "the best way to help if you don't know much about what [writers are] trying to do." She believed of her questioning, "If I'm asking a lot of questions of other people, then I'm probably asking a lot of questions to myself, hopefully considering all of the points that I need to address, being more thorough." According to Eleanor, diagnosis comes through dialogue, and productive dialogue requires questioning to determine what students are trying to accomplish. Through Gabrielle, Darcy, and Eleanor, we see their perception that patience is a necessary attribute for successful tutors.

Writers have a variety of practical needs with particular assignments, and these needs also require flexibility. Some of these needs might be expected, such as those with conventions and structure, as Gabrielle explained:

> [T]here were students who were struggling with grammar and just getting things down on paper. And then there were other students who were struggling with how to kind of structure their ideas or come up with new ideas for their paper.

So Gabrielle did not simply have to infer a student's learning style. She also had to be ready to address a variety of concerns. Issues pertaining to language conventions require sentence-level attention to detail, while the need to help writers generate ideas addresses issues at a more global level with respect to a writing assignment (Ryan and Zimmerelli, 2016). Cora, in contrast, found it typical to help students with proofread or "brainstorm their ideas." She told of one tutoring session that was particularly satisfying for her, when she and a student generated ideas together. Merging flexibility with humility, Gabrielle recognized her own weakness in her work, stating, "I think helping people come up with ideas may have been a little more difficult because with grammar it's a little easier to nitpick and focus on, but with ideas, that's a bit more personal." In making this distinction, Gabrielle perceived that the "personal" was more challenging than the need to "nitpick and focus on" grammar. As Gabrielle stated before, she believed individuals learn differently. She perceived grammar as a more objective, rule-based element of writing, so it was easier to assist writers with it.

Generating ideas, however, requires getting inside writers' minds and investigating how they wanted to approach a task. It requires attuning one's tutoring skills to a writer's voice and thoughts. When generating ideas, the dialogue between tutor and writer becomes less predictable, and the tutor must be dialogically agile at maintaining flow (Sherwood, 2007/2011), ready to discuss many potential approaches to a topic and able to work within the parameters of multiple academic disciplines. This can be a challenge for any tutor, which is why flexibility is such a necessary skill. Over time, however, willing tutors seemed not only to develop this skill, but to enjoy their growth in it.

Successful tutors can work with willing and unwilling visitors. With proper training and experience, peer tutoring is very doable, and all of the participants in this study were willing

to do it. But some tutors did admit that working with willing visitors to the writing center made the tutoring process easier. Some students, however, visited not of their own volition, but because teachers required them to. Working with the unwilling could prove difficult. This distinction was unsurprising. Tricia expressed a belief that "students who want tutors are generally the ones who understand the prompts and they know what is expected of them, so you're just going to someone who is on their level but knows how to interpret the directions." In her college tutoring, Tricia described students entering the writing center voluntarily as already aware of what was expected of them and of their need for help. They may have had different needs from those of basic writers, for example, because they at least knew how to start within the conventions expected of them in a college composition program. Basic writers may have had an idea of how to start, but they may not have known how to start within the conventions of Standard American English expected of them in their coursework (Shaughnessy, 1976/2011). Tricia suspected that the willing visitor of a writing center was not likely to be a basic writer. There could be a perception on Tricia's part that the most motivated students are those who already know what to do.

In Tricia's experience, then, the students who might need tutoring most want it the least. Cora found a similar sentiment in her experience tutoring band students. As a section leader, part of her job was to assist the musicians in her charge with keeping their grades up. Freshmen were eager to practice on their instruments, but "embarrassed to ask for help," leaving their parents to "[message] the band directors," who would then pass those messages on to the leadership. This circuitous communication led Cora to encourage her bandmates to visit the writing center, even if they were reluctant to do so, because she could help them in "low-key situations." Cora found it useful to promote the center through her willingness to tutor in multiple contexts. In this way,

she motivated students to seek help. Self-motivation may be a factor in the success of a tutoring session, but it should come as no surprise that students requesting tutoring already know what to do. They may appear to need less-intrusive tutoring, or as Lynn put it, some students might want "to be too cool for it, or something."

Enervation and frustration: Reflections on working with unwilling visitors. While the participants in this study identified as patient and flexible, a couple of outliers described themselves as enervated by working with unwilling visitors. At times students were sent to writing centers to improve grades, and the students did not want to be there. Tricia said that sessions such as these felt like a "punishment." It was not entirely clear if she was speaking of the punishment as solely on the student writer or on the tutor. If a teacher required students to visit the center willingly or not, that appeared to impact how well the tutoring session would progress. Such sessions did not feel as successful because unwilling visitors appeared less willing to listen. Tricia described some of these visitors to her college writing center as "really mad," even more than they would be if they were high school students. The captivity factor present in these sessions frustrates the tutoring process. This is evident in Terence's experience with a resistant visitor who "tried to do their own thing" during a tutoring session. By this, Terence means that the student was disconnected from the tutoring session and simply wanted Terence to fix everything for him. As will become apparent in the discussion of the tutoring process, Terence found it difficult to give feedback. As far as identity is concerned, it was discouraging. It was not always clear why such students appeared to participants not to want to be there. Some may have been frustrated that they were given another requirement to fulfill in order to succeed at an assignment—they did not like having another hoop to jump through. This visit to the writing center was frustrating to them. Some, on the other hand, discovered upon their

visit that the reason they had to be there was to fix an issue so minor that it may not have required a visit at all. Tricia gave an example of a student who came to the writing center for help, only to discover that his paper's problem was an MLA citation issue that could be remedied by looking online for the necessary formatting information. Tricia called such a reason to visit "dumb," referring to the imposition on a student for something so simple. In Tricia's mind, it complicated writing center work—and potentially wasted the time of both tutor and writer—to outsource minor corrections of a paper to an office that is dedicated to more thorough tutoring.

Such an incident revealed the potential for a university's writing curricula to bureaucratize the writing process and place tutors in potentially difficult positions that compromised their identities. Tricia perceived the hegemony (Vandenberg, 1999/2011) of composition pedagogy in a counterproductive light. It appeared to her to demand of students compliance through bureaucratic means, such as requiring visiting them just to require them. Particular teachers—in this case, at the university level—flexed their power over students in a critical moment, when a grade was at stake. These instructors' pedagogies prioritize meeting the simplest of requirements, and their practices negatively impacted the writing center's own pedagogy. Forced visits were so minor that they did not aid students in becoming better writers; they only enforced students to be better at following procedures. Visits over the most trivial of details undermined the deeper, "Burkean" (Lunsford, 1991/2011) work that traditionally undergirds writing center purpose and lore. The "conversation of mankind" (Bruffee, 1984/1995) isn't typically fueled by confirming MLA formatting. Sending students to the writing center over lesser matters could also present a significant problem with building a writing center's credibility. Tricia believed her tutoring identity was taken less seriously if students were forced to visit with her. If writers are visiting over what is essentially an easy fix, then they may not

understand that the writing center can help them with truly challenging assignments. Unnecessarily simplistic visits may also keep students from recognizing the deeper, more distinct help that students might better get from tutors than from their teachers.

Writing center tutors are distinct from teachers of record, but they are teachers nonetheless. Of course, writing center tutors are distinct from the teachers who lead instruction in the classroom and ultimately assign grades to student work. There are plenty of reasons to distinguish teachers and students from one another, and the participants did not identify as teachers per se. Owen thought he was "an augmentation to what teachers were doing," and Eleanor (as stated before) thought she had a "supporting role." Terence even believed that tutors "can help add knowledge," but at the same time, he said, "I don't think it's to the extent of a teacher." These opinions do not necessarily mean that they were not teachers at all, and it is important to recognize the teaching that happens in a writing center without certified teachers. Carino (2003/2011) writes that tutoring sessions "depend on authority and power" (p. 121).

None of the participants described their experiences or identities as agents of authority and power. On the contrary, as evidenced in their words above, a few tended to see themselves as supplemental. Their knowledge and skill, though, did lend them authority in their tutoring. Darcy viewed tutors as "qualified to help," and Kyle said tutors were "a good go-between" and a "good … alternative option." While they did not identify as teachers and did not describe themselves as powerful, they still recognized the expertise and influence they might have in a given tutoring situation. Teachers wield the power inherent in grading, and implicit within that reality, a teacher's pedagogy could influence a tutoring session without the tutor's presence. Participants rarely spoke of specific teacher instructional practices, but within the context of tutoring sessions, tutors saw themselves as wielding power over how to address what a teacher required

in a given assignment. When they interacted with their peers, tutors may even have had an advantage over teachers themselves.

While the participants in this study were eager to help others, they were not always pleased with how or why teachers sent students to the writing center. Tricia was not cynical when she declared as "dumb" certain motives teachers had for sending students. Importantly, she also said that student writers and tutors were on "equal footing." The hegemony of the university aside (Vandenberg, 1999/2011), Tricia did not view herself as superior to visiting writers. In discussing the dynamic between writer and tutor, Tricia said, "you're not talking down to them in any way. You're not going to grade them or judge them because even if they know you, they're not, they don't think you're going to pass judgment on them in any significant way." In Tricia's mind, it was easier for students to visit a peer tutor than to visit their own teachers. Talking with a tutor opened writers to criticism in a more comfortable manner than would be possible in a conversation with a teacher, who would ultimately grade the assignment. Eleanor, who had been her senior class valedictorian, believed high school was "easy." She framed her experience as one in which it was most important to figure out what a teacher wanted, saying that she had a knack for "navigating the patterns of what teachers want to see." With this self-perceived skill, Eleanor could recall (or perhaps even figure out) the pedagogy that her peers would need to comply with in order to succeed. She could teach more than writing; she could also teach compliance with a pedagogy. Ultimately, though, in both Eleanor and Tricia's experience, the pressure of pleasing the teacher took a backseat to authentic dialogue in articulating their identities and self-definitions of their work as tutors.

Other participants would sometimes frame the classroom setting as one where students could not get all the attention they needed, and this complication informed their identities as

serving a necessary and beneficial role in the school. At one point, Kyle tried to recall how many classes and students teachers had at his high school. I responded that at the time of the interview, the school had just transitioned to block scheduling, so teachers typically taught three classes per semester. Kyle did the math, assuming 20-30 students per class, and said (to me, but hypothetically of any teacher in the school), "You can't sit down with every individual. You're making your remarks on the paper. You're doing the best you can. But ultimately things are going to get misconstrued, or they just might not get it." In my experience, such problems have been genuine, and not always the result of poor teaching. It can be difficult to work with every student individually, and not all of them respond to feedback with a demonstrated interest in improving their writing. Kyle then situated himself in this system:

> They can come to me and I can act as an in-between and be like "Well, I think they meant this and you can do this to fix this," you know. And to just sort of mediate that a little bit. But also, you know, we're also a good alternative.

For Kyle, a peer tutor was a mediator who could aid student writers in getting help they might not get from teachers. But Kyle also referred to tutors as an "alternative," not just in the quote above, but twice more. At each point, Kyle positioned tutors as offering something different from what a teacher might do, and sometimes, that difference was an improvement. The tutor has a power (Carino, 2003/2011) that is different and advantageous. There were times for Kyle when peer tutors were better than teachers at giving feedback.

The advantages of the peer tutor-student writer relationship. As will be evident from the above and other results, the data revealed a distinct advantage to the peer tutor-student writer relationship. An impending grade could affect the relationship between student and teacher. Hypothetically speaking, the student wants to please the teacher, perhaps not just in writing, but

also in how the student communicates with the teacher. A writing assessment may begin not when a student puts pen to paper, but when seeking advice. Student writers come from a variety of backgrounds and may find it easier to talk to students. Tutors can more freely get to know their peers' backgrounds and work with them from wherever they are (Baker, 2006/2016). In the sense of a "hidden curriculum" (Strong, 2003, pg. 2), assessment begins with how students behave in class and how they interact with their teachers. Tricia imagined a student writer thinking of their teacher, "This teacher thinks I'm dumb because they gave me a bad grade on this paper." In her writing protocol, Cora wrote that visiting writers "receive positive criticism from people in a similar situation." This assessment is an alternative to what might happen in interactions with teachers. Later, in her interview, Cora said, "sometimes when you're talking to a teacher, it gets really nerve-racking, because it can feel like the teacher knows everything, about the subject and knows what they want." The language Cora used here construes the attempt to seek tutoring from a teacher as almost anxiety-inducing. There is potential for a serious communication gap between teacher and student. According to these participants, as much as teachers may want to help students, the nature of the teacher-student relationship brings with it a certain anxiety over the impending grade, as well as students' concerns over how teachers perceive them. Sometimes students are intimidated, and the burden of a grade may widen this gap further. Peer tutors, on the other hand, do not issue grades. Since they are not the ultimate evaluators of a piece of academic writing, they can talk student writers through the writing process. Student writers, then, can speak up without fear of harming the reputations they have with their teachers. Tutors may even have been in the same classrooms and completed the same assignments that give other students such anxiety. As "learned peers" (Baker, 2006/2016, p. 279), they could deliver inside information regarding how teachers would grade certain

assignments. Tutors could also inform students of the transferability of writing skills across other disciplines, leading to a broader range of success for student writers (Hill, 2016).

For Tricia and Cora, how students believed their teachers perceived them was a critical factor in how comfortable students were in their coursework, and ultimately as writers. To be a peer tutor was to work around the unseen stresses of the teacher-student dynamic in search of tutoring that was more comfortable and ultimately more successful. As Cora said, "a student [tutor] is more likely to express the style and know how the other teacher is going to read it." This feedback was inside information that reached beyond the writing process (Baker, 2006/2016, Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). While knowledge of the writing process was important in any tutoring situation, these exchanges also benefit from knowledge of the teaching and grading practices of teachers within the school community—the hermeneutical practices of teachers within that community (Fairfield, 2011).

In further discussion, Cora brought up more distinctions in the tutors' hermeneutical community between teachers' classrooms and the writing center:

> students are anxious to go into their classrooms of a teacher when they're busy and they feel like they should not be there, because you're scared of disrupting somebody or you're scared of being in the way of a different class. You just get anxiety from walking into a teacher's room, which should be something that is the exact opposite of a writing center.

In Cora's view, being a tutor gave the opportunity to address the mental stresses that she believed came up when students felt that they must please teachers. Cora believed that she could relieve anxiety through her knowledge of what teachers wanted. She mediated and interpreted

teacher expectations through her reading of prompts and her experiential knowledge of the teacher's pedagogy. As a member of the school's academic community—and perhaps, an agent of its hegemony (Vandenberg, 1999/2011)—Cora knew how to guide another student through the rules (seen and unseen) of a teacher and/or school's writing pedagogy.

Tricia and Cora were not the only participants who believed that peer tutors had a knack for working with their fellow students in a way that teachers didn't. Owen perceived the distinction between peer tutoring and teacher-led instructions as having the possibility that the tutor can discover something when teachers cannot: "Sometimes, although teachers try the best they can to reach out to every student, it can be difficult to reach, meet the specific needs of each student." Whereas Cora frankly characterized the experience of seeking teacher help as one filled with anxiety, Owen addressed the differences more charitably. Owen thought that teachers tried all they could to reach everyone, but classes could be big, and it could be impossible for a teacher to address every last writing issue with every last student. This perceived disadvantage in the mass teaching of writing is mitigated by what a peer tutor can offer:

> I think when working one-on-one with a peer, it might reveal something that they wouldn't, that the teacher wouldn't necessarily be able to find out. Or if they're struggling with something, it might be more readily, it might be easier for a peer to help them with that, as opposed to a teacher who may or may not even know that the student is struggling with that, like in terms of, like questioning themselves about their writing strategies and things like that.

