FROM TRAINING TO PRACTICE:
THE WRITING CENTER AS A SETTING FOR LEARNING TO TUTOR

DISSERTATION

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By

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Although tutorial programs have become key components of college freshmen writing programs, few studies have considered how students learn to tutor their peers. This study is a qualitative examination of a first-year writing tutorial program situated within a college writing center with a mission to ensure student retention in the college. In the tutorials, peer tutors consulted biweekly with basic writers throughout their first year of college. The peer tutors were trained in a three-week tutor training program designed to introduce them to both writing center theory and tutoring strategies which are aligned with the writing center mission and goals. Case study methods were used to consider the transfer of teaching tools from tutor training to the tutors’ practices in the writing conferences.

Through an activity-theory analysis of tutor training sessions, audio-taped and transcribed conferences, field notes, observation-based interviews, and other data, the two tutors’ decision-making was interpreted as a function of their participation in tool-mediated action—both conceptual and practical—in a range of settings. The research employed ethnographic methods to follow the peer tutors through a three-week training program and a fifteen-week semester of tutoring. The study identified the principal settings—both educational and personal—which shaped tutors’ developing roles and practices; explored the way tutors negotiate tensions which arise as they attempt to
appropriate the teaching tools presented in tutor training; and considered the contextual factors (e.g., outside settings, personal goals, prior experiences) which may shape the tutors’ appropriation of the teaching tools.

The results describe how the various activity settings affected how the tutors developed their own approaches to tutoring in the writing center as they negotiated the competing motives and emerging tensions at work in conference activity over a semester. In acknowledging these powerful tensions, the study suggests the need for critical and continual reflective practice on the part of both tutor trainers and peer tutors. The study also documents how various settings, including the tutors’ personal and academic backgrounds, mediate what they appropriate from tutor training and, in turn, the extent to which training mediates their ability and willingness to support basic writers.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM OF PEER TUTORING

A tutor sits next to a student and listens intently as she reads aloud the first draft of her essay. After reading, the student looks up at the tutor and says, “Well, there it is. I know I need to change some things. I hope you can help me.”

“I think you have a good start,” the tutor responds with a smile of encouragement. “Your topic definitely works for an argument of definition, and you have some great examples of the ways women are treated unfairly. I guess what I hear you saying is that you think that women have been underestimated and there are several reasons for that. But can you tell me more about what those reasons are? You have ‘why’ in your title, but I don’t think I heard that in your argument.”

“Oh, I guess I got carried away. I mean, I like writing about the examples, so I kind of forgot that part.” The student talks aloud as she writes down some notes in the margin of her essay. “Okay . . . so, you think I need . . . umm . . . I need to include not only how, but why. This seems like a lot to change.”

“Nah, it’s not a big deal really. You have the structure you need. You just need to work in that part. Maybe you could start by looking at one of your examples . . . like this one about your dad and brother. Talk to me about the why.”
“Oh, that one’s easy!” she begins. “Like, my dad always treats me, like, I’m helpless. That drives me nuts. He thinks I can’t drive more than five miles without a mile-long list of instructions. But my brother... he treats my brother completely different.”

“Okay, why? Why do you think he doesn’t treat you the same as your brother? Are you sure it’s a gender thing? Is your brother older?”

“Oh no, no,” she interrupts, “it’s a gender thing because he’s two years younger, but he always got to do things earlier than we did. My dad just trusts him more because he thinks he can take care of himself. You know, he’s big and strong... No one’s going to mess with him.”

Meanwhile, across the computer lab, another tutor meets with a student regarding his underdeveloped first draft of the same assignment. While the student stares blankly at the paper between them, the tutor reads it aloud.

“Let’s see... [reading] ‘When teachers come into the class, she should be ready to help the students’. Hmmm, let’s stop there. Did you notice anything funny about that sentence?” The tutor reads it again, this time emphasizing the problem in the sentence.

“Oh, yeah... My bad,” the student quickly agrees.

“So, what is the problem with the sentence?” the tutor asks.

“Umm...”

“Pronoun-antecedent number agreement,” the tutor answers after a brief pause. “Remember? Your pronoun and antecedent must agree in number. So, it should read...
When teachers come into the class. . . .” The tutor pauses and looks at the student, as if to suggest that he should finish the sentence correctly.

“Ummm. . . .” the student recognizes the signal, but appears puzzled. Silence follows.

“[Reading]’When teachers come into the class, they should be ready to help the students.’ Remember, number agreement with your pronoun and antecedent. Do I need to tattoo that to your forehead?’ the tutor asks with a laugh. “Now, let’s continue reading. . . .”

These two peer tutors have recently completed the same tutor training. They are also both practicing in the same conference setting: Each tutor is meeting with a basic writing student on the first draft of a newly assigned essay. However, it doesn’t take long to recognize that these two tutors are approaching the same conference setting quite differently. Given that these two tutors have both recently completed the same training, how do we account for such an undeniable difference in their practice?

One could spend an hour eavesdropping on conversations in any writing center on a college campus and recognize markedly diverse tutoring practices. Some practices will support the theoretical principles and practical instruction presented in tutor training, while others will clearly deviate from it. The manner in which tutors appropriate the tools learned in training for enactment during tutoring sessions is the focus of this research study.
The Usefulness of Peer Tutor-Student Conferences

Before delving into this study’s key issue—the appropriation (or lack thereof) of tutoring strategies learned in tutor training—I find it useful to first touch on the usefulness and underlying tenets of one-to-one writing conferencing and, more specifically, peer tutoring. In the process of focusing this study, there are several related questions I must address at the onset: questions such as, “Why conference about writing?” “How should one conduct such a conference?” and “What is the potential benefit of peer tutor-student conferencing over teacher-student conferencing?” These questions are important because their answers define the Writing Center’s mission. By first introducing the usefulness of peer tutor-student writing conferences, I will set the stage for my research focus.

Why conference about writing?

During the last three decades, proponents of writing conferencing have suggested that writing tutorials are an answer to outdated methods of composition instruction (e.g., Bruffee, 1984; Garrison, 1986; Ede, 1989; Harris, 1990, 1995). Based on their experiences as practitioners and some empirical studies, they argue that teacher-student or peer tutor-student conferencing can provide opportunities for an interactive communicative experience in a nonthreatening atmosphere.

There are several reasons that writing conferences are useful in the development of writing. For one, writing conferences are conducive to learning because they offer students the needed opportunity for talk. Students’ experiences with talking far exceed their experiences with writing, so it only makes sense to recognize the centrality of talk in
the nature of writing. Wendy Bishop (1992) explained, “Writers compose through inner speech while talking, by speaking aloud at the word processor, when discussing a work-in-progress, or as they share ideas during conferences in writing centers and classrooms” (p. 6). Conferences allow students to generate and articulate their ideas, as well as practice their arguments, before, during, and after the writing process. Conference talk also leads to productive revision, since it gives students the unique opportunity to work through their specific problem areas with a more experienced other (Freedman and Katz, 1987; Gere, 1990; Harris, 1990).

The interactive talk of effective writing tutorials also plays a significant role in developing writers who often lack understanding of the nature of writing. By talking about their writing with a more knowledgeable other, they begin to appropriate ways of talking about their writing and writing processes. For instance, they often begin to internalize an evaluative criteria by which to evaluate their own writing, and they also, consciously or subconsciously, start to develop an awareness of audience needs. Harris (1990) argued that collaborative dialogues “promote that social awareness that writers need . . . [an] awareness of writing for others” (p. 160). Writers have a chance to discuss their writing with a real audience; by doing so, they have opportunities to learn about the needs of that audience—a crucial consideration for academic writing and one that is often neglected by inexperienced writers.

Many would also argue that conferencing is a more efficient method for providing feedback than written response. Quite simply, writing tutors or teachers can say more about a paper than they can write in the same amount of time. Furthermore, in a conference they can also expect feedback from the writers themselves concerning their
intentions. Barnes (1990) explained that talk “enables students to represent to themselves what they currently understand and then if necessary criticize and change it” (p. 50).

Perhaps most importantly, conferencing allows for purposeful intervention throughout the writing process—at those points of the process where help is most needed—rather than saving response and evaluation for finished drafts. For example, many first-year college composition students struggle with developing adequate support for their arguments. Engaging such students in exploratory conversations about their topics may provide the students opportunities to try out their ideas on an immediate audience. If more support is needed, this audience can ask the students questions aimed at generating content. This process-oriented approach encourages writers to develop lifelong habits for revision.

The Promise of Peer Tutoring

Kenneth Bruffee’s (1984) landmark essay, “Peer Tutoring and the Conversation of Mankind,” has been heralded for providing a theoretical basis for peer-led writing tutorials. Bruffee posed peer tutoring as an alternative to the traditional classroom, one that was aimed at engaging a “community of knowledgeable peers” in conversation in as many points in the writing process as possible. He claimed that peer tutoring “provides a particular kind of social context for conversation, a particular kind of community: that of status equals, or peers” (8).

Muriel Harris (1995) described the peer tutor as a step above the “status equal” to more of a “middle person,” whose role falls “somewhere between the student and the teacher” (27). Harris maintained that since the peer tutor has a lower status than the
teacher, the tutor “can work with students in ways that teachers can not” (27), and the student will respond more favorably to the tutor because they “readily view a tutor as someone to help them surmount the hurdles others have set up for them” (28).

Unlike the typical classroom teacher, the peer tutor has opportunities to engage one-on-one with individual students. They have opportunities to learn about these writers’ backgrounds, dreams, fears, and goals. They learn about their successes and failures—in and out of the classroom—and observe how those play out in the students’ development as a writer. Considering the myriad opportunities for the development of a rich relationship, it is evident that their job title, “writing tutor,” is misleading, for surely their job requires richly diverse tasks.

During the last two decades, peer writing tutors have been welcomed as an integral part of writing center practice. Peer tutors are now employed in writing centers nationwide for a number of reasons. First, since the peer tutor has relatively equal status with the tutee (i.e., they are both students), the peer tutor may more effectively relate to the students who come to the writing center for assistance than a teacher would. The peer tutor also provides a less threatening environment for the student writer, since the peer tutor is not in a position of direct authority over the student; and a welcoming, nonthreatening environment is of paramount importance to a writing center. Because of this absence of teacher authority, Harris (1995) suggested that students will find working with a peer tutor to be less stressful than working with a teacher (35). The peer tutor may seem especially approachable to college freshmen, who are often uneasy about the transition of their first year at college and, consequently, may shy away from seeking assistance from a professor.
Some scholars have questioned the presumed absence of power and authority in the peer tutor-student writer relationship (e.g., Ede, 1989; Kail & Trimbur, 1987; Lunsford, 1991); nevertheless, the presence of peer tutors in writing centers continues to grow, and literature available to train peer tutors continues to grow at a commensurate rate.

Writing Center research, however, remains sparse. Most writing conference research is limited to conferences between students and their teachers. The development and practice of the peer tutors who populate most writing centers are only minimally represented in the research literature. Accordingly, in this study, I filled that gap, looking specifically at both tutor training and peer tutor practice across time. Furthermore, since the tutors under examination have had different experiences with both tutoring and writing, I examined tutors’ recollections of their own experiences alongside of their developing level of tutor expertise.

The Need for Tutor Training

When I instituted the writing center at SBC eleven years ago, I was frustrated at the practices of well-intentioned peer tutors. They talked to students as if they were doing them a favor by spelling out the secrets of the tried-and-true, five-paragraph essay or explaining to the students for the tenth time why they cannot put a comma between two independent clauses. Their tutoring practice consisted almost entirely of error identification and correction. The tutors controlled the focus of the conferences and ultimately decided what they thought students needed to know to write a better paper.
We hired these tutors because they were identified as good writers, so they knew what an ideal text—the sort of essay that would get an “A”—looked like, and they thought it their duty to get basic writers to write essays as similar as possible to the ideal ones in their heads. The conferences were cordial and pleasant enough, and usually resulted in improved grades and revisions, but I knew that our Writing Center was not meeting the goals I had in mind eleven years ago.

I had hoped that the Writing Center could offer writers the opportunity to receive support, experience, and strategies that they could carry with them into other settings. I had in mind a Writing Center in which tutors and students worked together in mutual collaboration. I had in mind a tutee who was actively involved in problem solving and revision, rather than waiting for a marked up copy of a text. Unfortunately our Writing Center was functioning more like what North (1984) called a “fix-it shop.” So, in 1999, I began a tutor training program in an effort to equip peer tutors with the theoretical grounding necessary for practice that coincided, at least a little, with current writing center theory. (See Chapter Four for a description of the Writing Center tutor training.)

Developing a training program was easier than I thought it would be. Much has been written in the writing center literature about what tutors should and should not do in the writing conference. Whole books are devoted to tutor training strategies that empower and improve writers such as Gillespie & Lerner’s (2000) The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring, McAndrew & Reigstad’s (2001) Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences, and Murphy & Sherwood’s (1995) The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors. I used these resources to build a training program that covered both a
theoretical framework that was aligned with the goals of our first-year writing program, and the practical strategies peer tutors should employ while tutoring. The tutor training centered on five main topics:

1. Understanding the diverse identities, needs, and expectations of basic writers;
2. Allowing for collaboration in which the student has an active role;
3. Respecting students’ ownership of their texts;
4. Negotiating the multiple roles of the writing consultant, including encourager, sounding board, friend, accountability partner, and teacher; and
5. Learning specific tutoring strategies that reinforce the mission and goals of the writing center and first-year writing program.

The Problem of “Good Intentions” in Preparing Peer Writing Tutors

I once read somewhere, “Even good intentions can impede insight.” I’ve been reminded of that quote many times while modifying our college Writing Center. I’ve found it easy to focus my attention on the obvious negative hindrances to effective tutoring in the writing center, such as “remedial” labeling of the students and overly-authoritative tutoring practices. But, as this study will reveal, my good intentions toward student support and empowerment may have hindered my ability to understand what tutors needed to know going into a semester of tutoring writing. At the start of each school year, we directors spent hours training peer tutors to prepare them for their role in the Writing Center. We covered the underlying theories for writing center practice, and we taught them effective tutoring strategies that were aligned with those theories. No
doubt, our intentions were good. We wanted our tutors to feel competent, we wanted the tutoring sessions to be effective, and we wanted our students to be empowered to produce more and better writing.

During and directly following each training session, our well-intentioned endeavors seemed to be paying off. Student tutors often completed the training with an air of confidence about the job that lay before them. They appeared to embrace those theoretical concepts that were introduced in the training—concepts such as student ownership, tutor-student collaboration, and process-oriented writing. They took notes and provided favorable comments as we discussed tutoring strategies that reinforced those concepts. From all appearances, these tutors were armed for success in their new role in the Writing Center.

However, the transfer of theoretical knowledge gained in the training sessions to effective practice in real writing conferences was not always recognizable. While in training, tutors would voice agreement with the theory, but once faced with the real activity of tutoring, tensions would often arise. Suddenly, tutors were faced with difficult questions that would rattle their confidence as a tutor. Questions such as, How do I get students to care about “ownership” when they just want me to tell them what to do to get a decent grade? or, I’ve given feedback using “minimalist techniques” to these students a dozen times, but they continue to have the same writing problems in every paper they bring to me. . . . Should I just show them how to fix it? Suddenly, the how-to’s of writing consulting were not enough for the novice tutor. Faced with this tension between the ideal tutor they think they should be and the tutor that acts in response to the immediate tension of the moment, novice tutors usually react in one of two ways: (1) they insist on
maintaining the ideal tutor role and enacting the strategies learned, even if they seem ineffective for the moment or in conflict with the student writer’s goals; or (2) they rely on other settings—usually prior settings—for support in constructing a new role, or identity, as a peer tutor.

An effective peer tutor must learn to negotiate the tutor’s role to accommodate those moments of dissention. Peer tutors must know when to let students take the lead, and what to do when students come with experiences and goals that get in the way of their willingness to take any agentive footing in a conference. Despite the overwhelming insistence for minimalist tutoring strategies and Socratic questioning in many training resources, experienced tutors soon recognize the limitations of such devices, for strategies alone will not empower basic writers. Sometimes, the moment calls for more explicit instruction on the part of the tutor. Quite often, the lack of both tutoring experience and an adequate understanding of the needs of basic writers leaves novice tutors unsure of their practice and questioning the theory behind it.

Perhaps more problematic, tutors sometimes lose sight of the two things that brought them to the writing center in the first place: their competency as writers and their genuine concern for other students. While they may be deeply committed to the goal of helping students at first, they can become paralyzed by the vexing complexities that they encounter along the way. As will become evident in this study, one reason for this paralysis is the writing tutors’ lack of experience and knowledge for adjusting to the complexities of students’ writing problems.

As they construct their own identity as a writing center tutor, peer tutors also face the contradiction of their position in the Writing Center, for the tutor is neither peer nor
teacher in the truest sense. When tutors enter the conference setting, they are met at once with dual challenges: First, they must sort through the diverse—and often overwhelming—needs presented by the tutees and formulate a plan to meet those needs; and second, they must negotiate an appropriate social stance with that student. This second challenge is often the one that undergoes the most change as tutors construct their identities. Tutors may scramble through a whole continuum of approaches, ranging from that of a friend to a coach to a teacher, all the while unsure of the efficacy of each role.

Writing Center directors and researchers have dealt at length with both the conceptual and practical tools that must be learned and internalized to ensure effective tutoring practice, but little has been done to explore and explain the tensions that arise when a peer tutor attempts to appropriate those tools, and to what extent these tensions hinder the appropriation of these tools across a range of settings.

Writing Centers and Writing Tutorials as Activity Settings

Although writing center instructors and directors often have their own personal explanations for why tutors fail to appropriate teaching tools presented in training sessions, there is only a thin empirical basis for such explanations. The question of why tutors struggle to appropriate the tools they learn in training remains unanswered. At this time, there is no research directed specifically at unraveling the complex factors at work which inhibit a tutor’s ability to put the theory they have learned in tutor training into practice in writing conferences. Perhaps more problematic is the failure of current research in the field to take into account the personal and cultural influences outside the activity of the conference to answer this question. Indeed, the question of why and how
social settings mediate tutor learning is complex, encompassing competing intentions, cross purposes, and conflicting prior experiences that are surely part of every tutor-student relationship in the writing center. According to Newkirk (1995), these cross purposes are “moved to the background” of discussions concerning writing tutorials (p. 196). More recent research on writing center conferences has largely focused on the primary activity setting of the tutorial itself, while ignoring the influence of secondary activity settings. Consequently, research is needed which is grounded in theory which accounts for the multiple and sometimes competing goals and purposes at work in tutorials.

For example, what happens when a tutor’s previous writing experience, which was limited to writing single-draft essays and receiving error-focused feedback, comes into conflict with the process-focused strategies for providing feedback privileged in tutor training? When responding to a tutee’s early draft, will the tutor remember to focus first on those higher-order concerns such as understanding of the assignment and adequate support for the argument? Or will the tutor regress to responding strategies concerned with lower-order concerns, such as grammatical correctness? These competing goals are foregrounded in this study of tutor practice and tutors’ conceptualization of their role in the writing conference.

Activity theory is concerned with the contexts of human development, particularly learning concepts such as process approaches to writing, ownership, etc. (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). Activity theory holds that there are multiple activity settings at work in any learning community. A particular setting, such as the college Writing Center, exists with its own set of values, goals, and resources, which may
positively or negatively influence the success of a writing tutor. Our Writing Center
participants, consisting of students (mostly basic writers), peer tutors, and staff/faculty
tutors, are each involved in other activity settings, each with their own sets of values,
goals, and resources. These settings may include a faculty workshop on authentic
assessment, a freshman composition course, a part-time job, a home in which a parent
may or may not place a high priority on academic success, and a tutor training course
which values certain theoretical approaches to tutoring. Moreover, activity settings may
overlap or conflict in dynamic ways. Sometimes their goals and attendant social practices
are congruent, easing the appropriation of new knowledge among participants; however,
when incompatible goals and practices coexist across settings, tensions can result
(Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia, 1999). These tensions may inhibit a productive
and satisfactory tutorial; furthermore, they may cause tutors to question the very nature of
their role.

More significantly, Leont’ev, one of the architects of activity theory, “identified
the motive of the setting—that is, the outcome implicit in the setting—as the overarching
goal toward which participants direct their activity” (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 142).
Wertsch (1985) argued that participants’ motives “maximize one goal, one set of
behaviors, and the like, over others” (p. 212). Thus, the motives of various settings shape
what a tutor may give up (e.g., a focus on higher-level concerns in responding) in order to
accomplish what the tutor desires (e.g., an insistence on correctness).

Johnson et al. (2003) provide a useful description of the way motives shape
learning and action. The motive, described above, provides a setting with a sense of
purpose and a sense of direction to particular actions. To accomplish this purpose, or
motive, participants must utilize tools, which enable them to engage in activity within a setting. In an education setting, these tools are referred to as theoretical—or conceptual—tools and practical tools. Conceptual tools are broadly applicable theories. . . and theoretical principles such as cooperative learning, which can serve as guidelines for instructional practice.” Practical tools are “practices, strategies, and resources that have more local and immediate utility,” such as brainstorming as a prewriting activity. “Appropriation refers to the process through which a person adopts the theoretical and practical tools available for use” in a particular setting, like the Writing Center. “The extent of appropriation depends on the congruence of a learner’s values, prior experiences, and goals with those of more experienced. . . members of a culture, . . . such as university faculty” (p. 143).

In order to best learn from an examination of a tutor’s practice, one must be willing to pay attention to those moments of incongruence and clashing motives across activity settings, for they are inherent to the nature of conference conversation, the developing relationship between a tutor and tutee, and the tutors’ appropriation of conceptual and practical teaching tools. Gillam (1991) explained that the apparent messiness of collaboration and its competing intentions and settings is a natural result of the “multi-vocality” that we have come to recognize as central to learning:

Like a fertile, overgrown garden, the writing center breeds conversations between the writer and tutor which grow and spread in directions neither consciously intends. Voices of others—past and current teachers, friends, parents, other texts—intrude, and boundaries. . . blur. Like fussy gardeners, those of us charged with tending to this environment try to keep things under control by pruning back the conversation and staking out borders. . . (p. 127).
Gillam also suggests, however, that we resist this predisposition for finding fixed answers aimed at relieving conflict, and instead pay attention to the “tensions” and “multiple agencies” at work in the conference and see them as “fertile ground for writing and talk about writing” (p. 129).

Activity theory also accounts for the collaborative and progressive nature of learning activity. Lee and Smagorinsky (2000) insisted that learning is not a “process of one-way appropriation”; rather it involves a “process of multidirectional change over time” (Freedman and Katz, 1987; p. 5, emphasis added). Time is a significant aspect of examining joint activity, since students, teachers, and the task itself all change over time as complex negotiations occur among active participants. While studying dyadic classroom interactions, Duran and Szymanski (1996) found that students oriented “to each other based on their past negotiations and in relation to the eventual progress of their current interaction. . . . Therefore, the interaction is a negotiated production with an implicated future and an intertextual past, . . . which they call consequential progression” (Putney et al., 2000, p. 91). According to this view, both within-event activity and across-event progression must be analyzed to understand learning over time.

Most research on writing tutorials has been limited to one-shot examinations of a single aspect of a writing conference. This narrow analytical lens discounts any across-event progression of tutorial negotiations. In this study, I observed and interviewed tutors throughout both tutor training and tutor-student conferences over a period of an entire academic semester (15 weeks) in order to deepen the understanding of the challenges writing tutors face and negotiate over time.
In order to develop a more substantive understanding of writing tutors’ learning and development, research is needed which takes a more in-depth look at the multiple settings and motives at work in tutorials as they progress over time. At the same time, research is also needed to examine the minute details of conference conversation in order to better recognize and understand social processes that permit tutors to appropriate the tools they have learned in training and which hinder that transfer. For this study, I employed both macro-level (social settings) and micro-level (writing conferences) analyses in order to contribute to a greater understanding of the tensions which arise in writing tutorials. Activity theory is an apt framework for this proposed comprehensive analysis of both the writing center tutorial task as it transpires across time and the many competing influences on and purposes for that activity.

**Research Foci and Questions**

Research is needed which addresses the multiple contexts and emerging tensions which shape the construction of a tutor’s knowledge of teaching tools and the dynamics of tutorials as they progress over time. In this study, I examined the factors that influence tutors’ appropriation of and/or resistance to the Writing Center theory and tutoring strategies presented in training in order to achieve a greater understanding of the conflicts, consensus, and negotiations which arise in writing tutorials.

Using ethnographic methods, I observed (as a participant) tutor training sessions and then observed and analyzed tutor-student conferences over a fifteen-week semester in order to examine the relationship between what tutors learn in tutor training and what they practice in the writing conference. The purpose of this study is to bring to the
foreground some of the tensions that interfere with the transfer of knowledge to practice and to argue against idealized notions of tutoring—especially peer tutoring—practice. This study has implications for improved tutor training approaches and more flexible tutoring practice in the writing center.

Three questions guided the study:

1. What are the principal settings for the tutors’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools for writing conferences? What are the overriding motives that govern participants’ actions in these settings?

2. Given the overlap among settings with potentially conflicting motives, what tensions arise as tutors attempt to appropriate both the conceptual tools and the practical tools they have learned in tutor training? How does the tutor negotiate these tensions over the course of the semester? What adjustments occur?

3. Within these settings, what shaped the tutors’ appropriation of the tools and how did their tutoring develop over time in relation to contextual factors presented by the conference conversation?

**Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

In the chapters that follow, I present the related literature, methods, contexts, settings, findings, and implications of this study. In Chapter Two, I focus specifically on the related research on writing centers, writing conferences, tutor roles, and activity
settings. In Chapter Three, I identify the contexts and methodology of my study, while in Chapter Four, I describe how those contexts become activity settings which shape tutor development. In Chapter Five, I reveal my findings regarding tutors’ initial conceptions of their role, based on both tutor training and their prior experiences with teaching, tutoring, and writing. In Chapter Six, I present my findings concerning the tensions and negotiations which occurred as tutors’ attempted to appropriate the tools of training throughout a semester of tutoring. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I connect those findings with implications for tutor training, reflective practice, and future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This research study is anchored in five areas within the scholarly literature: (1) the status of writing centers and tutorial programs in colleges and universities; (2) the role of collaborative conferences in serving the needs of basic writers, (3) the debates surrounding roles tutors should assume in the writing conference to ensure effective practice, (4) the effects of contextual factors on the writing conference as an activity setting, and (5) related studies on the transfer of teacher training to classroom practice.

The Status of Writing Centers and Tutorial Programs in Colleges and Universities

Writing centers began to emerge in the 1970s as dramatic changes took place in the demographics of entering college students. According to Mina Shaughnessy (1977), these changes led to growing numbers of “underprepared” students, who brought unique “problems” to the classroom. Writing centers—then called writing labs or writing clinics—became the place to fix those problems; however, this notion of writing centers as remedial spaces and fix-it shops has not been left unchallenged.

During the last two decades, an emergence of social theory prompted writing center theorists to grow more interested in the role of collaboration in thinking, learning,
and writing (Bruffee, 1984, 1984b; Ede, 1989; Gillam, 1991; Lunsford, 1991; North, 1984). According to North (1984), most writing centers aim to be student-centered, not text-centered; they focus on the student’s writing process, not the student’s completed draft. Tutors in writing centers work toward this aim by inviting writers into conversations about their writing. Consequently, the writer, rather than the tutor, has been the focus of much of the recent literature on writing centers and writing tutorials (e.g., DiPardo, 1991, 1992; Harris, 1990; Woolbright, 1992).

Writing centers today also occupy a more visible and central role in the teaching of writing. Muriel Harris (1995) suggested that writing centers serve an important function in colleges and universities due to their ability to meet the individual needs of students. According to Harris, writing centers are “integral to retention efforts, are good recruiting tools, provide a setting for computer facilities that integrate word processing with tutoring, are rich sites for research, and are free to spawn new services and explore new writing environments” (p. 27). Hawkins (1984) went a step further, insisting that writing centers, one of the “chief agents of the movement toward individualization and collaborative learning,” should help to redefine what it means to teach writing. Today, upon examining the growing legitimacy of the place of tutorials in first-year composition courses, one may argue that writing centers have done just that. As writing centers have experienced growth, they have found a legitimized space on many college campuses. In doing so, they have not only succeeded in serving the larger needs of the university, but they have also reached beyond their own walls to influence first-year writing programs.

In his article, “One-to-One: Tutorial Instruction in Freshman Composition,” Garrison (1986) insisted that the most relevant activity in learning to write is writing and
rewriting; yet writing courses, mostly taught the same way they were thirty or more years
ago, “teach them nothing useful about writing” (p. 15). He describes an instructional
model based on teacher-student tutorials as a means to keep students writing by providing
constant feedback and helping students diagnose their own writing difficulties and
resolve them. Similarly, Newkirk (1989) saw the writing conference as a promising
“dialectic encounter between teacher and student” in the first-year composition class (p.
328).

Though Garrison and Newkirk were both targeting instructor-led conferences, a
closer look at colleges and universities reveals a growing number of first-year
composition courses which include a built-in peer-led tutorial component. Lalicker
(1999) reported on alternative basic writing program structures which have become
commonplace in first-year college composition; two of which—the “stretch model” and
the “studio model”—provide basic writers tutorial assistance during their first year of
taking standard composition courses instead of requiring those students to take a
prerequisite basic writing course which puts them behind schedule toward graduation.
Arizona State University, the University of South Carolina, and Washington State
University are just a few of the institutions working with these alternative structures.