For Owen, the dialogue that emerges in the tutor-writer relationship is one of writers receiving more attention than they would in their classrooms, and more specific attention than they would even working one-on-one with their teachers. Talk of students' "writing strategies" evokes a

theme similar to Gabrielle's earlier talk of different learning styles. The practices may be distinct from those taught in the curriculum or classroom. They may be strategies that have developed over time, practices or routines that are part of an individual's writing process. Teachers are not necessarily familiar with these strategies, but they impact students' potential for success in their coursework. Owen appeared to believe that he had access to more knowledge of these strategies than a teacher might—that students are more willing to share them with him. Cora and Owen addressed different facets of the teacher-tutoring experience by describing and processing their lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). It is possible both for teachers to fail to address every writing need, and for students to feel tremendous anxiety when they seek help. Both perceptions led these participants to rationalize the need for their work as part of the interpretation of their experience.

Just as Owen and Cora positioned themselves as intermediaries, so did Lynn. She said tutors are

> kind of that in-between point that helps them just get on the paper and write it and kind of help with the details and stuff. Like they have what it is in their mind, you just have to help them be like the buffer between the paper and themselves to get it down and actually write.

For Lynn, the peer tutor is an intermediary between students and their writing. At the same time, she referred to her work as a "buffer." It is as if Lynn was a medium, channeling ideas from the writer's own mind in order to get students to write their papers. Lynn was not doing supernatural work. She was simply talking with students to get a grasp on their ideas. Lynn was encouraging verbal thought (Vygotsky, 1962/2012) by dialoguing with student writers. She aided them in unlocking the thoughts they had in their heads.

When fulfilling this role, Lynn believed the age of a tutor did not matter. She recalled helping seniors when she was just a sophomore, and

> there'd be like seniors coming in needing help with their senior projects and stuff. I'd be like, How can I help them? They're so much older than me, and they probably know more, but it's just—even if you're a new set of eyes looking at their paper, you can still help them. You kind of have to trust that you can help their paper somehow.

At the time, the school's senior capstone project was a rather involved collection of assignments that included a ten-page research paper. Every year, as the deadline for the paper approached, the writing center would become quite crowded with seniors hoping to get their papers peer reviewed before submitting them to their teachers. Just as a few of the peer tutors discussed the anxiety students might have in working with their teachers, they were also nervous about completing a large project that was a firm graduation requirement. While there were plenty of senior tutors to help their peers, the capstone season necessitated all the help the writing center could get, even if a few younger, less experienced tutors had to work with upperclassmen. This is the source of whatever concerns Lynn might have had, but it is also why she was not intimidated by being younger than some visiting writers. Constant practice gave her the confidence she needed to help anyone who walked into the writing center.

Being intimidated by a teacher's feedback was another matter. Lynn recalled a time when she helped a student feel better about her writing after receiving a high volume of negative feedback on her paper. Initially, Lynn was apprehensive about the number of negative markings on the student's work: "There were so many markings that I honestly felt intimidated. I had never seen this many markings on an essay before." Lynn went to say that the student's teacher had a reputation as a "harsh grader," marking errors all over student work in a way that Lynn felt

demeaned the students. Lynn kept her composure and assured the student that they would work through the paper together. They did, discussing elements of the writing process such as MLA citation, crafting conclusions, and language conventions. Lynn "expected [the student] to be defeated and upset" when she was done with the paper, but that was not the case. The student was grateful and thanked Lynn, mentioning that she loved writing and was just upset about the paper.

There are some important details to consider with regard to the experience Lynn described. The teacher's feedback disturbed the student. Cora's comments above about anxiety correlated with the emotional state Lynn's client was in. While Owen was more diplomatic about how teachers might fail in their writing instruction, Cora's and Lynn's thoughts perceived a negative side to the writing pedagogy they witnessed at their school. In at least their view (and with Lynn, with at least one teacher), there were problems with feedback—how teachers delivered it and how students received it.

Perhaps this state of things is why Lynn and others found it important to be friendly and personable. Fitzgerald and Ianetta (2016) believe it is important for tutors to be interpersonal and motivational, and the participants believed the same. Cora said that it was important for peer tutors "to be aware that they are a peer before they are anything else." The identity of being a fellow student took precedence over any role one had as a peer tutor, and it precluded any inkling of superiority over a peer. Cora believed in this principle strongly enough that she compared peer tutoring to servant leadership:

> They are here to help and they must act like they need help. It's a bit of like a—the best way to look at it is as a servant leadership, like when you're helping someone through,

> being with—you have to make sure that you're aware of making as many mistakes as someone else is.

In these remarks, Cora expressed a certain selflessness in the role of the peer tutor. She was not involved in the writing center just to fill in another line on a college application, but to help others with an activity that she generally enjoyed. She was also humble in her self-assessment of her own writing:

> The difference is as a peer tutor, you're also slightly more aware of your mistakes when you're writing, too. So because you're slightly more aware of your mistakes, you're easier to help out because you've been through the same things that they're going through.

Peer tutors have been there, and they are ready to help others navigate the same territory of writing. The experience that she went through reveals that she believed peer tutors have a distinct advantage over their teacher counterparts. Cora framed this distinction as one where peer tutors have made mistakes in the past—the same mistakes student writers might be making when they visit the writing center. Lynn said that when a peer tutor works with a fellow student writer, "you're going through it with them, instead of them writing it alone, and the teacher grading it alone. You're with them doing it." Kyle concurred in this when he stated that the "beauty" of peer tutoring is his perceived lack of distinction between writer and tutor. In his writing protocol, he envisioned peer tutors as "more approachable" than their teacher counterparts.

For one participant, being a peer tutor did involve an element of teaching. Darcy articulated this as a sort of juggling act:

> So it's just kind of a whole process of like, you're doing these things, or figuring out which of these things you need to do, and at the same time you really want to be serving them, so you need to figure out how can I best do that, how do I need to explain this issue like, what type of words can I use to best get this across, and like how much time do I need to spend trying to teach them how to use a comma as opposed to just pointing out the specific things wrong with their paper and telling them how to fix them. You know, in a teaching, like guiding kind of way.

Darcy illustrated a particular kind of grace necessary to be an effective tutor. She described peer tutoring as a "process" that required "figuring out" in the interest of "serving." "Teaching" and "guiding" were involved, but at a level that reflects the humility of not having the same authority as a teacher. Managing the peer tutoring process is a delicate matter in its need for writers to receive feedback and for tutors to deliver that feedback without asserting themselves as if they were adult teachers. That requires a balancing act on the part of peer tutors.

Darcy was also aware of the need to distinguish herself from a teacher, and she believed that there was an advantage to not being the teacher of record. She declared that

> a peer [tutor] would be a student, someone else, you know, at or around the same level or same demographic group as the other person as far as age and all that, that provides help tutoring with whatever the subject is at hand, but doesn't teach in the same way that a teacher does or has the authority to do.

This perceived lack of authority was reinforced when Darcy said that peer tutors "enforce what was probably being taught or was taught in the past, should have been taught and all that, and kind of go over things with students at a more one-on-one level than a teacher is able to do."

Oddly, there is an advantage in the perceived lack of authority, but the teacher's authority still trumps or informs how tutors should identify themselves and go about their work (Vandenberg, 199/2011). Darcy's words seemed contradictory here, but perhaps in reality they reflected the messy nature of teaching itself. Some teachers assign writing that hopefully reflects the principles in their content standards or other curriculum; inevitably, some instruction in knowledge or skill is lost in the shuffle, if it was delivered at all. Maybe a student writer needed further remediation, or maybe the student did not pay attention the first time, or maybe the teacher had to rush through instruction in order to stay on pace with a curriculum map. There are many possible explanations for why a student may need the extra help Darcy talked about, and more than one of them may apply. At the very least, peer tutoring provides another opportunity for students to get feedback on their writing. By Darcy's definition, a peer tutor is similar in some way to a student writer, based on the categories imposed by our educational system: grade level, demographic (which could be ethnicity, income level, or something else), and so on. The peer tutor is one of these things before anything else, and "doesn't teach." Darcy's use of the word "enforce" implies hegemony (Vandenberg, 1999/2011), and a continuation of how education has gone so far for the student writer. Indeed, tutors and writers alike may or may not be aware of the policies that lead instruction to happen a certain way (Monty, 2019). But Darcy makes a distinction between "what was probably being taught" and "what should have been taught." There is a lot of room in these words to account for both effective and ineffective teaching, or to distinguish between what a curriculum contained or should have contained. It is possible that peer tutors position themselves within situations where a student's writing life may have gone in a thousand different directions, with a broad spectrum of success, failure, or both. Darcy did not state that she had the authority to correct everything wrong that may have

happened in a student's writing experience, but she figured she had to be ready to help in myriad ways, subject to authorities outside herself.

Strong peer tutors are respectful of their clients and themselves. Peer tutors occasionally remarked that respect was very important to being an effective tutor. This respect should be extended to visiting students, whose needs and abilities vary greatly. But tutors should also respect themselves. Lynn wrote that peer tutors "should realize the importance of not only having respect for their peers but for themselves, too." According to Lynn, "a tutor should always be respectful and give their all to helping the student who comes in." Maintaining a certain composure is important because it respects all parties involved in a tutoring session.

There was a motif among some participants that it is important to take on a role of servant leadership. Peer tutors should be humble in their roles and should not assume too much authority over students who are working to fulfill the same requirements all students do. Owen believed that courtesy was vital. "Always try to meet the student's needs in a way that is constructive," he wrote, "so while critiquing their work, do not be too negative. Never attempt to assert yourself as the superior to the student; they are already there to receive help from you." Based on what Owen wrote in response to the protocol, it was clear that he regarded humility important to successful peer tutoring. His use of the word "constructive" reflects a need to edify students and their writing as much as possible. The conversational moves he described are similar to the "common ground" questioning delineated by Thompson and Mackiewicz (2014, p. 45). This questioning focused more on understanding the assignment and student need, setting aside more prescriptive comments and questions. For Owen, critique was necessary but was subject to the positive elements of a paper. While Owen and others were authorities within the writing center, they were not comfortable asserting that authority. They couched their knowledge

within an almost self-effacing humility and stressed the importance of praising a paper whenever one could. They perhaps could have asserted themselves a little more (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016), but in their recollections, they withheld from doing so.

Tutors cannot respect only students and teachers. Lynn wrote that peer tutors "should realize the importance of not only having respect for their peers but for themselves, too." In my field notes (29 July 2017), I noted that Lynn had an experience that may have informed that comment: Once, a student visited the writing center whose English teacher was also the supervising teacher in the center. The supervising teacher, frustrated over her own student's inability to describe what she needed to do, grabbed a writing reference book and forcefully urged Lynn to make the visiting student complete grammar exercises. The reference book, Andrea Lunsford's (2009) *Easy Writer*, did not contain grammar exercises, adding to the teacher's frustration. According to Lynn, "a tutor should always be respectful and give their all to helping the student who comes in." On this day, a teacher made that principle difficult to apply, and she imposed a teaching strategy—decontextualized grammar instruction—that, historically, is not effective (Weaver, 1996). I noted that Lynn chose not to include this incident in her writing protocol, and she didn't mention it in her interview, either. The episode exemplifies the need for tutors to gain confidence in what they do, and to hold their own. But what does a tutor do when her superior is intemperate? On an administrative level, the co-director of the writing center spoke with the offending teacher later. The teacher backed out of her commitment to supervising in the writing center, and she never apologized for what happened. While Lynn did not overtly connect this incident to her emphasis on self-respect as a component of tutor identity, her articulation of such a characteristic may be a consequence of what happened to her.

With all of the work that a writing center can and should accomplish, it is absolutely necessary that teachers and tutors alike respect each other and share a common purpose for what they do. The training students receive is essential, but so is a need for teachers to understand how a writing center is supposed to work. Once this foundation is laid, tutors can begin to focus on respecting the specific needs of visiting students. Along these lines, Owen thought that courtesy in tutoring sessions is vital. "Always try to meet the student's needs in a way that is constructive," he wrote, "so while critiquing their work, do not be too negative. Never attempt to assert yourself as the superior to the student; they are already there to receive help from you." Based on what Owen wrote in response to the protocol, it is clear that he also regarded humility important to successful peer tutoring. Other participants stressed a role of servant leadership. It was as though they could not state enough that in order to staff a functioning writing center, it was necessary for tutors to respect both the student writers and themselves.

Conclusion

The participants described peer tutors as occupying a unique position within the school experience. They were teachers of a sort in that they used their expertise to convey knowledge and skills to an audience. Their audience, however, was their fellow students. It is not unusual for students to help each other in a classroom or other social setting, but the participants in this study tended to see themselves as having a distinct responsibility to share their writing knowledge with their peers. With this burden in mind, the tutors recognized that they must be flexible, prepared to work with student writers on any kind of writing for any class or other purpose. They had to be ready for conversations with writers to take a variety of turns, and they had to be ready to work with both willing and unwilling participants, for better or worse. Successful tutoring privileges the peer tutor-student writer relationship. Its advantages stem from

the experience tutors have with previous writing assessments—sometimes the exact assessments and the same teachers with whom student writers might have to work. When talking to tutors, student writers may receive more attention and more specific feedback than they might get from teachers, who have to manage classrooms and respond to many other requests for their attention. This does not mean that teachers are shirking their responsibilities. They simply have a lot to do, and the tutors in this study viewed themselves as supplementing instruction and feedback. Finally, peer tutors respected both their clients and themselves. They worked within the school and curriculum to aid their peers in succeeding as writers, but they also had confidence in their abilities.

How Do High School Students Make Meaning of the Peer Tutoring Process?

Over time, as students volunteered to serve as peer tutors and worked consistently, they began to interpret their experiences. The data from this study revealed a few different reasons for how participants perceived the peer tutoring process and how they benefited from their experience. Tutors saw their experience as providing opportunities for mutual listening, which often led to self-improvement. Having previously felt some confidence as writers, they looked forward to opportunities to deliver authentic feedback to their peers. In the end, they also found mutual benefits for both themselves and the students they tutored.

An Opportunity for Self-improvement

Some peer tutors initially got involved because they wanted to improve at their own writing. Peer tutors wanted to be better at writing. They were beginning to recognize the benefits of writing as a craft, and they work to refine that craft. The felt need to teach writing—the self-imposed obligation to do so through volunteerism—had spurned them to get better. For these students, improving at one's own writing was essential to tutoring. Among these participants,

tutors by definition are writers striving to improve their own writing. Self-improvement was essential to their lived experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Eight of the nine participants said that working in a high school writing center was a means of becoming better writers themselves. Gabrielle, for example, said, "I felt like I needed to work harder on my own writing in order to help other people with theirs." She went on to say, "[A]fter I became a tutor I begin to look deeper when I was looking at my own writing and my own papers, so I would go more in-depth when looking at grammar and looking at the way I was organizing myself." The benefits of tutoring spread beyond the tutored. Gabrielle's experience reflected research that it takes more than a teacher for a student to succeed at writing (Elbow, 1973; Lunsford, 1991/2011).

Such research also coincides with Tricia's conclusion that

> the more you read what people do right, what people do wrong, the more you can, the better you can write on your own, too, so tutoring helps you become a stronger writer even if you already think you're a strong writer or you are. You're still going to pick up on more nuances and develop in different ways and a lot faster than you would if you were just writing your own essays. Like reading other people's essays, it's like you're writing a thousand essays.

We learn by reading and experiencing the texts of others (Bruffee, 1984/1995), even if we do not plan on emulating those texts and even if we perceive these texts as flawed. Peer tutors may receive training from a standard manual such as that of Ryan and Zimmerelli (2016), but the writings of their peers serve as important texts as well. Peer tutors learn not just from essential

scholarship or teachers, but also from authentic, in-process writings. They do not learn just from outstanding writing, but also from encountering unrefined writing.

Other participants bore these observations out as well. Owen said, "[B]efore I became a peer tutor, I didn't review my own work that often. I really hated reading what I wrote. Now I'm definitely more willing to do that. I see the benefit from it … I think it's really helped me analyze my own writing." In these words, there is not just a need for becoming a better writer, but also for being more likely to consider one's own work. Eleanor also liked "looking at other people's writing styles and kind of learning from it."

According to Eleanor, improving at one's own writing aids in tutoring others in their writing, particularly with regard to enjoying one's writing: "[I]f you don't feel comfortable you're not going to enjoy it. And once you do feel more confident and comfortable in your own writing, you can enjoy it more." Cora writes that she "volunteered to better [her] own writing skills." One of Lunsford's (1991/2011) students once wrote that in tutoring, everyone was "making and remaking our knowing and ourselves with each other every day" (p. 51). That appears to be what happened with many of these participants. Through tutoring others, they were becoming different (hopefully better) writers.

Terence was an outlier in that he stated different things at different times. Of his own writing, he said, "I kind of go through the same process of writing each time, 'cause I mean, if it works, it works." Terence was already a successful and evidently confident writer. His demeanor was quiet and humble; his profession of capability was plain-spoken. At the same time, he associated the presence of the writing center with his desire to improve at writing and his growth as a leader: "[The writing center] definitely made me feel more like a team leader in a sense and how it could help me improve as a writer, too." Terence was a quiet but accomplished student

who took a number of Advanced Placement and honors courses while in high school. Volunteering in the writing center gave him an opportunity to apply his knowledge and skills to a context and flourish as he had not before. Peer tutoring made him a more reflective writer:

> Well, looking at papers, there were some things that I wasn't exactly sure about, so going back and looking through stuff, you know, I found out more stuff about writing that I could improve on as well as them, so I'd go back and figure out more about what certain aspects I was doing wrong, and I could apply that to other papers as I progressed.

Terence was spurred by his peers' struggles with writing to pursue self-improvement on his own. He had the humility to recognize that writing as a process required dialogue through which both parties might learn. Such a realization also reflected the reality that both parties are subject to the school's broader writing pedagogy. Terence and his peers all had to grapple with what their school and individual teachers expected from them. He and his peers had to navigate the "complex classroom contexts" that were present in any school setting (Fecho et al., 2006, p. 109). Terence was happy to help, but he also knew that he needed to help himself. He might also have sought help from his fellow peer tutors, as Tricia did and continued to do in her university writing center. Such humility gave him the confidence to eventually consider working at his university's writing center.

Improving at knowledge of language conventions was important to at least one participant. Darcy had a lot to say about how she learned (or did not learn) grammar while growing up. When she was younger (elementary and middle school age), she did not understand why rules of standard written English functioned as they did. She cited commas as one of these mysteries, and when, in ninth grade, she finally learned the rules overtly, she felt relieved. She also spoke of having problems with conclusions, particularly during timed writing, when she

would spend so much time with the rest of the essay that she would have little time to wrap up a piece of writing. Interestingly, after speaking of conclusions, she spoke of writing to fit a certain formula in argument or informational writing.

Talking Through the Writing Process

Writers visit a writing center for varying reasons. Sometimes students bring a finished draft, but there are many other times when students are in the earliest stages of writing, thinking through a topic or assessment before committing anything to paper. This thought process is also part of the writing process (Emig, 1977/2011), and participants found themselves reflecting on the times they aided their peers in it. Owen estimated that the number of students looking for ideas was "probably close to half."

According to a few of the tutors, the length of a paper was a concern for a number of student writers. Darcy said that students would come in specifically asking for help generating ideas that would sustain them through a specific length—"three or four pages," for example. From deciding on a central idea, Darcy would then aid students in breaking that idea down into "three or four ways that [they] can back that up … either with examples from the text … or just ways that they knew they could prove the point." In this way, Darcy asked students to think through the main idea, breaking it down into smaller components that writers could support with evidence. Gradually, the students' papers would take shape.

Owen appeared to welcome that interest on the part of his peers in seeking help at such an early stage, believing that when students brought in later drafts, he "wouldn't have to refine that much." Darcy, meanwhile, would give students the opportunity to write an introduction in the writing center to ensure that they were thinking and composing effectively. Idea development proved to be a concern for many students, but according to a few participants, those who were

willing to think through ideas with peer tutors found themselves productive. Cora even wrote fondly of one instance working with a younger student who found his voice through inputting his own ideas "in the mixture" and receiving her advice. Together, they "were able to pre-write a good idea of what the essay should be dealing about and how to express certain points." Weeks later, the visiting student stopped Cora in the hall to thank her; he had received an A on the essay. In retrospect, Cora wrote, "I was glad to have helped him, even if it had seemed like something so simple to me. It was glad knowing someone had benefitted from my tutoring."

Peer tutors found a mutual need between themselves and student writers for listening intently and empathizing. On at least one occasion, Gabrielle attributed her success at tutoring to her ability to listen, but also to the ability of her peer to listen to new ideas. This mindset requires humility. In video elicitation, Eleanor noticed that the visiting writer was willing to listen, but the tutor was not helping by being more forthcoming about what fixes were necessary in the student's narrative. Terrence believed that following-up after a tutoring session illustrated the benefits of listening. The logic of Terrence's observation is simple: "If they take [the assignment] and they bring it back in, I can see the improvement. But if they don't, then I kind of don't know if they followed the advice I gave them." Mutual listening leads to mutual feedback—if the tutoring relationship extends beyond a single session, creating a more mutual approach towards writing pedagogy (Halasek, 1999).

There were times when the participants engaged in old-fashioned proofreading of a paper, typically when students had completed revised drafts of papers. This element of the tutoring experience perhaps reflected preconceived notions of what tutoring was. A few participants referred to one teacher in particular who sent students to the writing center with already-graded papers. Such a method succeeds in little more than showing students where they

went wrong, with little chance of showing them how they could improve. It could even lead to labeling of students as poor writers (Shaughnessy, 1977/2011), perhaps from the writers themselves.

Several participants believed the skills they developed as tutors were transferable to other work they performed. Cora noticed that "you write in everything—everything—and I actually noticed like, for AP and Honors U.S., you do a lot of writing in there, too." Cora was a section leader in her school's marching band, and in her music, she believed that "writing music is like writing an essay because you have to make sure your styles are appropriate, you have to look for typos." Cora even compared musical phrasing to the style of an essay. She noticed that writing tasks in different disciplines had different requirements, such as that "you cannot be overly descriptive in a more of a literature-free writing style, in a scientific essay." Tricia said,

> I would also I guess say that I feel confident writing in other disciplines than I do in English because in English people are going to be looking at your writing as writing, not like as a vehicle to get the other point across.

As Hill (2016) wrote, transfer relies on using metacognitive techniques to reflect on learning and connect skills and knowledge to fields other than their discipline of origin. The tutors spoke occasionally of how they might encourage transfer among their peers, but more frequently, they spoke of how the tutoring process was an opportunity for them to transfer their own skills to other contexts.

The Varying Characteristics of Feedback

Talk of tutoring feedback covered varied approaches and experiences. Much of this reflected the participants' time as tutors, but the video elicitation portion of data collection also led to a lot of conversation critiquing the tutors in the video the participants watched. This

section discusses the different ways feedback proceeded and was received, and it does so looking at both the benefits of such feedback and the problems that might occur during attempts at dialogue.

Comprehensive feedback. It was important to the tutors for feedback to address whatever issues presented themselves within a given assignment. A number of participants noted in the video elicitation that the first tutor (Megan) gave feedback that was not as helpful as the feedback from the second tutor (Lauren), primarily due to a perception that Megan did not share all that she could have shared. Tricia stated that the second tutor was "more confident and just giving the person all the feedback that they could." Confidence and comprehensive feedback went hand-in-hand for Tricia, whereas Megan's feedback was "confusing" because it was not comprehensive. Eleanor had something similar to say of Lauren. She was put off by Lauren's editing. As Lauren works, the footage speeds up while music plays. Eleanor interpreted this as the view that "they were saying more was better no matter what." Initially, Eleanor believed "that could overwhelm somebody," but ultimately, she stated that she would prefer the second tutor, with her more comprehensive feedback, over the first.

After tutors gave feedback, they appreciated discovering when it worked. This happened occasionally, such as when Lynn "graded" a peer's paper, and the student returned a few weeks later. The use of the word "graded" is an intriguing one. In referring to giving feedback as grading, Lynn gave herself more authority than she otherwise had. According to Lynn, the student said, "'I'm going to come back and show you how much of a better grade I got.' Or whatever, and he actually did come back, and showed me that it helped, so that was cool." Here, the perception of a tutor's work as "grading" was on the part of the tutor. Lynn appeared to have

performed well with the student, and the student was satisfied enough that he decided to prove it to her. The writer's satisfaction validated Lynn's skills.

How (not) to engage in dialogue. Participants recognized the opportunity peer tutoring provided for authentic feedback, but they also recognized when feedback was flawed. The video elicitation prompted evaluations of tutoring dialogue from the participants.

With the most experience tutoring in both high school and university settings, Tricia had a lot to say about the video. She thought Lauren, the first tutor, talked too much:

> [T]he first tutor had like I guess a lot of opinions … There's like these little exclamations that didn't make a lot of sense. So she went about it that way but would kind of go back on her things. She was like, "This is a problem, but it's probably okay."

Owen concurred but described Lauren's feedback as "passive." He went on to say that Lauren would give copious feedback, but would always qualify it, saying things like "this sentence was really long, but it's fine, it's okay, you don't need to change it." Owen concluded that couching feedback in such hesitant language contradicted the initial need for feedback.

On the other hand, Owen saw Megan, the second tutor, as direct, but recognized that the student writer in the video embraced the criticism more easily. Owen faulted both tutors for failing to ask questions about the writer's process in composing the essay, of "what they were thinking as they were writing the paper … or even of the prompt itself, or like how they started to write the paper." Owen believed that such information would be of great assistance in understanding the paper, getting to know the student's writing, and ultimately of helping the writer improve at her work. He did point out that the narrator of the video "giving suggestions

and then giving reasons to back up" what the tutor was critiquing. Darcy described the first tutor as "casual"; both Darcy and Terence described such thorough tutoring as "professional."

Lynn faulted both tutors for not offering enough solid advice into the writing process as a whole. She thought this could be a real problem, that "if that girl ever wanted to write an essay again, she'd probably wouldn't know how to write it better, because neither of them really explained why you need to fix each one." Cora also critiqued both tutors in this manner: "you need to make sure they are aware of why it's like that, so you need to have a little bit of an explanation behind why you're correcting." According to Cora, it was of little use to frame one's criticism simply by pointing out problems to fix; identifying underlying principles of writing and language use would give writers the opportunity to become better writers.

Tricia believed (as the video stated) that the first tutor was flawed; according to her, the feedback was full of "little exclamations," comments that did not necessarily lead to cohesive advice for the writer. The tutor's inability to commit complicated the feedback further. Tricia questioned the idea that a problem with a student's writing was still "okay." If the problem merited a mention, then it might have needed to be addressed.

One unique interrogation of the video came from Tricia, who was not pleased with some of the feedback in the video, but surprisingly, she also questioned whether or not what she wanted to see would be included in the video anyway. She pointed out that "neither one of them asked the person what this was for or about," referring to the lack of context for the essay discussed in the video. While the video does compare two tutoring approaches, it does not provide all the details that a student might provide or that a tutor might learn about an assignment. Tricia's comments corroborate with Hashlamon's (2018) call for a more robust approach to including student writer perspectives in empirical studies of writing center tutoring.

A perspective like Tricia's highlights the fact that without presenting the student writer's point-of-view, the video in itself is not a complete presentation of the tutoring experience. Bromley et al. (2016) did find in their survey of student writers that the vast majority found themselves intellectually engaged. Such a finding may be beyond the scope of the video, which is clearly for training purposes, but a concern of Tricia's (and other participants) for considering how students perceived the help they received was a worthwhile one.

Training, whether through printed materials, viewing videos, or an interactive practicum, provides much learning and skill, but it doesn't always provide everything. There is tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) that tutors can only acquire through authentic practice. Kyle argued that writers do not always figure out how to write on their own; they need to hear explicit feedback: "They brought it to you to review it so that you can point these things out. If they don't want to make the change after you've pointed it out, that's their decision." Tricia pointed out that the student writer left the room while the tutors read the essay, something that she never saw happen in her high school or university tutoring experience. Feedback is very different when it is given in real-time because tutors and writers can interact immediately and directly. Tricia found confirmation in the feedback she saw in the video, acknowledging that "there were definitely a few things that … I think I said something similar right there." Judging based on her own experience, she found validation in what she saw.

Tricia interpreted the student writer in the video insightfully, observing that "when she's responding to the first person, she definitely just acts more confused when the person just gives kind of vague directions or appears to be withholding something important and that definitely happens." Tricia interpreted the writer as not fully receptive of the tutor's feedback, primarily because the tutor is not as forthcoming with that feedback. It is not that the second tutor is blunt,

but she is more honest and comprehensive in responding to the essay. As the most experienced tutor of all the participants, Tricia's responses were generally detailed, and she sometimes agreed with the video's narrator. At other times, she added commentary of her own. She interpreted the video based on her own experience.

Based on the feedback of the participants, tutoring requires feedback that addresses the paper holistically and with regard to anything that might affect readability. All participants, however, interpreted the video thoroughly. They articulated their perceptions of the student and her tutors with a real desire to offer critique. Their critique might be more pointed towards the first tutor, but they were not afraid to critique both tutoring approaches presented in the video.

Receptivity. There was a lot of talk among the participants about how visiting writers received feedback. How writers appeared to accept or not accept feedback was distinct from whether they visited the writing center voluntarily or under compulsion. As one might expect, some students appeared to take feedback well, while others did not. Some participants had ideas as to how such distinctions in receptivity developed. The video elicitation data was helpful in giving participants an opportunity to discuss this, and they had their own ideas as well.

Participants believed it was important to make sure visiting writers understood the feedback they received. Darcy made this observation during video elicitation. She believed that because the first tutor was reluctant to point out organizational problems in the writer's paper, "the student isn't as receptive in the tutoring and you can tell she doesn't understand the things she corrected her on." The second tutor, according to Darcy, "takes the problem head-on and kind of works to like, bring more structure and . . . share with issues that she . . . had on the surface level, and then kind of talks to her more about what happened with the organizational issues and how she would go about fixing them." As a result, the writer is "happier to have

gotten all that feedback because now she knows exactly what to do." In response to the video, Darcy perceived an advantage to the tutoring situation when the feedback is frank and comprehensive.

Darcy's interpretation was corroborated by Eleanor, who thought that one tutor did not offer adequate feedback, and that the writer noticed this, too: "she knew there was probably more that needed to be done. The second one, she seemed really receptive to the criticism all the way through and probably appreciative of the attention given to it." Eleanor also observed "one tutor was more thorough than the other, and she made more suggestions based on how the reader would receive what was written." In Eleanor's own experience, she believes that writers "were pretty responsive" to her feedback, and that this happened the majority of the time. Later, when again speaking of her own experience, Eleanor said, "I think if they came into the writing center, they were going to be accepting of, of the feedback—unless maybe the teacher sent them, and they didn't really want to come, you know?" Eleanor believed that anyone willing to visit was more likely to be receptive to her feedback.

Lynn could appear to be proud of when a student was receptive to her feedback. In one instance, a student came to the writing center whose paper already had lots of negative teacher feedback, which resulted in a low grade. Lynn said that the student "just seemed so upset, and it kind of bothered me in a way, that this essay, with all of these marks off, made her think that she wasn't good at writing, and I don't know, she just, was very upset about it." Lynn noted that one teacher in particular had a tendency to send students with their papers already graded so that they could get further feedback in what they did wrong—a sort of postmortem for the paper. This practice is the most concrete example of teacher pedagogy having the potential to negatively affect tutoring in the research setting. Lynn said this bothered her, and when students from this

teacher would visit her, she would comfort them by saying, “Hey, this is normal. You’re not the only one.”