The tutorial component of first-year composition, which often replaces a separate
remedial course, is designed to provide individualized assistance to under-prepared
writers from someone other than the teacher. For example, the first-year writing program
at The Ohio State University offers English 110W, a “workshop” course. Students
required to take the course encounter the same intensive first-year writing experiences
they would encounter in regular composition courses, but these students are also supported through weekly writing workshops where small groups of students meet with a writing consultant.

Though tutorial components of first-year writing courses are becoming more prevalent, only a handful of studies have examined the effectiveness of such programs. Song and Richter (1997) conducted a quantitative survey aimed at determining the success of an in-class tutoring program at an open-admissions community college. They found that those students who received tutoring in the first-year program fared better in writing performance afterward than those who did not. MacDonald (1987) conducted a year-long evaluation of the Language Arts tutorial program at Los Medanos College in California and found that tutored students were more likely to earn higher course grades and complete classes than non-tutored students. In addition, Smith and Smith (1988) found that students’ grades in first-year composition improved when students received tutoring as compared with traditional grammar instruction. Young and Fritzsche (2002) conducted an empirical study which tested the relations between procrastination tendency, peer feedback, and student writing success. They found that participants who received peer feedback from the writing center procrastinated less and were more satisfied with their writing process than participants who didn’t receive feedback. Finally, Davis (1987) examined 121 freshman composition students and found that those students who received peer feedback in the writing center showed the greatest gains in positive attitude toward writing.
The Role of Collaborative Conferences in Serving the Needs of Basic Writers

In the past three decades, we have witnessed an emergence of tutorial programs resolved to meet the needs of basic writers entering colleges and universities. The efficacy of such programs lies in their provision for collaborative learning and individualized instruction. Sociocultural and social constructionist theories provide a theoretical grounding for tutorial programs, since the theory shifts focus from the learner’s or writer’s individual processes to the socially and culturally situated nature of language and learning. As learning occurs, socioculturalists argue, a mutual appropriation occurs in which participants are continually “co-opting or using each others’ contributions,” and thus “co-constructing knowledge” (Cobb, 1996, p. 38). From a sociocultural perspective, then, the social interaction necessary for a shared construction of knowledge is the very spark that ignites learning.

Social constructionists emphasize that language is a social phenomenon. Mikial Bakhtin (1981) explained that every utterance “exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” (91). Kenneth Bruffee (1986), who introduced social constructionist theory in composition studies, stated, “We use language primarily to join communities we do not yet belong to and to cement our membership in communities we already belong to” (784). Despite common misconceptions of the “isolated writer,” social constructionists hold that writing, too, is a social—not a solitary—activity. Not only are writers connected to others in terms of the audience to whom they write, but they are also influenced by others’ voices—voices they have read and heard. One-to-one writing tutorials directly demonstrate the social nature of
language and learning. Gere (1987) summarized well the benefit of collaboration for writing, explaining that collaboration involves “the process of working together [which] enables writers to use language as a means of becoming competent in the discourse of a given community” (p. 75).

Proponents of individualized, tutorial instruction have drawn heavily on the early language learning theories of both Vygotsky and Bruner. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that learning takes place in the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*, where teaching extends the student beyond what he or she can do without assistance. Internalization takes place as the learner interacts with a more knowledgeable person, who guides and supports the learner’s progress through the learning task. In the writing conference, that more knowledgeable person is a teacher or peer tutor who asks questions and supports student writers to help them to progress to a level beyond what they could do alone.

Similarly, Bruner’s (1975) notion of *scaffolding* profiles this mentoring process, which occurs as more knowledgeable or experienced persons engage in activity with less knowledgeable or experienced learners to assist them in constructing meaning. These views of language learning, and specifically scaffolding, have become a model for both classroom and individualized instruction. Anchoring their ideas in this earlier work, Applebee and Langer (1987) developed the concept of *instructional scaffolding* as an alternative model for effective writing instruction (also see Applebee and Langer, 1983.) This model presents a view of writing instruction that is based on providing “structured support or *scaffolding* as students undertake new and more difficult tasks. In the process of completing those tasks, students internalize information and strategies relevant to the tasks, learning the concepts and skills they will need in order eventually to undertake
similar tasks on their own” (p. 139). This model of instruction is highly applicable to the individualized instruction of one-to-one writing tutorials, where dialogue is the primary mode of teaching and learning. In dialogic writing conferences, the comments and questions offered by a tutor or teacher provide an appropriate scaffold that enables a student to grasp or complete a new, more difficult, writing task, first collaboratively and later on his or her own.

Effective writing tutorials which foster mutual appropriation share in common an emphasis on dialogic interaction, a knowledge-building dialogue which occurs as contributors jointly attempt to construct common understandings that they recognize as superior to their previous understandings. Several research studies reveal that such interactive talk, both in small groups and tutorial dyads, plays a significant role in developing writers of all ages. Gere (1990) claimed that high school students in writing groups produced better writing because talk helped them “identify and solve problems at many levels—word, sentence, paragraph, and whole piece of writing—and solving these problems leads to a better piece of writing.” She also found that students involved in writing groups learn about the nature of writing: “They develop a language to describe what they and others do to write, they learn about audience needs and expectations, and they develop criteria by which to evaluate writing” (p. 118). Freedman and Katz (1987) analyzed teacher-student writing conferences and concluded that writing conference talk is conducive to learning because in conference conversations, students have unique opportunity to solve problems and rehearse arguments, which may lead to invention or revision of their written texts. Harris (1990) argued that by having collaborative dialogues with college students, teachers can make students aware of our willingness to
assist them as helpers (as opposed to graders), and we can “promote that social awareness
that writers need,” an awareness of writing for others (p. 160). (Also see Ziv, 1983;
Bruffee, 1978; Dannis, 1980; Freedman, 1987; Benesch, 1985.)

An essay which has been oft-cited in discussions aimed at justifying the work of
tutorials is Kenneth Bruffee’s (1984) essay, “Collaborative Learning and the
‘Conversation of Mankind’.” In the essay, Bruffee provided a theoretical basis for
writing centers by locating conference practice in collaborative learning theories. Seeing
both thought and writing as products of social interaction (specifically talk), Bruffee
insisted that for students to think and write according to academic standards, they must
have opportunities to engage in academic talk. This essay made powerful space for
writing centers and writing workshops, where conversations about writing were central to
the center’s activity.

Kenneth Bruffee (1984) followed up the “Collaborative Learning” essay with
another landmark essay for writing centers which, this time, focused specifically on the
efficacy of peer tutoring. In the essay, “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of
Mankind,” Bruffee posed peer tutoring as an alternative to the traditional classroom, one
that is aimed at engaging a “community of knowledgeable peers” in conversation in as
many points in the writing process as possible. Bruffee’s essay has been heralded for
providing a theoretical basis for the peer-led writing tutorials of college and university
writing centers.

Research has linked the collaboration of one-on-one tutorials to the development
of writing proficiencies; however, most of that research remains limited to conferences
between students and their teachers. Tutorial-based writing programs and writing centers, which, for the most part, employ peer tutors to conference with student writers, are only minimally represented in research.

Debates Surrounding Tutor Roles

The onslaught of tutorial programs and writing centers has also prompted debates surrounding the roles that tutors should assume in the writing conference to ensure effective negotiations—specifically, those negotiations which invite students into the zone of proximal development. Erickson (1996) identified the teacher-learner (or expert-novice) relationship as one of “cojoint participation and influence. . . in which no mover is unmoved. . . . the learner is seen as having the same agentive footing in the interaction as the teacher” (p. 29). This idea of mutual appropriation, or a shared co-construction of knowledge, has defined the essence of effective tutor and student roles as they have been defined and described in most of the scholarly literature.

For example, Harris (1990) explained that in order to create opportunities for the kind of talk conducive to learning, i.e., true collaborative dialogue, teachers (as tutors) must learn strategies for carrying on conversation in which two speakers are “asking, answering, discussing, trying out, and exploring together. . . .” (p. 151). He described the different kinds of teacher-student talk which occur at various stages during the writing process and then provided helpful guidelines for (and examples of) collaborative dialogues, which are productive for meeting specific goals. For example, at the generating content stage, Harris recommended the teacher or tutor engage the student in “the kind of conversation we all engage in when we want to hear more about what
someone is telling us” (e.g., “who-what-when-where-why-how” questions) (pp. 151-2). At the *conveying information and strategies* stage, the talk may have “a more overt instructional purpose.” However, Harris warned that teachers should resist the common, yet ineffective, tendency to “tell” when talk moves to general aspects of writing. Rather, using the power of interaction, “the teacher’s side of this kind of talk [should be] focused on finding out why the textbook and/or class explanations were not clear. . . . How can an abstract concept become a reality for this particular student?” (p. 154). At the *responding to writing* stage, Harris invited teachers to resist the one-way, often misconstrued, response, and instead opt for an interactive talk, where we can “hear student’s hesitations and the half-articulated questions” and then “clarify and amplify our responses” (p. 155).

Though applicable to peer tutors, Harris’s (1990) guidelines for tutorial roles and strategies were specifically directed to teachers. Later, however, in an essay entitled “Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors,” Harris (1995) extended the advice to the peer tutor, whom she labeled a “middle person” who “inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher” (pp. 27-28). Since the peer tutor is typically not vested the authority of an evaluating teacher, Harris claimed that students can engage in a dialogue that is more free and honest. This kind of flexibility and interaction in a tutorial “permits a close look at the individual student” (p. 29), which in turn can enable the tutor to implement need-based strategies, including the following: generating ideas through “exploratory talk”; assisting with “acquisition of strategic knowledge” through “talking, modeling, and offering suggestions”; giving students confidence and

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encouragement through use of “motivational language”; and “interpreting the meaning of academic language” through helping students understand assignments and teacher comments (pp. 33-39).

Discussions such as Bruffee’s and Harris’s that describe the ideal roles peer tutors can assume have legitimized the presence of peer tutors in many college and university writing centers across the country. However, consensus over the role peer tutors should assume and the nature of the collaborative conference has not yet been achieved. For example, Ede (1989) agreed with Bruffee (1984, 1984b) that writing tutorials should be located in collaborative learning theories, but she also questioned Bruffee’s (1984b) idealized assumptions that peer collaboration is always beneficial to our students, claiming we need more detailed analyses of what actually happens in the collaboration. Kail and Trimbur (1987) also troubled the notion of peers serving as tutors, claiming that in curriculum-based writing-center models, the tutors, who are usually hired within the institution, share its authority; therefore, an uninhibited, collaborative exchange between peers may not transpire.

Lunsford (1991), also basing writing center practice on collaborative theory, presented metaphors of what she observed as the different kinds of writing center collaborations. Drawing on these metaphors of “Storehouse,” “Garret,” and “Burkean Parlor” writing centers, Lunsford pointed out the problem that tutors’, teachers’, and tutee’s prior experiences may work against collaborative environments, causing participants to hold to “the rigid hierarchy of teacher-centered classrooms” (Storehouse models) even when tutor-centered conversations are the goal (p. 112). The arguments of Ede, Kail and Trimbur, and Lunsford have led practitioners and researchers to
problematize the peer tutor role by posing questions such as, Exactly what do we mean by collaboration? And, Where is control located in the collaboration? In the tutor? The tutee? Or, as Lunsford suggests, in the negotiating group?

In an attempt to privilege the “collaborative” conference, some literature on writing tutorials reflects an almost obsessive concern for resisting directive strategies altogether in the conference for fear they will result in the tutor usurping control and ownership over both the conference and the student’s text. Consequently, tutors are urged to provide “hands-off” tutoring approaches. For example, in his oft-cited essay, “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work,” Brooks (1991) proposed that tutors assume a more passive role in the conference and adopt strategies that make the writer the primary agent in the writing center session: “The less we do to the paper, the better. . . . Ideally, the student should be the only active agent in improving the paper. . . . If, at the end of the session, a paper is improved, it should be because the student did all the work” (p. 87). Brooks suggested that tutors should resist doing what most students want them to do: tell them what to do to fix their paper. He even went as far as to insist that the tutor should resist giving any written feedback on the text; instead, the tutor should point the student toward solving problems in his or her writing (without ever calling them problems) by asking “leading” questions.

The minimalist, or “hands-off,” tutor role has not been embraced by all, however. Herdman (1997) and Gillam (1991) expressed a shared concern that these approaches have silenced tutors’ voices and stripped them of a clear sense of how to negotiate their diverse roles and authority in the collaborative conference. Herdman (1997) noted that tutors, when faced with the confusing task of deciphering whether they are providing
legitimate collaboration with the student or unfair influence over the student, often err on
the safe side and provide only minimal feedback for the student. Gillam (1991)
explained that “by privileging the writer’s voice and restraining the tutor’s, [we stunt] the
growth of conversation, the writing center’s richest resource” (p. 128). Drawing on
Bakhtin’s idea of answerability, she reminded us that “No matter who said what or how
much each talked, conversation creates and alters meaning, and for that meaning both
participants are responsible. . . . Since the tutor’s response intervenes in the writer’s
process and alters the writer’s ‘answer,’ the tutor is responsible by role and training to
make that response as enabling as possible” (p. 133).

Walker and Elias (1987), in an analysis of highest-rated and lowest-rated writing
conferences at two universities, contributed significant understanding to what student
tutees think about tutor-student collaboration. They found that the conversations of the
highest-rated conferences did not necessarily consist of conversations in which the tutor
resisted an evaluative role and assumed a more subtle, Socratic one—the role privileged
by advocates of minimalist tutoring strategies (e.g., Brooks, 1991). Rather, students rated
high those conferences in which tutors provided consistent standards, or criteria, as well
as evaluations based on those standards. Walker and Elias reasoned that “for students to
be able to evaluate their own papers, and revise them according to a set of principles that
define a model of good writing, they must, first, be told what that model is and, second,
be able to articulate it for themselves” (p. 272).

In their research study, Walker and Elias (1987) aimed to shed light upon the
desires and expectations of the tutees who come to the writing center. What they found
students want, however, grates against a plethora of tutor-training literature, which
advocates the idea that the tutor should assume the role of collaborator, or co-learner, in substitution of a teacher/evaluator role—advice which may be overly idealistic and simplistic. Collaboration is paramount, but the collaborator-evaluator binary fails to recognize the authority that even hired tutors bring to the conference (Kail and Trimbur, 1987), and it also assumes that students do not desire or expect expert, evaluative feedback.

Newkirk (1995) warned that students may feel frustrated by a “lack of directness” when evaluation is “cushioned” or precluded altogether (pp. 196-7). Newkirk described one student who, when prompted by her tutor to evaluate her own writing, complained that she was used to “having [her] teacher correct it, tell [her] what’s wrong with it, and give [her] a grade” (p. 204). Clearly, effective tutors, in negotiating their roles, must strike a delicate balance between implementing more explicit tutoring strategies (e.g., articulating standards, providing instruction, and modeling revision) and resisting those practices which may strip the student of his or her ownership of the task (e.g., dominating the conference agenda, imposing formulaic and standardized quick-fixes, or even doing the work for the student.)

Though the term “collaboration” has been a bit muddied, one thing is clear: its efficacy lies in privileged notions of student “ownership.” We now know that learners are empowered and motivated through their involvement in and ownership of authentic learning experiences, a concept Dewey (1916) termed sympathetic identification. For scaffolding to be productive, the task must be claimed as the learner’s own. Applebee
(1986) noted, “The instructional task must allow students room to make their own contribution to the activity as it evolves, giving them a sense of ownership of what they are doing” (p. 110).

Walker and Elias (1987) found student ownership of the task to be the most important determining factor for student satisfaction of writing tutorials. In theorizing about writing conferences, we often equate student ownership of the task with whether or not the student dominates the conference in terms of talk time or talk turns. As stated earlier, however, Walker and Elias found that talk time was not a key factor. Rather, what was key was whether or not the conference focused on the student’s work and the student’s agenda. Though students were satisfied with conferences which focused on evaluation of their papers, they favored most those conferences in which they were given an active role in evaluating the writing, contributing to the criteria for evaluation, and finding solutions. Conferences in which the tutor “takes over the task and tells their students what to write and how” were consistently rated low by students (p. 278).

Though few would argue that ownership is not key to successful tutorials, it has become apparent that the notion of ownership cannot be easily translated into effective tutoring strategies and clearly-defined tutor and student roles. Knoblauch and Brannon (1982) and Graves (1983) argued that teachers and tutors should respect student ownership of their texts and not attempt to appropriate those texts. Newkirk (1989), however, urged that we must be mindful of the ways the metaphor of “ownership” can place the role of teacher (or tutor) in defined and restricted boundaries. He problematized these notions of ownership by explaining that though the student owns his or her paper to a degree, “the paper is intended for others . . . and so, to a degree, the writing is also
owned by its readers” (p. 329). While Newkirk was careful to avoid condoning practice which dismisses student intentions and choices, he also noted that “the expectations of the teacher, the course, and the academy must interact with the intentions of the student” (p. 329). Bartholomae (1997) also argued that we should be explicit about the power, tradition, and authority inherent in academic writing. To pretend that writing classes occupy a space free from traces of power and authority “keeps this knowledge from our students” and keeps them from “confronting their situatedness” within power politics (p. 481). Consequently, writing center tutors may be doing a disservice to a student when they privilege that student’s intentions and discount the expectations of the teacher or academy for whom that student is writing.

Debates surrounding the role tutors should assume, the nature of collaboration they should strive for, and the student ownership they should aim to preserve are clearly unsettled. More research which illuminates the complexities of tutor and student roles and negotiations—and how those roles shift over time—is needed in order for tutors to conceptualize a more sophisticated understanding of collaboration. As Erickson (1989) argues, we need to critically consider where collaboration “is essential” and where it “is nonessential and perhaps even inappropriate” (p. 432). Furthermore, we need more critical examinations of the complicated position of peer tutors, who assume roles ranging anywhere from “friend” to “more capable peer” to “expert.” Only then will tutors be able to move beyond relying on idealistic roles and tutoring do’s and don’ts to develop a broad repertoire of roles and devices which are responsive to both the student and the service of the task.
Contextual Factors on the Conference Activity

In order to critically examine the way tutors conceptualize their role and make decisions regarding their practice, we must, at the same time, consider the multiple activity settings and competing intentions that factor into each tutorial activity.

Most of the limited research available on competing activity settings and their influence on the tutor’s role and tutor-student negotiations focus on only a single aspect of conflict, such as the influence of a tutor’s memberships (e.g., gender, culture, and language) on the tutor-student conference itself. Anne DiPardo (1991, 1992) conducted perhaps the most thorough research studies that considered the shaping effects of social contexts on writing tutorials. Her across-time analyses of tutors’ conferences with cultural minority students illuminated the writing tutor’s need to pay attention to the cultural tensions at work in the writing conference. DiPardo’s research was situated within an overwhelmingly Anglo university whose campus administrators had recently introduced several programs designed to enhance equity and promote inter-cultural understanding. She not only sought to examine the tutorial conference, but she also examined the tensions which characterized the campus’s efforts toward equity—a tension which filtered all the way into the writing center tutorials.

Most other context-related research consists of practitioners’ reflections of isolated tutorials or surveys. For example, Hunzer’s (1994) survey of student tutees in a writing center specifically examined how gender might contribute to tutorial satisfaction. The survey results revealed that students demonstrate a notable preference for tutors of their own gender. Also, Maxwell (1994) analyzed fifty-four tutor-student conferences at UC Berkeley in order to examine how tutors define their roles, deal with cultural
diversity and gender difference, and learn from their experiences. The separate cases revealed various tensions which emerged in the tutor-student encounter (e.g., unwanted advances). While these studies certainly inform some aspects of writing center practice, they tell us little about how multiple contexts and membership settings may be interrelated and how they affect the tutor over time.

One contextual factor that must be considered in a tutorial program when it functions as a required supplement to first-year composition is the marginalized status of remedial programs. As a result of being placed in such a program or labeled as somehow incompetent, students may be resistant to participate in conferences and may not respond well to the tutor, who, in many ways, represents the institution’s decision to place them in remediation. Regardless of attempts to change course names (e.g., “Basic English” to “Writing Center Course”), change tutor labels (e.g., “tutor” to “writing consultant”), or soften the labels given to students, the very process of tracking and labeling “brands” students in debilitating ways. These labels, or brands, hold considerable power over students’ self-identities. Rose (1989) reminded us of the dangerous position of the student who passively accepts or, in time, internalizes the label. Rose warned that this student might not be able to separate out his particular problems with writing from his own image of himself as a thinker.

Royster and Taylor (1997) attempted to capture the “voiced identities” in a basic writing classroom (English 052), a workshop course which operated much like our Writing Center course. Taylor’s students’ voices, represented in their final portfolios, echoed the oppressive nature of tracking and how it contributed to their own identities of self as positioned in the academy. Mike, in his cover letter for his final portfolio,
identified the Writing Workshop as an “‘Evil Stepmother’ preventing this ‘Cinderella Class’ from going to the ‘Ball’-English 110” (p. 39). Another student, Casey, wrote a riveting allegory, titled “The City of 052,” in which the city inhabitants, who were “placed there by the government because they were considered to be slightly behind the rest of the world in intelligence,” were “bonded together by the simple fact that they were unhappy to be stuck in a city confined to the bottom of the ocean. . . [where] they seldom had contact with the real world” (39). Casey’s allegory not only resonated her discontent and resistance, but her description of the city’s inhabitants (who are “slightly behind in intelligence”) offered a telling sign of her own blurred distinction between writing issues and thinking issues.

Undoubtedly, the views that teachers and tutors construct of their students’ abilities and the ways they label students’ performance can have profound effects on these self-identities. Hull et al. (1991) warned that, more often than not, students internalize our opinions and fulfill our expectations of them; quite simply, if we (teachers and tutors) expect little out of them, they will meet our meager expectations. Brophy (1985) recommended that we not maintain unrealistically high expectations, but we should hold accurate assessments of students’ competencies and find ways to push against students’ negative self-perceptions.

In the last chapter, I quoted Gillam (1991), who argued the inevitable existence of “tensions” and “multiple agencies” in the collaborative conference (p. 129). Tensions are inevitable in the writing conference as contexts overlap and tutors and students bring different goals, experiences, and attitudes to the conference. Gillam asserted, however, that we must resist the temptation to control or iron out these tensions and instead pay
attention to them. Accordingly, in this research study, I have sought to follow Gillam’s advice and treat those moments of dissention as opportunities to learn more about the contextual factors that influence the way novice tutors negotiate their roles.

Unlike previous studies of writing tutorials, I have sought to situate an understanding of tutor-student tutorials within the layers of social contexts which contain them. I have examined the purposes and motives of both the larger institutional contexts (e.g. college retention efforts) and more immediate contexts (e.g. tutor training) in which writing tutorials are nested (Cazden, 1988). I have also examined outside factors (e.g., tutors’ prior experiences, memberships, etc.)—subsidiary activity settings which inevitably influence the tutorial, yet have received only speculative attention in the literature.

**The Transfer of Teacher Training to Classroom Practice**

Although little has been written regarding the transfer of tutor training to tutor practice, research out of the teacher education tradition provides meaningful insight to the developmental processes of learning to teach. In particular, several studies have examined the ways early-career teachers transfer the conceptual and practical tools of their teacher training to classroom practice. Many of these studies have revealed that a number of factors beyond teacher training shape the complex process of teacher development. For example, novice teachers are not only shaped by prior methods courses, but their practice is also heavily influenced by their own prior school experiences, their individual beliefs, and the professional support they receive from administrators and colleagues within the educational setting in which they teach.
Similarly, the development of writing tutors cannot be solely attributed to writing center tutor training. Rather, tutors conceptualize their role and develop their practices according to a number of factors similar to those identified in these related teacher research studies. Like novice teachers, novice tutors’ development of their approaches to tutoring are affected by various settings, including tutors’ own prior experiences with tutoring and learning to write, their personal beliefs about good writing and useful tutoring, and the ongoing support they receive from writing center staff.

Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, and Fry (2003) conducted an activity-theory analysis of an early career teacher and found that the teacher’s decision-making regarding teaching the five-paragraph theme was influenced by a number of contexts. Even though the teaching of the five-paragraph theme was not endorsed in her teacher education program, that training was superseded by the goals and motives of other contexts. These settings were often more persuasive than her teacher preparation settings. For example, she faced pressure from colleagues to conform to their practices, pressure from the community to maintain passing scores on the state writing test, and she was even confronted by her own deeply held belief in the five-paragraph theme as a useful genre in students’ learning to write. Similarly, novice tutors will likely encounter pressure from persuasive sources, such as students who expect tutors to fix their papers, teachers who expect the writing center to address writers’ problems so they won’t have to, and administrators who expect the writing center to ensure student retention.

Newell, Gingrich, and Johnson (2001) examined the practice of nine student teachers in order to gain insight into the contextual factors that either helped or hindered the appropriation of teaching tools emphasized in the university’s teacher education
program. They found that pre-service coursework and field experiences, cooperating teacher goals (which at times conflicted with university-endorsed tools), and the student teachers’ prior learning experiences were just a few of the contextual factors which influenced their developing understanding of teaching English language arts. These studies are not all recent. For example, in a sociological study on the schoolteacher, Lortie (1975) learned through surveying, interviewing, and observing classroom teachers that prior experiences have a significant effect on teacher learning. Along a similar vein, novice tutors are also inclined to rely on prior experiences, more specifically what worked for them as they succeeded in college writing endeavors. Prior experiences provide tutors with tutoring tools that are familiar and accessible; even though they may not coincide with the tools presented in tutor training, the tools learned through prior experiences are often more persuasive than those learned in more formal preparation.

Other studies have looked at specific secondary settings which influence teacher development. For example, approaching their research from a sociocultural perspective, Grossman, Thompson, and Valencia (2001) examined the potent influence of school district policy in shaping teachers’ learning and practice during the early part of their careers. They learned that district policies provide a lens through which “teachers develop particular views of and concerns about teaching” (p. 15). They concluded that for beginning teachers, who “are still very much in the beginning stages of constructing their understandings and practice of teaching language arts,” districts can serve as a “powerful role as teacher educators, even if first-year teachers are only dimly aware of formal district policies” (pp. 18-19).
There is plenty at stake for writing centers when this line of teacher education is considered in light of the challenge of locating undergraduate tutors, training them, and then hoping for their successful transfer of teaching tools. For example, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) regard education programs that are loosely organized without a sustained, consistent focus on a pedagogical approach as “a patina of beliefs layered over a lifetime of learning” whose effects are so limited that “when confronted with the realities of the classroom [or tutorials], these beginning teachers [or tutors] reverted to their deeper belief systems” (p. 158).

These studies of the work and mission of the writing center and of teacher learning raise our awareness of the complex demands on early career teachers and writing tutors to negotiate the often competing motives of past and present settings which influence their practice. Even though these studies focus on the transfer of teacher education to classroom practice, their findings regarding the multiple contexts at work in the appropriation process provide a useful backdrop to my study.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

For the present case study, I observed as a participant Writing Center tutor training, and then observed and audio-taped two tutors as they worked with the same students over a fifteen-week semester. By engaging in a qualitative research study, I gained better understanding of both the unique and contextualized activity of tutoring in the Writing Center.

The purpose of the study was three-fold: (1) to understand the range of activity settings that shaped tutors’ knowledge of writing and tutoring writing; (2) to examine the extent to which tutors’ practices made use of the tools presented in tutor training, as well as the extent to which their practices changed over time; and (3) to better understand the factors that influenced their manner of appropriating those tools. The overriding concern of the study was tutors’ processes of appropriation within a range of settings. Sanders (1981) described the usefulness of case studies for examining process: “Case studies help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (p. 44).

The second concern focused on obtaining insight into the “why” or the reasons for tutors’ decision-making in the conference activity. Yin (1994) noted that case studies,
due to their suitability to examine both a phenomenon and its context, are particularly useful in answering complex questions concerned with decision-making in specific contexts. Yin (1994) identified the usefulness of case study design for research in which the variables of the phenomenon cannot be separated from their context: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Due to the nature of this study and the theoretical framework through which I approached it, I needed a research design which could accommodate the complicated blurring of boundaries across settings and across time.

In this chapter, I first identify the contexts for my research. My descriptions of these contexts are brief due to the rather detailed description of these contexts as activity settings in Chapter Four. In the second half of the chapter, I identify my methods for data collection, and my coding and analysis of the data.

### Research Context

**SBC**

SBC is a small church-affiliated college. Approximately 500 students are enrolled at the college. The average age of those students is 21 years old. While the college at one time was attended mostly by young men, currently the gender statistics list that 51% of the students are women. The faculty, staff, and students are predominantly white and middle-class—much like the demographics of the surrounding community. Historically, the student bodies of Bible Colleges have been and continue to be homogenous groups. However, due to a concerted effort to increase the ethnic diversity
of its student body, SBC increased its percentage of minority students from 2% to just under 10% during the last decade. A similar percentage is reflected in the college staff, faculty, and governing board.

The College has been an accredited member of the Association of Biblical Higher Education since 1976 and has just recently received North Central Regional Accreditation. During the time of this study, the College was heavily involved in the self-study process, required by the Higher Learning Commission in pursuit of regional accreditation. The self-study process marked a time of progressive reflection and transition for the College.

SBC offers a total of 14 professional programs which lead to a Bachelor of Arts degree. Of these programs, five are in ministry, four are in teacher education, two are in psychology, two are in business, and one is in nursing. This program distribution reflects a radical shift which has taken place in the last 15-20 years, as the college has gone from mostly ministry majors to more professional majors.