At the same time, Lynn recalled a time when a student was less receptive to feedback. A student who appeared to be older than high school age entered the writing center, sent by a counselor in the building. Still, his origins were unclear, and when Lynn attempted to help him with his paper, he did not take her feedback seriously. This reaction frustrated Lynn, leading her to ask herself, “Why am I—like why am I here?” This instance, one among others, again illustrates the need for students to come voluntarily and purposefully.

When watching the video, Lynn was perplexed by the student writer’s easy reception of the feedback she received from the tutors. The student doesn’t question it at all, and Lynn found that odd. Lynn even perceived this as a “weakness.” Lynn also said that in her own experience, “I’ve never really had anybody not want to change it or not want to do better, so usually everybody’s always accepted what I was saying.” So her own experience correlated with what she saw in the video. Generally speaking, Lynn said,

> One of the things I like is when they would leave, they would always seem happy, you know?... if a student is coming to the writing center, that always shows, that already shows that they’re someone that you can actually help, ‘cause they’re coming to the writing center in the first place. They want help.

Despite a few outlier instances, Lynn found students amenable to the feedback she provided.

Cora colored her thoughts on receptivity with her experience in marching band. She recalled the difficulty of delivering negative feedback when she was a section leader in the band, and she did not relish the experience: “Like you don’t want to—you don’t want—you want to

hide away and go back, and you're not really open to criticism when stuff happens like that." Cora combatted this feeling by being sure to remember her identity as a student: "You have to make sure that you're coaching on the same leveling." The word "leveling" refers to the equal status between tutor and writer as students. Cora found this stance important because she believed tutors delivering critical feedback must be mindful of how they might receive similar feedback. Teachers are further removed from writing and may have to make a greater effort to empathize with their students in such a manner. In contrast to her band experiences, Cora tried to make visiting writers feel comfortable when she delivered feedback. As a result, she believed writers were "both very grateful and very happy because they can get this down and they're working with now." Cora was satisfied with the demeanor she presented when offering critiques of her peers' work.

Some students, however, were not receptive to the peer tutors in the writing center, heading directly for the teacher-chaperone who happened to be in the room. These students still trusted the teacher more than they would their peers. Since teachers actually graded the papers, this stance made sense. It was contrary to the operations of the writing center, however, and could be frustrating for the tutors. Cora characterized these students in this fashion:

> "I'm only here because so and so told me to come." So you're sitting here, you're quite aware that they don't actually want to be there and they don't actually want help with their writing. They just want to be there because maybe their teacher will give them an extra point.

Such resistance to getting help from a peer added tension to the climate of the writing center, and is not helpful. Nevertheless, it reinforces the idea that students are best off visiting the writing center willingly. Those who do, Cora observed, have a much more positive experience.

Occasionally (once per month, by Cora's estimation), a student would blatantly rebuff the peer tutor on duty, and once, a student deleted all of Cora's suggested changes in front of her immediately after receiving them. During video elicitation, Cora suggested that the video could have included more advice for delivering feedback students would appreciate:

> make sure you are not afraid to offend the writer, but make sure you are also talking in the right kind of way. One of the first writer's fears is that she was scared of hurting her feelings, and that should not be the way that a, that peer writing should be done.

Cora went on to say that students need to make sure their writing gets through to its intended audience, and make sure that they are not offended by tutors' feedback. It was important to strike a balance between delivering honest feedback and being sensitive to how students will receive that feedback.

These incidents were not nearly as frequent as when students were more receptive to whatever feedback they would receive. In Cora's experience, "Most of the time they will be very open or they will appreciate that you're helping them. You just have to make sure that they speak up a little bit." Cora did believe that students would often feel "ashamed" to walk in and said that writing centers could work to eliminate the stigma that sometimes (or perhaps often?) accompanied the need to visit.

Then there was the problem of a paper with so many problems that it needed extensive revisions. What if a paper was (to use Darcy's term) a "mess"? In such a case, the feedback could be overwhelming. Darcy recalled a student who had written a lengthy paper about making a knife—a unique topic, one that could lead to a fascinating piece of writing. She lamented, however, that the paper had a lot of stylistic and mechanical issues that would take a lot of work

to fix. Darcy could not remember the exact length, but it was somewhere between ten and fourteen pages. She tried to put herself in the writer's shoes and attempted to understand how he must have felt to get the feedback he did:

> [Y]ou write this whole thing, and then somebody tells you like literally like every few words you've written should be changed. And I, if it was me, I don't even think I would have gone back to change it all, if I had found that out after I had done it all.

Producing a paper of at least ten pages requires a tremendous amount of work. The simple completion of a draft is an achievement unto itself. Darcy regretted the feedback she gave—it felt damning to her, and she sympathized with the possibility that a writer might give up after hearing it all. She believed her feedback was not as deep as it could have been, which reflected the challenge of having to give it.

Such a problem reminds one of the contents of the training video and the reactions to the two tutors featured in it. Most participants pointed out the hesitancy Megan had to deal with the paper's true problems, and Darcy had a similar issue here. She knew the knife paper needed lots of work, but she also struggled with how to share with the writer the news that it would require that work. In this case, Darcy may have hit the limits of her training. Most of the time, tutors in this writing center worked on shorter papers of a few pages each. A ten- to fourteen-page paper was more than she was used to, and the paper needed so much work that she hardly knew where to start. Owen was realistic about this problem, too, writing that "sometimes [the writing center] is incapable of performing certain assistance." Owen was humble in his writing and interview, and that showed in this comment, which hits at a flaw in how the writing center operated. Unlike many university writing centers, this high school writing center was run by volunteer students, and the adults involved were helping on top of their expected duties as teachers. That may be

why Darcy struggled with this particular student, and it is possible that there were more such incidents in the day-to-day operations of the writing center.

Receptivity and video elicitation. Participants gave varied, nuanced views on the two tutors in the video. Kyle thought differently on how students received feedback. He believed engagement with students in healthy dialogue was essential to getting students to receive advice well. During video elicitation, he noted of both tutors, "There was no back-and-forth or engagement, which you know, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. You can't force someone to engage with you, but I think the engagement is important." Such an observation led him to recall an incident in his own experience, in which he offered extensive feedback to a student, only to have the writer reply "Okay," and walk out. Kyle was disappointed that there was no dialogue between himself and the writer. Later in the interview, Kyle referred to a reaction like this one as "neutral," and in his estimation, it was typically the worst thing that would happen when writers received his tutoring. Kyle believed the "neutral" reaction indicated a lack of engagement with the writing assignment in question: "Those were the people you could tell they didn't, they were not enjoying the paper. This was something they had to do."

Terence was a soft-spoken participant who did not speak at great length, but during video elicitation, he believed the student writer was receptive of the feedback she received from the tutors. In his own experience, he saw student writers as generally receptive as well. He qualified his affirmation, though, saying, "I don't know if they actually went through and followed it, unless they got the paper back and brought it back to me." In the tutoring moment, however, Terence said that most students were "positive" about the feedback they received.

The student writer, Darcy believed, was not as receptive to tutoring as she could be because the tutor notices but does not elaborate on deeper problems with the paper, such as

"organizational problems." As a result, the student writer "doesn't understand the things she corrected her on, or like why she brings the problem up and then discusses it." This corresponds to earlier comments Darcy made about her own frustration when she was younger and did not understand the underlying principles of grammar. Perhaps in that moment, she identified with the student writer. Darcy noticed that although the second tutor gave the writer more negative feedback, "she seemed to take that, like she was happier to have gotten all that feedback because now she knows exactly what to do." In Darcy's view, the writer was more receptive to harsher criticism.

Resistance and dissatisfaction. Most of the time, the participants described tutoring and tutoring sessions in positive terms, and their clients were appreciative of feedback. Nevertheless, there were exceptions from time to time when students were less receptive. During video elicitation, the participants also perceived flaws in how the tutors worked with a student writer.

Darcy said that "You can definitely tell when somebody comes in if, like they don't really care either way or like their teacher told them to come." Such resistance can be frustrating and can bring a tutoring session down. Darcy added, "[I]f it seems like they don't really care either way, then I'm just not gonna you know, put still effort into it, like 'Do you get that? Do you get that?' 'Cause then it's like badgering them, it's rude, anyway." In another example from Darcy's experience, a student came in for tutoring without having started the paper. This was nothing unusual, since students sometimes needed help at that stage. Darcy said that as she tutored him, "I tried to go through it and stuff with him, but like he just didn't seem like he cared enough to tune into what I was saying." Darcy believed writer buy-in was an essential component of the tutoring process. If students do not wish to visit the writing center and talk with their peers, then the session will not go as well.

Sessions with reluctant visitors could be frustrating. Gabrielle commented on a session that did not go well:

> A student came in with a completed paper that had not been graded. The paper had many grammar and structural mistakes. It was fixable, but I knew that it would take some time and effort on the part of the student. I told her that and asked when the paper was due, and she told me that it was supposed to be turned in the week before. I told her that it would take some time to complete, but she kind of shrugged it off. I did not feel that she was going to take most of my advice, nor did I believe that she was open to listening to it.

The key issue here is not necessarily the student writer's lack of interest in tutoring, but what experiences might have led to the lack of interest in the first place.

Sometimes, too, a student might want a tutor to provide a teacher's imprimatur on a paper, something the tutor simply cannot provide. Tricia expressed the apparent dissatisfaction a student writer might express in this instance: "In some instances, students are seeking more direct guidance from a teacher, and as a student, I can't speak for their teacher/professor, so the session is dissatisfying to them." While earlier examples from the data exhibited a perceived advantage in the opportunity for students to receive feedback from their peers, Tricia's observation reflected a perceived disadvantage when writers wanted feedback more definitively similar to a grade. By design, peer tutors do not offer such final evaluation of a paper. While they may work with rubrics provided by students and written by teachers, it would be unwise to predict a grade for a writer. Tutors can evaluate a student's writing according to criteria, but students wanting more than that will inevitably be disappointed.

Cora noted that “some people refused assistance in any way or form from their peers.” On one occasion, Cora experienced some of the most direct resistance in the study: A student needed proofreading of an essay to be entered in a competition. Cora noticed and pointed out a number of errors in mechanics, as well as problems with formatting. In her writing protocol, Cora wrote that the student “simply told me that I was wrong, and exited out of the document without saving any of the changes; thus, this student purposely deleted all of the work that I had helped proof read. The student did not come back afterwards.” For Cora, tutoring sometimes involved such encounters with students who did not want the help they were given.

The effects of resistance were not limited to visiting writers; they could also be felt among tutors. The resistance (or perhaps apathy) of one student caused Terence to disengage.

> I think the student was more forced to come in than willingly coming in, so they just kinda handed me the paper, and tried to do their own thing during it, and I mean, if they don’t want to improve or put in the effort to improve, I don’t exactly want to try to help them become better because they obviously don’t want it.

Left with a resistant student, perhaps tutors are left with a dilemma: work against the resistance, hoping to win students over, or put in a minimal effort and hope something clicks with these reluctant visitors. More often than not, tutors would not get terribly discouraged by resistant students, but it would be understandable if discouragement did happen.

Students were never required to tutor in this particular writing center, but Kyle warned against such a policy:

> Don't be like "Hey I'll give you five extra credit points if you go tutor this day," 'cause that's just going to get people that are going to go in there, they're just going in there just [slouches in chair and takes out phone] "Yeah, more adverbs. Yeah."

While comical, Kyle's comments were indicative of two things. One is the frustration that might develop among tutors working with students who do not wish to be in the writing center. Such a sentiment was echoed in the words of other participants in this study, such as those of Cora and Tricia. The other is the perception of resistant students as lazy and indifferent to feedback. The participants sometimes sympathized with students forced to visit the writing center, but it was not always clear where they wished to direct their frustration with the students' resistance. Surely the student writers' attitudes were not entirely self-generated. There are other factors at play in student resistance, such as teacher pedagogy demanding visits to the writing center, or a writing curriculum developed at least in part by personnel not invested in the school. Perhaps these student writers simply were not invested in the writing they were expected to do.

Cora's experience with reluctant visitors corresponded to Kyle's. She also expressed frustration with some tutoring sessions: "They just seem very off-putting like even when you do try to help them, they don't seem very accepting toward the advice, where they are just sitting there like, 'Mine is better.'" Such resistant visitors were not frequent; Cora estimated that students with those attitudes came "maybe like once a month, you would get someone that didn't want to go with you at all, and they did not want to work." Still, these students left enough of a mark that they tempered the enthusiasm with which she and others otherwise described their work.

With her combined experience in college and high school writing centers, Tricia found similarities in these situations. Unfortunately for her, reluctant visitors did not disappear at the

college level, and even then, instructors might require students to visit the writing center against their will. She recounted, “One way that they are similar is that there are the same amount of reluctant students that come that don’t want to be there in the first place that still come because they want extra credit, or whatever else, their teacher told them they had to.” None of the participants wrote or stated that visits from resistant writers eventually resulted in a willingness on the part of these students to return to the writing center. They may have, but the tutors themselves were either unaware of such changes of heart, forgot about them, or were correct in their observations that forced visits do not make for return visits.

Gratitude. Participants discussed gratitude in one of two ways. Some participants discussed the gratitude that visiting students expressed after receiving the help they needed. Others expressed their own gratitude at being able to work in the writing center.

Some participants seemed happy to see the gratitude of their fellow students, as if it was good for the tutors to see their work have an immediate effect. Lynn described all students visiting the writing center as wanting help, and she described her experience in terms of universal gratitude on the part of the writer. When they sought help from her, they said they would “act happier” and “be all thankful.” Lynn also said “most of them always had a positive attitude, like, ‘cause like, ‘I’m going to go home and fix this.’” Then she characterized a student writer as saying, “Thank you so much. I’m going to have such an easier time writing this.” Not everything Lynn said was positive, but these words were particularly optimistic in their assessment of client satisfaction. Earlier, I shared Cora’s success in dialoguing through the writing process with a student, and his gratitude applies here as well. He saw her in the hall to mention that he had received an A on the paper. Afterwards she wrote that she was “glad knowing someone had benefited” from her work. The gratitude in a tutoring session would

sometimes reciprocate, as it did for Cora in this instance. An experience like hers was not always to be expected, however; Tricia said that "sometimes the sessions don't seem to go well, so people are not grateful but they still come back and ask you to tutor them again." Tricia's interpretation of her clients' responses is intriguing, and seemingly contradictory. If her thinking is right, though, then her clients may recognize the value of visiting the writing center even if they do not initially enjoy the act of seeking help.

Peer tutors also felt gratitude just for being involved. There was the distinction of being involved in what participants perceived as an innovative project, and there was also the satisfaction of working in a specialized community. Tricia liked helping students with whom she did not typically interact. As she reflected on her time in the writing center, she found it easier to work with students she already knew, but also found that "working with people that were in regular ed classes also felt very rewarding because you were actually I guess able to help them in a more meaningful way." Tricia's classes were typically either Advanced Placement or Honors classes, and her statement reflects a certain separation between her peer group and that of students who do not take those classes. She never showed any disdain for students outside of Honors and AP classes who visited the writing center, but she also presumed that she accomplished more with them because (for whatever reason) they were not on the same exact academic path.