The Writing Center

The investigation of the present study took place in the College’s Writing Center, which has been in existence since 1994. The primary rationale for the inception of a college writing center eleven years ago was two-fold: 1) to offer writing support services campus wide; and 2) to offer an alternative to the skills-based Basic English remedial course requirement.

The Writing Center’s services are available to all college students. Students who come to the Center receive one-on-one consultations with peer tutors. Most students who
voluntarily visit the Writing Center come to get feedback on papers they have written. However, the tutors’ services are not limited to providing response to texts. Tutors also help students understand course assignments, develop ideas for writing, and understand instructor feedback on their writing.

The Writing Center Course

The Writing Center course, which was added in 1995, is an extension of the Center’s services. The course was designed as a tutorial component to the two composition courses required in students’ first year. The course was also intended to replace the previously required Basic English course, which focused solely on sentence-level grammar and mechanics and lacked any real connection to the students’ writing. The following course description appeared in the 2003-2005 College Catalog:

LA 099 Writing Center: A course designed to engage students in one-on-one writing tutorials with trained writing consultants. In the Writing Center, students may receive direction and assistance with the writing assignments required in English Composition; therefore the two courses should be taken concurrently. Repeatable. Pass/fail. Credits earned do not count toward graduation.

First-year students are required to enroll in the Writing Center course based on a writing assessment conducted during freshman orientation. This placement is based on three factors: 1) their writing proficiency demonstrated in a one-hour timed essay; 2) their ACT or SAT scores; and 3) their high school English track and grades. At least two instructors are involved in the placement decision-making process.
Students required to enroll in the course must attend the Writing Center during scheduled times twice a week, for a total of three hours each week. During this time, students work independently on their writing, discuss their writing with others, and conference one-on-one with one of the hired peer tutors. Students earn three credit hours for taking the course, but the earned credits do not count toward graduation. Students are assessed with a “pass” or “fail,” based on their attendance, preparedness, and time on task in the writing center.

**Tutor Training**

In 1999, I began working with Melissa, the co-director of the Writing Center, to develop a tutor training program to equip peer tutors with this theoretical and practical knowledge. The main thrust of the program was to help novice tutors to begin to recognize the connectedness between the theories of writing that we endorse in the Writing Center, and the roles they assume and strategies they practice in the writing conference.

Initial tutor training, held the three weeks prior to the start of the semester, took place over six training sessions. In training sessions, we first communicated our expectations of the tutors by providing tutor job descriptions and covering various tutor responsibilities. The majority of tutor training, however, was spent discussing and responding to the essays on tutoring writing which tutors were required to read prior to each training session.

Subsequent training sessions, intended to provide ongoing training to tutors, were also held at various points of the semester.
Participants

Tutor Participants

I selected two Writing Center tutors for my focus in the case study: Calvin and Derrick. Specific selective criteria included their interest in examining their practice, an ability to demonstrate a broad array of tutoring methods to meet basic writers’ needs, and prior experience in tutoring, either in the Writing Center or in other contexts. Although both tutors had received favorable reviews from the students they had worked with the prior semester, their level of experience and training for tutoring was quite different. The semester of the present study marked Derrick’s second semester of tutoring in the Writing Center; however, he did have a long-standing reputation with students, especially athletes, as a student who was willing to critique other students’ papers. Calvin, however, had significantly more experience, as the semester under investigation marked his sixth semester of working in the Writing Center. Although both tutors expressed an interest in reflecting on their practice in the Writing Center, Calvin was noticeably more confident about his role than Derrick, who admitted he had “much to learn.” More detailed portraits of the two tutors are provided in Chapter Five.

Student Participants

In selecting student (or tutee) participants, I focused my attention on those students who were assigned to the two tutor participants. The selected student participants were first-year students who had been placed in the Writing Center course as a remediation requirement. Their required attendance enabled me to observe relationships between the same tutors and basic writing students throughout the semester.
By week three, I narrowed the student participant sample to six case study subjects who represented different levels of engagement in the conference. These different levels of engagement were determined by patterns recognized in the initial observations of conferences. My decision to focus on tutees’ levels of engagement was based on a pilot study I conducted the previous year. In the pilot study, I noticed that the tutoring strategies that tutors employed were somewhat dependent on the agency of the student they were tutoring. In other words, they tutored differently with a student who was active in the conference than they did with a student who held a more passive role. Therefore, in order to more fairly represent the diverse methods of both tutors, I assigned each tutor at least one active student and one passive student.

My Role as Researcher

During the two years prior to this investigation, I conducted two pilot studies: one for a research methods course that I took as part of my doctoral program, and the other to more directly pilot my methods for the present study. These pilot studies sharpened my awareness of my situatedness as a researcher in the research setting. Since I was directly involved in the inception of both the college Writing Center and the Writing Center course, my role as researcher was, and is, a complicated one. During the pilot studies, I entered the site as a “knower.” Having already been ensconced in the setting, it was difficult for me to observe the setting without placing it against known contexts.

I also found my researcher role complicated by the authority vested me by my roles as a teacher, tutor, and director. For example, in the first pilot study, I observed several tutor-student conferences and then interviewed the student. During conference
observations, I attempted to make my presence in the conference as unobtrusive as possible, yet the student began asking me questions about his writing instead of the tutor. He later admitted in the interview that since he knew I taught English, he “trusted my feedback more.” My attempts to remove myself from participation in the immediate setting were overshadowed by the student’s awareness of my authority and participation in related settings.

Little did I realize, the obstacles encountered in the pilot studies merely introduced me to the plethora of tensions I would encounter in this research study. What surprised me even more, though, was my changing perception toward these tensions. After completing the research, coding, and analysis, I realized that these tensions were not always problematic; rather, my situatedness in the setting, and the subsequent tensions that surfaced in relation to my role, provided yet another context worthy of examination. I will describe here the conundrum in which I found myself as I worked through my own conceptualization of my role as researcher. I will begin with a description of the role I thought I could (or should) assume in this study.

When I began conceptualizing this study, I was painfully aware that I was examining tutor training and tutor conferences in a program and course of my own devising. Accordingly, I sought to scrutinize my complicated position in the study. In research methods courses, I had learned about the various roles of the researcher, and the unique concerns that accompany each role. Adler and Adler (1994) outlined Gold’s (1958) classic typology—the four roles of researcher. These roles range from complete participant (where the researcher is a fully active member of the research setting) to complete observer (where the researcher is completely removed from the setting). I was
aware that my role in the present study was clearly more complicated than just sorting out the roles of participation and observation, but if I had to characterize my role, I would say that it fell in the range of the participant-as-observer role—in which the researcher has a membership role in the setting, yet may or may not be participating in the activities.

Agar (1980) warned that in participant observation, “familiarity with the setting” may “dull the researcher’s awareness” (qtd. in Morse 1994, p. 226). Therefore, in planning my role as researcher, I imagined the ideal participant observer as one who made every attempt to approach the setting as a stranger. In preparing for this research study, I made many accommodations concerning my involvement in the settings. I mindfully removed myself from positions of authority over both the tutors and the students. I gave up teaching the Writing Center Course, as well as all sections of Freshman Composition except for the advanced section, so that I would not encounter tensions which would naturally surface from having some of the students in class. Furthermore, I made arrangements for the acting director and instructor to also lead the tutor training, so that tutors would be less apt to see me in a position of authority.

As I approached the study, I felt I had been conscientious and responsible in planning my role as researcher, yet now I realize the absurdity of my attempts on many levels. First, it was impossible for me to truly relinquish my authority in the settings. In retrospect, I realized that I relinquished them in title only. This truth became clear the second day of my research when Melissa, the acting director who was in charge of tutor training, called in sick and was unable to train the tutors. I knew that we could not afford to scratch the training session, so I dutifully removed my researcher robe (which meant I could not take notes) and proceeded to train the tutors for the next three hours.
Second, even if I hadn’t been confronted with such a turn of events, I had to take into account my prior relationships with the tutors. During the two years prior to the study, I had developed both working and social relationships with both of the tutors. They were aware of my involvement in the Writing Center and my interest in Writing Center and Basic Writing research. Furthermore, one of the tutors had worked under my direction the two years prior to the study. Clearly, as a researcher, it was not possible for me to disrobe myself of the authority that they had come to know.

Third, my influence on the activity that I would be observing was unmistakably affected by the fact that I played a key part in planning the tutor training. Although Melissa worked with me to select some topics and present the material to the tutors, ultimately, it was I who selected the readings, composed the discussion questions, and compiled the training manuals. In the end, it was my biases over what tutors should learn, know, and practice that controlled the agenda of the tutor training sessions. Throughout tutor training, there was no mistaking my conception of ideal tutor roles and my agenda to guide these tutors to that ideal. Clearly, my value-laden and motive-driven role in the Writing Center was an undeniable factor which influenced the activity of both tutor training and writing center conferencing.

Perhaps most important, though, was my realization that the theoretical approach of my study would dictate the extent to which I could negotiate my role as researcher. Smagorinsky (2001) explained that when researchers enter a setting to conduct research on developmental processes—as I have with these two tutors—they “become part of that setting and thus become mediating factors in the very learning they purport to document.” Rather than perceiving this as a worrisome “contamination of the research environment,”
Smagorinsky argued that researchers should resist attempts to deny their influence, and instead look for the ways they mediate the learner’s development. This notion of researcher-as-mediator further suggested that even if I had refrained from any personal interaction with the tutors, I still would have provided mediation by way of my involvement in the Writing Center context and its history.

A turning point in my conceptualization of my role as researcher was when I realized the potential benefit of my member status. My invested role in the Writing Center from its inception to the present, as well as my direct involvement in the other contexts within which the Writing Center is nested was, in fact, advantageous to my perspective on the research. Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999) explained that while many activity theorists recognize the importance of understanding the cultural history of settings, “it is often difficulty to document clearly” since the “deeper sense of. . . institutional history is only available primarily through interviews and suggestive artifacts” (p. 10).

Unlike the activity theorists they describe, however, I have full access to the histories due to the very nature of my involvement in the contexts. Eleven years ago, I proposed to the faculty the development of a campus writing center. I helped compose the goals and mission statement of both the Writing Center and the First-year Writing Program. As a director of both the Writing Center and the First-year Writing Program, I am involved in the hiring processes of any instructor for the composition courses and any staff member for the Writing Center. Furthermore, as described earlier, I designed the tutor training course, and by default, I even played a part in introducing the conceptual and practical tools that I would later, as a researcher, watch for in the tutors’ practice.
Throughout this process, I have had to retrain myself against guarding too carefully my influence on the contexts and worrying about “contaminating” the setting; rather, I had to learn to carefully examine how my situated roles, as both researcher and past and present participant in the various contexts, provided additional mediational means in the tutors’ development and appropriation.

I realize that, along with my awareness of my inevitable influence on the scene and activity of the research, also comes an urgency to problematize my role as I analyze the data. I am reminded by Punch (1994) that I am my own research instrument: “much fieldwork is dependent on one person’s perception of the field situation at any given point in time. . . . that perception is shaped both by personality and by the nature of the interaction with the research. . . . this makes the researcher his or her own ‘research instrument’” (p. 84). For me, this meant that my perceptions of the tutors’ practice had to be viewed through the lens of inquiry, not evaluation. I had to be mindful of moments when I found myself examining the tutors’ practice against my own ideals of what tutoring should look like, and I had to resist limiting my description of their practice as either failed or succeeded appropriation. Rather, my perspective needed to be driven by activity theory, which meant that I had to shift my focus from the individual tutors to the contexts which influenced their practice.

**Methods**

**Data Collection**

The purpose of this study was to consider two tutors’ thinking about teaching writing, particularly their instruction within the contexts of a writing center located
within a small bible college. Due to the contextualized nature of the study, I collected
data from a wide variety of sources. I also incorporated multiple perspectives in this
study in as many points possible. Table 3.1, provided later in this chapter (see data
analysis section), details a comprehensive list of the sources of data and the focus of my
analysis for each source. These sources are arranged according to the contexts, or
settings, which house them. In the section that follows, I will describe my process for
collecting data through the multiple stages of my research.

Phase One: Collection of Artifacts and Observation of Tutor Training

In order to better understand the goals, values, and motives of the various
educational settings which have influenced the services of the Writing Center, I collected
and reviewed artifacts representing various perspectives of members in those settings.
Some examples of these artifacts include the goals and objectives of the newly formed
Retention Committee, the SBC Catalog, the charted results of the National Survey of
Student Engagement (NSSE), and various other documents.

During this time, I also collected artifacts used for tutor training, including
the writing consultant tutor job description, the Writing Center mission statement,
program goals, the Writing Center course syllabus, the Freshman Composition syllabus
and course schedule, discussion questions, and handouts to be discussed during the six
initial tutor training sessions. I also collected the packet of required readings used to
guide each session’s agenda.

During the three weeks of tutor training, I observed all training sessions, and I
wrote post-observation reflections after each session. I also made notes during some of
the training sessions, but since, as I explained earlier, I was drawn into the training activity, much of my note-taking was postponed until after each session. This observation experience was intended to provide me with an overview of the conceptual and practical tools for tutoring which were introduced and discussed in the training. The discussion portions of the training also gave me some initial insight into the tutors’ prior experiences with writing and learning to write, as well as some of their attitudes and beliefs concerning what constitutes “good” writing and what basic writers need to learn.

Phase Two: Semester Weeks 1-2

The first week of the semester, I distributed a questionnaire to all Writing Center students and tutors to obtain information regarding demographics; personal education and career goals; prior experiences with education, reading, and writing; and their expectations of the Writing Center. (See Appendix A and Appendix B.) Information gained in this first questionnaire provided early insight to the tutors’ and students’ expectations, prior experiences (e.g., former classes, tutor training, etc.), and the roles they expected to assume in the writing conferences.

During the first two weeks of the semester, I also audio-taped all tutor-student conferences. Of those conferences, I observed as many as feasible. These audio-tapes and initial observations of student and tutor engagement in the conferences helped guide my selection of the two tutor participants and six student participants in this case study.
Phase Three: Semester Weeks 3-15

In phase three of my investigation, I focused on the tutoring activity of the four case study tutors. During weeks three through fifteen, I observed and audio-taped all conferences between the case study tutors and the six students that they met with biweekly over the course of the semester. The instrument for these observations was a simple researcher log of tutorial activities, which included estimations of time spent on various conference activities (e.g., generating content, conveying information, responding to writing, etc.) (See Researcher Log example in Appendix C.) These categories of conference activities were drawn from Harris’s (1990, 1995) identified stages and different purposes for collaborative writing conferences. I decided to use Harris’s activities as a guide for my observation since conference activities are closely related to the roles tutors and students assume and the practices that tutors enact in the conference. For example, if the purpose of a conference is topic selection (generating content), the tutor and student will be more apt to assume interactive roles. On the other hand, a conference aimed at explaining an assignment (conveying information) may necessitate a more directive role of the tutor. The log also included general field notes, including information about tutor-student body language, descriptions of shifting roles, and notable moments of consensus and conflict observed during the tutorial. Audio-taped conferences were transcribed for analysis.

I further grounded my analysis of tutorial conversations with interpretations from the involved tutors by conducting debriefing interviews during weeks three through fifteen. In the debriefing interviews, I referred to first-week questionnaires, initial interviews, audio-tapes or transcripts of tutor-student conferences, and Writing Center
logs (see Appendix D) in order to tap into the tutors’ tacit knowledge and attitudes about their roles and practice in the conference. For example, after having a tutor listen to part of a conference, I asked questions like, “Will you take a minute to reflect on the session and tell me what you remember about it?” I also offered alternatives for consideration; for example, if a tutor expressed that they did not understand the direction the writer was going with the paper, I asked questions like, “In reflecting back on the conference, is there any point in this conference where you could feel comfortable expressing your honest critique of the student’s writing?” By soliciting interpretations from the tutors, I was able to gain information regarding the reasons behind their decisions.

These debriefing interviews also served as member checks, which sometimes verified my interpretations of observations and sometimes challenged them. My research focus on the “why’s” behind tutor practice and decision-making necessitated the presence of the tutors’ own voices. This study, therefore, relied on my own observation and interpretation, as well as the tutors’ continual reflection on their practice. This reflection was documented in the form of data by way of the debriefing interviews, the end-of-term questionnaires, and the tutors’ own reflection logs. While these three data sources are all reflective in nature, the processes involved for each are quite different.

In the debriefing interviews, I often guided the focus of the tutors’ reflection, as evidenced in the sample questions described above. I also guided tutors’ reflection in the end-of-term questionnaire. (See Appendix E). In the questionnaire, which was distributed the last week of the semester, I purposefully directed tutors’ attention to certain attitudes and beliefs that they had expressed early in their tutoring experience. My purpose for doing so was to get tutors to consider any attitudinal changes that had
taken place. In the tutors’ reflection logs, however, I provided no direction or instruction regarding what they should write. Rather, the tutors were encouraged to reflect on their practice in whatever way they felt led. This multifaceted inclusion of the tutors’ own voices decentered my voice as researcher and added another interpretive layer to my findings, contributing to both the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

To further triangulate my data collection, I also audio taped and transcribed end-of-semester interviews with the students with whom each tutor worked. These interview questions regarded the students’ perceptions of the conference activity (e.g., the students’ perceptions of the tutors’ responsiveness to their personal goals and expectations, the tutors’ effectiveness in supporting the overall goal of the Writing Center and tutorial course, and any tutor changes or emerging tensions that the students’ may have noticed throughout the semester.) I also received feedback regarding the students’ perceptions of the Writing Center and tutorial course in general.

Throughout the duration of my observation and analysis, I kept a reflective journal during the study to reflect, question, complain, explain, and criticize my own practice, decisions, and assumptions.

Data Analysis

The goals of my data analysis were to (1) describe from an activity theory perspective the activity settings in which two tutors leaned to teach writing (chapter 4); and (2) to construct portraits of each tutor that are grounded in empirical data and a relevant theoretical framework (chapters five and six). (See Appendix F for an overview of my levels of data analysis.)
My method of data analysis mirrored Huberman and Miles’s (1994) emphasis on the process of analysis: Data reduction and conclusion drawing occurred throughout the process—before, during, and after data collection. Aiming to incorporate reflexivity in the process, I engaged in on-going, continuous, and recursive data analysis. In this section of the chapter, I will describe this process in terms of stages.

The goal of my data analysis was to create theoretically-based portraits of the case study tutors and their developing practice over time. In order to achieve that goal, I had to attain an acute familiarity with my data. Therefore, before beginning any formal analysis, I engaged in multiple rounds of reading through the entirety of my data—most notably, tutor training materials, notes, and subsequent training transcripts; tutor-student conference transcripts; tutor debriefing interview transcripts; tutor and student questionnaires; tutor reflection logs; and my researcher log. Table 3.1 provides not only a summary of data sources, but also the focus of my analysis for each source.
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<th><strong>Context</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sources of Data</strong></th>
<th><strong>Focus of Analysis</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>College Catalog</td>
<td>General Education Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Blueprint</td>
<td>Faculty perception of program objectives/rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retention Committee Documents (N=4)</td>
<td>College-wide retention goals and efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Dean Interview</td>
<td>Academic retention goals, efforts, and statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NCA self-study</td>
<td>Institutional reflection on issues and goals concerning retention and enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Graduate Exit Survey (N=5)</td>
<td>Students’ perspectives of attitudes and experiences concerning available support, faculty-student relations, and College-wide writing emphasis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-year Writing Program</td>
<td>Artifacts (e.g., goals/objectives, course descriptions, syllabi, etc.) (N=7)</td>
<td>Director’s/Instructor’s perceptions of program goals/objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor questionnaire (N=1)</td>
<td>Director's/Instructor’s perception of program goals/objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center</td>
<td>Artifacts (e.g., mission statement, syllabi, etc.) (N=4)</td>
<td>Director’s/Trainer’s perception of Writing Center goals/objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor questionnaire (N=1)</td>
<td>Director/Trainer’s perception of Writing Center goals/objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Center log (N=40 entries)</td>
<td>Tutors’ perspective of activity of the conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor Training</td>
<td>Artifacts (e.g., tutor training notebook, tutor job description, agendas for sessions, required reading, discussion questions, etc.) (N=11)</td>
<td>Director’s/Trainer’s perception of the ideal tutor role, theoretical position, and conference strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation log from initial training sessions (N=9 entries)</td>
<td>Overview of conceptual and practical tools for tutoring writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio-taped and transcribed subsequent training sessions (N=2)</td>
<td>Tutors’ growing and changing theoretical and practical understanding of their role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Summary of Data Sources and Analyses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Conferences</th>
<th>Audio taped and transcribed conferences (N=40)</th>
<th>Frequency and manner of appropriation of tutoring tools from tutor training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher log (N=36)</td>
<td>Researcher description of tutoring strategies, emergent tensions, and tutor/student positioning as they were observed in conference sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio taped and transcribed tutor debriefing interviews (N=12)</td>
<td>Decisions during conferences; self-reflection of concerns and tensions encountered; evidence of conceptual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor reflection log (N=17 entries)</td>
<td>Tutors’ self-reflection of concerns and tensions encountered; evidence for evaluating practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor questionnaires (N=3)</td>
<td>Tutors’ beginning-of-term and end-of-term perceptions of their role; appropriation of conceptual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher Conceptual Memos (N=40)</td>
<td>Researcher’s initial analysis of conference activity alongside of other data (e.g., logs, interviews, questionnaires, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutee end-of-term interviews (N=6)</td>
<td>Tutees’ perceptions of the conferences; tutees’ self-reflection of tensions encountered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutee questionnaires (N=6)</td>
<td>Tutees’ beginning-of-term and end-of-term perceptions of writing center purpose and goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage 1: Analysis of Tutor Training

In order to begin developing a coding scheme, I had to first identify the tools to look for in the tutor’s practice. The primary setting for the direct learning of these tools was the initial training that each tutor went through the three weeks prior to the start of the semester; therefore, the first stage of analysis involved a thorough examination of the initial training sessions, which included analysis of artifacts (e.g., required readings,
agendas, and tutor training materials) and my own observation notes from the training sessions. In analyzing the tutor training data, I looked for salient patterns regarding the theoretical concepts and the tutoring strategies which were introduced and discussed in the training.

These patterns were identified as *tools* for tutoring. Johnson et al. (2003) described tools in relation to teaching in a manner which is applicable to my work with tutoring: “Although different on the surface, these tools share the quality of being instruments through which teachers [or in my case, tutors] may act on their environments by employing them in an effort to teach” [or tutor] (p. 151).

The identified tools were further categorized as either *conceptual tools* or *practical tools*—categories which were later used for coding. *Conceptual tools* are “capable of being abstracted to apply to many circumstances” (e.g., ownership or collaboration), while *practical tools* are those tutoring strategies which are “more immediately applicable” to the conference activity (Johnson et al., 2003, p. 151). Examples of practical tools utilized in the conference setting include specific tutoring strategies, such as having a student read their paper aloud to check for clarity, or engaging a student in an exploratory conversation in an attempt to generate content.

Part of this analytic process also involved identification of the *relationship*, as it was expressed or implied in tutor training, between the theoretical concepts presented and the related practical tools, or tutoring strategies, which may serve to support each theory. Table 3.2 details this relationship.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTUAL TOOLS</th>
<th>PRACTICAL TOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance &amp; Ownership</td>
<td>Develop rapport with students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help students see relevance of writing to their own lives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect and learn about students’ goals, interests and learning styles;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have students read their texts aloud;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keep writer’s own words;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust the writer’s idea of a text;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask writers their plans for writing and revision;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offer affirmation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let students do what they can for themselves;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keep hands off and let writers write on their texts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remind students of challenges they have conquered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Autonomy</td>
<td>Provide models or templates for future learning experiences;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasize writers’ processes of composing, rather than their immediate texts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage writers to develop good writing habits;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let writers write on their texts so they will learn strategies for revision and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>correctness;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognize and praise students’ steps toward independence;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhance the strengths of students’ writing;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hold students accountable to due dates;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give students tasks, then go away and let them work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration &amp; Student Agency</td>
<td>Ask leading questions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do not dominate talk time;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sit next to, instead of across from, students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow students to hold the paper and pen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Relationship between the Conceptual and Practical Tools Presented to Tutor
Table 3.2 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing as a Process</th>
<th>Emphasize writers’ processes of composing, rather than their immediate texts;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning stage strategies:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Encourage freewriting or clustering;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Engage students in conversation aimed at topic or content generation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Help writers articulate their goals;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Break writing task into manageable pieces;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Model the invention process;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Encourage reading and research when necessary;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drafting stage strategies:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Help writers draw connections between ideas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Give candid opinion of strengths and weaknesses of the work in progress;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revising stage strategies:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Make sure writing responds to assignment;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Start with high-order concerns (focus, clarity, organization, content development);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Gloss” the text with students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- End with later-order concerns (sentence variety, word choice, correctness, mechanics, document design);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Re-read, breaking the paper into small parts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Have students paraphrase unclear sentences;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Note prevalent error patterns;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Explain rules and have writers apply them;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Have students read papers from end to beginning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coding scheme developed for the analysis of tutor appropriation of conceptual and practical tools was drawn from the salient patterns of tools noted in tutor training. While Table 3.2 reveals the entirety of the tools presented or discussed in training, Table 3.3 provides a list of those tools which received the most attention in training. The relationship described in Table 3.2 is significant because it reveals the inevitable overlap in the coding of tool appropriation. For example, if a tutor assigns a student a prewriting task in order to get some of the student’s initial ideas onto paper, that
portion of the conference would be coded as both “Task Assigning” under “Practical Tools” and “Autonomy” under “Conceptual Tools,” since the strategy of assigning the student a writing task and then letting the student write was identified in training as a useful strategy which fosters student autonomy. Table 3.3 provides the coding chart which was based on tutor training patterns and used in the analysis of tutor practice for each writing conference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTUAL TOOLS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF ALTERED APPROPRIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance &amp; Ownership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration &amp; Student Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRACTICAL TOOLS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF ALTERED APPROPRIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapport Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Assigning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling &amp; Explicit Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Aloud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process-based Responding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Coding Chart for Conference Activity
Stage 2: In-process Analysis of Conferences

During weeks three through fifteen of my study, I conducted debriefing interviews with tutors to check my assertions and uncover tutors’ attitudes toward and reasons behind their practice. The use of debriefing interviews during the weeks of observation necessitated early and ongoing analysis of their conferences. These conferences were analyzed for salient patterns of tool use.

In selecting sample conferences to use for debriefing interviews, I aimed for two types: 1) those which clearly supported my tentative assertions regarding the tutors’ attempts to appropriate tools, and 2) those which served as negative cases for these assertions. This method reflects Erickson’s (1986) description of generating and testing assertions by “seeking disconfirming evidence as well as confirming evidence” (p. 146).

For example, in a debriefing interview with Calvin, we discussed some of my observations regarding patterns in his tutoring strategies, specifically those practices which could be characterized according to minimalist tutoring strategies. In our discussion, he voiced agreement with my observations regarding his intention to practice minimalist strategies; therefore my member check with Calvin served as a confirmation on my assertions. I then pointed out to Calvin several conferences with one student in which he took a more directive approach. By directly consulting with Calvin regarding his decision, I was surprised to learn that he had a reason for switching roles. Calvin’s response to the negative case disconfirmed my tentative assumption that he may have unknowingly slipped into the default mode of directive tutoring; rather his switch was purposeful and intentional.
Stage 3: Analysis and Coding of Individual Conferences

The first stage of conference analysis involved dividing each tutor-student conference into episodes. An episode shift in the conference could be triggered by a number of things: a change in topic, a shift in tutor and student interaction, a noticeable difference in tutor or student agency, a switch in strategies used by the tutor, or even a recognized moment of tension between the tutor and student. This chosen unit of analysis allowed me to divide transcripts in a multi-purposed way. During initial analysis of the conference, I noted episode shifts and divided the transcript accordingly. These episodes in the conference were individually analyzed and coded.

Using the tool categories listed earlier in Table 3.3, I then analyzed, coded, and charted each episode in the conference transcript according to the tutor’s attempted appropriation of tools. In an initial round of coding, I wrote symbols in the margins of the transcript (e.g., “R/O” for attempted appropriation of “Relevance and Ownership”). Once I completed marginal coding of an entire conference, I went through the episodes again, this time examining the coded episodes for evidence of appropriation (moments when the tutor appropriated the tool in way supported by tutor training) or altered appropriation (moments when the tutor appropriated the tool in a way not supported by tutor training or the tutor drew from alternative tools for tutoring practice).

Episodes of appropriated tool use were coded first with marginal symbols, and next with tally marks on the coding chart (Table 3.3). For example, if a tutor asked the student an open-ended question, the employed strategy would be coded “Q” for the practical tool of “Questioning” and “C” for the conceptual tool of “Collaboration”; however, if the tutor went on to answer his or her own question or provide the solution to
the implied problem, the coding of tool use would be changed by adding an “x”—signaling altered (or in this case, unsuccessful) appropriation of the tools. Thus, the new marginal coding would read “Q-x” and “C-x.” Once finished with marginal coding, I then charted each code by placing a tally mark in either the “appropriation” column or the “altered appropriation” column. All forty conferences (twenty for each tutor) were coded using this process. (See Appendix G for an example of a coded transcript and Appendix H for a list of codes.)

Stage 4: Comparative Analysis of Data and Conceptual Memoing

As explained above, my analysis of conference transcripts were coded according to tutors’ frequency and success in appropriating the conceptual and practical tools learned in tutor training. After coding and charting each conference, I engaged in a comparative analysis of the conference against other data sources, which usually included the following:

- My research observation log, in which I recorded general field notes, as well as time spent on various conference activities. Observation notes generally included descriptions of tutor and student body language, shifting roles within the conference, and any notable moments of consensus or conflict;

- The Writing Center log, in which the tutor noted comments, concerns, and suggestions regarding the conference;

- The tutor’s reflection log (if the tutor wrote an entry for the conference);

- Transcripts of debriefing interviews (if one was conducted following the conference);
- Transcripts of subsequent training sessions, in which tutors often discussed their conferences;
- Any other artifacts relevant to the content or activity of the conference.

This analysis allowed me to triangulate my initial hypotheses of the conference activity with multiple sources, which added another interpretive layer to my analysis. Sometimes these sources served as member checks (e.g., the tutor’s reflection log often served to support my interpretations), while others afforded an inside look at the motives behind the tutors’ decisions (e.g., tutors often explained reasons for using strategies in the debriefing interviews).

Following the comparative analysis, I created a conceptual memo for each conference. In the writing of each memo, I followed a set process. To illustrate, I will describe the process and include a few excerpts from a single conceptual memo derived from a conference between Derrick (D) and Jim (J).

The first step in the process involved reporting pertinent information from the researcher log. I began each memo with a notation of the conference focus, since the focus (or purpose) often dictated, to some degree, the strategies employed by the tutor (e.g., conferences aimed at generating a topic or content were usually collaborative, while conferences aimed at responding to a final draft of an essay tended to be more directive). I also included any additional notes in my research log (indicated by RL) that would not have been recognized in the transcript, like the tutor’s or student’s positioning or body language, and any relevant conversation that transpired after the tape recorder was turned off.
Excerpt from conceptual memo:

- Conference focus: Responding to writing (discuss final draft revision)
- RL—Position: D is sitting next to J. They are both looking at the paper on the table, both pointing to passages occasionally, and they both, at times, write on the paper. J writes to correct things. D writes to make note of what J should direct his attention to when he revises for a final draft. He also sometimes writes when J tells him to. D writes a correction once, but only after J self-corrected the comma error himself.
- RL—Not in transcript: D made plans w/ J to get together over the weekend to go over draft again. Gave J specific direction…what to have done for tomorrow & set up a meeting time.

The second part of the conceptual memo served as a form of descriptive note-making of the activity in the conference in order to describe my noticings. In writing this description, I kept in mind the following questions:

- What happened in the conference?
- What tools are the tutors attempting?
- What tensions emerged?
- How are these tensions related to their acceptance or resistance toward tutor training theory and practice?

Excerpt from conceptual memo:

- There was definitely a recognizable pattern… D would go to a problem area of paper and say, “Okay, read this sentence…” Jason knew right away that he probably needed to change something since D had him read it. If J didn’t self-correct by reading… (which only happened once in episode 4, in which he also hypercorrects)...then D would prompt J w/ questions or leading statements until he would finally identify the problem D was getting at. (This happened throughout the conference.) Perhaps D’s overemphasis on leading J to the problem was indicative of his surface understanding of questioning strategies as they relate to ownership & autonomy. But he did, at least, usually follow up w/
questions that got J to express the why of the revision…. D tested J’s understanding to make sure he wasn’t just blindly following his advice.

- I also noted that D did well alternating between editing concerns (word- and sentence-level problems) and higher-level revisions. This is evidenced when Derrick responded as the reader, rather than editor, in comments like “This is leaving me hanging…” in episodes 16-18. At the end, D involved J in a meaningful task to get him to come up w/ his own ideas for developing the scene of the story…Even though J had asked for D’s ideas, D turned it around on J to get him to do the work…again D responded well to their clash in expectations.

Stage 5: Analysis and Coding for Type of Tool Appropriation

For the fifth stage of analysis, I wrote the third section of the conceptual memo for each conference. In this section, I moved from the descriptions of noticings (demonstrated above) to explanations of how I would code the conference according to tutoring types. Before I describe the process of type coding, I must first describe my development of this additional coding scheme.

While the first round of conference coding targeted the frequency and success of the tutors’ attempts at appropriation, another round of analysis needed to account for the tutors’ type of appropriation. I knew that I needed to develop a scheme which brought to the foreground the motive-driven manner in which tutors attempt to appropriate the tools learned in training. When I first began coding these episodes, I attempted to code according to Grossman et al’s (1999) “levels”—or “degrees”—of appropriation; however, it soon became apparent that these levels did not account for the various types of appropriation I was noticing in my analysis of the conferences. Therefore, I moved from coding according to degree of appropriation to coding according to type of appropriation. These types are not void of any reference to “level” or “degree”; on the contrary, some of the types that follow are defined by these levels. However, the types
that I have outlined also account for those moments when some degree of conceptual understanding and use of practical tools has been demonstrated in the tutor’s practice, yet the tutor either forgets, ignores, or rejects those tools when they encounter certain tensions in the writing conference. These *types* move beyond the *degree* of tutors’ success with tool appropriation to more accurately represent the *manner* in which tutors appropriate tools. Table 3.4 provides definitions of the five “types” of appropriation that I found to be the most prevalent in the tutors’ practice. The first type is marked by appropriation of the tools learned in tutor training, while the next four types are characterized by moments when either the tutor appropriated the tool in a way not supported by tutor training, or the tutor drew from alternative tools for tutoring practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DEFINITION OF TUTOR TYPES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROPRIATION</td>
<td>The tutor appropriates both conceptual and practical tools. The tutor understands theoretical concepts which underlie the use of practical tools, and the tutor appropriates practical tools in a way that fully supports the correlating theoretical concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURFACE APPROPRIATION</td>
<td>The tutor demonstrates surface, or superficial, appropriation. The tutor has demonstrated some degree of understanding of the conceptual and practical tools, yet the tutor only enacts the tool on a superficial level. This limited appropriation is usually due to a gap in the tutor’s conceptual understanding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Definitions of Types of Tutor Appropriation

Continued
Table 3.4 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEFAULT TOOL APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>Although the tutor has demonstrated some degree of understanding of the conceptual and practical tools learned in training, he or she often resorts to default tools—more familiar and comfortable tools which have been appropriated from prior experiences—when tensions arise in the conference.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT-CENTERED APPROPRIATION</td>
<td>Based on an awareness of a student’s individual or immediate needs, the tutor performs a “necessary evil” to purposefully respond to those needs, even though the employed strategies may not directly align with the conceptual and practical tools presented in tutor training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTEXT-BASED APPROPRIATION</td>
<td>Instead of enacting the conceptual and practical tools presented in tutor training, the tutor alters his or her practice in response to the goals and motives of personal and/or educational activity settings, even though the shift in practice is not directly aligned with the goals and motives of the writing center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An essential step in type coding was the comparative analysis of sources. In the previous example of one my conceptual memos, the provided excerpts served to describe information I had gleaned mainly from my observation notes and my initial interpretation of the conference activity. However, for type coding, I needed to engage in a more thorough and comprehensive comparative analysis, which involved the meticulous process of combing through other data sources to see how they may yield heightened understanding and insight to the motive-driven, goal-oriented nature of the tutor’s practice. Part of this comparative analysis involved comparing the conference to prior conferences between the tutor and student in order to begin to make sense of the ways the
tutor was changing and developing. The following excerpt from the conceptual memo between Derrick (D) and Jim (J) demonstrates the descriptive and interpretive process involved in assigning types to conference episodes.

Example from conceptual memo:

**APPROPRIATION: Episodes 1-6**
--D starts out letting J decide what paper he wants to work on together. J picks the one that’s in its latest stage of revision. This isn’t unusual, as J often looks to D for that final affirmation that his paper is okay to turn in for a grade.
--Ep 4, D begins by having J read aloud. J is usually uncomfortable doing this, but they’re alone in the lab at the time, so he agrees to.
--Ep 6, D gives J explanations re paragraph continuity. Notice throughout this conf D mostly explains w/out any use of grammatical terms…rather he uses terms anyone could understand (e.g. beginning sentences)… (See *** for example.)

**SURFACE APPROPRIATION: Episode 7-11**
--Ep 7, first example of advice masked in leading question…these are funny in this conference…great examples…also good ex of how confusing this can become to the student who is just looking for the tutor’s answer or some direct guidance… (See ** for moments of this.) J is quite savvy in this conference. He recognizes in no time that D’s direct questions, more often than not, signal a need for revision or editing. (See Ep 11).

**APPROPRIATION: Episodes 12-18**
J still not getting it…offering only vague, bland descriptions…really just repeated the same vague comment w/ different words…J asks for D’s help (clash of tutor expectations…D admits to intentionally avoiding this in interview), but D salvages the moment and engages J in a meaningful task of exploratory writing…particularly good handling of student expectations which are at odds w/ tutor role.

In addition to describing the coded tutoring types in the conceptual memo, I also recorded the coded episodes on a chart. (See Appendix I).

Throughout the process of writing conceptual memos for each conference, my attention was often drawn to patterns of tensions which surfaced as each tutor attempted
to appropriate what they had learned in tutor training. When those attempts were altered, the comparative analysis helped me to understand why. During comparative analysis of data sources, I found myself “shuttling back and forth between first-level data and more general categories” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 432) as I sought data which would confirm or disconfirm my interpretations regarding patterns and tensions that I was noticing. I used emerging themes of noted tensions as a frame for encountering new data, yet I strengthened that analysis by testing it against multiple sources and perspectives (e.g., comparison against tutor reflection logs, debriefing interviews, and questionnaires).

The insight gleaned from this analysis often enabled me to identify the settings which supported or hindered appropriation. It also led me to examine how the tutors’ practice developed in relation to the tensions that emerged when the goals, motives, and values of activity settings clashed. This triangulation of data allowed me to more fairly represent the tutors’ motives and decisions behind their practice. By focusing on the tutors’ goal-centered use of tools (both in the moment and across time), I was able to better analyze their developing understanding of their tutor role.

Stage 6: Cross-case analysis

After case portraits of the tutors were established, I aggregated findings across both tutor case studies to determine patterns which transcended the particular cases. Specifically, I looked for evidence across both cases of consensus and conflict between the conceptual and practical tools presented in training and the conceptual and practical
tools enacted in the conferences. These patterns of conflict and consensus became the framework for my findings regarding the factors which shape tutors’ practice.

As a final stage of analysis, I employed the method of “constant comparative analysis” (coined by Glaser & Strauss, 1967; qtd. in Strauss & Corbin, 1994); specifically, I looked for thematic patterns in tutor-student negotiations and tutor practice as they changed over time.
CHAPTER 4

THE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS WHICH SHAPE TUTORS’ DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR ROLES AND PRACTICES

Grossman and Stodolsky (1994), quoted in Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999), described the overlapping relationships among activity settings:

Activity settings typically overlap. That is, they do not exist as insular social contexts but rather as sets of relationships that coexist with others. Some exist side by side, while others are subsumed within larger settings. Each classroom participant, for instance, acts within an activity setting bounded by the classroom, which is a subset of different coexisting settings.

Grossman and Stodolsky, in the above description, captured the manner in which educational settings are situated alongside or within other institutional settings, each with their own goals and motives. Their description provides a useful backdrop as I begin to answer the first of my research questions: What are the principal settings for the tutors’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools for writing conferences?

In answering this question, one would be inclined to first consider the activity setting of tutor training, since the primary motive of the setting is to equip tutors with the knowledge and tools needed for tutoring practice in the Writing Center. However, one
cannot stop there in their search for influences on the tutor’s developing practice. Activity theory assumes that multiple activity settings (e.g., some past; some present; some physically bound, like a classroom; and some bound by other means, like cultural membership) influence development.

In this chapter, I will describe some of the primary contexts—particularly those contexts which are subsumed within the larger College context—which shaped tutors’ developing practice in writing conference activity. For example, the two tutor participants completed three weeks of initial tutor training. This tutor training was “nested” (Cazden, 1988, p.198) in the Writing Center—more specifically the tutorial Writing Center course. This tutorial course, required of basic writers both semesters of their first year, is valued by College administrators as an essential component in recent college-wide efforts toward improved student retention and support of at-risk students. Furthermore, the tutorial component of the Writing Center functions alongside of the required first-year composition courses in which these students are also enrolled. In this chapter, it was not possible to examine all of the settings related to this study; however, I have described and characterized those key institutional settings which are most relevant to tutor training and writing conference activity.

SBC

Due to its small size (approximately 500 students) and faith-based emphasis, many students, staff, and faculty perceive the College as a close-knit community. On College recruitment literature, such as letters, pamphlets, view books, and the College website, one can easily find reference to the family-like atmosphere of the College. For
example, on a letter used for recruitment, the College President writes, “SBC offers you the most conducive environment of acceptance and love in which to learn. We really do want the best for you.” The College website offers this description of the campus community: “At SBC, you will find a new family that is looking out for your best interests. From the dorms to the classroom to administration, you will find people genuinely concerned about you as an individual!”

Students often mention as one of the more valuable features of the College the small faculty-to-student ratio (currently 14 to 1), reporting that the engagement with and support of faculty shaped their learning more than any other factor during their college years. These attitudes are reflected in both a National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and our own Graduate Exit Survey.

For example, the NSSE reported that on a scale of 1 (never) to 4 (often), students rated their interaction with faculty members concerning career plans at 2.93 (compared to the NSSE mean of 2.38); they rated their amount of discussion with faculty members outside of class over ideas from readings or class discussions at 2.47 (compared to the NSSE mean of 1.98); and they rated their frequency of working with faculty members on activities other than coursework at 2.58 (compared to the NSSE mean of 1.85). On a scale of 1 (very little) to 4 (very much), students rated the support they received to succeed academically at 3.33 (compared to the NSSE mean of 2.82); and they rated the support they received to cope with non-academic responsibilities, such as work and family, at 2.42 (compared to the NSSE mean of 1.90).

On a scale of 1 (unfriendly, unsupportive, unhelpful) to 7 (friendly, supportive, helpful), students rated their relationships with other students at 6.00 (compared to the
NSSE mean of 5.80); they also rated their relationships with other faculty members at 6.00 (compared to the NSSE mean of 5.72); and they rated their relationships with other administrative personnel and offices at 5.50 (compared to the NSSE mean of 4.81).

These data suggest that the College has been successful in creating a nurturing, supportive, and friendly environment in which to learn. This support has been demonstrated in a number of ways, most notably through frequent interaction between faculty and students. However, some would say that the way this goal for support and acceptance has been interpreted across other settings within the college has raised important questions regarding our unclear identity.

**Student Recruitment.** Two years before the present study, the enrollment services department was restructured. Part of that restructuring process involved the setting of a new goal for the Admissions Office to work toward: an annual growth rate of 7% in the student body. The department also began implementing recruitment efforts aimed at a broader geographical region, since the student body of the previous two years was composed primarily of students from Ohio. Not only has the Admissions Office exceeded its growth rate goal, but it has also brought in a student body which represents a greater geographic and ethnic diversity than those of prior years.

Many faculty have raised concerns over what they consider to be a misdirected emphasis on growing numbers; they maintain that recruiters should instead focus on getting the “right kind of students” at the college. If you ask faculty members to define that “right kind of student,” you will get a number of responses, but the most common are references to students who exhibit academic excellence and a clearly defined purpose—or calling—for attending the college. Recruitment emphasis on growing numbers has
raised many questions and concerns regarding who we are as a college and the students we aim to serve. Faculty members comment often on the challenges they encounter due to a changing student body.

In a conversation about student recruitment with one faculty member, he stated,

We are benefiting no one by striving for numbers. What is most frustrating is that our best students think that they are coming to one of the finest colleges around for biblical and theological training. Then, they look around at their classmates and see students who barely made it through high school. Those students—our serious students—are the ones we lose because they think that we have compromised who we are. And they’re right. We’ve compromised the very attribute that distinguishes us from other institutions. It’s not really that much different than what’s going on in the evangelical church today. They are trying so hard to adapt to the world’s culture that they eventually lose sight of who they are.

In an interview with the Academic Dean, he explained that, although we are not an open admissions college (i.e., we do decline applications), it is not unusual for the college to admit students who do not meet the standard admissions criteria. He reported on several occasions when students have been turned away, but they appealed the decision, and the college reconsidered and admitted them at the probationary level. He explained, “Sometimes the student will say, ‘Just give me a chance.’ We give them that chance, and though they may not make it beyond their first year, they are often grateful for the chance to experience college. Some of those students have even gone on to graduate.”

Academic qualifications and standards. Academic qualifications for admission to the College (described in Table 4.1) enable students to be accepted according to three levels:
--Regular acceptance: No restrictions on students, unless incoming placement tests reveal otherwise;

--Provisional Acceptance: Students limited to 13 hours a semester or less; and

--Probationary Acceptance: Students placed on academic probation, limited to 13 hours or less, excluded from extra-curricular activities, and job load limited to 20 hours per week. If a grade point average of 1.7 or higher is not achieved in the first semester, the student will be suspended for a minimum of one semester. A grade point average of 2.0 or higher will remove the student from probation.

Table 4.1 reveals the requirements for each level of acceptance:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regular</th>
<th>Provisional</th>
<th>Probationary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>19+</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>14+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>2.0+</td>
<td>2.0+</td>
<td>1.8+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK</td>
<td>Top 50%</td>
<td>Top 60%</td>
<td>Top 80%</td>
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Table 4.1: Academic Qualifications for Levels of Acceptance

Students admitted to the College are held to academic standards; these standards have been the subject of much discussion among the College faculty. In these discussions, the goals for “support” and “acceptance” mentioned earlier become invisible; in their place, one will find words like “standards” and “excellence.” Many faculty members have expressed concern that the qualifications for regular acceptance are too low. Other faculty members, specifically program directors, have expressed a desire to increase the minimum standard in their programs. Some program directors have found other ways to raise standards within their programs. For example, the directors of the
Christian Ministries program recently did away with the pre-seminary track and are now requiring the more rigid pre-seminary requirements (e.g., four semesters of Greek and hermeneutics) for all Christian Ministries majors. Some have suggested that the motive behind this curricular change was actually an effort by the program directors to weed sub-par students out of the program.

However, despite years of concerns voiced by faculty, the established minimum standard of the college remains at a 2.00 minimum grade point average for all programs. The only exception to this minimum standard is the Teacher Education program, which requires a minimum grade point average of 2.7. By the end of the second semester, if a student’s grades fall below the required minimum, the student will be assessed as follows:

--If the cumulative g.p.a. is between 1.90 – 1.99, an academic warning is recorded on the student’s transcript, and the student is required to take a minimum semester load of no more than 12 hours.

--If the cumulative g.p.a. is between 1.7 – 1.89, academic probation is imposed. Students on academic probation are limited to a 12-hour course load; are ineligible to participate in intercollegiate athletic competition, college-sponsored public relations groups, or other groups which represent the College to the public; and are ineligible to hold any appointed or elected office with student government or organizations.

--If the cumulative g.p.a. falls below 1.70, academic suspension is imposed. Students may appeal for reconsideration of the dismissal. (College Catalog, pp. 25-26)
Given the lack of consensus regarding the goals for growth among the various settings of the College, it is no wonder that student retention rates were consistently low. While administrators and admissions personnel were becoming more lenient with incoming criteria, faculty were feeling more than ever the need to raise the bar to maintain some standard of excellence. However, the following section reveals how the College was eventually forced to attend to low retention rates.

Institution-wide Efforts Toward Student Retention

During the time of this study, the College was in pursuit of regional accreditation. This goal involved several stages of self-study, a process required of the Higher Learning Commission (HCL). Early in the self-study process, several concerns were noted by a visiting team of the HCL, one of which regarded the College’s low retention rate the prior decade, which was reported at an average of 33 percent. In response to the team’s noted concern, the College established a completion rate goal of 50 percent and began monitoring the retention rates more carefully. (The retention rate had received surprisingly little attention the prior decade.) During the self-study process, the retention rates increased dramatically. By the year under investigation, the completion rate had increased to 62 percent (compared to a national average of 52 percent).

When I asked the academic dean how he accounted for the significant growth, he cited three main factors which helped the College meet and exceed its goals for retention: (1) the start of a retention committee; (2) emphasis on existing support services, like the Writing Center and other tutorial programs; and (3) the hiring of an academic coach. Of
the factors mentioned, the Writing Center was the only one which existed prior to the newly emphasized retention efforts. In the interview, the dean commended the Writing Center’s services and acknowledged the role it played in leading the way for other support services across disciplines. The Student Retention Committee, which was organized the semester prior to the semester of this study, seeks to “identify at risk students and help them find assistance in their areas of difficulty, including academics, finances, social, and/or spiritual needs.” Their mission is to “promote a campus-wide awareness of retention needs” and strive for the “early detection and intervention” of students’ needs, which “should increase retention.” The following section describes the ways the college strives to accommodate the diverse academic needs of students. Many of these services were introduced by the Retention Committee just prior to the semester under investigation.

Provision of Student Learning Services. All faculty are requested to include the following statement on each course syllabus:

Students who have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations must let the professor know early in the semester (preferably the first week) so that learning needs can be appropriately met. In order to receive accommodations, documentation concerning the disability must be on file with the Academic Dean’s office.

Although the College does not limit its support services to those students with documented needs, the Retention Committee members hoped that the inclusion of this
statement on course syllabi would serve to communicate to students the College’s willingness to accommodate their needs, while also serving to involve faculty in the process of identifying and responding to those needs.

In addition to identification through self-disclosure, at-risk students are also identified according to several placement tests administered during freshman orientation. Those students whose proficiency in writing or math is deemed deficient according to placement tests and other measures, such as ACT/SAT scores and high school grades, are required to take developmental courses (Fundamentals of Math and/or the Writing Center course) for those disciplines. All freshmen are required to enroll in a Student Success class during their first year, which is designed to help students develop study skills, time management skills, and other skills deemed helpful in easing the transition from home to college.

One major change made by the Retention Committee in meeting the needs of at-risk students was the development of an organized tutorial program. In years past, tutors were only made available if students made formal requests, which rarely occurred. Tutor support services were not advertised and the College lacked any systematic means for responding to the needs of students. Students who desired help had to seek it on their own. If they were lucky, they had an instructor who was willing to find a student in the class who might volunteer some time to help the student in need. Oftentimes, faculty members would even take it upon themselves to provide the student the assistance. If a student made their request to the personnel in the Academic Office, however, they would often wait weeks, or sometimes longer, for tutoring arrangements to be made.
With the new tutorial program, students simply need to show up at scheduled
times in the library, which is centrally located on the campus, to meet with peer tutors
who are on call and available to meet with any student regarding their indicated need.
Students are not required to have a documented learning disability to be given tutorial
help. The peer tutors are appointed upon recommendation by faculty and employed
through a work-study program. Though they are not formally trained to tutor according
to special needs, they provide general tutoring in the form of reviewing papers and course
work for content, completeness, and grammar; explaining difficult reading passages;
reviewing for quizzes and exams; and giving any other educationally appropriate help.

Students with documented learning disabilities are also assigned an academic
class. The academic coach, who serves primarily as an accountability partner, meets
with the student periodically to discuss their progress, concerns, or challenges as they
progress through the semester. The academic coach also communicates regularly with
the students’ instructors in an attempt to identify early any problems that might result in
failure or withdrawal of a course, like excessive absences or missed assignments.

These student learning services benefit both the at-risk students they aim to
support, and the Institution in its goal for increased retention of students. However, this
two-fold agenda has not gone without some criticism and questioning.

In an informal interview with the Academic Dean, we discussed some concerns
which have surfaced during Retention Committee meetings. The Dean commented more
than once on the committee’s sensitivity towards concerns over providing students too
much support, thereby contributing to students’ dependence on the support systems and
perhaps compromising the academic integrity of the College. The Academic Dean reported that at least half the discussion time in retention committee meetings is spent discussing concerns of this nature. He noted,

I think we have to be realistic. If we have an abnormal environment because we have offered too much support to students, these students may graduate and think that the world is going to work that way. We want them to succeed, but we don’t want to create an environment that will make these students unprepared for the real world once they leave.

He also admitted to having concerns that we may be offering too much support to students who may not be “college material.” This concern has been echoed by faculty at countless meetings. Despite his reservations, the Dean maintained a positive outlook on the potential benefit of these support services. His decision to select a faculty person that he characterized as “very sympathetic and sensitive to student goals—more so than [he is] inclined to be” speaks highly of his willingness to aim for retention of all students. He added, “In many ways, giving these students the chance to succeed and the support they need to do so seems the Christian thing to do.”

The above descriptions of the college’s goals for growth in student enrollment and retention suggest motives which may be at odds with those expressed some of the College faculty. This tension inevitably surfaces in the Writing Center, since the Writing Center is one of the primary settings for support of at-risk students. In the following section, however, I describe an emphasis on writing for both learning and assessment, the motive of which has been embraced by most of the faculty.
**Institution-wide Emphasis on Written Communication**

The first-year writing program is situated within the general education core of required courses for each program. The following list of general education divisional objectives, which were revised during a faculty workshop a year prior, conveys the faculty’s emphasis on writing and communication which extends across all programs:

Upon completion of study within this division, the student will have developed a foundation in general education. The student should be able to:
1. Communicate clearly and effectively in oral and written forms.
2. Conduct research in an ethical and competent manner.
3. Articulate the aesthetic, imaginative, and creative forms of expression and show appreciation and discernment in the use of these forms.
4. Analyze and apply principles of social, behavioral, and interpersonal understanding.
5. Evidence critical thinking skills of inquiry, analysis, and communication.
6. Understand the relationship of general education concepts and skills to Biblical and professional applications.

Writing is perceived by the faculty as not only a skill that students must hone, but it is also utilized as a primary tool for assessment in upper-level courses. At SBC, most of the lower-level courses focus more on content in the subject area. As students move on to take more advanced courses during their final two years, course requirements shift toward more of an emphasis on research and writing as a means of assessing their knowledge and understanding. For example, a senior capstone seminar course required of practically all graduates requires a major term paper in which students are to articulate their biblical and theological knowledge. Each paper is evaluated by a team of three professors. An examination of the evaluative rubric revealed that 80 percent of the grade was based on written expression (e.g., audience awareness, clarity, organization, style,
and overall correctness), and only 20 percent of the grade was attributed to students’ biblical and theological knowledge. When asked about the weighting of the rubric, one evaluator responded:

We want to see that students have wrestled with biblical and theological concepts to the point that they, hopefully, have begun taking ownership of some ideas. We are not assessing their theology as much as we are their ability to articulate their theological position. It’s interesting to see how students can take the knowledge learned and rework it into language they can communicate to someone else.

The College’s emphasis on writing is reflected in the National Survey of Student Engagement report. On a scale of 1 (never) to 4 (often), students rated their experience with writing research papers at 3.67 (compared to the NSSE mean of 3.34). Our students also rated higher their experience of preparing two or more drafts of a paper before turning it in (2.95, compared to the NSSE mean of 2.70). The next two ratings were based on a scale of 1 = none, 2 = between 1 and 4, 3 = between 5 and 10, 4 = between 11 and 15. SBC students rated the number of written papers between 5 and 19 pages at 3.00 (compared to the NSSE mean of 2.66). They rated the number of written papers of fewer than 5 pages at 3.92 (compared to the NSSE mean of 3.11). Overall, on a scale of 1 (very little) to 4 (very much), SBC students rated their educational growth in the area of writing clearly and effectively at 3.25 (compared to the NSSE mean of 3.09).

Several faculty workshops have been devoted to topics related to the value of writing in all fields of study. Some examples of recent workshop topics include the importance of students gaining experience in different styles of writing (e.g., research
writing, sermon manuscripts, etc.); writing as a tool for authentic assessment; ways to manage the time constraints of grading papers; and strategies for helping students develop critical writing skills.

The First-year Writing Program

Given the aforementioned emphasis on student writing at SBC, much pressure has been directed toward the first-year writing program. Many faculty members perceive first-year courses as gate-keeping courses, and thereby assume that students who make it through will possess the skills necessary to engage in the kinds of academic writing and research expected in upper-level courses. However, providing students the tools to produce writing that meets these rigid expectations is a daunting—and sometimes impossible—task. DiPardo (1991) commented on the complexity of students’ struggles to master these tools, as well as the magnitude of implications these expectations hold for the teachers and tutors of writing: “These students’ struggles with academic discourse must be seen as part of a larger grappling—a grappling that is at once cognitive and social, public and personal.” Consequently, the role of the teachers and tutors “is not simply to provide useful background knowledge or skills, but to invite them into this conversation” (p. 3). The first-year writing program is not an end-all to the foundation students need; rather, the primary goal of the program is to promote success of writers by providing opportunities for students to enter the conversation of academic discourse. In order to succeed in college, students must become able and willing to enter that conversation, and we see our role as supporting writers through that oftentimes difficult endeavor.
Our first-year writing program was conceptualized using both collaborative language learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978, Bruner, 1975) and Applebee and Langer’s (1987) instructional scaffolding model. These theories hold that students learn to write through actively engaging with the task and receiving support and response from readers. Applebee and Langer (1987) described five components of effective instructional scaffolding: ownership, appropriateness, support, collaboration, and internalization. Each of these ingredients is vital to every course offered in our first-year writing program.