Conclusion

Participants saw the peer-tutoring process as multifaceted. They saw in their work an opportunity to improve their own writing, both through tutoring others and through their conversations with each other. Exposure to the writings of others led peer tutors to reflect on their own writing. By perceiving themselves as improving at their writing, they believed they

also became better tutors. Their tutoring and writing skills were interdependent and mutually beneficial. It is through this recursion that tutors began to view the tutoring process. The participants believed the tutoring process entailed mutual listening. Some of the topics of discussion included idea development and proofreading, but the participants overall approached papers from a global standpoint. During video elicitation, they pointed out that the filmed tutoring sessions lacked a more organic approach that addressed fundamental issues (audience awareness, for example) in student writing. Too much talking on the part of the tutor could be problematic and indicative of an unwillingness to understand the writer's concerns or the writing assignment itself. The participants believed most student writers were receptive to feedback, with occasional exceptions. When visiting students were resistant or less receptive to feedback, the tutors tended to sympathize with them, understanding that the writing process was difficult, and teachers were not always ideal communicators. When student writers were grateful, so were the tutors. All participants felt affirmed in their work by tutoring sessions they saw as successful.

How Do High School Peer Tutors Perceive the Tutoring Process Within a Student-Run High School Writing Center (HSWC)?

If one thing is clear about the role of the writing center as an entity in itself, it is that students saw the benefit of working within a dedicated space. Not all of them directly discussed the environment when discussing tutoring sessions, but they enjoyed completing their work in the writing center, and they valued the space as an incubator for community. Kyle pointed out that "there wasn't anything that existed like that at [his high school] at the time," and that excited him. He and his friends who started the center were eager to be on the ground floor of a new initiative. Eleanor, too, said that "it's good to have a set permanent location for everyone to

know this is all the writing tutors will be at these times." The space provided consistency for anyone seeking assistance, whether needed in September, December, or May.

In addition to tutoring, the writing center provided a space for extracurricular activities—some in which the communal bonds of the tutors grew stronger, and some in which the center provided space for creative writing. In their recollections, participants generally were fond of both the extracurricular activities and the tutoring, lining up with previous research infused with the enthusiasm of helping be a part of a writing center that was bigger than themselves (Fels & Wells, 2011; Greer & Trofimoff, 2013). The tutors participating in this study did not simply express gratitude for the writing center space; they grew as writers and people because of the space. This section discusses the tutoring and extracurricular activities as situated within the writing center as a physical space.

The High School Writing Center: A Vital Space for Developing Community

Mission. The writing center in this study had a mission of helping all students with any writing assignment for any class, and also for promoting writing for pleasure through extracurricular activities. While the participants in this study did touch on both of those foci, they described the mission of the writing center differently in their writing protocols.

To some degree, all of the participants mentioned that the mission was about helping students, "at all different levels of writing" (Darcy). Working in the writing center required finesse, articulated well by Thompson (2018) as "elastic English" (p. 3)—the ability to address all manner of issues when encountering the writer and the page. This was no surprise. Terence said the mission was to "help everyone become a better writer," and that "peer tutors also become better writers" when they work in the writing center. Gabrielle described the writing center as "a resource for people who struggle at any point in the writing process." Kyle put more

of a networking spin on his description, characterizing the writing center's mission as putting "skilled students willing to help in contact with those students that are seeking the help." Similarly to Terence, Kyle believed peer tutoring has the potential to "benefit all parties." These articulations of the mission are different, but they get to the heart of what the writing center was about, with the added advantage (according to a couple of participants) of helping peer tutors become better writers. Other participants discussed this benefit in their interviews and in response to different questions, but for Terence and Kyle, self-improvement was fundamental to a writing center's mission. The study gave participants the confidence to tutor others after they graduated: Gabrielle tutored in math, Owen and Darcy helped their college friends with their writing, and Kyle became an undergraduate teaching assistant in his major. The ideals at work in these participants' minds are indicative of some earlier scholarship in writing center studies that prizes conversation as king in writing center spaces (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2011; North, 1984/1995, 1991). These theoretical pieces articulate the idea that the writing center is its own space designated for the dialogue the authors hope to hear. Inherent within the recollections of these participants is the fact that their writing center was its own space. If the participants look back fondly on their time as tutors, it would be wrong to dismiss the fact of the center as a unique physical space. They reported for duty, usually outside of regular school hours, and the visiting students, for the most part, voluntarily walked in for help. The space may have added value to the work that was taking place. It legitimized the work in a way that might not have happened if the tutoring took place in a teacher's classroom, a cafeteria, or some other room in the school.

In a couple of other descriptions, the participants used more unique language to define the writing center's mission. Cora wrote that the writing center's feedback should be "unbiased

and judge free" and "positive criticism." The space should be "stress free." Student writers "should not feel embarrassed" to be there and should feel "as if they are not a burden for needing assistance." Eleanor, too, thought people should "feel comfortable" when they visit, and she also said that a writing center should make students "enjoy writing." This language reflected a desire to enable verbal thought (Vygotsky, 1962/2012) in as comfortable a manner as possible and provided (figurative and literal) room for elastic English (Thompson, 2018). Lynn said the writing center should be "well known." If tutors can achieve the progress in writing that they hope to in their descriptions, then they will make the center's reputation into one where students know they will receive the help they need. While tutors could work anywhere, the separate space made it easier for tutors and visiting writers to congregate. It also allowed for tutors to grow closer in their work.

Tricia had some distinctive things to say as well. The overall message of Tricia's words is that "A writing center shouldn't make better papers. The goal should be tutoring stronger writers." Tricia did not want the positive effects of the writing center to be short-term—she wanted the advice to last long beyond one assignment. Some of her other language included that a writing center "gives tools" for writing successfully. Students must leave "feeling like they have learned" without being "patronizing." Tricia's words suggest that writing centers should keep the whole student writer in mind. Tutoring is a long game; if focused strictly on the assignment at hand, its long-term effects are limited. Focusing on deeper pedagogy allows the center to benefit students the most and reflects a need to promote the idea of tutor as artist, flexibly addressing the writer's needs in myriad ways (Sherwood, 2007/2011). Such moves reflect the potential for long-term involvement of the writing center in school pedagogy, including the teachers who volunteer to chaperone the center and those (like my co-founder and

myself) who direct the writing center. Adult involvement tends to be over the course of more years than the peer tutors are part of the school.

Physical space. I documented in my field notes a physical description of the writing center space. The writing center in this study was an average-size classroom (24' x 24') compared to others in the building, and it was adjacent to the school's media center. As students entered the media center, they could access the Writing Center through a door to their left, just past a storage room, a teacher work room, and a bank of computers. The writing center was windowless, save for a door that opened to the outside of the main school building. Students who entered saw a main desk where the supervising teacher sat. The room had conference tables for the first few years it was open; these tables were eventually replaced by semi-triangular desks that could fit together to form groups of four. Along two walls were computers, which tutors and visiting writers could use. Another wall contained a few bookcases, which were left over from when the room was a career center. We put some books and supplies in them, but we never filled them—they provided a lot of shelf space. On the walls were a few posters pertaining to writing strategies, and a whiteboard, which typically contained a combination of upcoming meetings and random notes written by the tutors.

Overall, the cream-colored brick walls of the writing center were decorated in a rather spare fashion. In my experience, the tutors spent their time in the writing center either talking with each other or with clientele--they did not talk much about decorating. The fact that there was a dedicated physical space for the writing center made a difference in how participants described their experiences as peer tutors. As seen below, some thought the location of the writing center was beneficial, and others appreciated the ambience that developed in the center.

Various participants spoke of a few different characteristics that arose from the writing center's existence as a unique physical space.

It was advantageous that this particular writing center was adjacent to the library. Owen said, "And it also was a quiet space, because it was in the library, and not many students were in the library at the time. Or they were supposed to be quiet anyway and I think that's also important." Noticeably, Owen conflated the writing center with the library. This was owing not simply to its location, but also to how students entered the writing center. While there was a door that opened to the outside, it remained locked for security reasons. Students entered the writing center by walking through the school's media center, so to say that the writing center was "in the library" was an easy way both to describe its location and to direct people on how to get there. Kyle thought that "it should be logically a place where people are going to study and write anyway" but that "intent" was really most important. Lynn did note that not everyone knew the location of the writing center, but that the library staff would always point students in the right direction. The center was also close to the school's cafeteria, so Darcy said, "[I]f we were doing lunch, people would come and drop it off and then go get food and then bring their food, and then eat it." This convenience may have added to the value of the writing center's location. Darcy concluded, "So that's kind of nice to have a space that you can like—like the tutor will be there, and then you can give them time to do what they need to do and then they can come back." Tutors could begin looking at a student's work while they stepped out for a few minutes. The presence of lunch in the writing center also reflected a laidback atmosphere.

Terence thought the room needed to be "quiet," as did Eleanor and Cora. These participants believed that the writing center needed to be an approachable, desirable place to be. Anyone who visited needed to know that it was perfectly all right to be there. At no point should

there be any identification of the writing center as simply an environment for remediation. The writing center's success had to depend not just on students who were required to visit, but on students who wanted to be there.

Talk of the writing center sometimes produced fond memories. Lynn said that the writing center was "cool" and "smells good … like peppermint or something." She even suspected that the center had an air freshener (it did not). In contrast, she thought the room in the training video was bland. The comfort of the writing center, despite its lack of elaborate decoration, was "homey" to her. She liked being there. Comfort was vital to Cora as well, who believed that students who were not comfortable when they visited would not return. She did not want the writing center to turn into "a teacher's office," which Cora believed existed in students' nightmares. She once even tutored a student in the library who would not enter the writing center—the student was that apprehensive about entering the place. This student's discomfort was not necessarily a product of the writing center itself, but perhaps a product of apprehension about the writing process.

Not everyone was as attached to the room as Owen was, or thought that it was quite so essential that the writing center be where it was. Eleanor said "the location is slightly flexible." While she did believe that some places, such as a football game, were not desirable for tutoring, she believed that "as long as there's a table that you both can sit at, at the same level, and looking at something sitting next to each other, a classroom would be fine." The flexibility Eleanor demonstrated here situated tutoring as a process that was not so dependent on space, but on having the necessary furniture and a particular physical stance. Sitting side-by-side was more important to Eleanor than the location of the writing center or the room itself. Her comfort for a classroom was qualified by her professed need for the room to be "comfortable" and "quiet." The

room needed to be a consistent location as well. Kyle echoed this need by imagining having to coordinate between multiple programs for the same space. Such constant logistical issues would complicate things. The more Eleanor described a hypothetical useful location for writing tutoring, the more the space sounded like one dedicated to tutoring: quiet, comfortable, permanent, properly furnished.

Despite the perceived quiet in the writing center as it was or in an imagined writing center, there was still an advantage to overlapping tutoring sessions, at least for Darcy. She said, "it was nice to have space because we could be separate from each other. Like we could have three tutors and be like five desks away from each other at all times, and that was nice." There was enough space in the room that multiple tutoring sessions could take place without the noise level distracting anyone from their work. At the same time, Darcy said, "we were also close enough to like overhear and like, 'Oh, actually, to add onto that point,' if we needed to, which was rare." In Darcy's mind, it was worthwhile to be able to comment on other tutoring sessions. Tutoring became an activity for her where she could address multiple papers simultaneously, even if she did not do so very often.

The identification of the room with writing tutoring was important. When Owen spoke of the room, he described it as "a location for students to go and get writing help and then so if I am a peer tutor there, it was just easier to like, students know what the writing center is about." That students knew there was a specific place to get help was important to him. Owen described it as "a place where [tutors] can really focus on the student's paper and talk freely about it, which is important that there wasn't anything else going on around them that would detract from the session itself." The location of the space as apart from a typical classroom was also critical to him. In that classroom, any number of activities may be going on. The teacher could be

facilitating whole-class instruction, the students could be engaged in small group work, or students could be working individually. Whatever work is going on may be noisy, or it may require silence. It may be difficult for students to receive individual attention, and as some participants said previously, there are perceived advantages to seeking a peer for help, such as a lack of intimidation. Since any of these factors could be at play in the classroom, the writing center provided isolation from many potential distractions. Owen concluded that the writing center provided a niche for students who needed help but would get the best help by leaving the classroom or visiting the space outside of class time.

Community

When the writing center in this study was first established, establishing community mattered a great deal. A persistent theme among the participants was the value of being around like-minded tutors and teachers who could serve as mentors in tutoring work. As Tricia put it, "[I]t's better if people like each other, so stuff like that can lead to those things and make the environment just better all around." Tricia's comment found additional confirmation in her university writing center experience, which served as a more formal workspace. She got along with her high school peers, just as she now gets along with her university co-workers.

When the tutors in the writing center (and in this study) found themselves working together, they were sometimes already friends. Eleanor referred to the writing center as an "extended academic environment" where she could also be social. She thought the writing center was "a good way to hang out" with her friends. She may not have joined up if her friends were not involved already. Together they were "nerdy because we were really into school. We were pretty good students, and I enjoyed school, I still do. It's nerdy, and I like it." Eleanor self-identified as a nerd and socialized with students she also recognized as nerdy. For her, the

writing center gave her specialized community a space to pursue specific interests while also serving the broader school community. Tricia and Eleanor's experiences are indicative of the social benefits of assembling a tight-knit writing center staff. In their minds, such camaraderie is essential. These participants were so comfortable with how they worked together and tutored others that tutoring became an act of leisure (Pieper, 2009), even though the tutoring was largely in the interest of completing assigned work.

The establishment of community provided a collegial atmosphere and laid a groundwork for both continuing existing friendships and conversing comfortably about various writing matters. Over time, the writing center became a learning community (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013) that flourished within the school and aided students from many different classrooms. While scholarship on learning communities is often focused on teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), the participants in this study worked together in a similar fashion. This flourishing could not have taken place without having strong social bonds among the tutors, some of which already existed, and some of which formed organically as the tutors got to know each other.

The writing center provided an opportunity for student staff to give each other affirmative comments. Pieper's (2009) thought also resonates here as he argued that affirmation fueled leisure and allowed people to grow in their thinking. Tricia remembered times of affirmation fondly, saying, "[J]ust getting good feedback from teachers and I guess peers when there's peer review, and if you're weird like me and like, you and your friends read each other's papers, and you're like, 'That's great! You're so smart.'" Tricia found reasonable validation of her work built her confidence as a writer. Among the staff she worked with, this was helpful in becoming a better writer. The writing center was not simply a place for students to help visiting peers. Sometimes tutors would consult on each other's papers. Cora thought "You're helping as a

friend, you're giving positive criticisms if you need it. And you're letting them bounce brainstorms off of you. It's a casual conversation that's set to help the person further in their writing." Among several participants, the observation rose that when students were together as a writing center staff, working in the same space as teachers, more dialogue about writing was likely to happen, and that dialogue was a positive experience for them. For the tutors, this dialogue was typically outside of the bounds of evaluation—the teachers present were not always their current English teachers, and when talking with their peers, the tutors did not always share the same classes. Learning to write happened beyond whatever writing these tutors had to complete for their classes of record. Being in the writing center with like-minded peers and teachers was enough for them to continue the process. Community turned the tutors into better students of writing.

Working with teachers. Occasionally, students would also find an opportunity to include stronger working relationships with teachers as a part of this community experience. Lynn recalled,

> like the second year I was there, [an English teacher] was there, and I like, made really good friends with her throughout the year. And then [the Yearbook teacher and co-founder of the writing center] left for Yearbook, and she [the first teacher] became the Yearbook teacher, so it was cool that I met her through the writing center, so I already knew her well, and I knew she was going to be an awesome yearbook teacher.

Yearbook is a particularly involved program in which students work long hours alongside their advisor to produce an accurate, engaging, and visually appealing record of the school's entire year, including student life, academics, and extracurricular programs. At the end of one year, the co-founder of the writing center left the school for another one in the area—one that was closer

to his home, and where he would take over the Yearbook program. Lynn's concern for her school's Yearbook program was alleviated when she discovered that it would be taken over by a teacher who was also involved in the writing center. In this experience, a teacher-student relationship was strengthened because both were active in the writing center. Flourishing began in the center between these two, and they were able to forge a working relationship that would carry over into the Yearbook program (field notes).