The first-year writing program consists of two composition courses and a Writing Center tutorial component (described in a later section). The two composition courses are typically taken the during the Fall and Spring semesters of the students’ freshman year. In English Composition I, students engage in various styles and uses of argument; this course uses the text, *Everything’s an Argument*, by Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz (2001). First-semester composition is also designed to give the student experience in research strategies and research writing; therefore, all students must write a researched-based argument of evaluation. Students are expected to learn MLA or APA forms of documentation in preparation for term paper requirements in other courses. In English Composition II, students will continue their experiences with both expository and creative writing. Throughout the semester, students will develop a writing portfolio, which involves a considerable amount of reflection and self-evaluation.
As a framework for the development of the freshman composition curriculum, first-year writing program instructors agreed to adopt the goals presented in “The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the College Strand,” a statement put out by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The following excerpt from the document is provided to all composition instructors and is included in the tutor training packet. The first-year writing program of SBC strives to do the following:

1. Build on current theory and research to focus on the uses of language; on the value-laden nature of all such uses; and on the ways writing, reading, speaking, listening, and critical thinking shape our students as individuals and as members of academic and other communities;
2. Stress an active, interactive theory of learning (rather than a theory of teaching), one that assumes students do not learn by being passive eavesdroppers on an academic conversation or vessels into which knowledge is poured;
3. Build on what students already know;
4. Offer a basis for students’ continued language development as individuals, immediately in the academy and later in other communities.

Furthermore, in order to best represent our key motives regarding the teaching of writing, I met with the Melissa, Instructor and Co-director of the Writing Center, and together we brainstormed what we considered to be the most important values and goals that we endorse in the first-year program. We came up with these overarching goals:

1. Rather than teaching narrow conceptions of acceptable, or correct, writing, we strive instead to teach students to communicate effectively. We teach students to write in ways that are appropriate to the situation and the audience. The writer must be able to answer such questions
What is my purpose? What authority do I have on the topic? Who is my audience? What assumptions can I make about that audience? What language use and style of writing best suit my audience and purpose?

2. We place a high priority on giving students many opportunities to practice writing. First-year students need frequent opportunities for practice in a supportive context.

3. We insist on process-based assessment. We believe that a focus on the writing process, rather than the single product, has empowering potential for first-year writers who need opportunities for risk-taking. Therefore, instructors in all composition courses are required to postpone grade evaluation until the student has engaged in at least three drafts of an essay. The first due draft receives peer response, the second receives instructor response, and the third is assessed a grade.

4. We attempt to engage students in writing for real purposes. In order for students to see the value of writing, they have to believe that it is a useful activity to accomplish their own purposes, and they must be given opportunities to make decisions about the task.

The Writing Center

The investigation of the present study took place in the College’s writing center, which has been in existence since 1994. The Writing Center operates using peer tutors—or peer writing consultants as they are referred to in the Center. Recruitment of tutors
consists of writing center staff seeking out potential tutors based on recommendations from faculty. With little financial support available, the Writing Center relies almost entirely on the college’s work study program to fund peer tutors.

The primary rationale for the inception of a college writing center eleven years ago was two-fold: 1) to offer writing support services campus wide; and 2) to offer an alternative to the skills-based Basic English remedial course requirement. During our early years, we often found ourselves competing against others’ expectations of our services. The most prevalent was the notion that the Writing Center functions as what North (1984) referred to as a “fix-it shop”—a place where students can drop off their papers and competent writers will fix the problems so that the papers will meet the instructors’ expectations. We often had visitors to the Center who would say something like, “Professor Whitmore told me that he wouldn’t accept my paper until I went the Writing Center to get it fixed.” Another common misperception was that the Writing Center would somehow serve as a magic remedy to take care of the under-preparedness issue, as far as writing was concerned.

The Writing Center directors and tutors have made concerted efforts to make our goals known to the College community. In faculty meetings, freshmen orientation, and in circulating literature, we have attempted to make clear the services that we do offer, and those we do not. While leading faculty workshops on writing and response across disciplines, we are always mindful to situate a description of the supportive services of the writing center. We also have the following Writing Center Mission Statement (which
was adapted in part from the Writing Center Mission Statement at University of Texas)
posted in the Center. We often encourage new visitors to read it before meeting with a
tutor:

Our Mission

Our goal is to help students grow and mature as writers by providing help
with difficulties they may have in academic writing. Primarily, we do this in
individual tutorials, called consultations, in which a student works one-on-one
with a Writing Consultant.

We envision our role as that of friendly, yet professional, consultants. The
advice that we provide for these purposes is honest, but it is not punitive and not
judgmental. The consultant views her client as a competent student who faces
unique difficulties with writing. A few of these difficulties include inadequate
preparation for the intellectual and stylistic demands of college writing, lack of
experience with the writing process, and limited exposure to various genres. We
believe each student is unique and deserves our individualized attention and
respect as we attempt to meet his or her specific needs.

The help we provide is intended to foster independence. We do not,
therefore, pick students’ topics, develop their outlines, or edit their papers. We
believe that the invention of ideas and supporting statements remains the writer’s
responsibility. To this end, we intend to help student writers in the following
ways:

- We help students understand assignments;
- We engage students in conversations aimed at generating topics
  and developing content relevant to their own interests and
  experiences;
- We engage students in the writing process, which includes
  pretextual activities (e.g., prewriting, conversation,
  mapping, outlining, etc.), drafting, response, self-
  evaluation, revision, and editing;
- When working with students’ texts, we teach students how to
  identify and address problems in their own work more
  accurately and efficiently.

The addition of the required tutorial component of the Writing Center, described
later, has played a part in feeding the common misperceptions of the Center’s services.

While we have been persistent to advertise our services campus wide to all writers, our
center is attended almost entirely by those students who, based on first-year placement, are required to attend. Consequently, much of the College community perceives the Writing Center’s services as limited to remedial services. The employment of peer tutors has helped to remedy this assumption to some degree. Peer tutors communicate directly with the student body in ways and with frequency that directors cannot. When they hear friends talk about problems with a writing assignment, they invite them to the Writing Center. Those peer-initiated invitations have broadened our services more than any other advertising attempts.

The Writing Center Course

The Writing Center course was added to the first-year writing program in 1995 as an extension of the Writing Center’s services. The course was designed as a tutorial component to the two existing composition courses. The course was also intended to replace the previously required Basic English course, which focused solely on sentence-level grammar and mechanics. During my first year of teaching at SBC, I almost immediately recognized problems with the Basic English remedial course. The course could easily be characterized using Rose’s (1987) description of the “self-contained” remedial course; that is, the course lacked any real connection to the academic communities in which they were located.

We knew that the Basic English course was ineffective in meeting the writing needs of basic writers; however, college administrators were reluctant to do away with the course due to concerns that we needed to somehow accommodate the overall lack of preparedness recognized in a significant number of incoming freshmen. The Writing
Center course became that accommodation. The course not only offers a more relevant and positive learning environment, but it also keeps students from falling behind in their academic programs, since it is taken alongside, rather than before, the two composition courses. The course is designed to engage students in one-on-one writing tutorials, or conferences. During the tutor-student conferences, students receive direction and feedback with the required composition assignments.

Some college freshmen are required to enroll in the Writing Center course. Placement in the course is based on a timed essay sample, which is assessed by two evaluators, as well as ACT or SAT scores and high school records.

Many of the students who are placed in the Writing Center course are also ones who have been accepted to SBC under provisional or probationary status; however, some students required to take the class have experienced considerable success in school, despite their struggles with writing. While some studies identify basic writing students as largely minority students and members of lower-class families (See Lunsford and Sullivan, 1990), that is not the case with the basic writers in our writing center. Our writing center course is populated, for the most part, by white, middle-class students; however, over one-third of the students report that they are first-generation college students.

Students required to enroll in the course must come to the Center twice a week, for a total of three hours each week. The primary activity of the Writing Center course involves meeting one-on-one with a peer tutor to discuss the students’ writing; however, students also spend part of the time working independently on their writing and discussing their writing with others. Students earn three credit hours for taking the
course, but the earned credits do not count toward graduation. Students are assessed with a “pass” or “fail,” based on their attendance, preparedness, and time on task in the writing center.

Since the Writing Center is designed to take alongside of Composition I and II, the objectives of the Writing Center course are the same as those listed in the Composition syllabus. Following each objective, however, is a brief description intended to explain to students how the Writing Center will contribute toward that end. The objectives and descriptions that follow were taken from the Writing Center Course Syllabus.

Specific objectives to be achieved include the following:

1. To improve the student’s ability to organize material and communicate ideas in a clear and concise language.
   Writing consultants will be available to help you organize your ideas and research materials. While consultants will never do the work for you, they will help you to generate topic ideas, recognize main points in your planning, think about how to present those main points, and consider whether adequate development has been achieved for each point.

2. To provide the student experience with different writing styles and uses of voice.
   In English Composition II, specific attention will be given to style and voice in writing. Writing consultants will help you consider your audience and purpose for writing as you engage in different kinds of writing assignments. They will also work with you on stylistic features of your writing.

3. To help the student identify and correct problems in usage, structure, grammar, and mechanics in his or her writing.
   Through one-on-one conferences, writing consultants will aim to help you identify and understand your most common problem areas in writing. Throughout the process of writing, editing, and revising several drafts of various papers, you should (with the consultant’s help) begin to identify your weaknesses, correct them, and eventually alleviate them from your writing. You may also be assigned additional reading and exercises out of the English Composition texts which target your specific problem areas.

4. To familiarize the student with the concept and process of building a portfolio.
Most of the English Composition II course involves the development of a writing portfolio. Writing consultants will offer assistance with recognizing self in the role of the writer, understanding the criteria for selecting pieces to include in the portfolio, and learning to self-assess your own writing.

Most students required to take the Writing Center course attend the writing center regularly, appreciate the assistance offered, and pass both the Writing Center course and the English Composition courses.

During the last six years, I have had students in the Writing Center course complete end-of-year surveys to evaluate our services. Their responses indicate that most students are highly satisfied with the services of the Writing Center. They reported that the one-on-one tutorials were helpful in various ways, including meeting specific academic needs, supporting students with encouragement, and providing accountability. In the surveys, every student responded that the tutorials were helpful in meeting their academic goals.

For example, Heather wrote that she usually finds it “very hard to ask for help,” but reported the following about her time in the Writing Center course: “I was given the one-on-one help which gave me insight to my papers and helped me get things done.” Nathan wrote, “In the writing center, I get to work one-on-one with a tutor, where in class I don’t get that as much. . . . [The tutors] helped me to see many new and different ways of wording things. . . and helped me to become a stronger writer. . . . Just spending time one-on-one has helped me tremendously.” David, a student who had difficulty with plagiarism during his first semester of college, wrote, “I now realize the importance of properly recognizing resource information and documenting.” Jeannie, a regular in the
Writing Center, wrote, “This year and last year [the tutors] have helped lift up my spirit and confidence in myself to see that I can do it. They have been very faithful in helping me to learn more. . . . [The tutors] have looked over and discussed things in my papers so I could understand them more.” When asked if she would describe her tutor as a friend or teacher, Jeannie responded, “[The tutors] are a very big part of my life. They have inspired me to push myself for my goals and that I can do it as long as I never give up. They are much more than a friend.” Adam wrote, “It’s nice to have the advice of someone other than my comp. professor. My tutor helped me in and out of the Writing Center many times. He helped me to keep looking at my papers. At first I was a little uncomfortable because I was scared of what people would think of me, but now I can really be myself. I know that the tutors are here because they want to help. They don’t look down on you.”

Almost every student reported that they felt their time in the Writing Center was time well spent, and all students mentioned the one-to-one tutoring as the most effective component of the writing center. Although most students reported satisfaction with the program, I still knew that we had room for improvement, most notably in the area of the kinds of response the tutors give to students.

Tutor Training

During the writing center’s early years, peer tutors were persistent in focusing primarily on the problems of the writer’s single text. It became apparent that the collaboration idealized for peer support was not practiced in the writing center. Realizing that this practice grated against the goals of the writing center and the first-year program,
I began to question what tutors needed to know in order to tutor basic writers, which lead to my own research interests in the challenges posed by basic writers and their texts. Armed with this research, and what I thought were goals for support and empowerment of these writers, I worked alongside the other director to develop a tutor training program to equip peer tutors with this theoretical and practical knowledge.

The main thrust of the program was to help novice tutors to begin to recognize the connectedness between the theories we endorse in the Writing Center, and the roles they assume and strategies they practice in the writing conference. For example, by adopting a more facilitative approach, rather than a directive one, we allow for a transfer of control in the conference from the tutor to the student. This facilitative stance—and the transfer of control which flows out of it—supports theoretical constructs of student ownership and student agency, two theories endorsed in the Writing Center. But when a tutor takes the approach of an evaluator, rather than a collaborator, student ownership and agency may be squelched.

Initial training, which took place over six sessions, consisted of discussions over assigned readings, explanations of their roles, and role-playing. Subsequent training sessions at various points throughout the semester were also intended to provide continued training to the tutors. In subsequent training sessions, the agenda is largely determined by the tutors (per their requests). Tutors would request topics for training based on the problems or concerns that they were encountering in their practice (e.g., student passivity or unpreparedness). In response, Melissa and I developed training
sessions which would target those tutor-initiated topics. Due to their reflective nature, these training sessions (which were audio taped and transcribed) were often useful in revealing tutors’ understanding of and attitudes toward tools.

I found it more suitable to include the initial training in this chapter for two reasons: (1) it serves as an introduction to the practices of our Writing Center, and (2) the selection of topics, readings, and items of discussion reflect—to a large extent—the goals, values, and privileged practices espoused by the Writing Center and its directors. In the following section, I have provided a detailed description of the tutor training as it occurred just prior to the semester under investigation.

**Description of Initial Tutor Training Sessions.** The majority of tutor training occurred three weeks prior to the start of the semester. I, along with Melissa, co-director of the Writing Center and instructor of two composition courses, led the training sessions. The peer tutors were each given a training packet which consisted of the following: a writing tutor job description, program goals, a Writing Center syllabus, a Freshman Composition syllabus and course schedule, required readings, discussion questions, and handouts to be discussed during the six tutor training sessions.

The writing consultant job description details the responsibility of the peer tutor as follows:

--The student tutor should meet with students at least biweekly to check on assignments coming due and progress made on those assignments. Tutors may help students on selecting a workable (narrow) topic, researching that topic, writing a thesis statement, developing a workable outline, and revising and editing drafts. Many students may also need assistance in understanding and practicing the rules of English grammar. If students are caught up on Freshman Composition assignments, the tutor is encouraged to work with them on writing
assignments for their other courses. This may require contacting the instructor occasionally to confirm accurate understanding of the expectations for each writing assignment.

--The student tutor will meet with the student to provide helpful individual attention throughout the writing process. These tutorial sessions will be personally arranged to address individual student needs. Tutorial sessions may be spent helping the student through any of the following stages:

a. Making sure the student has a clear understanding of the assignment and a comprehension of the expectations of the instructor giving the assignment.
b. Helping the student generate topic ideas.
c. Helping the student through writer’s block.
d. Helping the student revise and edit through the writing process, which includes planning, organization, drafting, global revision, editing, and proofreading.
e. Helping the student identify and understand errors in his or her writing.

Following a discussion of the general job requirement and expectations, as well as an overview of the Freshman Composition course objectives, assignments, and schedule, the remainder of initial tutor training sessions (approximately 12-15 hours over 6 meeting sessions) were allotted to providing the peer tutors with the tools necessary for their work.

The first two sessions provided an overview of the Writing Center: What it is and isn’t. Discussion in these sessions centered around conceptualizing the tutor’s role in the writing conference. Prior to this session, students read Stephen North’s essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” Chapter 1—“Why We Tutor” from The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring, and “The Tutoring Process: Exploring Paradigms and Practices” from Murphy and Sherwood’s The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors. Based on the readings and an examination of our Writing Center Mission statement, which is posted in the Center, peer tutors were encouraged to consider the theoretical constructs that
underlie the writing center. We lead them to recognize the major shifts in thinking about
how writing should be taught (i.e., traditional rhetoric, expressivism, and social
contructionism) and, consequently, how writing centers should function—giving specific
attention to resisting the writing center as a “fix-it shop.” Tutors were led to consider the
contextual, collaborative, interpersonal, and individualized nature of tutoring by
responding to issues including remedial labeling, conflicting teacher/tutor/tutee goals and
expectations, freshman anxiety, the nature of talk in the conference, and the diverse roles
the tutor must assume in order to meet the unique needs of writing center students.

Peer tutors brainstormed the various roles they may need to take in the writing
conference, e.g. a reader who responds, a friend who listens, a coach who provides
encouragement, and a teacher who explicitly instructs. After reading transcripts of
DiPardo’s “‘Whispers of Coming and Going’: Lessons from Fannie” and listening to
audiotapes of former conference sessions, students discussed the importance of
interpersonal skills in the tutor-student relationship and considered the complex
negotiation of roles in the tutor-student relationship.

Sessions three and four of tutor training focused more on the practical tools of
conferencing, especially the tutoring process and strategies of response. Following a
reading of Chapter 3—“The Tutoring Process” from *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer
Tutoring*, we considered practical strategies and suggestions for a successful conference,
including basic questions a tutor could ask, what to do if the writer has no essay, and
having the writer read their paper aloud. We also spent a considerable amount of time on
the need to make the conference consistent with the writing process, e.g. work first on
higher-order concerns with a first draft before addressing later-order concerns, such as
sentence-level revision and proofreading, with later drafts. Sample drafts of student papers were then distributed, and the tutors attempted to decipher what kind of feedback the student needed: global revision (e.g., content development, focus, organization, audience consideration); editing (e.g., sentence structure and style, word choice, grammatical correctness); or proofreading (e.g., misspellings, typographical mistakes, omitted words). Tutors also discussed what strategies, or practical tools, might work at each of those stages.

During sessions five and six, students responded to the following readings: Fulwiler’s “Provocative Revision,” Brooks’s “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work,” and an on-line OSU CSTW document entitled “Responding Strategies: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.” Peer tutors were encouraged to discuss to what extent they agreed and disagreed with the various, and sometimes opposing, strategies of response espoused by the various authors.

Fulwiler supports experimentation and play in writing, and warns tutors against providing students prescriptive processes, like the five-paragraph essay. Brooks proposes that we turn focus on the writers, instead of their imperfect texts, by assuming a more “hands-off” approach in the conference and adopting strategies that make the writer the primary agent in the writing center session. These strategies include avoiding writing on the student’s paper, especially in red pen; having the student read, hold, and write on the paper; and asking leading questions, such as “What do you mean by this?” in order to get the student to talk.

Although we had planned to spend more time discussing the theoretical implications of Fulwiler’s and Brook’s essays, the tutors seemed most interested in the
practical advice given on the on-line document, “Responding Strategies: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,” put out by The Ohio State University Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing. The document not only gives characteristics of positive and negative responding strategies, but also provides examples of different levels of response, from reader response to error analysis. We noted that tutors drew primarily from this document in the last tutoring session, in which the tutors practiced giving response to students through both written feedback and role-play conferences.

Though tutor training was considered the primary source for providing tutors the conceptual and practical tools that would guide their practice, this chapter illuminates the various and sometimes competing educational activity settings within which the writing conference activity is nested. The overriding motive of the writing conferences required of students in the Writing Center course is to make sure these students are writing well for Freshman Composition and that they develop writing processes that they will carry into other courses. In this chapter, I disclosed the expressed or implied goals, values, and motives of other activity settings which may or may not support these goals for the writing conference. The extent to which these outside goals and motives support or compete with the goals and motives of writing conference activity is a shaping factor in the tutors’ success and the willingness to appropriate the tools learned in tutor training.

Now that we have some sense of the various educational contexts that influence tutor practice, we will turn our attention to how Derrick’s and Christopher’s experiences respond to the motives discussed in this chapter. Specifically, we will examine their individual perceptions of the training, as well as their own prior experiences, in order to understand the practices they employ in the Writing Center.
According to activity theory, an individual’s learning and development is shaped through the process of problem-solving in various settings. Within these settings the learner is encouraged to use certain tools in order to move towards the settings’ goals or motives. “Tools enable people to act on their environments and are the means through which people engage in an activity within a setting” (Johnson et al., 2003). Accordingly, the two case study tutors, whose conferencing I observed over a 15-week semester, each drew upon a range of tools and other resources as they developed their own approaches to tutoring. One such source of a range of teaching tools was the tutor training that both tutors completed just prior to the start of the semester. However, even though the tutors shared the experience of tutor training—the same sessions at the same time—they each had their own unique way of making sense of their training, which, in turn, influenced what they took away from the training experience and the extent to which it would guide their tutoring practice as they started the semester. Specifically, the way they made sense of their training was shaped by their backgrounds and beliefs regarding tutoring and
writing instruction, as well as their own experiences with writing and education. It is this matter—varying contexts and the myriad of ways they influence one’s practice—that I have revealed analysis of throughout this chapter.

In the next chapter, I will describe some of the tensions faced as the two tutors attempted to appropriate the concepts and strategies of training; while doing so, I will explore their efforts to make sense of the various settings that shaped their appropriation of tutoring tools. In order to do that, however, I must provide the backdrop for this encounter—a process which I began to articulate in Chapter Four and will continue to discuss in this chapter. In Chapter Four, I described the various educational settings in which the Writing Center tutorial course is nested. In this chapter, I will introduce the tutors and describe their prior experiences, attitudes, and beliefs going into the semester. Such information is necessary in order to understand the way personal and social histories carry with them motives which will inevitably bear on the tutors’ understanding of the role they are to assume and the strategies they are to employ.

As tutors engage in conferencing activity, they are operating within a setting (the Writing Center course) which has been shaped by those contexts described in Chapter Four. Therefore, these tutors’ practices have been influenced—explicitly and implicitly—by their involvement in a setting whose goals and motives have been determined by a number of secondary settings within the institution (e.g., the Writing Center, the English Composition course, the College’s goals for enrollment and retention, the College’s emphasis on creating a caring and supportive environment, etc.). These settings sometimes present competing motives, at which point the individual makes decisions regarding which motive will supersede the other.
As the researcher, these settings were, for the most part, tangible and transparent. My involvement in the college and the various educational settings played to my advantage as I sought to understand each setting’s goals and its subsequent influence on the writing conference. However, this process is made more complicated when factoring in those activity settings outside of the college boundaries—those activity settings which are unique to the tutor’s experience. These settings are harder to analyze, since, as Grossman et al. (1999) suggest, “a deeper sense of individual . . . history is available primarily through interviews . . . rather than through direct, empirical study” (p. 10). Consequently, I recognize that my representation of these tutors relies heavily on how they presented themselves to me: through interviews, informal discussions, questionnaires, their tutor log, and even through their performance in the Writing Center. Through analysis of these multiple sources, I have attempted to give a fair representation of the prior experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of each tutor. This representation—presented by way of individual tutor “portraits”—begins this chapter. Following these portraits, I will describe the tutors’ initial conceptions of their roles as they entered the semester of tutoring—a conception based on both their prior experiences with teaching, tutoring, and learning, as well as the tutor training they had recently completed.

Tutor Portraits

Derrick

Derrick, a twenty-one-year-old college senior and captain of the college’s basketball team, is a self-described “life of the party.” The semester previous to the
present study marked his first tutoring experience in the Writing Center, so he was still a fairly new tutor during the semester under study.

In both learning and tutoring, Derrick seemed to privilege practical knowledge acquired during his apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). He explained that his motive for attending college was to “receive skills for a career.” Through four semesters at the college, however, he failed to decipher which skills he needed and what career he intended to pursue. Even prior to his last semester before graduating, he met with his academic advisor to see if he could switch his major to education. Since he was unable to do so without delaying graduation, he decided to graduate with a Professional Studies major, a major designed for students who wish to combine various professional programs. He stated that he was “ready to get out of here” and hoped that “a degree in something would provide enough for a decent job in business or, if not, would allow [him] to pursue graduate school in an area [he was] more interested in.” Most of Derrick’s elected professional courses were selected from education and social sciences.

Previous to attending SBC, Derrick spent two years as an English major at a liberal arts college; however, he explained that his English classes primarily focused on the study of literature. When asked about his experience with writing, he only cited personal writing:

I like to write in a journal and occasionally write fiction. Outside of school assignments, I write mostly when I’m bored or when I need to get something off my chest. . . . Many times, writing provides me a release when it’s not appropriate to say what I want to say. I think of the page as a friend who listens to anything and everything I have to say. It never puts me off.
Though he enjoyed writing for personal purposes, Derrick labeled himself a “closet reader and writer.” When discussing student attitudes about writing during a tutor training session, he admitted the following:

I kind of understand why some of our students don’t want to appear too interested in their writing assignments, especially considering the fact that they are just coming out of high school. In my high school it was extremely uncool to write and read, and even more so to admit liking it. Only geeks did that. It was considered cool to brag about how little time we spent on our writing and how little we read and still managed to get good grades on our essay answers. . . . Our school emphasized technology and science more. Even the students seemed to value the doing and hands-on stuff more than passive stuff, like reading and writing.

Though Derrick tried to hide his interest in writing in high school, he admitted to spending much more time reading and writing in college, which led to his campus-wide reputation as a writing tutor even before he was hired in the writing center. Prior to his becoming a tutor, students—especially male dorm students and basketball players—would talk about Derrick’s willingness to help them on their writing.

I’m not sure how I became the dorm or ball team writing tutor. I think it’s because I try to mentor some of the freshmen players on the team. We work together on the team, and I think the support I give on the court somehow carries over to other areas. I look at some of these guys, like Sean and Jason, and wonder if they’ll make it. I’m always on them about keeping their grades up; I tell them, if nothing else, they need to see it as a responsibility to their team. If those two are ineligible next semester, we’re hurting. . . . But even more than that, I want to see them do well because I care about these guys. I see some of myself in them—when I was in my first year of college—and I know they can make it if they put forth the effort and learn what they need to do to meet their goals. Some of these guys don’t get that yet, and they may not make it if someone doesn’t stay on them.
Though Derrick expected his tutees and team members to commit to honorable educational goals, his own practice as a student was, at times, questionable. For one, Derrick admitted to compromising his own goals and developing a “get-by” attitude toward many of his courses. In his words, he “learned the ropes to get by—and get by successfully,” even when he knew he was not putting much effort into his assignments or completing them in a way that might benefit him in the long run. For example, during tutor training, Melissa explained that students would be required to select two pieces of their writing to be web-published. When another peer tutor inquired what that meant, Derrick bragged,

Yeah, I know something about that. When I was in my lit. classes and didn’t feel like reading some of the literature, I used to pull up other students’ web-published essays and read them to get a decent understanding of the themes of the story. That way I could at least sound like I knew what I was talking about. It always worked.

He also admitted to avoiding the writing process, even though he expected his writing center tutees to work through it:

I have to admit, I’m kind of a hypocrite when it comes to this stuff [referring to the writing process]. I expect Jason and Neal to work through each step, and I get kind of ticked at them when they don’t, but I really don’t write like that myself. I’m a lazy writer when it comes to school writing assignments. I try to pay attention to what the professor wants from me, and give him or her exactly that. I’ve learned that that’s all I really need to do if I want to write a decent paper the
first time around. I really don’t revise much, unless it’s a quick proofread. I know I’d be a better writer if I revised like I know I should, but I have a hard time finding the motivation when I can get B’s this way.

Melissa and I were somewhat aware of Derrick’s attitudes and practices before hiring him as a Writing Center tutor, and we discussed at length our reservations (both social and academic) in hiring him. Despite our reservations, Melissa made the decision to hire him based on his interest in helping the students. We were in desperate need of another tutor, and, though we had been happy with the knowledge and experience of our staff, Melissa believed that Derrick’s “self-initiated will to help people” would benefit the writing center.

While Derrick challenged our ideals of what we typically look for in hiring a tutor (in terms of his habits as a writer and a student), the next tutor I will describe in many ways exemplified all of the qualities we looked for in a tutor: He was driven, friendly, articulate, organized, dependable, and a good writer and student overall.

Calvin

Calvin, a 28-year-old married student, was our most experienced peer tutor in the writing center. The present study followed him through his sixth semester (third full academic year) of tutoring in the writing center; however, this academic year marked his first year in which he received formal tutor training. Unbeknownst to the directors, Calvin slipped through the cracks, since only new tutors were required to go through
training, and he was hired the year before the formal training began. Nevertheless, he agreed to attend the training sessions during the present semester, and he even offered to share his “veteran tutor” experience when helpful.

Calvin was initially hired based on his exceptional writing ability as demonstrated in English Composition I and II. He stated as his reasons for tutoring: “I enjoy writing and talking about writing” and “I find it to be an extremely valuable experience for both me and the students.”

Calvin was a pre-seminary major, but he explained that he was unsure that the major would fit his career interests. When I asked about what those career interests were, he seemed undecided, but his wife chimed in, “I really think he would like a job like yours!” Though Calvin was classified as a second-semester junior, he planned to spend at least two more years at the college, admitting he “could make a career out of being a student if [his] wife would allow it.” Though he was unable to identify and specific career goals, he did express the educational goal of pursuing a doctorate in either biblical studies or theology.

When asked about his previous experiences with writing, Calvin described both school and home experiences which contributed to his love for reading and writing:

I would take any chance to write. In high school, I was in the college prep track, so I wrote a lot and enjoyed it. I have kept journals off and on through my life. If given the option I would choose writing over a project or a test any day. . . . In my senior year of high school I took a pilot class called humanities that was an option to European literature. It gave us the opportunity to write on a variety of subjects and current events. . . . In addition I was very well read. My mother and father have always read, and my mother encouraged me to read for as long as I can
remember. My mother is probably the biggest influence on my ability to write. She would get us the scholastic activity boxes to do over the summer between school years. She was very active in my education.

Calvin often made reference to his frequent opportunities to write in his college courses. In fact, the first day of the Writing Center course, he asked if he could say a few words to the students regarding the importance of developing their writing skills for their future classes. He said that he thought it might help for the students to get an upperclassman’s perspective. In an interview, Calvin explained:

Those freshman-level courses lay the foundation with content and some general exposure to college writing, but in my upper-level courses, the professors seemed to emphasize even more the value and relevance of being able to write. For example, you need to be able to write well to manuscript a sermon or compose a business proposal.

Beyond pragmatic purposes for writing, Calvin also expressed that he enjoyed the challenge of researching and writing to “simply learn more about a subject through organizing [his] thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about that subject.” At times, Calvin referred to writing as a tool to internalize difficult concepts and learn how to articulate them to others:

In my theology classes, sometimes I’d get this feeling—kind of like the feeling you get when a child asks you what a certain word means. . . . You know what the word means, but you stand there saying, “Uh. . . uh. . .” Sometimes it’s hard to define something when you know that something too well. We experience our faith, and then we learn these massive theological concepts in theology classes. . . . When you’re made to go through the process of putting them in concrete forms, it helps you to be able to relate them to other people, like your future congregants.
Or, like in Philosophy, all of a sudden you are writing on the big questions of the universe. The writing that I’ve done for my upper-level classes really gave me a broader sense of writing beyond the assignment. . . . Through writing, I came to understand these very difficult concepts.

While these portraits of Derrick and Calvin served to introduce two very different tutors on more general terms, the following section will serve to provide even more insight into each tutor’s goals, attitudes, and beliefs toward tutoring. More specifically, I intended in the next section to capture each tutor’s thinking during a very specific and pertinent time in the study: after tutor training, yet prior to the start of the semester of tutoring. In doing so, I sought to identify how the tutors were beginning to conceptualize their tutor role before encountering the tensions which would surface in the actual conferences.

Prior Experiences and Initial Conceptions: The Beginning of Meaning-Making

To tap into tutors’ initial conceptions regarding their role, I drew from three data sources. First, I examined their beginning-of-term questionnaire; next, I looked at a debriefing interview that I conducted with Calvin in order to better understand his prior experiences with teaching in the Navy, and then I analyzed my transcripts of an audio-taped training session. I will first describe their questionnaire responses, since those responses best represent the tutors’ deliberate answers to questions regarding ideal tutor roles and their feelings going into the semester.

In the beginning-of-term questionnaire, tutors articulated their goals for the semester and also expressed their opinions regarding the ideal tutor role, the most
When asked to describe the ideal tutor, Derrick argued for the tutor’s need to fulfill multiple roles, yet Calvin’s ideal tutor clearly privileged the “guide” role of the tutor over other roles. Derrick wrote that the tutor needs to be calm, warm-hearted, motivating, sometimes stern, and a good listener. He added, based on the circumstances and the students’ needs, the tutor needs to appropriate a number of roles, including friend, coach, guide, and teacher. He explained, “If you can’t find a way to incorporate all of these roles, then you may struggle to fully reach the student.”

Calvin defined the ideal tutor as a “teacher/guide who can lead students to the discovery of tools to allow the writer inside to emerge with confidence. . . . This tutor must have patience to work through a student’s writing problems, wisdom to know when to push and when to aid, and professionalism in interacting with the students.” He described the most important role of the tutor as a “guide,” and even warned that “tutors should never become too much of a teacher, coach, or friend, or they run the risk of acting as a crutch for the student.”

In terms of defining success in the conference, the tutors’ responses differed again; while Derrick defined success in terms of immediate problems solved or tasks completed, Calvin articulated more far-reaching goals. When asked to describe what he considered a successful tutorial session, Derrick wrote, “Completion. . . I need to feel a sense of completion to feel that we’ve succeeded in something, whether it’s a brainstorming exercise to come up with a decent topic or a revision of a draft. The importance comes from completion . . . seeing that end goal met.” Calvin defined the successful tutorial as “a session in which the student has been able to comprehend a
weakness in their writing and understand not only how to fix it, but also how to avoid it in the future.” He later added that through his experience tutoring, he has learned that “the more you give students tools—and the knowledge to use them—the more they learn to be their own as writers and not just depend on the consultants to improve their papers.”

In considering his own motives and goals for the semester, Derrick expressed disappointment over his students’ limited benefits from their conferences the previous semester; however, I’m not sure he understood that the cause of the problem may have had more to do with his attention to task completion and grades than a problem with effort. Derrick wrote,

I hope to find a sense of fulfillment and improvement—both my own and my students’. Last semester, all of my students did okay in terms of grades, yet I felt they grasped few, if any, real concepts about writing . . . and few habits that they’ll take with them to their next class. Despite a few breakthroughs toward the end, many improvements didn’t surface—maybe due to the students’ lack of effort, maybe due to mine. That was my first semester, so maybe I’ll understand more this time around.

He added that this semester he hoped to offer students “a better understanding of how they can improve their own writing, and the ability to notice problems in their writing without being told over and over.”

Calvin’s expressed motives and goals included a long-term perspective, which was closely aligned with his earlier responses in terms of benefits reaching beyond the semester, both for himself, and for the students. When asked what he hoped to get out of tutoring, he wrote, “the experience that only hands-on effort can bring . . . to allow what I have learned to be put to use so I can better apply it in future tutoring sessions.” He
explained that he hoped to offer students “a better grasp on what they are capable of doing, to give them the independence they will need to function in school and the world beyond college.”

When asked about his feelings going into the semester, Derrick explained that although he felt the training and support he had received was “more than adequate” and it made him feel “more comfortable” approaching the tutoring task, he was still “a little anxious to make sure things would run smoothly and [he] would do the job right.” When I asked Derrick what “doing the job right” meant, he added, “I am realizing that I need to really think about my role. Instead of tutoring like I did in the dorm or on basketball trips, I need to make sure I’m fulfilling more of the consultant, rather than tutor, role in the Writing Center.” Like Derrick, Calvin also reported satisfaction with and enjoyment of the tutor training and ongoing support, yet at the same time, he was conscious of the challenges in meeting that ideal tutor role: “I feel I can be of use to the students, but at the same time, I still walk the tightrope of trying to not be too much help and end up doing some of the work for them.”

Overall, Calvin’s responses on the questionnaire were closely aligned with the Writing Center’s goals and mission. Almost all of his responses revealed a bias toward student autonomy. He wanted to tutor in a way that would instill in students confidence and strategies that they can take with them into other classes and post-college experiences. Calvin appeared confident and grounded in his role.

Derrick’s responses were less consistent. Though his text- and product-centered goals of task completion grated against the writer- and process-oriented goals of the Writing Center, it became clear in the end that he was beginning to understand the
importance of students grasping what he called “concepts” and “habits” that they could
take with them. He was also beginning to note the distinction between the informal
tutoring he did on his own prior to working in the Writing Center, and the kind of
tutoring, or consulting, he was expected to do in the Writing Center.

Like Derrick, Calvin also had prior teaching/tutoring experiences in a context
outside of the Writing Center. Since he only made slight reference to this prior
experience in the questionnaire, and since it was an experience of which I had no prior
knowledge, I decided to interview him. In the interview, Calvin revealed that he was a
training petty officer in the Navy for a year. He explained the purposeful, but product-
oriented, motive behind the strategies he was expected to employ:

In the Navy, you’ve got guys who need to be able to regurgitate whatever you’re
teaching them. I’d have these guys as my captive audience for 30 minutes. All
they’d have to do at the end of the day is be able to repeat something, like some
kind of standing articles. So, to this end, I’d have them repeat this stuff back to
me 20 times, and that was the training. I could force feed it to a sailor if I needed
to; it’s the Navy’s material, so the sailor’s need for “ownership” is irrelevant.
Being that forceful trainer didn’t bother me. Even though it was end-results
oriented, it worked in that context and served its purpose. . . . When I read the
piece on minimalist tutoring [Brooks (1991)] though, the difference really stood
out to me. Basically, it seemed the author was warning tutors that if they get too
involved or too forceful or become too much the dominating partner in the
conference, the work can end up becoming the tutor’s instead of the student’s.
Another difference is that with tutoring in the Writing Center, you’re getting
students involved in the process, so they can own it, understand it, and later use it.
I am now more consciously aware of avoiding a lot of the tactics used in the
Navy. . . . I have to keep the two separate because they have two totally different
goals.
Calvin also went on to explain how his father, who was a retired instructor in the Navy, failed to take these things into consideration when working with his sister. He described a memory he had of his father trying to help his sister with her math. Calvin went on to explain the radical difference between his sister and the students his dad taught: “In his experience as an instructor, his students were guys who knew the stuff to some extent but hadn’t applied it for some time, . . . but with my sister, it was different. My sister was just learning this stuff, so she needed more guidance. It was just a difference of situation and background of the student.”

In this interview, I was struck by the way Calvin articulated the cross-purposes of various contexts—in terms of both physical settings and prior experiences—without any prompting. He consciously tapped into all of these experiences as he sought greater understanding of his role in the tutorial. Not only was he was conscious of those influences going into the semester, but he had also made up his mind regarding the need to resist those habits learned in the Navy.

While the tutors’ description of their goals and experiences revealed much about their intentions, perhaps a more valid representation of the tutors’ real attitudes and ideas are revealed in the last tutor training session, since their responses in these discussions are unrehearsed. In this training session, the tutors’ expressed ideals of tutoring were quite different than those indicated in their questionnaire responses.

In this training session, Melissa had the tutors read and role play excerpts from real conferences and respond to the efficacy of the tutoring strategies used in the conference. This process allowed tutors to not only express their opinions of the strategies, but also to explain why they might use one strategy over another. Therefore,
analysis of this training session transcript revealed some pertinent information regarding the tutors’ understanding of both practical and conceptual tools for tutoring as demonstrated early in the semester. I have broken this analysis down according to the tools that were discussed.

**The Importance of Having the Student Read Their Text Aloud.** In discussing the usefulness of having students read their texts aloud, Calvin admitted that he rarely engaged in the practice because students often seem reluctant; however, he did note that the main benefit of the practice, in his opinion, was that it led students to correct their own errors.

Derrick agreed with Calvin’s analysis, but he also described added another benefit of the read-aloud strategy:

> Another thing that works when you have the students read is you can hear the their vocal punctuation. The writing makes sense when they read it because you hear their inflection and their pauses. . . . And once you understand those differences [referring to the difference between the tutor’s reading and the student’s reading], you understand their intentions . . . how they want the text to sound. And once you get that, it’s a whole lot easier to teach them how to structure sentences and punctuate correctly because you are basing it on their reading of the text, rather than your own.

While this description revealed a sophisticated understanding of the benefit of this strategy, Derrick’s explanation just a few seconds later of how he used the strategy with one student showed evidence of tool use that was less grounded in writing center theory. He explained that when working with Neal, he liked to read along on a printed copy while Neal read the text aloud from the screen. That way, when something needed to be
changed, Neal could fix it right away on his computer. He further explained how it used to “drive him crazy” when he circled or underlined a problem in Neal’s paper, and Neal would come back to him five minutes later and not know what to do. He noted, “This way [referring to on-the-spot corrections] the problem is changed before [the student] forgets about it.”

Derrick’s explanation of the usefulness of the read-aloud strategy for understanding student intentions was insightful, yet his use of the tool in practice with Neal only served to satisfy his own need for error correction. This use of the tool led to little problem-solving or long-term understanding on the part of the student; rather, Neal was simply given the opportunity to change the error before he forgot. This misplaced focus on error correction, rather than student understanding, revealed that Derrick had not yet appropriated a conceptual understanding of the tool use; specifically, he failed to take into consideration the goal for student autonomy.

Responding to a student’s text. Following the consideration of the read-aloud strategy, Melissa led the tutors into a discussion about how to begin a response-based tutoring session. Calvin’s method involved working through a preset protocol; he would take the student through a series of questions in order to determine where to begin with the student:

First, you have to make sure they’ve verbalized some concept of the assignment, and if it doesn’t go along with what they’ve written, you have to get them completely on track and decide whether what they’ve written is usable. But if they are on track, you should start with the biggest issues: Does this meet the assignment? Yes, it does. Is it complete? No, but this is what I’m going to do to finish it off. If complete, is it organized? . . . Basically, you just run through the
questions with the student and let them answer until you get to one that you don’t get a “yes” to. When they say “no,” you have something to work on—something that the student, not the tutor, has identified.

Though his process is rigid, Calvin’s strategy for first-round response lines up to some degree with theories of student ownership and agency in both the conference and the writing process. Furthermore, the easy-to-apply process may have helped Calvin to remain conscientious about resisting the top-down instruction he employed as a trainer in the Navy.

Unlike Calvin, Derrick described a method of response to writing that was more natural, more conversational:

My approach is quite different from that. I’d ask them first what their paper’s about, what they were trying to tell the reader, things like this—basic questions. . . . Then when they finish reading their paper, the first thing I always do, if it’s a first draft, is tell them what I liked about it. I try to be careful with how I word things in order to keep it honest; like I might say, “Man, where’d you come up with this? This is really interesting. I never knew that.” That way they know they did something well. . . even if it’s just coming up with a couple of ideas. Even if the paper stinks, I find something good to say because a lot of them come in with a first draft and think it’s so good. They don’t realize they have four or five more drafts to go. . . The first draft is kinda like a baby, y’know? You have to be real careful, real gentle. If you tell them everything that’s wrong the first time around, the next thing you know they’ll be bringing you a totally new rotten first draft on a whole new topic. I had that happen with Jason, so from then on, I started focusing on the positive qualities the first time around. And then, the second time we’d meet, I’d hit ‘em. I get as honest as possible with them, because by then, they already know there’s something worth salvaging. By the time I get done with them, we’ll probably end up scrapping half the paper.

Once again, Derrick, in his description of a tutoring strategy, went from a student-centered approach, which included sensitivity to students’ (especially basic writers’)
needs—to a more tutor-owned process, in which he would take the reigns in the second session, directly leading the student through major revision. Derrick was beginning to reveal a conceptual understanding of the way motivation contributes to student ownership, yet his conceptual understanding fell short when he usurps that ownership in the revision process.

Understanding control in the role of the tutor. Probably the most enlightening part of the training session involved the tutors’ responses to one sample conference, in which the tutor takes a more facilitative, rather than authoritative, role. In the sample conference, the tutor has the student tell her what he’s trying to do; throughout the process, the tutor does two things: provides positive response where deserving, and repeats back to the student what she understands regarding her impression of what he is saying and trying to do. When Melissa asked the tutors what they thought of the session, Calvin was the first to respond, and the following exchange unfolded:

Calvin: I don’t think I’d have done it that way! I mean, I know we’re also students, just as they’re students, but in that sense we have to set up parameters . . . some sort of control . . . instead of just saying, “Well, what I understand you saying is . . .” and “Yea, go ahead and do that!” . . . There has to be some sort of conversation, but there also has to be an agenda. You can’t just count on the writer to know what they’re doing. That’s why we’re here!

Melissa: Why? Why are we here?

Calvin: To help lead them. . . . It’s just that, the way the tutor acts . . . she doesn’t seem like she knows what she’s doing. I just get the impression right off the bat that this person is either clueless or unprepared.

Derrick: I looked at it differently. The tutor doesn’t want to come in and seem like a drill sergeant. She’s giving some structure, but making it appear less structure-ish. You can have an agenda without outlining it at the beginning of the conference. . . . I think the tutor’s questions are good because they get the writer talking about what he’s trying to say. I
know that the students I tutor many times know what they want to say, but they just need to say it. So I get them talking about it. I might say, “Oh, so what you are trying to tell me is such-and-such... I missed that part when I read your paper.” Getting the student to tell us what it is they want to say—what it is they want to tell the reader—is a big part of our job, I think.

This discussion captures perhaps the gap between Calvin’s intended motive (i.e. avoiding being the “dominating partner” in the conference) which was expressed in the post-questionnaire interview, and way he is conceptualizing the tutor’s role as described here. Ironically, what Calvin doesn’t seem to recognize is that this tutor’s strategy is not all that far removed from the first-draft response strategy that he described earlier. Though they are very different in terms of interaction, both strategies seek to relinquish control of the conference agenda to the student, as well as get the student to take an active role in thinking about what they’ve written.

Calvin’s method of starting the conference with preset questions is clearly more structured and rigid, yet he described that he lets the student answer the evaluative questions, and it isn’t until he hears a “no” response—indicating that the student has identified an area which needs work—that they get into the text. The sample tutor’s strategy is more flexible and conversational, but ultimately, approaches like these described in the literature serve the purpose of getting the student to talk about their paper, their ideas, and their motives until the tutor notices a gap between what the student has said and what the student has written.

What is perhaps more enlightening in this exchange is the way Calvin’s explicit concerns over “setting up parameters of control,” determining the “agenda,” and “not
counting on the writer to know what they are doing” are suggestive of motives that contradict those expressed earlier.

Derrick’s response to the conference, on the other hand, reflected a more grounded understanding of the tutor’s goals and practice. One may concur that his statement, “you can have an agenda without outlining it at the beginning of the conference,” is as much a stab at Calvin’s approach as it is a distinction of a more implied agenda.

Derrick’s attuned perception of the activity is also illustrated in his analysis of the intricacies of the tutor’s and student’s conversation. Calvin argued that the tutor’s successive “okays” throughout the student’s talk were an annoying interruption. Derrick, however, explained that the drawn-out, “o-kay,” can serve to communicate to the student that he needs to say more in order for the tutor to fully understand where he’s going with the topic. “It’s almost like saying, ‘I’m following you, but tell me more.’”

Derrick went on to argue, however, that it’s virtually impossible to “understand the transcript out of context,” explaining, “with my students, an okay like this can mean a number of things: an affirmative statement that they’re on the right track, a signal that they need to tell me more, or a passive agreement with what they’ve expressed.” Derrick’s comments suggest a keen awareness of his understanding of the dynamics of the conversational patterns between a tutor and student; more specifically, he was recognizing what Newkirk (1995) called “backchannel talk,” words used by tutors or students which act as cues for moving the conversation.

A little later in the session, Melissa pointed out the conflicting status of peer tutors who are, on one hand, equal in status to the students, but on the other hand, their
status suggests a more hierarchical relationship: “Remember, you are a peer tutor employed by the college to help these students succeed. That status carries heavy implications regarding how students respond to you. Even if you do take a more collaborative, facilitative approach like we see here, students are sometimes quick to act on your every suggestion.” Rather than seeing her comment as a warning to be mindful of the power implicit in their role, Calvin found in it a sort of justification for his earlier comments:

That’s partly one of the reasons why I do take a more structured, have-a-plan approach. . . because the students I’m tutoring are seven years or more younger than I am. Most of them see me as older. . . wiser. . . I don’t know if that’s true or not [laughs], but I can tell you that they look to me as an authority figure. With most of the students, if I don’t take control of the conference at the beginning, then they’re going to take it [laughs]. And so, it’s hard to fit in that way.

Calvin’s last comment, “and so, it’s hard to fit in that way,” was difficult to interpret. I wanted to assume that he was referring to the difficulty of negotiating a less-authoritative role when students look at him as an authority figure; however, this interpretation doesn’t stand up against the previous statement, “if I don’t take control of the conference at the beginning, then they’re going to take it,” which was voiced as a concern—something that he didn’t want to see happen. One assumption I can make, though, is that his contradictory statements implied that he hadn’t developed the conceptual understanding of his tutor role—in the way one would assume he had based on his beginning-of-term questionnaire and interview. Calvin’s resistance to the peer status of his role is perhaps most obvious in this next stage of analysis of the sample conference.
As a final point of discussion, Melissa asked the tutors how they would describe that tutor, given the roles discussed earlier (e.g., peer, coach, editor, authority figure, etc.) Calvin answered, “Peer. Definitely. She doesn’t take any sort of an authority stance whatsoever, so I have a hard time seeing her in the helpful role of a coach or editor or authority figure.” Calvin’s response, which suggested that the helpful role is limited to more authoritative approaches, left no question regarding his bias toward tutor authority in the conference. Derrick’s response was equally perplexing:

A bit of each, I guess. . . . Well, I take that back. I don’t know if I’d use any of those to describe this tutor. She sounds more to me like a certain kind of teacher. . . . You know, the teacher who knows how to fix something, but doesn’t want to tell you. . . like Professor Elliot. Josh took his paper to Prof. Elliot because he got a low grade, so I told him he should go and talk to him to find out what he did wrong. They talked for a half hour, but Josh came back without a single suggestion for how to make the paper better. I’m like, “What’s the use?”

Though Derrick’s earlier responses indicated that he was in agreement with the tutor’s practice, his final assessment of her non-direct approach was that of a really smart teacher who refused to impart her know-how to a struggling student.

In sum, the tutors’ initial conceptions regarding their tutor role inform my findings in significant ways. First, they bring to the forefront the explicit and implicit contradictions between the ways tutors describe their role (i.e., direct responses in the questionnaire), and the ways they apply that role to specific tutoring contexts (i.e., discussions of sample conferences in training and reflections on prior tutoring experiences). These contradictions mark perhaps the beginning of attempts at appropriation—a process undeniably altered as the tutors try to make sense of the training
just received. Interestingly enough, the tutors’ unrehearsed statements revealed in this chapter in many ways foreshadow the very tensions that surface throughout their semester of conferencing in the Writing Center.

In approaching the final chapter of findings, it is important to remain mindful of both the educational contexts (described in chapter four) and the tutors’ histories and initial conceptions of their role (described in this chapter) as we begin to examine the primary setting of analysis of this study: the writing conference. These various contexts and settings are replete with motives. Some of the motives of these settings will align neatly with the mission and objectives of the Writing Center. When these goals and motives overlap, a successful appropriation of the tools learned in tutor training is likely to occur. However, when these goals and motives collide, tensions result, and the tutor must negotiate the extent to which they will appropriate those tools.

In Chapter Six, I will present my findings regarding the frequency and manner of tool appropriation by each of the tutors in the conference activity. Imbedded in this discussion are my findings concerning the tensions—or clash of context goals and motives—that arise as the tutors attempt to appropriate the tools across time.
CHAPTER 6

TUTORS’ LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME

In chapters four and five, I answered my first research question regarding the principal settings for tutors’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools for writing conferences. In those chapters, I described the motives for the various settings and the complicated ways these motives can overlap. In this chapter, I will answer my second and third research questions:

2. Given the overlap among settings with potentially conflicting motives, what tensions arise as tutors attempt to appropriate both the conceptual tools and the practical tools they have learned in tutor training? How does the tutor negotiate these tensions over the course of the semester? What adjustments occur?

3. Within these settings, what shaped the tutors’ appropriation of the tools, and how did their tutoring develop over time in relation to contextual factors presented by the conference conversation?
Before starting, I find it appropriate to touch once again on the daunting task that these tutors are faced with as they begin the semester of tutoring in the Writing Center. They are met at once with the multiple roles they must assume: professionals who understand the composing process, nurturers who are sensitive to the students’ struggles and needs, and peers who will come alongside the students in order to ease their transition to college. All the while, these tutors are students themselves; at best they are novice tutors, still in need of training and support. Consequently, in presenting these findings, my goal is not to distinguish between those moments of tutors’ successful or unsuccessful tutoring (though at times my narrative may read as such); rather, I hope to direct the reader’s attention to those factors which inhibit tutors’ appropriation of the tools learned in tutor training. In doing so, I hope to bring to light a greater understanding of how tutors can more successfully negotiate those tensions which hinder appropriation.

Tutors’ Patterns of Appropriation

For the reason stated above, I will only refer briefly to the findings regarding the frequency of tutors’ attempts toward appropriation. Table 6.1 offers a numerical and visual presentation of these findings. As such, it represents my first cut through the complexities of the transcribed conferences—I will add more texture to these descriptions later in this chapter.

In order to fairly represent the tutors, it is necessary again to define the two juxtaposed categories. In analyzing the tutors’ conferences, when the tutor appropriated a conceptual or practical tool in a way supported by tutor training, that attempt was coded as appropriation. When the tutor’s motive or practice did not line up with the advice
given in tutor training, the attempt was coded as *altered appropriation*. By characterizing the appropriation as *altered*, I hoped to make clear that the tutor’s practice was not necessarily unsuccessful or wrong. (In fact, the findings, at times, suggested otherwise.) However, I did intend to identify the tutor’s practice and motives as contradicting, falling short, or different than those ideals presented in tutor training.

To better illustrate this distinction, I will give two examples of altered appropriation: one in which the tutor purposefully shifted his role and strategies according to student expectations and the purpose of the conference; and one in which the tutor’s altered appropriation was more representative of what I would call unsuccessful appropriation. First, the shifted appropriation: In the last few weeks of the semester, Derrick assumed a more directive stance in many of the tutorials. This switch did not imply that he had given up his goal for a collaborative role in the conference; rather, it had more to do with the nature of the conferences. Since his students were completing final revisions to include in their portfolios, the students often came with direct questions and expectations that forced Derrick into a more dominant, evaluative role. Second, the unsuccessful appropriation: In order to help his students generate content, Calvin would often model how their topic or thesis could be supported with various ideas. While modeling was an encouraged strategy for tutoring, Calvin failed in his attempt to appropriate the tool successfully when he persistently modeled according to his own ideas and experiences, instead of asking the students questions to get at their ideas and interests in the topic. As a result, his students often struggled to find relevance in his feedback.
One might be inclined to question the broadness of my altered appropriation category; however, given the next stage of coding and analysis, which captured the tutors’ intentions and motives behind their practice, this category was sufficient for this first stage of analysis aimed at capturing frequency rather than manner of appropriation. Given this explanation, I will now provide the coded results of each tutor’s practice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTUAL TOOLS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF ALTERED APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY OF ALTERED APPROPRIATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relevance &amp; Ownership</td>
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<td>59</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Collaboration &amp; Student Agency</td>
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<td>64</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing As a Process</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>245</td>
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<td>38%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>PRACTICAL TOOLS</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Assigning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
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Table 6.1: Results of Frequency Coding

Continued
The frequencies in Table 6.1 offer two useful findings that provide a prelude to understanding the more context-specific findings offered later in this chapter. First, these results highlight the profound differences between each of the two tutors’ attempts to appropriate the tools over the course of twenty writing conferences: Calvin had only 150 attempts in appropriating the tools, while Derrick had 517 attempts. The vast difference in numbers may lead one to assume that these findings suggest that Calvin was doing something other than attempting to appropriate the tools in his conferences. However this was not the case. To clarify, the coded episodes of both tutors’ conferences had on average two coded attempts per episode; therefore these findings suggest that there were fewer episodes for analysis in Calvin’s conferences.

To explain another way, Derrick’s conferences involved significantly more talk than Calvin’s—not always more time, but more talk. While transcribing the two tutors’
conferences, it didn’t take long at all to notice that Derrick’s transcriptions of conferences were much longer than Calvin’s. It was surprising, though, how many of their conferences were approximately the same length in minutes. For example, I compared two 25-minute conferences between the two tutors in which they were engaging in the same type of conference (response to a first draft). The transcript of Derrick’s 25-minute conference was twelve pages long, while Calvin’s 25-minute conference was only four pages long.

A number of factors accounted for this difference, but the most predominant involved Derrick’s patterns of interaction—more specifically, his rapid speech. Derrick was a “fast talker”—both in and out of the writing conference. In examining his patterns of interaction, I was struck by how his students were often drawn into the quick exchange; for example, there were few pauses that lasted more than two seconds (unless he was reading). Calvin, on the other hand, talked very slowly. He took his time expressing his thoughts, and as a result, the conversation as a whole seemed to progress at a slower pace.

Another consideration for this difference is the number of Derrick’s conferences which were considerably longer in talk time than Calvin’s, which was about half. Upon examination, it became clear that Derrick’s conferences were, in fact, driven by that need for “completion,” which he described in one of his responses on the beginning-of-term questionnaire. Due to this need for completion, Derrick rarely ended a conference unless he and the student had either accomplished a task together, or the student was at a point where he or she could progress steadily on his or her own.
Beyond number of attempts, we can also note Derrick’s higher success rate for appropriating the conceptual and practical tools of tutor training: Seventy-two percent of Derrick’s attempts were aligned with tutor training, compared to Calvin’s 65 percent. An understanding of this difference will unfold as we turn our attention to the two tutors’ manners of appropriation, as represented by types. These patterns are revealed in the following section.

Tutors’ Types of Appropriation

The five categories listed in Table 6.2 were intended to represent the various manners in which tutors appropriate tools. As alluded to in the previous section, this distinction goes beyond notions of success (or lack thereof) to get at the why and how of the tutors’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools learned in tutoring; as such, this more complex analysis led to findings which more directly responded to my second research question regarding the tutor’s negotiation of conflicting motives and tensions in the conference setting. The five categories of tutoring were defined as follows:

--Appropriation: The tutor appropriates both conceptual and practical tools presented in tutor training. The tutor understands theoretical concepts which underlie the use of practical tools, and the tutor appropriates practical tools in a way that fully supports the correlating theoretical concepts.

--Surface Appropriation: The tutor enacts limited, or surface, tool appropriation due to a gap in the tutor’s conceptual understanding.

--Default Tool Appropriation: The tutor resorts to use of default tools which he or she has appropriated from prior experiences with teaching, tutoring, or learning.

--Student-Centered Appropriation: The tutor alters his or her practice in response to the student’s individual needs and problems, even though the shift in approach is not directly aligned with tools presented in tutor training.
--Context-Based Appropriation: The tutor alters his or her practice in response to the goals and motives of personal and/or educational activity settings, even though the shift in practice is not directly aligned with the goals and motives of the writing center.