A couple of other participants reported that they were able to work better as writers and tutors because of their interactions with teachers. These interactions led them to think about how they might best pursue tutoring within the writing center space. Darcy's memories of helping within the writing center community are intertwined with her experience working with teachers, particularly of her memories of receiving similar help when she was younger. She used to wonder why she could not master particular rules of mechanics, but one teacher in particular helped not just correct her work, but also understand the rules underlining standard written English. Such learning, realized over time, has motivated Darcy to help others who might experience the same confusion.

> It's just like kind of, nice, for me to read something and be like 'Oh, that's wrong.' And like I know that, and if I was writing this, I wouldn't have done that. It just kind of feels good. I was so stressed about it when I was younger, like it made me so freaked out. Like when did everyone else learn this? I never learned it. I feel like I should know.

For Darcy, helping others was the essence of tutoring because she was first helped by someone else. Getting help was a prerequisite for helping. In the context of a writing center, she and her peers received help all the time, from supervising teachers, and more importantly, from each other. Without community, this kind of help would be harder to give and receive for all involved

parties. It should be noted, however, that Darcy's formative experience began with the frustration of not knowing basic language conventions when she was younger. She rooted her positive experience in the writing center in a negative experience she had as a child. This memory added a sense of urgency to her work within the writing center. She wanted other students to have better experiences with learning to write than she had when she was younger. The writing center community provided her with that opportunity.

In contrast to Darcy's experience, Owen reported the benefits of interacting with teachers and other tutors in order to help a fellow student: "Most of the time I was able to help them with their problem and if I couldn't help them, I tried to get someone that could, whether that be the supervising teacher in the writing center at the time or another peer." Eleanor, too, appreciated the opportunity to share tutoring duties with others. If just one person was in the writing center, "they would have more than one person helping them, which I liked. I felt more comfortable having a partner, and we would all sit down and read what that person had written and help them as much as we could until they had to go or we had to go." An essential part of developing community in the writing center was this ability to seek help wherever one could find it. Peer tutors were comfortable talking with each other and with others when they did not know the best possible feedback to give a student writer. For Darcy, this was almost a crusade to prevent other students from experiencing the confusion she did while she was growing up; for others, it was about maintaining a meaningful dialogue in a low-stakes environment. As Cora said, "you build a sense of community helping out too, so it's not just peer tutors helping out other students, it's peer tutors helping other peer tutors."

There is no denying the ease with which many participants in this study adopted the role as peer tutor and developed the humility necessary to perform their task. These students had been

writers in the classroom for their entire schooling lives, and they had evidently spent that time knowing they had to seek help when they needed it. By doing the same as peer tutors, they modeled for visiting writers a necessary virtue for flourishing as writers, and more broadly as students. The environment of the writing center, where students were able to pursue this specific work to perform these tasks and develop community as both writers and tutors, was a necessary element in the success of everyone involved. Some participants spoke more of their enjoyment as part of the writing center and working within a circle of friends, while others, while certainly speaking of that, also spoke of the pleasure of writing. Kyle said that he "always enjoyed writing and reading and been good at it," while Cora said that she continued to "freewrite" regularly, perceiving that "normally people don't freewrite anymore." Freewriting, as Cora defined it, was writing freely, just for the sake of writing. Again, this kind of writing typically takes place outside of a curriculum, and some participants found it very important to do. The writing center provided an environment where students could feel encouraged to write without an immediate academic purpose. Such attitudes complemented the center's attempts to coordinate various extracurricular activities.

Extracurricular activity. Many students who aided others in the writing center joined initially out of a desire to join the National English Honor Society (NEHS). Students joining the club had to have passed at least two semesters of high school English and maintained a minimum 3.0 grade-point average. After submitting an application, students went through an induction ceremony, during which they pledged to commit to serve the local community and promote the literary arts (Induction Ceremony Script). Community service was expected of each member of the NEHS, and the bulk of that community service occurred through the writing center. In addition to tutoring, the writing center planned extracurricular events both to promote the writing

center and to encourage writing outside the curriculum. While these activities are not easily identifiable as "tutoring," a number of participants believed part of their work as tutors included their participation in these events. They let them partly define their tutoring experience. Tricia confirmed this in her interview, saying,

> the goal of most extracurricular activities is to generate interest in writing centers, whether that's to get students who really like writing or reading to like, be interested in tutoring, or (which I think is happening on some level), or if it's just to get students to realize "Oh, I like writing poetry."

The extracurricular activities were popular among writing center staff, and they also attracted a small but devoted audience of non-tutoring peers who would visit or participate just for fun. The Short Story Sprint, for example, was an annual contest in which students had one week to write a short story in a genre drawn out of a hat (field notes, Judges Instructions). Sometimes they would come just to listen to their friends' work be read, or to engage in questions at a trivia contest. Tricia also said that extracurricular writing in the writing center is "a way to make it seem a less scary place for people for people who are really reluctant to go." Providing extracurricular writing opportunities also affords students the chance to grow more comfortable with writing. This kind of writing also adds to the total amount of writing everyone needs in order to improve. Experience with writing is a fair application of the idea that experience leads to greater learning (Dewey, 1916, 1938). Extracurricular writing within the writing center space, with friends and other peers, also has a social component, adding to the potential for deeper development of writing skills (Knoeller, 2004). It also gives students more time working within a writing process that is likely different from what is done in a traditional classroom. Since the writing process is nonlinear and recursive (Flower and Hayes, 1980/2011), writing creatively in a nonthreatening

setting gave students the experience they need without the burden of impressing a teacher. Such writing is the epitome of Elbow's (1973) "teacherless" writing class (p. 76).

Community service. About tutoring, Kyle said that "it was very helpful, and it gave me a fun thing to do after school before I did my ten billion other fun things, 'cause I just take up way too many extracurriculars." The peer tutoring that took place in the writing center was a form of community service, but students also had opportunities to serve in other contexts with other groups of students. The peer tutors did not just write for each other or for other peers. Writing was also a means of community service.

One opportunity for community service occurred every year, when kindergarten students would visit the school for a couple of hours of Christmas-themed activities. Visiting students had the chance to visit with Santa Claus, and they also progressed through a series of stations sponsored by a variety of clubs on campus. At the English Honor Society table, tutors helped the kindergarten students compose letters to Santa Claus. Terence described the work that he and others did:

> [W]e write down what the kids wanted for Christmas, and then we put it in an envelope, and if they wanted to draw a picture they could draw a picture on it, and then we'd give it to them and tell them to give it to their parents so Santa would know what they want for Christmas.

Reflecting several months after participating, Terence enjoyed this experience, saying,

> It definitely brought a smile to your face, because they were all goofy. And they wanted some weird things for Christmas, but overall, I thought it was beneficial to them, because they got to have fun, and to us because we got to help out, you know, the community.

This Christmas activity led Cora to believe that "writing is very important in the community." The tutors liked helping out beyond classroom assignments. They valued writing enough to work hard at helping others in a slightly different context, with a different age group—an age group that needed much more help simply getting words on the page. The writing involved was extracurricular for both the tutors and the kindergarten students. No one would receive a grade for a letter to Santa. The fun nature of the composition kept everyone engaged.

Another opportunity involved a visit to a local elementary school to provide writing activities at their arts and writing festival. Lynn explained the activity they led with students of varying grade levels at the school: "We did the paper bags where they reach in and feel what is inside without looking. After they felt whatever was in the bag, we would help them write about and describe what was in the bag." The activity was intended to be fun, allowing students to write in a way that they might not be able to in a standardized curriculum. Lynn reflected in her writing protocol that "It was interesting being able to help little kids with their writing and not students my age like I usually do." The time at the elementary school provided an opportunity to do something other than the usual peer tutoring in the writing center. Between this event and the kindergarten Christmas event, it was appealing to some participants to play with writing in partnership with younger students. These tutors had an ease with the writing process that allowed them to share it with others. They added to their experience, so writing was more likely to become a habit (Dewey, 1916, 1938) and tool for flourishing—particularly their own, through their voluntary acts (Hanley, 2009).

When reflecting on their time working with elementary and high school students outside of the usual curricular standards, participants sometimes concluded that venturing outside the curriculum was important to promoting the promise of writing for reflection and enjoyment. It

was as if the participants concluded that in order to flourish as writers, people (maybe even people of all ages) needed to write outside of rigid curricular requirements. On the kindergarten event, Cora said,

> It really opens the little kids up to being able to write their little things, and even though it's simple, kindergarten is still really important to developing lit because I feel like a lot of the time, people start to hate literature by the time they're graduated because they don't want—they're scared of writing.

These words of Cora's reflect a desire to make writing more pleasurable than she perceives the school system allows it to be. The writing center provided a space where students could learn to tolerate, succeed in, and hopefully grow to love writing. For the participants, cultivating writing habits was a charitable but nonetheless virtuous act. In Cora's mind, her work set right the outlook her peers might have had due to burdensome writing requirements in class. With the volunteer work with elementary students, her work laid a foundation for younger students to enjoy writing before they too had to become fearful of the very act of writing. The younger students gained from Cora's charitable acts (Hanley, 2009).

Familiarity with each other. Parties, whether at the end of the year or as the end-of-the-year holidays approached, served no purpose other than socializing. Only one participant, Eleanor, spoke of them in any detail. She recalled that everyone brought food to eat, I might give a "debriefing" to sum up the year's activity, and then everyone would chat freely while eating. We both laughed when she mentioned the debriefing, but for the most part, the parties were a chance to solidify the community that had developed among the writing center staff. Their lack of direct relevance to peer tutoring, however, did not stop participants from sharing fond memories of the times they did have these small parties. Eleanor went on to say, "I enjoyed

spending time with the other writing center tutors looking back on the semester and our experiences. I was already friends with several of the other tutors, but I found it fun to get everyone in a room together." While many of these students were already friends, the opportunity to bond within the writing center appeared to mean a great deal to her.

Conclusion

Overall, participants had much to say about the writing center space as a context for tutoring, a venue for extracurricular writing-based activities, and a base for building community. Multiple participants described the benefits of tutoring other students in a space dedicated to tutoring. The space allowed them to work without distraction from a larger class, and it permitted the tutors to discuss best practices, sometimes within sessions with student writers. The writing center was the location for writing contests, parties, and other social events, which established the vitality of writing as more than a requirement to pass coursework. The center also provided a space for teachers and tutors to build community among themselves, but also among their clientele. The school itself, in providing a room for writing tutoring, established writing as a priority for its academic progress.

Concluding Comments on Findings

The participants in this study readily wrote about and discussed their experiences as peer tutors in a high school writing center. They completed a writing protocol and sat for an interview which prompted them to talk about their own tutoring and to comment on a video of two tutoring sessions. The writing and conversations focused on how participants identified as peer tutors, how they articulated different facets of the peer tutoring process, and how they perceived their work within the physical space of the writing center.

How Do High School Peer Tutors Articulate Their Identities as Peer Tutors?

With regard to tutor identity, peer tutors described themselves in terms that reflected a perceived role as volunteer teachers whose work supplemented that of teachers of record. They felt responsible for passing their knowledge and skills onto their peers, so they took this role quite seriously. The participants believed flexibility was critical in their dialogues with their peers. They also believed their abilities stemmed from their experiences as students of various teachers in the school, sometimes having completed the same writing assessments with which their peers struggled. Tutors who recognized themselves as supplementing classroom instruction did not necessarily believe that instruction was deficient, but that teachers themselves are unable to offer the consistent one-on-one help that peer tutors can. When working with clients, participants had a great deal of respect for their peers for having the courage to visit the writing center and the willingness to receive feedback on their work.

How Do High School Students Make Meaning of the Peer Tutoring Process?

Many of the participants in this study wished to improve their own writing, and that was often a motivating factor in becoming peer tutors. In the dialogic nature of the tutoring process, they found opportunities to talk through the best practices of writing. Many of the tutors were also collegial enough that they found themselves talking with each other about writing whenever they worked together in the writing center. Topics covered in much of this dialogue included idea development and mechanics. It was vital for the tutors to understand from a global, whole-paper standpoint what writers were attempting to accomplish in their papers. The tutors relished positive feedback from visiting writers. Occasionally, their peers were less receptive to feedback, but the tutors continued undaunted and were proud of their contributions to the tutoring process. Overall, the successes of the tutoring process overshadowed the setbacks.

How Do High School Peer Tutors Perceive the Tutoring Process Within a Student-Run High School Writing Center (HSWC)?

The participants saw great value in the writing center as a physical space. Working within a dedicated space afforded the tutors and their peers time and presence away from the distractions of other students, whether in the classroom or another busy space (such as the cafeteria) within the school. The writing center was also a place where teachers and students could build a writing-centered community. Students could talk about writing assessment with each other, but they could also pursue extracurricular writing, sharing it with each other. The writing center also coordinated volunteer opportunities for peer tutors to lead elementary students in pleasure writing activities, such as writing letters to Santa Claus or writing at their own schools during a special day devoted to the arts. The students and teachers in the writing center were proud of their space and enjoyed working in it.

Undoubtedly, the participants had much to say about their time as tutors. They reflected on it with enthusiasm and were grateful for the experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?

2. How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?

3. How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?

It is important to note that the investigation following from these questions yielded data and conclusions that apply only to this group, and not more broadly to all peer tutors and writing centers. Within this study, data collection and analysis uncovered three major themes. First, the peer tutors participating in this study were both equals with visiting students and mediators between their peers and teachers. These practitioners of peer tutoring developed virtues that motivated their work. Second, peer tutoring proved to be a means of delivering feedback on writing that was revelatory in ways that feedback from a teacher is not. The peer tutors in this study used knowledge not just of writing, but of the teachers assessing it, as part of their feedback. Finally, having worked in (and in some cases, helped start) a high school writing center, these peer tutors perceived themselves with a particular agency that they did not have within their classes. The following discussion is organized first with restatement of the principles of hermeneutical phenomenology and my own biases. Then I will discuss the findings according to the above themes. Using writing center theory and research, I have attempted to engage with the "achievements" of past scholarship and the recollections of tutors. Following all this research

and analysis, I present conclusions and recommendations that may be worth considering as writing centers continue to develop in high schools.

Experience as Text

This study engaged in philosophical hermeneutics as a means of interpreting the lived experiences of high school writing tutors. Davey (2011) writes that "What concerns philosophical hermeneutics above all are the transformative effects of an educational disposition which engages dialogically with the achievements of the cultural past and is open to responding to the unavoidable challenges of the future" (p. 45). Put simply, when applied to educational contexts, this form of hermeneutics must converse with past research and integrate it with current experiences and new research. There has already been plentiful scholarship on the writing process (Graham, 2019; Graham et al., 2016; Perl, 1994; Smagorinsky, 2006) and writing centers (Murphy & Sherwood, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016) published over the last few decades. While the tutors in this study are not necessarily reflecting on this whole body of research, their experiences are a part of the continuing progress towards greater understanding of the essence of the peer tutoring process as situated within a high school writing center. My interpretation of their experiences is informed by the body of research, and it will in turn inform further research as part of the hermeneutic circle (Crotty, 1997), illuminating what Spence (2017) calls "a sense of tension between that which is known and that which may yet be known" (p. 840). Spence goes on to declare that "a good phenomenological thesis must 'show' and 'tell'" (p. 840). In this study, I have aimed to show how peer tutors described their experiences and to tell (so to speak) what this might reveal about the phenomenon of peer tutoring in their context.

The participants in this study described experiences that corroborated with the practitioner-oriented scholarship on high school writing centers produced in earlier years

(Farrell, 1989; Fels & Wells, 2011; Kent, 2017), with some distinctions produced by the simple fact that these tutors are different people. They also found meaning in their volunteerism, just as DeFeo and Caparas (2014) discovered when interpreting narratives from university writing center veterans. All participants looked back fondly on their time in the writing center, and they perceived benefits in different ways. Of the participants, only Tricia continued to work in a university writing center, while Terence expressed a desire to work in one. All participants, though, had distinctive experiences which helped flesh out what it means to tutor in a high school writing center that is based on the university model. The high school, however, was a different context, which led certain tutoring experiences and procedures to differ from what one might encounter in a university writing center.

Revisiting My Own Biases

As Gadamer (1975) writes, there are horizons from which we see and interpret experiences. There are multiple horizons within the present study from which to gain understanding of the data. The aforementioned body of scholarship is one of those horizons; so are the experiences of the participants. As I reflect on both previous research and the data at hand, these horizons fuse into one presentation. The end result is not free from bias, and I must again acknowledge my own positionality before moving on. I was co-founder of the writing center where these participants worked. I must constantly question how I interpret the data in this study, but in doing so, the dialogue continues between prior research, participant experiences, and myself (Spence, 2017). According to Gadamer (1975), the dialogues between parties are not simply transactions without consequence for one or more of the parties involved. They are rather transformations in which parties "come under the influence of the truth of the object" and become "a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (p. 387). The potential

changes to understanding apply not just to specific ideas about writing center research and tutoring, but also to phenomenology. As Laverty (2003) states, “A methodology is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter” (p. 28). What the data reveals may lead to a retrospective change in understanding the essence of peer tutoring, and it can also change my understanding of the methodology undergirding the study itself (Van Manen, 2017).

Peer Tutors Identify with Their Fellow Student Writers

Previous studies have established that student writing benefits when students seek help from knowledgeable peers (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Graham, 2019; Kamps et al., 2008; Stenhoff & Lignuaris/Kraft, 2007; Thompson et al., 2009). Recall what Lynn said earlier (as I reported in Chapter 4): that when a peer tutor works with a fellow student writer, “you’re going through it with them, instead of them writing it alone, and the teacher grading it alone.” Most participants echoed this idea, identifying with other students’ struggles to succeed at the writing process. In the past, they had struggled as writers (and/or continued to do so), and they were able to use those experiences to identify with the writing experiences of the student writers they were trying to help. Talking of one’s own mistakes made it easier to assist students and gave the opportunity to express hope that visiting writers might avoid the same errors. Past struggles became an opportunity to serve others. The tutors had been through struggles of their own and had persevered. The self-efficacy of the tutors in this study corresponds well to the self-efficacy in Powell and Hixson-Bowles’ (2018) study of self-efficacy in tutors, which found a strong correlation between writing self-efficacy and tutoring self-efficacy. The tutors in the present study had similar ideas about their work in both writing and tutoring. Success in the former led to

capability in the latter and a likelihood of encouraging revision (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013; Thompson & Mackiewicz, 2013).

At the same time, when peer tutors identified with other students, they did so within the context of the pedagogies of teachers, without the opportunity to effectively interrogate them. Pushing back against such pedagogies either did not occur to them or was simply out of the question. The tutors always gave feedback with respect to the teacher's pedagogy, without ever questioning it. The prevailing practices of teachers occupied a pivotal role behind the tutoring that happened. Questioning the teacher's methods or assignments might lead to repercussions from the teacher, toward the students involved and possibly toward the writing center. When these tutors identified with student writers, they provided aid and sympathy during the writing process, but they did not offer recourse if a teacher was harsh or negligent.

How can peer tutors respond to these less-than-ideal writing situations? Peer tutors must have the opportunity to assess for themselves the hegemony of school writing instruction (Vandenberg, 1999/2011), and their experience can give them an informed voice when considering writing pedagogy in a school. Monty (2019) recommends that writing centers consider labor, class, and "frameworks of social and restorative justice" (p. 41) when they reflect on their work. Restricting tutoring to the assignments themselves overlooks the many factors that affect student life and bear consequences for the written work students do. These factors provide an instance where it might be helpful for the teachers in the writing center to establish protocols for addressing classroom assignments, methods, and feedback that may not be in the best interests of students. Preparing for the nonideal (Wolbert et al., 2019) can allow tutors to know that they can raise their concerns with teachers advising the center. Then together, they can open

lines of communication with the broader faculty about what writing pedagogies might be most effective for the student body.

Peer Tutors as Mediators

Between Students and Teachers

Whether teachers deliver instruction effectively or not, the participants in this study had to work within their school's writing pedagogy. The pedagogy was not necessarily the product of a large-scale curriculum program (such as that created by Lucy Calkins [2020], for example), but was an amalgam of the experience and resources of many teachers in the school. This amalgam represented an underlying hegemony under which tutor and student alike had to work (Vandenberg, 1999/2011). Within this reality, the participants tutored not just with regard to language conventions and what might best simplify the writing process. They also had to tutor with these teachers in mind, and broadly speaking, their work supported the wider educational system (Monty, 2019). The dialogue participants would engage in with their peers often reflected this reality (Csomay, 2007, Mackiewicz, 2017). Sometimes students were intimidated by their teachers and would not approach them. Some participants said that teachers simply did not have the time to work with each student individually for an amount of time that would really be fruitful for the student. Overall, the participants believed that they provided a necessary work in aiding their peers to understand their teachers' expectations.

If students must work to anticipate the requirements of specific teachers, they may not be using their time and resources in the best possible way. Student and teacher communication might aid in this, not just in respecting the students' voices and writing experiences, but also by opening up the various challenges of the writing process so that more stakeholders can see them. Participants were generally reluctant to evaluate classroom pedagogy in light of what they

learned and applied as writing center tutors. Considering the knowledge and experience of classroom teachers, they were reluctant to appear critical of what happened in classrooms, and in the tutoring moment, criticizing pedagogy might have created an awkward tension between the writing center and a particular teacher or department. This had consequences for tutoring sessions, as the tutors became agents of sending teachers. Expecting peer tutors to assume this stance makes them appear to have power over student writers that undermines the potentially fruitful dialogue of the peer tutoring experience. The career experience and knowledge of teachers took precedence, but that of students was also valid and worth hearing. If both teachers and tutors wielded power over writing situations (Carino, 2003/2011), greater, more equitable dialogue between the two parties would be a valuable experience for everyone involved (Bayne, 2013; Marsh, 2018). The results of this study reveal an opportunity for students and teachers to enact a more collaborative, student-centered process for curriculum and instruction. Participants knew how teachers taught, but not why. This lack of knowledge may have hampered dialogue between tutors and writers. Involving students in the creation of a writing center is a great start (Greer & Trofimoff, 2013), but an entire school would benefit from involving students in curricular design: examining content standards, selecting texts, devising assessments, and so on. The students involved do not necessarily have to be writing tutors, and they do not necessarily have to be the top academic students in the school (Jeter, 2011). Through productive dialogue, students can hear how faculty determine how curriculum is created, and faculty can hear the concerns of students towards creating a truly student-centered curriculum that promotes not just rigorous but also engaged student writing (Malenczyk & Rosenberg, 2011). Together, they can improve curriculum and instruction in a way that promotes flourishing for all (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013).

Between Writers and the Page

Many of the participants stated that students would often visit the writing center to generate new ideas. They were still in the thinking stage of the writing process (Emig, 1977/2011), and by visiting, students were acknowledging that writing was a process (Murray, 1971/2011). Writing centers are venues where the recursive nature of the writing process (Flower & Hayes, 1980/2011) is in full play, and the tutors and their peers' work ensured that the center in this study was no exception. There was often a need for dialogue in conceiving how to write a given assignment. The back-and-forth of talking through ideas aided students in developing stronger work (Knoeller, 2004). By continuing to work through the writing process in dialogue, the participants in this study and their writing peers built on their experience as writers. They expanded their knowledge and practice, establishing skills that might eventually become habits of mind (Dewey, 1916, 1938).

Tutors who are aware of this reality will benefit their peers by recognizing their role as coaches coaxing ideas out of the minds of their peers. Busekrus (2017) addressed these circumstances by suggesting overt conversations about questions, metacognition, and choices. Tutors and writing center administrators would do well to consider how best to help students enter or initiate conversations when they visit the writing center. Once there, tutors need to understand how to read people—how their speech and movement expresses their writing struggles. They also need to ask more questions of students, establishing common knowledge and subject-specific language in the pursuit of better writing. Tutors may also address the underlying structures of writing (thesis statements, organization of body paragraphs, etc.) that will help student writers manage their comprehension of a writing assessment and the content of subsequent drafts (Buserkus, 2017). Much of this kind of work will require clinical hours in the

center, which will provide time in authentic dialogue. There is a lot of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) at play in understanding how best to interact with others, so tutors will master these moves best by authentically performing them. As said before, tutors have experience struggling through the writing process, so they can help their peers flourish in it as well.

Peer Tutors Struggled with Frustrated Students

It is difficult to help students who appear not to want the help, and unfortunately, some of those students may be struggling the most (Bredtmann et al., 2013). The writing center in this study also had to deal with many writing pedagogies coming from the classes students took. There can be a disconnect between classroom pedagogies and the expectations placed on a writing center, and this can cause problems with the experiences of visiting writers (Sloan, 2013). The participants in this study received brief training when it would fit in their schedules before or after school; due to the school's scheduling allotments (which made it very difficult to fit in a section of a tutoring course), only one participant (Terence) received course credit for peer tutoring. The lack of training may have made it more difficult for students to know what to do given varied writing tasks (Klein & Boscolo, 2016), but the participants did not appear to let that concern them.

There is no better example of counterproductive writing center pedagogy than the examples of students forced to visit the writing center to fulfill a basic course requirement. Participants blamed teachers for forcing students to visit against their wills, and they shared stories of working with unwilling visitors. For some tutors, these moments appeared to be among the most frustrating in their tutoring experience. Neither tutors nor visiting writers seemed to benefit from the tension that would develop in these tutoring sessions. Some guidelines would be helpful for both when and how to send students to a writing center (Sloan, 2013). Doing so

requires looking at the historic tension between centripetal theories (emphasizing commonalities between writers) and centrifugal theories (emphasizing unique qualities between writers) (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). Put simply, students visit the writing center for different reasons, but sometimes they are working on the same assignments or attempting to master the same skills (Sherwood, 2007/2011). A consideration of the student writer's perspective would be valuable in training tutors and as both tutors and teachers reflect on tutoring practice. Such perspectives have become more present in research over the last 20 years (Hashlamon, 2018), and there is evidence that students do find themselves engaged when they visit the writing center (Bromley et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to continue thinking in this direction for the benefit of student writers, whether they wish to seek help from the writing center or not. Peer tutors must be ready to encourage those students who are reluctant to visit the writing center, but teachers must also be advised that required visits do not always proceed well. In a way, teachers could also use some help in learning how to guide their students to take advantage of the writing center. Sending students after they have already received a grade (as discussed in Chapter 4), for example, does not appear to have been a worthwhile time to send them. Escorting a class to the writing center and discussing with tutors the purpose and benefits visiting would set up more positive tutoring experiences. As stated earlier, communication between peer tutors, student writers, and teachers would be very helpful in this regard (Malenczyk & Rosenberg, 2011). There is no reason not to do so when promoting pedagogy that allegedly promotes firsthand experience as a means of learning (Dewey, 1938).

Future research could look at intentional planning and instruction between faculty and writing centers in more depth (Miley & Downs, 2017). It would also reflect a more realistic and optimistic perspective on what a writing center staff can do. The participants in this study

believed in the mission of the center, and in fulfilling it, they lived out some ideas from fundamental texts in the field of writing center studies. Their conversations aided student writers in thinking through ideas that were part of an ongoing civilizational discourse (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2011), if on a smaller scale. While they did not possess power in an official capacity, tutors did have the power to evaluate student writing. The tutors saw their work as supplemental to classroom teaching and saw themselves as de facto teachers. At times, they even expressed that their work contained advantages lacking in the more official teacher-student learning dynamic. They were not arrogant in describing their work this way; rather, they believed their work was a public service that was additive to the teaching and learning process.

The tutors also valued dialogue at all stages of the writing process, no matter what the topic or finished product would be. In these ways, the tutors situated themselves within broader traditions of composition. While some writers needed help with analyses of literature, others needed to refine the ability to support their writing with research. Some students wrote about ideas, while others wrote about careers. The participants may have discussed writing with their peers in a relaxed environment that encouraged dialogue, so although they were part of a small-scale civilizational discourse, they did not fashion themselves as philosophers or rhetoricians in a grand tradition (Bruffee, 1984/1995; Ede, 1989/1995; Lunsford, 1991/2011). Such a lack of awareness does not necessarily mean the landmark essays in the field are wrong. The tutors were trained to help others, and they did so just as their university-level peers did. Any shortcoming in self-awareness should not be held against them, but overt training in the knowledge and lore of peer tutoring, specifically within the writing center tradition, would be helpful in raising

awareness of what the tutors are doing, how best to do it, and how their work will benefit others and themselves (Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011).

The Peer Tutoring Process Is Rooted in Dialogue

We have already established that peer tutors saw themselves as mediators between students and the page. An essential component to this mediatory process is dialogue. Students need to talk through their work as they generate ideas, complete initial drafts, and revise their work for submission. In general, the English classroom needs sufficient opportunities for frequent, authentic writing (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham, 2019), so there is perhaps less growth in writing among students than there could be. A dedicated course on peer tutoring is the best venue for comprehensive instruction in theory and best practices. Tutor training must include instruction in cultivating effective dialogue between themselves and their peers. This dialogue can take various forms. Sometimes tutors or writers may read aloud, or they may talk about writing, or they may even talk through revisions, a form of thinking out loud (Denny et al., 2018). Fruitful dialogue requires that tutors be ready for any kind of talk that might stretch a writer's abilities into greater effectiveness (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962/2012). Studying specific dialogues from a more directly linguistic approach may also reveal insights into how tutors and writers speak and what they emphasize in dialogue (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2016). Better tutoring can arise from learning better conversation.

Tutoring for Transfer

Tutoring for transfer is also vital (Hill, 2016). While the participants in this study appear to have worked with their peers primarily on English assignments, there was also a need to provide those peers with the necessary knowledge that the skills they learned in English were also applicable to their other classes. In Hill's study, students benefited when they heard this

overtly rather than implicitly, and from tutors, instruction in transfer was more likely to stick. It is likely that similar teaching of transfer would have positive results in other instances. In the present study, participants discovered for themselves how their writing and tutoring skills transferred to other fields, but they did not discuss how talk of transfer might have benefitted the students they helped. Specific training in metacognitive strategies, such as those outlined by Hill, would be helpful in encouraging transfer.

Promoting Awareness of the Tutoring Process

One additional concern related to dialogue is to ensure that student writers understand the nature and method of how and why the tutoring process proceeds as it does. Tutors are generally trained to be non-directive in their work, encouraging writers to talk through and solve problems together without requiring too much direction (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2009). While feedback from visiting writers can be overwhelmingly positive, sometimes negative feedback can come from writers dissatisfied with the often non-directive style of tutoring (Hendengren & Lockerd, 2017; Denny et al., 2018). The participants in this study self-reported experiences in which student writers were mostly pleased with the feedback they received, with few exceptions. In the participants' recollections, dissatisfaction had more to do with being coerced into visiting the writing center than with tutoring style. In future research and tutoring practice, it might be helpful to understand what kind of feedback a writer wants. While it might be preferable to ask non-directive questions that help writers reach their own conclusions, there is also the need to be more direct when writers need to complete assignments in order to have them done. Perhaps sometimes the urgency of coursework might lead one to set aside more idealistic approaches for what might be necessary in a given moment (Nordlof, 2014). Future research into this tension would be beneficial for the field as a whole.