While the first type, “Appropriation,” accounted for the moments of appropriation of the tools learned in tutor training, the four types that followed accounted for moments in which the tutor either unsuccessfully appropriated those tools, or the tutor intentionally enacted tools appropriated from alternative settings. It is these moments of altered appropriation to which we now turn our attention in order to understand the factors which support or hinder tutors’ appropriation of the tools presented in tutor training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Appropriation</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface Appropriation</td>
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<td>16%</td>
<td>Surface Appropriation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Tutors’ Patterns of Appropriation or Altered Appropriation

Continued
Table 6.2 Continued

<table>
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**Tensions Impeding the Appropriation of Teaching Tools During Conferences**

According to these results, both Calvin’s and Derrick’s manners of appropriation were identified as aligned with the conceptual and practical tools of training more than they were identified according to the other four types of altered appropriation. More specifically, Calvin’s practice was coded as successful appropriation 48 percent of the time, and Derrick’s was coded as successful appropriation 59 percent of the time.

Through the process of analyzing the conferences, coding the conference activity, writing conceptual memos, and assigning tutor types, I was able to discern patterns and themes that suggested regularities in these tutors’ activity across writing conferences. This analysis enabled me to discern patterns in the kinds of tensions that emerged as each tutor engaged in tutoring practice, as well as each tutor’s response to the tensions. This response—the manner in which they adjust their practices—contributed to my
understanding of the influence of activity settings on the tutors’ attempts at appropriation across time. In rest of the chapter, I present my findings regarding those tensions that most influenced each tutor’s practice.

Derrick: A Case of a Reflective Tutor

Though Derrick’s success with appropriation was more frequent than Calvin’s, Derrick still encountered many tensions throughout the semester as he attempted to make sense of his role and adjust his practices accordingly. In the following section, I will reveal the tensions that Derrick encountered while tutoring throughout the semester. In an attempt to connect these tensions to the earlier coding scheme, I will uncover the prevalent tensions which emerged as Derrick engaged in tutoring which was characterized by altered appropriation.

Surface Appropriation

Derrick was an interesting tutor to study. In many ways, his mere presence was a contradiction. As he talked with other students, he wanted to present himself as a “laid back” student who was guided by purely pragmatic motives and a just-enough-to-get-by work ethic. However, behind this façade was a tutor who seemed genuinely concerned with serving the mission of the Writing Center, while at the same time serving students in meaningful ways. More importantly, we found a tutor who was willing to approach his role as a learner. Activity theory holds that the process of learning is replete with uncertainties and contradictions, and an individual’s development is shaped as they engage in problem-solving and meaning-making processes in response to these
contradictions. Accordingly, given Derrick’s novice tutor status, it would only make sense then that Derrick’s attempts at appropriation would sometimes fall in the surface appropriation category.

I adapted the surface appropriation tutoring type from one of Grossman et al.’s (1999) five identified levels or degrees of appropriation. “Surface appropriation” is marked by one who has learned “some or most of the features of a tool, yet does not understand how those features contribute to the conceptual whole” (p. 17). Accordingly, we can assume that this individual is “making some effort to grasp the official conception, yet is succeeding in doing so only at a surface level” (Grossman et al., 1999, p. 17). In Derrick’s case, it is also reasonable to assume that a significant relationship exists between this limited appropriation and the tutor’s lack of experience and/or training.

Given this assumption, I might also add that one may sensibly conclude that some level of surface appropriation is an inevitable precursor to successful appropriation. While trying on newly presented roles and practicing unfamiliar strategies, the novice tutor will likely demonstrate less-than-ideal practices, but their attempts may signify a move in the direction of successful appropriation. These moments of surface appropriation are indelibly related to the tutor’s conceptual understanding of the tools, and as Grossman et al. (1999) point out, the process of appropriation involves different levels, or stages, through which a learner must progress in order to achieve mastery.

Derrick’s initial self-perceptions of the tutor role, revealed earlier in this chapter, in many ways foreshadowed the tensions he would encounter due to his lack of conceptual understanding of his role. This was most notable in the training session.
Derrick offered insightful response to many of the sample conferences, yet in the end, he would relate the strategies to his own practice in ways that contradicted the motives they aimed to satisfy (e.g., noting the value of having a student read aloud to capture the writer’s intentions, yet using the strategy in his own practice as a useful tool for convenient, on-the-spot error correction). Put another way, Derrick was able to articulate theoretically-grounded rationales for what the sample tutors were doing, yet he often failed to apply that same purposeful context for tool use to his own practice.

In analyzing Derrick’s conferences, I recognized only a few occasions in which Derrick attempted to appropriate a practical tool presented in training, but did so without regard to its underlying motive or theoretical underpinnings. The most notable tool which Derrick struggled to appropriate was the practical strategy of questioning, which should, in the context of the tutorial, be used to support the conceptual tools of ownership and agency. Ideally, a tutor will ask questions in an attempt to foster a collaborative interaction and encourage the student to take an active role in reaching solutions to writing problems. Therefore, the questioning strategy is often regarded as a useful tool when the tutor is aiming for a nondirective role.

However, Derrick used the tool for different purposes than those described above. Rather than inviting inquiry on the part of the student, Derrick’s questions were often asked in a way that led his students to the answers or solutions that he had already envisioned in his own mind. He did so as if to suggest that by couching his advice in the form of questions, he is somehow still allowing the student to be the primary decision maker or problem solver with his or her writing. An example of this type of question is, “Do you think that word is best for what you want to say?” Upon hearing such a
question, the writer is in a catch-22. Even if she cannot think of a better option, she is painfully aware that there is a better word for what she wants to say, or the tutor would not be asking such a question. The following brief exchange illustrates this surface tool use as Derrick commonly used it, especially while working with Jason to get him to identify and correct his own errors as they worked through his text (Note: Italicized text indicates that the speaker is reading):

Derrick: Uh... Okay... but men takes... men takes or take? Do men take people for granted, or do we takes people for granted?
Jason: Take.
Derrick: Take.

In common examples like this one, Derrick only stops in the reading when he recognizes an error. So, although he’s asking Jason to give the right answer, Jason is understands that when Derrick interrupts the reading to offer an either-or option for revision, it only makes sense that he would do so if something needed changed. Furthermore, since Derrick pointed out that something, and gave an alternate option, it was quite predictable the Jason would provide the answer Derrick was looking for. In another more lengthy exchange, Derrick’s pattern of asking directive questions became so predictable that Jason did, in fact, catch onto which types of questions indicated that something needed fixed in the paper:

Derrick: He knew that people were buying and selling... Do you really need this comma [referring to a comma before ‘and’]?
Jason: So I don’t need it?
Derrick: What do you think?
Jason: No. You wouldn’t have asked if I needed it!
Derrick: You never know. I might sometimes do goofy things to try to trick you, to see if you are paying attention. Read this right here and tell me if you need a comma right here.
Jason: \ldots{} people were buying and selling.\ldots{}
Derrick: //Okay, did you pause or stop right here?
[points between ‘buying’ and ‘and’]
Jason: Nope.
Derrick: Was there a list that needed to be divided? Like, you know how you say, my mom, my dad, my sister, and my brother?
Jason: //So, I take both of those out?
Derrick: Well, why do you have a comma there?
Jason: This was wrong.\ldots{} The people were buying—comma—and selling in the house of God—comma—but they thought that it was no big deal.
Derrick: So.\ldots{} what was the problem with that second comma?
Jason: Are you tryin’ to talk me out of it?
Derrick: I’m not tryin’ to talk you out of it. I was just asking. See, that’s where you need the comma [pointing]. You didn’t need it there [pointing], but you do need it here [pointing] because it’s joining two independent sentences.

Later in the conference, he continues:

Derrick: Okay, read this beginning.
Jason: \textit{When Jesus entered the temple he was very mad at the sight of what was going on.}
Derrick: //Okay, did you just take a breath, right there? [pointing]
Jason: Umm.\ldots{}
Derrick: Read it again.
Jason: \textit{When Jesus entered the temple} \ldots{} Okay, there was a pause, so do I need a period?
Derrick: Okay, \textit{When Jesus entered the temple} \ldots{} Could I put a period there and end the sentence?
Jason: Yeah.
Derrick: Okay, now listen to the sentence, \textit{When Jesus entered the temple} \ldots{} Is that a complete thought?
Jason: I guess not since you’re askin’ me again.
Derrick: Listen to the two examples: \textit{When Jesus went into the temple} \ldots{} or \ldots{} \textit{When Jesus went into the temple, he was very mad at the sight} \ldots{} Which one makes more sense as a complete thought?
Jason: The second one where you said it all together.
Derrick: So, what are we going to do with this right here [points]?
Jason: Get rid of it.
Derrick: Why?
Jason: Because it all goes together, and that part can’t be a sentence by itself. It’s supposed to be all one thought.
Derrick: //Right.

Another noticeable blunder in the above example is Derrick’s reliance on an unreliable strategy for determining comma usage (e.g., “Did you just take a breath, right there?”). Though Derrick probably relied on that strategy because he aimed to present mechanical rules in terms that his students could understand, his use of the strategy remains questionable, since this method for adding commas is often unreliable. Such an example illustrates how a tutor’s reliance on a learned strategy or habit can strongly influence their likelihood of employing that tool in the conference, which leads to the second pattern noted in Derrick’s conferences.

Default Tool Appropriation

The above example of Derrick’s use of the pause-and-place comma strategy is a useful example of how tutors may rely on default tools for tutoring. Default tools are tools which the tutor has learned in a prior experience—most notably while teaching, tutoring, or learning, which may or may not be in conflict with those presented in tutor training. Due to the tutor’s experienced use of and exposure to such tools of tutoring and writing activities, tutors often find it easier and more natural to utilize these tools instead of the ones presented in tutor training.
The tutor’s use of default tools is often marked by an abrupt shift in the conference. This shift from appropriation of training-related tools to default tools may be due to the tutor’s frustration with tensions that emerge in the conference activity, or perhaps the tutor’s lack of confidence in his or her ability to successfully implement the tools presented in training. The tutor may also simply resort to default tools out of habit. Whatever the case, as the tutor becomes entrenched in the activity of the setting, he or she may consciously or subconsciously enact those default tools that are more natural and familiar. This switch to default tutoring is most evident in conferences in which the tutor begins the conference implementing tools aligned with tutor training, but later switches, for no apparent reason, to default tools. On these occasions, the tutor, in response to a tension sensed in the present tutorial, resorts to a style of tutoring that is uncharacteristic of the tutor’s previous pattern of successful appropriation. Such is the case with the following example.

The following excerpts were drawn from one of Derrick’s more ineffective conferences of the semester. I should set the stage by explaining that the student he was conferencing, Sandra, was typically highly involved in their conference conversations. She almost always came with a plan of action and usually succeeded in pulling Derrick into her plan within the first few minutes of the conference. Quite simply, her approach to the conference made it easy for Derrick to maintain the student-centered, mutually collaborative conference emphasized in training. Consequently, Derrick successfully appropriated the tools of training in almost every conference with Sandra throughout the
duration of the semester. However, Sandra’s involvement was quite different in this conference. To illustrate, I made the following notation in my observation log regarding their unusual roles:

This was definitely one of Derrick’s weaker conferences. He and Sandra both seemed out of their element today. Sandra was unusually passive and agreeable, thereby demonstrating little agentive footing in the conference. Her involvement, for the most part, was limited to a lot of nodding as Derrick talked. This seemed to throw Derrick off; he was not at all used to this passive side of Sandra. Unconditioned to responding to Sandra in this way, Derrick tried to read whatever cues she did give, which were limited to nods. Consequently, he seemed to misread her nods as a cue to keep talking—to keep explaining—whether Sandra needed him to or not.

One could question my decision to include in this write-up such an atypical example of collaboration between Derrick and Sandra; however, I chose to do so based on the premise that this example can serve as a lens through which we might come to understand the causes for a tutor to shift to default tutoring. One such cause is the emergence of some type of tension. In this case, Derrick seemed to be taken a bit back by Sandra’s more passive approach and even her direct request for help at the beginning of the conference. His confusion over her role is also understandable considering the fact that this conference takes place around the sixth week of the semester—far enough in that the tutor and student had likely developed a mutual understanding of each participant’s role in the conference. This mutual understanding is evidenced in the almost predictable pattern of collaboration in their other conferences.

Consequently, the unexpected role assumed by the student may have prompted Derrick to resort to default tools and assume a more dominating stance. Had Sandra
approached the conference with her usual focus and control over her topic, Derrick likely would have sought to maintain a more collaborative exchange. The following excerpt was taken from this unusual conference between Derrick and Sandra. In the conference, Derrick is attempting to help Sandra work through the feedback her instructor has written on her first draft:

Derrick: What do you think about this one? What’d you think about that?
Sandra: //Um, yeah, I think I should probably change that.
Derrick: Yeah, that’s something you could be more specific on.
Sandra: //What should I put?
Derrick: Umm. . . It was the night before another battle. Okay, well what she [the instructor] wrote was, “It was? What was?” So what she’s saying is, you’re saying “it. . . . Well, what is . . . what is the “it”?”
Sandra: (pause 5.0) The night. It is the night? I don’t know.
Derrick: Well, do we have a, a time period? Do we have a specific reference to time that we should look at? She’s saying “it was” cause that’s what you wrote. So she’s asking you to tell the reader, “what was?” Was this a specific time? Cause up here you talked about, um, how they had to continue their journey . . . fight many battles along the way. Is this the night before a specific battle? Uh, is this the night before they actually went around the city? You know, is this a special night?
Sandra: //Um, yeah.
Derrick: Well then, then you might wanna say something about that, about what night it was. Like this was the night . . . (unclear) . . . This might be more meaningful than if you say it’s just the night before another battle, cause . . . it sounds like it’s just any old normal night . . . just the night before another battle.
Sandra: //Okay.
Derrick: As the reader, you don’t know when it was, what it was . . . . Was it a special night? Cause if it, if it ends up being—and I know cause I’ve read it—it ends up being an important night, so instead of having it sound general . . .
Sandra: //Mm-Hmm.
Derrick: . . . like it’s just any other night, you might wanna add somethin’, like um, like uh, like what time period it was. You understand? You-you
Sandra: understand. . .

Derrick: understand? Cause I’m not really sure I totally understand what I’m tryin’ to tell you!

In this portion of the conference, Derrick was controlling the conference agenda and collaboration. Furthermore, his talk appears somewhat aimless; specifically, he takes seven talk turns of a total of more than 250 words to simply explain to Sandra that the instructor wants her to use a more specific word in place of “it.” Again, notable in this conference are the tensions to which Derrick is responding. First, Sandra has unexpectedly asked him “what to put.” Though Derrick is used to this type of request from Jason, he has never encountered it with Sandra. He seems to consciously avoid, however, telling her “what to put,” and attempts instead to prod it out of her. While doing so, though, he’s looking at Sandra, who is constantly nodding. His persistence with continued explanation—even when the explanation is redundant and unnecessary—seems controlled in many ways by Sandra’s incessant nodding. The more she nods, the more he talks. By the end, Derrick clearly recognizes the ridiculousness of his lengthy explanation, and while there may have been some truth to his final comment, it also seemed like he was trying to, in a way, poke fun at himself. What is most perplexing about Derrick’s practice this day is that, even after realizing the aimlessness of his venture in the first part of the conference, he proceeded to do almost the exact same thing in the next 5 out of 9 episodes. Like this first example, most of these others started with a
valid point of response, but Derrick spent many turns explaining a single, somewhat
simple, concept. As an example, consider the following excerpt, which followed shortly
after:

Derrick: Is that where the sentence...  
Sandra: Yeah... At, the day was finally here...  
Derrick: Is this the break right here? (3.0) Make that part consistent. Mm-
  kay, yeah, you talk about, talk about how Dad, Dad did this, Dad
  has been through this, so...  
Sandra: past tense, right.  
Derrick: Yeah, this is all past tense, right... this is all past tense. You’re
  looking at, it’s like you’re looking back, and then you say the day
  is finally here. When you say that, you’re saying, it’s here, we’re
  at this point, so now you’re using... that’s present tense. So what
  you wanna do is, you wanna, is you wanna um, you wanna switch
  to that and say, uh, you could say something like “the day finally
  came” or, or something like that... With past tense, you can be
  talking about, you can still go in order and get to that certain point,
  but you still wanna make it sound like it’s past tense, like this stuff
  has already happened. Cause you’re, that’s how you started it.
  You under... You understand what I’m saying with all that?  
Sandra: MmHmm. Yeah. Yeah, I understand.

The difference between this part of the conference and the previous example is
that Sandra did begin to take a more active role. Before Derrick even fully identified the
problem, Sandra interrupted him and identified the problem herself, “past tense, right.”
However, Derrick failed to even take into account her success at identifying the problem.
Already set in a pattern of providing lengthy explanations for each of the problems noted
in the instructor’s feedback, Derrick continued to identify the problem, explain the
problem, and even suggest word-for-word revisions. Each of these actions would be
considered unnecessary and inappropriate according to the tutor training Derrick received; however, in a debriefing interview, Derrick explained the source of such practices:

Sandra was not herself today. I don’t know if she’s just not feeling well, or what, but I felt for a minute there like I was tutoring Jason or Neal instead of Sandra. I know I talked way too much in this conference, but it was hard not to. This is the kind of conference that I’m more used to because of the way I’ve helped the guys on the team. I’m used them coming to me and expecting specific guidance and even instruction. With Sandra I haven’t had to do that at all, which has been really nice, but today was different.

In the interview, Derrick admitted that both he and Sandra were out of sorts, which triggered his shift to a more authoritative stance. Once Derrick slipped into that default mode, it was virtually impossible to pull him out of it. Sandra’s shift to a more active role later in the conference (e.g., identifying problems herself; mentioning repeatedly that she understood, as if to suggest he need not describe more) seemed to go unnoticed by Derrick, who was already determined to fulfill his agenda—a more familiar agenda based on his experiences tutoring in outside activity settings.

Student-Centered Appropriation

Due to the nature of the tutorial component of the Writing Center course, tutors often become quite adept at understanding the particular needs of students, especially since these tutors have opportunities to work with the same students over the duration of the semester. Due to this awareness of a student’s individual needs as they surface in the
activity of the writing conference, the tutor steps in and enacts a role that responds to the student’s particular needs, even though the enacted tutoring strategies may not be aligned with those upheld in tutor training.

An important feature of the student-centered type of appropriation is its reliance on the tutor’s notions regarding his or her own interpretive authority. In other words, Derrick was trusting his own interpretive insight regarding what the student needed, and was then exerting the authority to act on that insight—even when doing so meant engaging in tutoring practice which was unsupported by the tutor training and Writing Center mission.

Derrick’s process of learning to tutor was situated not only within tutor training and the nested activity settings described in chapter four—though these too were shaping his insight—but his development was also situated within a 15-week course in which Derrick was meeting with the same students twice each week. The collaborative, progressive, and social nature of his learning would inevitably factor into his moment-by-moment decisions for tutoring each student. Activity theory accounts for the “process of multidirectional change over time” in one’s learning (Lee and Smagorinsky, 2000). Derrick’s process of orienting to his students based on their past tutoring sessions and in relation to the progress of their present interaction gives an example of yet another activity setting which mediated his development.

Therefore, a distinguishing feature of student-centered tutoring is that the tutor is usually mindfully aware of his or her decision to place the student’s needs above tutor
training advice when appropriating tools for the conference. This conscious resignation
is recognizable in the following excerpt taken from Derrick’s reflection log during week
four of the semester:

I guess always in the forefront of my mind is how or whether my tutoring is going
to help my students. Maybe I still need to think more about the kind of help that I
should be aiming for, and maybe I should be considering whether that kind of
help is the kind that [the tutor trainers] want me to give. I think about these
things, but the bottom line is this: What’s most important to me is that I want
these sessions to serve a real purpose for the student. They may not see it as
helpful at first, especially when I’m making them do things that they don’t want
to do, but I only do that if I know (or at least have a pretty good hunch) that this
student will learn most from going through this process. Sometimes I think to
myself, Who am I kidding here? What do I really know about what’s best for
these students? And then I remember the fact that I’m meeting with each student
individually twice every week. If I don’t realize their needs by now, I doubt if
anyone does. Tutor training is helpful. It’s helped me to understand those things
that I need to take into consideration that I really haven’t thought a lot about
before working in the Writing Center. . . things like encouraging student
ownership of their writing. . . . But more than anything, I think I am learning the
most from getting to know my students and searching on my own for ways that
will help them improve their writing.

In this entry, Derrick makes an important distinction that sets student-centered
appropriation apart from context-based appropriation, which I will address next.

Specifically, his intent is not to cater to the student’s expectations, or motives, but rather
he is seeking to respond in a purposeful and productive manner to the specific needs
posed by an individual student—needs that he’s come to recognize only through working
with that student on a consistent basis.

Therefore, the tension that is shaping Derrick’s practice in these conferences is his
own keen insight regarding what the student needs at a given moment. This purpose-
driven pedagogy is what drives Derrick to make decisions which are—as far as he can ascertain—in the student’s best interest, and it is also this purpose which makes him more reflective about his practice, a topic I will address more later. Rather than enacting rote strategies in conference after conference, Derrick approaches each conference relying more on his natural sense of how to best meet the students’ needs as those needs surface throughout the semester.

Student-centered appropriation does not necessarily cross purposes with the appropriation of tools learned in tutor training. Most of the time, Derrick was able to pull from the tools that he learned in training to meet those individual needs. However, when his insight revealed that other strategies may be more useful, Derrick, more often than not, allowed those strategies to take the place of those that he had learned through training. Johnson et al. (2003) refer to these moments of purposefully adapting practices according to the immediate needs of the moment as performing “a necessary evil well done” (p. 164).

More often than not, when faced with these needs-based tensions, Derrick appeared willing to perform the “necessary evil” in order to satisfy his own notion of what the student needed to do or learn. Derrick’s willingness to adopt this end-justifies-the-means approach was not surprising, given his articulated motives toward task-completion in the conference, and his sometimes overly pragmatic approach to his own education as revealed earlier in his tutor portrait.

An example of student-centered appropriation was recognized in a conference with between Derrick and Neal. The conference focus was generating content and deciding on a topic for a recently assigned argument of definition essay. During the
Midway through Neal’s comments, Derrick shot me a look as if to suggest he was all too aware of the haphazard paper that might unfold.

So, Derrick engaged Neal in a collaborative conversation regarding Neal’s initial thoughts about the topic and how those thoughts might be used in fulfilling the assigned essay. In doing so, Derrick pulled from Neal’s own ideas and asked questions in a subtle way that led Neal to consider different ways to define his topic and develop his ideas more fully. Derrick’s appropriation of the practical tools of questioning and the conceptual tools of collaboration, student agency, and autonomy were successful according to any training-based measure. However, during this exchange, Neal was all over the place as he attempted to draw connections between the assignment, Derrick’s questions, and his own ideas, which—judging from the brainstorming exercise that lay between them—he’d given little thought prior to the conference. For example, consider the following exchange:

Derrick: Okay, good stuff. . . . So you’re talking about different ways of hugging people, like your mom, your friends, your girlfriend, even
your teacher. Are there fake hugs? I mean can you hug somebody and not be hugging them?

Neal: Oh, yeah. . . . Like, Kevin was telling me the other day about how he was trained to tackle people in his job as a security guard. He said he would go up, wrap his arms around them, and throw them down. At first I didn’t think that was a good example because we were talking about how caring is there in a hug. Wendy was at the table and she was like, well that is not too caring. . . but then I started thinking that it was about caring! Kevin is hugging that person and taking him down because he cares about someone else’s life. Caring is all around a hug, no matter what. Like, this is weird how it all came about, like she said it’s not caring, but then I thought about not caring for the person . . . about the person taking that person out, but caring about the person that they might have been going after.

Based on Neal’s struggle to grasp the assignment, Derrick began focusing his questions a bit more. Derrick admitted to feeling like he was “leading him like a horse to water” in an attempt to appease his own need to salvage something useful in the conversation: “I couldn’t stand it anymore. I had to help Neal come up with something tangible to develop his topic.”

After explaining to Neal that he needed to make sure that he wrote on something that he could relate to, since that would make his act of defining more meaningful and purposeful, Derrick tried to get Neal to think about hugs in a different way, yet a way that they could both relate to. During this exchange, Derrick started out with a rather lengthy monologue regarding a unique type of hug that he’s experienced in hopes that Neal might relate to either the content that he’s discussing (basketball—they are both on the team) or the process in which he’s engaging (describing specific examples in an attempt to define):
Derrick: Just thinking about it... I think of the different people that I’ve hugged... Like after a game and stuff like that, there’s some people I go through the line and I’ll shake their hand, but once in a while one might give me a hug. Like with playing KCC, there’s two or three people I’ll hug... some of the coaches will hug me and stuff like that. Now is that a friendly hug? I mean, are they hugging me because they like me? Or are they hugging out of respect? You know, there’s a different type of thing there. The difference to think about, maybe is the reason for giving the hug.

Neal: I never really thought about a hug of respect neither.

Derrick: You know how like you shake somebody’s hand and you hug them, you embrace. Everytime I go through the line with certain individuals, I’ll hug them not because I necessarily like them of love them. It’s almost like I respect them so much that the way I show that I care for them and respect them is to go beyond that handshake and hug them. There’s a lot of different angles you can take with this.

Neal: Mainly it’s putting this together is what I have to do now. Just start writing, putting stuff together, and then throwing out stuff that don’t belong. Just put it together, read it, and throw stuff out mainly... ‘cuz it’s due Tuesday.

Derrick: What’s due?

Neal: The first draft.

Derrick: And how long does it have to be?

Neal: Two to three pages. Yeah, once I start rolling, start going, start writing, I know I can write til I get two or three pages now that I have some ideas.

Derrick: Well, here’s an idea for what you can do [begins writing on Neal’s brainstorming sheet]... Start off with what you think a hug is—a more broad definition... then in the next paragraph you could say what you think a hug isn’t—define by negation, remember? Then describe by example by writing about some of these different types of hugs you seen or experienced yourself. When you do that, think about what we talked about... think about the reason behind the hug... why the person is giving or receiving the hug. That will make your paper more interesting and meaningful. Remember, she wants you guys to have meaning and purpose behind your definitions. Don’t just fall into the trap of defining in the most typical way. That’ll bore her. You’ve got to be creative. Take your time with this. Talk through some of your ideas and write about them before you just plop them down into the draft for Tuesday.

Neal: Maybe I’ll just get down some ideas for now. Hey, this could go along with... especially maybe looking at this weekend, like I could do like work like we do with psychology class. Maybe I can watch people like Friday night, senior game night. We’re gonna be hugging...

Derrick: Oh, yeah, there’ll be lots of hugs Friday night.
Neal: Yeah, different kinds of hugs tomorrow. You know we’ve hugged each other during the season, but tomorrow night our hugs to you guys will probably be more special than we have in the whole thing. So I can think about when are they different... different kind of hugs at different times. I could write that down, maybe... Why are they different?

Derrick: Sounds good... good idea. Let’s, let’s get together if you want on Saturday and you can tell me about what you saw. Sometimes it’s good to talk about those things before you just sit down and write.

Neal: Yea, I’ll plan on it.

In a debriefing interview directly following his conference with Neal, Derrick immediately began describing a “pattern” he was noticing with Neal:

Neal scared me there for a second. I didn’t know what to think about that topic. I could tell he wasn’t all that interested in it because he couldn’t give many any real details. It’s like he couldn’t think beyond the obvious. That’s why I tried to bring up ideas that Neal would hopefully relate to, like hugs at a basketball game. I knew that without an interesting topic and a focused plan, he would flounder at the drafting stage... I had no idea where he was going with that security guard idea... I’m not sure he did either. I’ve noticed a pattern with Neal though. He always starts off with an assignment with nothing on the brain except the due date, the page limit, and some vague idea of the assignment. If I can get him talking about some ideas—things relevant to his own life and interests, like basketball—he’ll come up with all kinds of great ideas on his own! I mean, did you hear his idea at the end about making note of the different kinds of hugs for different times? That was great. I felt like I helped him walk away with a sense of purpose for this assignment. The real catch, though, will be to see if these great ideas make it into his paper. A lot of times, instead of using those ideas, he writes on a general level... very broad and splotchy. He seems to write until he reaches the page limit and then quits. What’s worse is he doesn’t seem to want to write or revise after he has a draft. We make him, but he’s very resistant and does as little as possible. That’s why I kind of spoon-fed him an outline of sorts. Maybe I was crossing a line and doing too much, but I’m telling ya, if I don’t push him to work through the process at this stage, he’ll have a sucky paper come Tuesday, and the revision won’t be much better.
In the debriefing interview, I had to say very little to get at Derrick’s motives behind his decision-making in working with Neal. Derrick seemed anxious to let me in on the all of the details regarding what he’d learned about Neal: how he approaches an assignment, how he fails to transfer good ideas to his draft, his limited preoccupation toward page limits and due dates, his resistance to revision. Derrick justified his every strategy: He tied them to Neal’s specific problems and reflected on his practice with little doubt that he had provided the most purposeful help possible for this particular student.

Derrick is right about several things. Neal’s habits did call for flexible approaches on behalf of the tutor. And without the conference, Neal probably would have come with a “sucky” draft on the following Tuesday. So, in many ways, this was a very successful tutorial. However, there is something else to consider. An honest critique to his purpose-driven pedagogy rests entirely on one essential question: Whose motive determines the purpose toward which the tutoring activity is aimed? In his earlier log reflection, Derrick wrote, “I want these sessions to serve a real purpose for the student.” However, as clearly illustrated in the above conference, his tutoring practice was based on his own ideas of what that purpose should be. Questions like these are more directly confronted as we approach the last tutoring type.