The Peer Tutoring Process Is a Valuable Opportunity for Feedback

Delivering feedback is a delicate matter. The kinds of feedback tutors might give ranges from basic evaluation of ideas to intensive proofreading. There are definitely right and wrong ways to give feedback, as evidenced by both the training video shown to the participants and their interpretation of it. If you recall Tricia and Eleanor in particular, they critiqued the tutors in the video as insufficient and impersonal in their approaches. Eleanor interpreted the time-lapsed editing at one point of the video as advocating for quantity in tutoring time over quality. Such a presentation contradicts tutor perceptions of high intellectual engagement (Bromley et al., 2015). According to the participants, feedback needs to be comprehensive, and it requires delivery that is both sensitive and addresses everything a student needs in order to improve their writing (Buserkus, 2017; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016).

Moreover, peer tutors need to be mindful of where students are in the writing process. Some knowledge is tacit, requiring experience in order to be acquired (Polanyi, 1967), and the tutors' comments reflect that assertion. Feedback must be tailored to students who have not yet composed a draft or to students who may be revising an already-graded essay. The varied kinds of thinking present in the writing process and required in disparate academic disciplines requires greater awareness of how they affect peer tutoring (Klein & Boscolo, 2016). Initial training can come from an established manual like that of Ryan and Zimmerelli (2010) or Fitzgerald and Ianetta (2016), but acquiring the knowledge and skills of tutoring requires a blend of reading, guided practice, and tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967). Tutors (and by extension, their teachers) need to be aware of all these aspects and situate them within the context of their school. As students progress through training and authentic tutoring sessions, the writing center's administrative team (one or more teachers) can work with them to determine what issues

pertaining to interacting with peers need more time to master. In this way, tutor training becomes recursive. Reviewing research and training manuals continues to happen alongside practice tutoring sessions and authentic tutoring.

Peer Tutoring Prepared Tutors for Their Future

With the exception of Tricia, the participants in this study did not become English majors, but they did find that the skills they learned as peer tutors did transfer into other contexts. Tricia worked in a university writing center, while others, such as Darcy and Owen, tutored in other subjects. Terence had plans to find work in his university's writing center. Kyle became a teaching assistant within his major's department and recognized the skills he utilized in that role were shaped by his high school tutoring. When recruiting tutors, it might be helpful to point out that the skills they pick up when tutoring will serve them well in many walks of life—many majors, career fields, or even pleasurable pursuits (Hill, 2016).

Tutors could also use a solid grounding in research. The participants in this study received training when they volunteered and regularly reflected on their practice with each other, but they did not get a more formal opportunity to research the practice of tutoring. A recent survey by Ervin (2016) suggests that both writing center directors and tutors believe research would improve their practice. Tutor respondents who had participated in research more readily transferred their tutoring skills to other fields, not to mention that they became better tutors overall (Hill, 2016). With the most experience and training, Tricia fulfilled this promise. Those participants who reported additional experience tutoring in other contexts also bear the potential to benefit in this way.

Peer Tutors Felt a Sense of Ownership of the Writing Center

Students who worked as peer tutors in the writing center felt a strong sense of ownership of the space (Jeter, 2011). They loved being there, and they loved hanging out. They got to know teachers better as well. A couple of participants believed the writing center was their only option for getting involved in extracurricular activities they truly cared about. Kyle believed that he was contributing to a work that would improve the school—he was an idealist about this. He believed in the power of writing as a tool for improving one's life. His idealism evokes the idea that the intellectual life of the school requires engagement with ideas (Evans, 2009; Lunsford, 1991/2011; Mulqueen, 2011).

A number of participants discussed the benefits of dialoguing about writing not just with their visiting peers, but with each other—their peers who were also tutors—as well as with the teachers who supervised the center. These students appear to have learned a lot about writing during their time working in the center, and in retrospect, that learning experience was overwhelmingly positive (DeFeo & Caparas, 2014). For them, the writing center was a low-stakes environment where learning happened organically, without direct instruction—or rather, without instruction directed at them specifically. Most peer tutors in the writing center were acting purely voluntarily, and they learned while they worked.

The implication of this finding is that students can learn as they help others, and they can gain valuable skills and knowledge in a field without being held accountable for that learning. A writing center that operates in such a way models cultural reproduction. The peer tutors become proficient enough at their work that they can pass their learning on to both student writers and newer peer tutors (Mulqueen, 2011). All students—even so-called struggling students—might benefit from similar opportunities. Teachers, too, would necessarily be part of this legacy. Adult

writing center volunteers (directors and teacher chaperones), who are involved with centers perhaps over a period of many years, longer than any student, would oversee this legacy and perhaps inevitably wield more influence over it than any student. Such a reality may increase the likelihood that the prevailing practices of the school's writing pedagogy will lurk in the background (Vandenberg, 1999/2011). Concerned teachers and students can promote dialogue over writing to serve as a resistance against obsession over micromanaging time during the school day, forcing evidence-based practice, or giving standardized testing a preeminent role (Henderson & Hursh, 2014). Tests and evidence-based practices are not human, but peer tutors are, and they can provide more compassion than mass-produced reforms (Cherkowski & Walker, 2013). In response to the third question in this study (How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center?), the idea of human flourishing may be most useful. The participants in this study have flourished themselves, and they saw their involvement in the center as an essential part of their personal and intellectual development.

Extracurricular activities in the writing center provided students with the opportunity to write as an act of leisure (Pieper, 2009). They were able to play with words through writing contests. No one on the writing center staff was required to participate; some did purely out of pleasure. Or the participants could enjoy words by reading contest entries, or through discussing books they had read. Participants enjoyed each other's company, and when they were not tutoring, they were talking. Conversations may or may not have been centered on writing and literacy. Sometimes they discussed other matters entirely. The freewheeling nature of these conversations reflects Pieper's (2009) idea that active leisure is an opportunity to cultivate flourishing. High school students have found a writing center to be fun before (Greer &

Trofimoff, 2013). Pleasure and leisure, then, may be the best means for interesting students in staffing, sustaining, and visiting a high school writing center (Jeter, 2011). Nevertheless, it should not be lost on those aspiring to start such a center that in Greer and Trofimoff's article, students were essential to developing the space. Teachers and administrators would be well advised to take the same approach.

While this study yielded less data about this subject, the importance of a space cannot be stressed enough. Future research in this topic would be fruitful. There is more to be said for how students appreciate the space they are given for tutoring and the satisfaction they experience knowing that their school cares enough about writing to dedicate a room to its practice. High schools looking to launch regular drop-in writing tutoring should seriously consider finding a dedicated space for the tutoring, and it should be big enough that multiple parties should be able to have conversations without one overlapping with and distracting the other. If parties are not distracted by each other's conversations, then student writers are less likely to believe they are being overheard, and they will be less intimidated. Having this space also aids maintaining confidentiality in discussing a student's writing and personal information (Parsons et al., 2021). The writing center directors and staff should also work to preserve that space at all costs.

The need for time to run the writing center is just as important as the need for space to occupy. The writing center in this study was run by volunteer students, and the teachers who helped operate it were doing so on top of all their expected duties as teachers. All teachers at this school were required to offer tutoring hours during the workday. Those who helped in the writing center could offer their hours there, and more importantly, they could involve the peer tutors in the process. Nevertheless, the time and resources necessary to run the writing center required more than a willingness to tutor in the center instead of in the classroom. As co-director

of the writing center, I did have one year in which I was able to devote a class period to supervising a few tutors, but during the other five years I was involved, everything other teachers and I did with the writing center was on top of everything else required of us. Schools would benefit from a writing center that received healthy funding and included a faculty member whose primary work was administration of the writing center. Any writing center without such sustained support is subject to the whims of teacher scheduling, room availability, and the energy level left in teachers and students who already have so much more to do.

Implications for Further Research

The findings in this study are not generalizable to all writing centers or their tutors. They are the lived experience descriptions (Van Manen, 1990) of nine former high school students who worked in one center. At many points, the data revealed similar memories and sentiments, but they are not generalizable beyond their context. Moreover, all of the participants worked in a writing center co-founded and directed by the researcher. They thought back on their time fondly, but they may also remember working with me fondly. Even so, they were not shy about addressing the complications that arose from their work or the struggles that arose from deficits in training. My co-founder and I had an idea to start a writing center, and we did so without necessarily knowing all we needed to know. We began our work before we knew of the broad body of research surrounding writing centers, and I did not conceive of pursuing this study until well after we started the center. There is a need to study more comprehensively the impact of a high school writing center on its school. Practical literature on these centers has existed for a few decades (Farrell, 1989; Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Kent, 2017), but there is still plenty of opportunity for growth in the field.

The data and discussion herein may be valuable in providing direction for future researchers in writing center scholarship. Recent developments in the spread of high school writing centers are encouraging in this regard. The total number of high school writing centers is still unknown. As I pursued this study, however, a regional peer tutoring organization, the Capital Area Peer Tutoring Association (CAPTA) became a national organization. Now known as the Secondary Schools Writing Center Association (SSWCA), it currently has 30 member schools (SSWCA, 2020). The new SSWCA is continuing CAPTA's annual conference and starting a peer-reviewed journal, *The Journal of Peer Tutoring in Secondary Schools*. Interest in high school writing centers continues to grow, so there may be a corresponding increase in scholarship. The present study is hopefully a humble contribution to this growing field of research.

The present study is not quantitative in nature, but that does not mean that further research need avoid quantitative methods. The need for replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research continues to be felt throughout the field of writing center studies (Driscoll & Perdue, 2012; Pleasant et al., 2016). Despite the misgivings and differing priorities of some writing center scholars (Fels, 2011), quantitative research methodologies may have some value in measuring student writing before and after a tutoring session. They can also measure more finely the different elements of a tutoring session, such as the amount of time students and tutors each speak, or the kinds of feedback given.

One potential continuing problem is the presence of hegemony in university writing studies and the writing center's potential to be complicit in that hegemony (Vandenberg, 1999/2011). Quantitative methods in education have often been hijacked to political ends that do not serve the interests of students (Ravitch, 2013). As long as hegemony is a threat, there will

understandably be skeptics of quantitative methods. It may always be difficult to persuade some writing program administrators that numerical data can reveal important results, but that does not mean that it will not have value. Future research into high school writing center tutoring will need to consider quantitative methods, but the researchers will want to take care that they do not betray the dialogic and interpersonal nature of writing center work. When public schools continue to come under data-driven scrutiny, it is important for writing center directors to take a stand and avoid getting swept up in extending the interpretation of data beyond its reliability (Ravitch, 2013) or in such a way as to undermine the mission of the center (Fels, 2013). Meeting the needs of students, especially when they may seek different kinds of help, is the most important thing (Denny et al., 2018).

Conclusion

While high schools and universities have differing characteristics and populations, high school writing centers have much to gain from scholarship rooted in university-level writing centers (Fels & Wells, 2011; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Murphy & Sherwood, 2011). The university model presents a framework for operating a writing center in a distinctive space, where students can make appointments or drop in, usually independently of teachers. Peer tutors have much to offer their fellow students through mutual listening and dialogue, and they can do so without student writers' feeling intimidated by their teachers of record. Often, student writers had concerns similar to those of college students: improving a grade, fulfilling an obligation to visit the center, and so on.

Still, the high school writing center exists within a context that has different concerns than a university center does. The participants in this study made comments reflecting students' need to complete a capstone object, study for the SAT, or other activity specific to the high

school experience. Students and teachers are beholden to batteries of standardized tests, curriculum mandates (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015), and other dictates that require attention and serve as burdens on the learning process (Ravitch, 2013). As interest in high school writing centers continues to grow, perhaps the need for research into these differing factors will become more apparent. There is much opportunity for further study in these issues, and future scholars will hopefully take advantage of filling these gaps in the research. In the meantime, in writing centers nationwide, well-trained high school students can continue to provide assistance to their peers that will help them succeed in a comfortable environment, providing dialogue that both supports classroom instruction and is helpfully distinct from the conversations that might occur in the teacher-student relationship. In the end, all parties will benefit.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table A1

Writing Protocol Prompts Correlated with Research Questions

Research Question	Writing Protocol Prompts
• How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?	• Describe the thought process that led you to become a peer tutor. • Describe your role as a peer tutor. • What kind of work do you do as a peer tutor? • Describe your experience participating in extracurricular activities in the writing center.
• How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?	• Write about a time when you tutored a student in the writing center. Share as much detail as you can recall. • Write about a tutoring session that you believe was successful. • Write about a tutoring session that you believe was not successful (or did not go well). • Write about what peer tutoring means to you.
• How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?	• Describe your role in the context of the operations of the writing center. • Describe how peer tutors should proceed in their work. • Describe the mission of a writing center. What should a writing center do? • What, if anything, do you do to promote the writing center?

Table A2

Follow-up Questions to Writing Protocol Correlated with Research Questions

Research Question	Follow-up Questions
• How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?	• Tell me about what you wrote in your lived-experience description. Would you add any details? • How does being a tutor distinguish you from your peers?
• How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?	• Tell me about what you wrote in your lived-experience description. Would you add any details? • How is your lived-experience description typical of your overall experience as a tutor? • How does your lived-experience description illustrate any underlying principles guiding you through the tutoring process? • How do these principles affect your writing? • How do these principles affect your other schoolwork?
• How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?	• Tell me about what you wrote in your lived-experience description. Would you add any details? • What role, if any, does the writing center play in aiding the peer tutoring process? • How are the details of your lived-experience affected by the fact that you work in a writing center?

Table A3

Interview Questions Correlated with Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
• How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?	• What is a peer tutor? How do you define a peer tutor? • Why did you volunteer as a peer tutor?

	• How do you perceive your work as a peer tutor in relation to the work of teachers? • How important to you is consistency in tutoring a writer? • How do you see yourself as a tutor in relation to teachers at this school? • How do you see yourself as a tutor in relation to the school as a whole?
• How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?	• How important do you believe your work to be? • How helpful do you believe students perceive your work? • When a student enters, how do you initiate a tutoring session? • How do you sit in relation to the student? • Who initiates questioning, and how? • What issues or elements of writing do visitors typically need help with? • How do you address flaws in student writing? • How do visitors react to your feedback? Can you describe specific details from tutoring sessions?
• How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?	• How did you first hear of the writing center? • Describe what you do when you report to the writing center for a shift. • What happens during a tutoring shift? • What do you do as you wait for a writer to show up? • How do you feel if no one shows up? • What role does the writing center serve in facilitating peer tutoring? • What has been the students' response to your work as a tutor? • What conversation, if any, do you hear from other students about the writing center? • Describe the comments (positive or negative) other students make about the writing center. • How has the presence of the writing center affected you personally?

	• How do you perceive the work of the HSWC in relation to the work of teachers? • How do you perceive the work of the HSWC in relation to the work of the school as a whole?

Table A4

Video Elicitation Questions Correlated with Research Questions

Research Question	Video Elicitation Questions
• How do high school peer tutors articulate their identities as peer tutors?	• What details about the tutor and his or her actions stand out to you? What strengths or weaknesses do you perceive? • What details about the student writer and his or her actions stand out to you? What strengths or weaknesses do you perceive? • How does this writer present himself or herself to the tutor?
• How do high school students make meaning of the peer tutoring process?	• What is happening in this tutoring session? • Describe the tutor's body language, including how the tutor situates himself or herself physically in relation to the writer. • How is this body language similar or different from your own experience? • Describe how the tutor speaks with the writer. • How is the tutor's speech similar or different from your own use of language in the tutoring process? • Describe the advice given by the tutor. How does the writer respond to the tutor's advice? In your experience, how responsive have students been to your own tutoring advice? • Describe each tutor's body language, including how the tutors situate themselves physically in relation to the writer.

	• Tell me what you think of how the tutor speaks with the writer. • Tell me what you think of the advice the tutor gives the writer. • As you view the video, what stands out to you about the peer tutoring process?
• How do high school peer tutors perceive the tutoring process within a student-run high school writing center (HSWC)?	• What role does the writing center as a space play in this video? • How much does it matter where this tutoring session takes place? • What does this space have to offer that another space (such as a more traditional classroom) would not?