Context-Based Appropriation

While working in the writing center, the tutor will inevitably be confronted with a difficult decision: whether to uphold the goals of the writing center and implement the tools valued in tutor training, or respond instead to those conflicting goals and motives that emerge from other competing activity settings. Though the conceptual and practical
tools presented in tutor training are ideal and even expected, it is unrealistic to assume that they will not, at times, be difficult to implement when placed against competing contexts. All settings (e.g., a college retention committee, an athletic program, a composition course, etc.) contain their own set of goals which are supported through the mediated use of certain tools. Though many of these goals may grate against those of the Writing Center, most of these goals are marked by valid concerns that tutors would be foolish to ignore.

Perhaps the most prevalent example of this clash of goals involves the goal of many writing center students to receive a certain grade—not necessarily a high grade, but one that allows him or her to achieve his or her own personal goals. These personal goals are often derived from those goals and motives of activity settings outside of the Writing Center. For example, many students required to come to the Writing Center are admitted to the college on provisional status. Receiving a certain grade in a class may be the factor which determines whether or not they will receive full admission status. Similarly, students on academic probation wants to make the grade so they can return to college the next semester, and an athlete who is at risk for ineligibility wants to make the grade so he or she can be a starting player at the next basketball game rather than sit the bench.

While all of these goals, especially the last, may not be recognized by many educators as ones that should guide practice, the tutor—especially a peer tutor who often interacts with these students in settings outside of the writing center—may find it difficult or even unfair to disregard these students’ goals. This encountered exigency contributes to the tutor’s decision to forego the tools highly regarded in tutor training and instead enact ones that, at least to some degree, acknowledge these goals. And some may argue,
“rightly so!” These examples are indicative of valid concerns that tutors cannot ignore if they want to reach at-risk students. Even so, the negotiation is a complicated one—and one that we’re not always aware of, which complicates matters more.

Even though the literature on tutor training rarely shows evidence of sensitivity to these high stakes issues, conversations surrounding this collision course of goals can frequently be heard as peer tutors negotiate their role and the strategies which define it.

Derrick’s questionnaires, reflection log, debriefing interviews, and even his conferences were riddled with references to motives that reached beyond the Writing Center. His earliest reference was the first week, when Derrick was reflecting on his prior experiences with tutoring his teammates. In this reflection he talked about how he offered support across various contexts: “We work together on the team, and I think the support I give on the court somehow carries over to other areas.” He went on to describe his identification with the first-year students, and the values and motives that they will have to respond to: “I look at some of these guys, like Sean and Jason, and wonder if they’ll make it. I’m always on them about keeping their grades up; I tell them, if nothing else, they need to see it as a responsibility to their team. If those two are ineligible next semester, we’re hurting.” Derrick’s reasons for tutoring, even before coming to the Writing Center, were based almost entirely on his sensitivity to the goals and values of various activity settings (e.g., a community of care, a basketball team, an athletic department with eligibility standards, a first-year transition, etc.).

Once tutor training was added, Derrick had one more activity setting to draw upon. Derrick was forced to confront head-on with process-oriented, student-centered motives, rather than the product-oriented, grade-centered motives that had guided most of
his learning and tutoring to that point. His willingness to at least try to uphold the values and motives of the Writing Center was expressed early in the semester (“I want to do the job right. . . . I need to make sure I’m fulfilling more of the consultant, rather than tutor, role in the Writing Center”), and it remained recognizable throughout the semester, especially in his reflection log and in debriefing interviews, which, by their very nature, provoked more reflection on his part.

After midterm, however, as stakes became high for some of these students, Derrick’s attentiveness to competing goals became more pronounced. Around every corner, Derrick confronted these tensions, all the while realizing that his response to them would determine his allegiance to certain values and goals. To fully embrace the goals and motives of the Writing Center would mean that his attention would remain on matters which had been foreign previous to his employment in the Writing Center: matters such as the students’ writing process, their attainment of knowledge and skills which would reach beyond the composition course, and perhaps most troubling, their right to fail. To opt instead for the motives which had guided his practice before Writing Center would mean allowing evaluation to take precedence over learning; to let product take precedence over process; to allow teacher expectations to take precedence over audience sensitivity; and to let assignment completion take precedence over practice.

Derrick ended the semester mindful of the tension, yet in his practice he wavered between the two extremes, usually landing somewhere in the middle. This struggle is all too pronounced a conference with Jason and Derrick’s reflection which follows. First, I must set the stage.
In the previous conference with Jason, Derrick pulled from a number of useful strategies in order to work through some tensions that had been surfacing for some time. Some of these strategies were appropriated from training, and some were not; yet this conference, which took place just prior to midterm, was one of the first which evidenced Derrick’s developing repertoire of strategies, as well as his usefulness in applying them. In this conference, Derrick and Jason went over the peer feedback that Jason had just received on his argument of definition essay. Before doing so though, Derrick was interested in hearing what Jason had to say about his chosen topic, “The Role of Women.”

Although Derrick had not yet read Jason’s paper, he was fairly certain that it was yet another example of Jason’s tendency to use the Bible as his sole source for every argument. Derrick had expressed numerous times earlier his frustration over Jason’s overdependence on the Bible as his primary source for support. For example, Derrick wrote this in his tutor reflection log:

[Jason’s] ideas are so one-dimensional that it frustrates the crap out of me. I wish he would just come in and write about something he cares about—something he came up with on his own—rather than always writing on something to do with the Bible! I know this sounds bad to write, but honestly, I’ve been tutoring this guy for months, and I’m still trying to find his voice, his ideas in his papers. . .

This tension surfaced in conferences as well, as Jason would often respond to Derrick’s content-related questions and challenges with a string of Bible verses.

So for this conference, Derrick took a different approach. Instead of moving right into the peer feedback and needed revision (which was his typical approach in response-
based conferences) Derrick instead engaged Jason in a conversation about the content
before he even read the paper. He explained to me later that he did this because he was
interested in seeing how Jason’s “patchwork quilt of Bible verses” held up against his
own ideas. Derrick begins broadly:

Derrick: [Reads title] What’s a Woman’s Role. All right. Tell me.
Jason: What’s a woman’s role?
Derrick: Yeah.
Jason: [laughs and then slides his paper to Derrick] There it is.
Derrick: Well, tell me about it. I don’t need to read it yet. I’ll read it. I just
want to know some of your thoughts before we look at what
you’ve written. You know, you’ve got to prepare me for what I’m
about to read. [Derrick and Jason both laugh.]
Jason: A woman’s role is . . . (3.5) . . . is . . . [Jason looks down at his
paper (5.0) . . . is biblically a helper to man in marriage.
Derrick: Well, what else? Don’t, don’t read to me what you’ve written. I
want to hear Jason’s ideas . . . off the cuff. . . impromptu. . .
Whatever you want to call it.
Jason: Uh . . . You want me to summarize it?
Derrick: No. Just tell me what you think . . . Like I wanna hear your ideas
. . . [Jason looks at the paper again and begins spot reading
portions to Derrick. Derrick slides the paper aside, turns it over,
and once again makes his request.]

Although the last line of this excerpt is somewhat comical since Jason, even
without reading, still began with reference to his reliance on the Bible, the rest of the
conference was a fine example of mutual collaboration, in which Derrick and Jason
engaged in casual, but meaningful, conversation about Jason’s topic and about writing in
general. After doing so, Derrick (upon Jason’s request) turned his attention to the paper.
Jason complained about the peer feedback he’s received, arguing that it’s wrong half the
time and he’d really rather just get the feedback from Derrick and the teacher. Derrick
encouraged Jason to rethink his opinion and consider the value of drawing on a larger audience. To support his position, Derrick directed Jason’s attention to the usefulness of the feedback he received, which was actually quite good. Derrick explained the benefit of revising with the peer feedback and helped Jason to understand how to apply it.

In the tutoring session just described, Derrick was faced with a number of tensions which grew out of a clash of motives and values. For example, some might argue that Derrick was out of line in forcing Jason to move beyond biblical opinions, since the College subscribes to the belief that the Bible is the inherent Word of God. Derrick also attempted to uphold the value of peer feedback, which is a required part of the student’s composition course, even though he had expressed to me privately on several occasions that he thought the process was “more of a hindrance than a help” to Writing Center students. And lastly, Derrick is forced to respond to Jason’s developing dependence on his feedback, especially when Jason stated at the end, “You’d better be here next time, cuz I’m not going to get through this revision without your help. I really need you to help me fix some of this stuff.” Jason’s stated expectations of Derrick, which resembled the “fix-it” mindset that North (1984) warned tutors about, implied motives which clash with the Writing Center’s goals toward student autonomy.

The heightened tensions which surface as a result of conflicting expectations and motives are even more apparent in the next conference between Derrick and Jason, which takes place a few days later. The first tension involves Jason’s promptly expressed expectation for Derrick’s assistance: “Hey, I need major help. . . major revision from you.” This first line of the conference is the first of many in which Jason expresses his dependence on Derrick’s feedback in the revision stage. As a backdrop to my discussion
regarding this clash in expectations, I’ve pulled from the conference the seven requests
Jason verbalizes in an attempt to get Derrick give him the kind of feedback he thinks he
needs, which ranges from catching surface errors (3), to giving opinions on the peer
feedback (4), to telling him what to add to fulfill the length requirement (5-7).

(1) Hey, I need major help . . . major revision from you.
(2) I-I wanna see your opinion first.
(3) See if you can, I don’t know, catch any, uh, graphical errors?
(4) I just, I wanted to know your opinions on some of these.
(5) What do you think I sh . . . I’m thinking maybe, maybe give me some idea of
what I should add in. It needs to be longer.
(6) Anything else?
(7) What, what about, what should I put right there?

The tension provoked by Jason’s expectations became more pronounced when
Derrick realized that Jason failed to revise his paper after their last conference.

Derrick: So . . . what, uh, what have you done since the last time?
[Jason mumbles (unclear 1.0)]
Jason: Well, I’ve been working there on the computer, and I’ve changed
some things, so I-I wanna see your opinion first.
Derrick: Okay, uh, why don’t you tell me (1.0). . . I just wanna see what
you changed first, what ideas did you take and which ones didn’t
you take?
Jason: Well, most people made fun of people.
Derrick: I’m just looking at the corrections that were made the first time, to
to see if
Jason: Yup
[Derrick shifts attention to the copy with the written peer feedback]
Derrick: What did uh, what did you think about that? What did you decide
to write about?
[Jason points to response from a peer that Derrick encouraged him to act upon
in the last session.]
Jason: I don’t know (unclear, 3.0).
Derrick: Well, what did you change and why? What change did you make? From what I’m looking at, I see there’s been no changes. Like all the, the things we went over last time, you didn’t really change any of them. What changed from last time? (3.0) Like what did you make different?

Jason: Did you write anything on the paper last time?

Despite Jason’s obvious reluctance to answer Derrick’s repeated question, Derrick continued reading, looking for revisions. According to my researcher log, they were almost ten minutes into the 24-minute conference before Derrick recognized this important detail on his own, and it was obvious that Jason wasn’t about to give himself away if he could avoid it. Derrick explained later in a debriefing interview that he kept reading the paper because it didn’t enter his mind that Jason would have asked to meet with him after neglecting to change a thing:

I kept wondering, okay, what is it I’m responding to? What am I missing? It wasn’t until I started recognizing the things that we had discussed which were still unchanged that I realized that he really hadn’t changed a thing! What nerve, y’know? Thinking that I’d walk him through the whole process again! That really ticked me off.

Jason’s “nerve”—as Derrick called it—persisted throughout the conference. However, what we were inclined to call “nerve” may have been more of a misperception of the role Derrick would assume as his tutor. For example, in the above excerpt, after Derrick directly confronted Jason regarding his failure to do anything based on their last meeting, Jason interrupted, “Did you write anything on the paper last time?”
Despite Derrick’s lengthy explanations on the value of peer response in the last conference, despite the twenty minutes they spent reading the response and discussing how Jason might benefit by responding to it, despite all of that, Jason somehow concluded that he only needed to make changes if Derrick wrote down something to that effect on his paper.

Considerably frustrated by this time, Derrick went into another lengthy explanation of the value of peer response—not much different than the one he gave in the previous conference—but this time he added to it, in a rather irritated tone, his voiced frustration over time wasted and his inability to be Jason’s “sole responder”; nor was he willing to “go back over what they had discussed in the last conference.” Instead, he urged Jason to make use of the peer feedback. After Derrick’s ten-sentence tirade, the strangest thing happened. Jason, without missing a beat, picked up right where he left off and voiced yet another request of help from Derrick. Perhaps even more strange was Derrick’s willingness to slip right into that mode of being Jason’s “sole respondent.”

Jason: What do you think I sh. . . I’m thinking maybe, maybe you could give me some idea of what I should add in. It needs to be a little bit longer.

Derrick: It needs to be longer. (3.0) Okay. What do you think you could add to this to make it longer? Did you have any ideas? Was there anything on here [referring to peer response copy] that anybody said that you wanted to add? Um, any ideas that. . .

Jason: I’m not, I’m not sure. Um, I kind of wanted to ignore some of their questions if I hadn’t already answered them anyways.

Almost as if the confrontation never occurred, Jason continued to barter Derrick for specific help revising, and Jason continued to resist the peer response after Derrick
had spend considerable time in both conferences explaining their value and usefulness for his process. Derrick’s response was just as surprising. Once he was finally convinced that Jason will not revise based on the peer feedback, he did exactly what he told Jason he would not do: He went over many of the same responses that had already been addressed the previous session. While doing so, Derrick does, at least, pull from the ideas that he is able to draw from Jason as they engage in conversation; however, in the end Derrick resorts solving the problem for Jason, and even writing down instructions so he wouldn’t forget:

You don’t, you didn’t tell me exactly what you were thinking about it. Like what were you. . . I understand what the Bible is saying here, but I don’t understand what Jason is trying to say here. You said, ‘That is totally false because. . .’ and all you did was give more scripture. Well, uh, I think another way you could develop a little bit more would be to explain what you’re. . . what these scriptures are saying. Like condensing it. Giving a short commentary, Jason style. . . So why don’t you jus. . . Why don’t you, at the end, after those scriptures, go ahead and say why you think it’s okay. . . Not just because of, not just the scriptures but also because of whatever you think, as far as what the scriptures are trying to say. (2.0). I’m going to write that note, just on the side.

Derrick’s decision to give in to Jason’s requests to give him directive help was puzzling. In the debriefing interview, which directly followed the conference, Derrick had this to say:

I’m ticked at Jason, to say the least. I can’t believe he didn’t change a thing after we spent all that time, and then he comes in today ready to have me do the same thing? I mean, it’s a hard place to be. I guess technically he didn’t have to use the peer feedback if he thought it was so bad. But if that was the case, why didn’t he tell me upfront that he wasn’t going to use it so we wouldn’t have wasted a whole conference on it. That’s the thing that ticks me off. . . the wasted time. . . I don’t know. . . . I was trying to do the right thing by supporting the peer response process. Maybe I took it too far. Maybe I’m the one to blame for
making him address the peer feedback stuff when he told me more than once that he thought their comments were stupid. I mean, I think he was confused today, too. I think he approached the whole peer feedback thing as an option. And now I’m left thinking, well, was he the right one? Should it have been? Do I even have a right to be ticked? I guess that’s kind of why I gave in at the end and helped him think of ways to add to his paper. I start thinking, he wouldn’t be dependent on me if I didn’t let him in the first place, you know? And then I start pulling back because I want him to work out some of this on his own, and he doesn’t know what’s goin’ on! Maybe, in a way, I’ve created the monster, you know what I mean? I don’t know . . .

Derrick’s reflection brought to the surface many of the tensions that influence his practice. What is most clear in this reflection is the fact that Derrick is just beginning to make sense of how many of these tensions ultimately affect the role he will assume in the conference, as well as the role the student will expect him to assume. Most obvious in his struggle is the push-pull he experienced as he sorted through these expectations and sought to examine them from multiple perspectives. In doing so he reached a humbling conclusion in the end: that perhaps he created the problem. Perhaps he unknowingly, unintentionally fed Jason’s dependence on him, all the while thinking that once he pulled back, Jason would somehow fly on his own.

This concern that Derrick raised in the end is not all that different than the one voiced by the academic dean regarding the support provided of the retention committee. Over and over again in the writing conference, in the Writing Center, in the first-year courses, and in the retention committee, questions regarding the balance between support and autonomy continue to surface. And failure to negotiate that appropriate balance can lead to the quandary in which Derrick found himself with Jason.
Calvin: A Case of a Less Successful Tutor

Although Calvin had been employed as a peer-tutor in the Writing Center for years, in many ways, this year seemed like more of a first-year experience than the others since it was the first year which Calvin received tutor training. In tutor training, we aimed to offer conceptual and practical tools to tutors for three reasons: (1) to provide the tutors practical strategies for tutoring, (2) to provide the tutors the theoretical framework on which to ground their practice, and (3) to provide the tutors a conceptual lens through which they could critique and reflect on their tutoring approach and practice.

Consequently, since Calvin had already tutored in the Writing Center prior to receiving training, his learning and development which followed tutor training was quite different from Derrick’s. While Derrick’s focus was on the first two reasons listed above, Calvin’s was on the third. More specifically, the training supported Derrick through the beginning stages of constructing his understanding and practice of tutoring in the Writing Center; the training led Calvin, on the other hand, to reconstruct his practice.

As a result, it seemed as if Calvin went from a confident and talented Writing Center tutor, to a tutor who grew more and more unsure of his practice. During training, this uncertainty led to a major shift in his practice, and throughout the semester, it led to avoidance, lack of commitment, and misplaced blame on Calvin’s part.

Calvin’s transition during the three weeks of tutor training involved a major paradigm shift in the way he envisioned his role and practice. In many ways, this came as quite a surprise to me and Melissa. Even without training, Calvin was a good tutor. Though he didn’t have formal training to guide his practice, he did have supportive directors who welcomed him into dialogue regarding the tutoring and teaching of writing.
He was an excellent writer, and he consistently received good reviews from students regarding his helpfulness in seeing them through revision. As a matter of fact, three students had requested Calvin to be their tutor prior to the start of the semester. He also had a fairly keen sense of the know-how of tutoring—more so than the Calvin who emerged in this study. Ironically, I leave this study wondering if the Calvin of a year prior would have had a better success rate in terms of tool appropriation, even without the tutoring, than the one I observed the immediate semester following the training.

As suggested in this introduction and in the earlier findings which precede it, Calvin encountered many tensions throughout the semester as he attempted to attune his practices to the newly reconstructed role that he was envisioning going into the semester. In the following section, I will reveal the tensions that Calvin encountered as he engaged in practice.

**Surface Appropriation**

In an earlier section of this chapter, I wrote about Calvin’s initial perceptions of his role as expressed in his beginning-of-term questionnaire, which was completed after training but before the start of the semester. On this questionnaire, tutors were asked to articulate their goals for the semester and express their opinions regarding the ideal tutor role and the successful tutoring session. Calvin’s responses on the questionnaire were what I would expect from a seasoned, successful tutor who had just completed training—training which, I assumed, would lead Calvin to be even more successful and grounded in his role. His envisioned role echoed many of the attitudes and practices represented in the tutor training. For example, he wrote about the importance of the conference benefits
reaching beyond the immediate writing task to future settings. He seemed to place high priority on student autonomy, warning against becoming a “crutch” to the students. Overall, Calvin’s responses on the questionnaire were closely aligned with the Writing Center’s goals and mission. He wanted to tutor in a way that would help students succeed as writers during their first year, and beyond (other classes and post-college experiences). Furthermore, Calvin expressed his conscious intent to avoid those “tactics” he employed while teaching in the Navy and aim instead for the minimalist strategies which he recently read about in the Brooks (1991) article.

Calvin attributed his conscientious approach toward minimalist strategies to the reading of Brooks (1991) article, and in terms of articulating his role and his goals, he appeared to grasp theoretical underpinnings of such strategies. Calvin appeared confident in his role and grounded in the theory. However, the role that he envisioned did not transfer easily into his practice.

While Calvin seemed to grasp the theory and motive behind minimalist tutoring, he fell short in his attempt to appropriate the related practical tools. Perhaps his response should not have been surprising, given the concerns that others have raised regarding the efficacy of minimalist strategies (Gillam, 1991; Herdman, 1997). For example, the minimalist tutor is encouraged to replace directive statements with “leading questions,” yet these leading questions can become as prescriptive and tutor-focused as the direct advice minimalists oppose, if they are employed with the motive of leading the student to the tutor-envisioned solutions. Furthermore, minimalist tutoring advocates that a tutor should not be an active agent in improving a student’s paper; the student should be the only one responsible for improving his or her paper. Such approaches have left tutors,
such as Calvin, without a clear sense of how to negotiate their roles in the Writing Center, especially when working with basic writers who usually expect and need the intervention.

Two tensions emerged in relation to the gap between Calvin’s theory and practice: (1) Calvin’s minimalist approach toward tutor-student conversation fell short in fulfilling goals toward mutual collaboration and student agency; and (2) Calvin’s minimalist approach toward modeling, more often than not, failed to support goals of student relevance and autonomy of basic writers.

One of Calvin’s students, Sean, was an example of one the greatest challenges tutors face while tutoring basic writers: the problem of passivity. Some of the students who are forced (by placement) to attend the Writing Center are unhappy about their requirement to spend three hours a week working with someone on their writing. Therefore, much of a tutor’s work in the Writing Center involves finding a way to make writing relevant to the students’ purposes, engaging them in meaningful conversation related to their writing topics and processes, and motivating them to persevere through the process of writing and revision. As Calvin reconstructed his tutoring role according to minimalist principles, he began to lose sight of these essential roles of the tutor.

This problem was most noticeable as he attempted to work with Sean over the course of the semester. Early in the semester, Sean was active in the conference sessions. Calvin was even pleasantly surprised at Sean’s active role, but as the semester progressed, Calvin recognized that Sean was becoming more and more aloof. The following excerpts from Calvin’s reflective journal illustrate his changing impression of Sean:
WEEK #1: Going into this semester, I didn’t know too much about Sean. My initial impression, though, was that he would be the least involved of all of my students. Sean has really caught me off guard in these first few conferences, though. I am not used to Writing Center students being this proactive. In our very first session, Sean laid out what was wrong with his paper and how he was planning to fix it. He had good ideas and seemed ready to go.

WEEK #3: Sean started strong and fizzled fast. He had his paper and seemed eager to work on it. We discussed his work and what he could do to improve it. Then I set him loose. When I checked on him the rest of the class, he had done very little. I’m not sure what happened to the gusto he started with. All in all, he can seem like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde when he wants to.

WEEK #7: Sometimes Sean can be the student you hope to see in the Writing Center. Eager, proactive, and hard working. Then you get days like today and you want to know what alien race took over his body. He showed up without his paper, and then had no motivation to do any work. He has decided to completely rewrite his narrative and has not started on his argument of definition. I pray that he shapes up and realizes his need for some self-discipline. He asked about dropping writing center and taking it next semester. I told him it was tied to comp and they had to be taken together. I worry that Sean is not taking things seriously and will have problems more than he can handle before long.

WEEK #13: Mr. Hyde was out today. Sometimes Dr. Jekyll shows up and does good work that impresses me. Today the man of many masks returned. He puts on a good show and talks a good talk, but there was no real effort put forth. He just does not want to work sometimes and makes no real secret of it. He puts on a front, a very transparent one at times, but doesn’t get any real work done. I can help him, but I can’t make him want to do the work.

A closer look at the conferences between Calvin and Sean revealed that the problems were larger than motivational issues on Sean’s part. Part of the problem may have been Calvin’s failure to appropriate nondirect strategies in a purposeful way.

Consider the excerpt from a conference which took place two days before the week #7 log entry above:
Calvin: So what are we working on today?
Sean: She’s got how to.
Calvin: Is that your argument of definition or your . . .
Sean: Mm-hmm
Calvin: Okay.
Sean: After school I’ll have more time to work on it.
Calvin: Great. So how are you doing?
Sean: Pretty good.
Calvin: Feeling overwhelmed yet?
Sean: Just countin’ the days til it’s over.
Calvin: You looking forward to spring break?
Sean: Yeah.
Calvin: Just about week left. Are you going away for spring break?
Sean: I don’t know yet. I might. I have a couple of options.
Calvin: Good. It’s good to have options.
Sean: Yeah, I guess so.
Calvin: So, you know where you are headed with your paper?
Sean: Yeah, I’m going . . .
Calvin: Is this one due tonight, or is it the other class that’s due tonight? I keep getting confused.
Sean: These aren’t due tonight. Wait, yeah, the second draft is.
Calvin: If you need any help give me a holler. If you are running out of ideas to develop, just consider what somebody opposed to your point of view might say. Consider an argument against it, that’ll help you develop more material.

A look at Calvin’s first-week conferences with Sean revealed he was quite comfortable in the minimalist tutor role when it involved letting the student set the agenda for an interactive conference and, in his words, “jumping in to help where need is expressed.” However, Calvin didn’t seem to know how to adapt these strategies when tutoring a passive, disinterested, or unmotivated student. Calvin attempted to appropriate a few practical tools to generate discussion (e.g. opening the conference in a way that put the student in the driver’s seat; building rapport with the student to build comfortability), but he did so unsuccessfullly. Specifically, he interrupted Sean’s answer to the first question, and he awkwardly switched to small talk only after his previous attempt to
engage Sean had failed. Calvin’s signature exit, “Give me a holler,” had come to mean “you’re on your own” to this passive student who had never sought out the tutors’ help. Finally, the advice that Calvin ended on was perhaps his last-ditch effort to offer Sean something useful from his bag of tricks; however, it was highly unlikely that Sean would act on the advice since Calvin failed to relate it in any way to Sean’s paper or topic.

According to my researcher log, even Calvin’s positioning was awkward. He never sat down beside Sean; rather he stood over him and talked, while Sean, after briefly looking up once, looked at his paper the entire conference. Given these surface attempts toward collaboration and the vast disconnect between this pair, it’s no wonder that Sean had checked out for the day.

What is strange about this conference is that Calvin, even after learning that Sean hadn’t yet finished the paper due that night, let him off the hook. Since Sean had already missed the first draft deadline for peer response, this meant that he would be receiving no feedback at all before turning the paper in for a grade. Calvin didn’t even attempt to engage him in a discussion about his topic, which may have been helpful since Sean was still trying to develop his content. Calvin’s final question, “So you know where you are headed with your paper?”, was not an invitation for a meaningful, content-generating collaboration; rather, he was allowing Sean to call the shots to end the conference.

This conference in many ways revealed a clash of expectations: Calvin expected Sean to be interested in his writing, and he gauged his interest by how talkative he was in the conference. The responsibility of engagement in the conference fell on Sean. When Sean wasn’t talkative, which was usually the case, Calvin struggled to find any meaningful strategy move Sean toward success. When Sean failed to meet his
expectations, Calvin became a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde himself—shifting roles from an interested, affirming tutor, to an avoidant, unhelpful one.

Even when the student met his expectations, Calvin still, at times, struggled to appropriate strategies in a way which supported his stated goal of offering students “a better grasp on what they are capable of doing.” In many ways, Mikiella represented the ideal tutee to Calvin; he wrote this about her at midterm:

WEEK #8: Mikiella takes ideas and runs with them. She is ideal. She wants her paper to be the best and is willing to let others help her in this endeavor. She is highly receptive and works well in class and out. She will discuss ideas freely with me and is not afraid to stand up for her work if I misunderstand what she wrote.

Even though Calvin is fully aware of Mikiella’s competence, he hinders her from taking any agentive footing in this conference:

Mikiella: So now I’m starting on my, I’ve been taking forever to choose a topic on (.5) argument of definition.
Calvin: Mm hmm
Mikiella: I finally, I decided to do it on time, but I’ve been reading some stuff. . .
Calvin: on time?
Mikiella: On time, what’s time.
Calvin: Hmm, (1.0) well, the other thing is, you have to remember this is an argument of definition, so you really want to choose something that can be argued. (4.0) Yeah, so, time, time is one of those you’re really going to have to work at to make an argument out of, uh as you define it because initially if you ask most people, you know, what’s time, there is going to be just a standard definition, so, so where did you plan to go with it?
Mikiella: yeah. I don’t know
Calvin: Another topic might be a better
Mikiella: I don’t know, I was just, I was just thinking over it. I mean there were things (2.0), but I don’t know. I’ll probably just start writing on it.

Calvin: Oh. Uh, time, time, how about if you narrowed your topic down to say effective time or wasted time tried to define that, because if you just try to define time as a whole . . .

Mikiella: It’s a lot.

Calvin: You really get into a lot, in trying to do an overview of all the different concepts of time is, is where you would run into a problem, because it’s a human concept, you know. It doesn’t exist the same way to God as it does to us. It doesn’t, you know, I mean there’s, there’s so much you could cover, but I think if you try and narrow your focus down that will lend itself more to an argument, . . .

Mikiella: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I get it.

Calvin: . . . you can get more into the details of time (2.0) and less, less into the cosmic spectrum of, of what time is. (3.0) Did I help you get a place to start, or did I just confuse you more? [laughs]

Mikiella: Yeah, you helped me, I just needed (2.0) . . . I have to find my opinion in what is a waste of time. I need to think about it for a few minutes.

Calvin: You could even narrow it down to what is time to God. (2.0) That would be a deep theological topic, I am sure. You could start a lot of arguments with that. [laughs] Uh, so when is your first draft due?

Mikiella: Thursday.

Calvin: This Thursday?

Mikiella: Um hmm. I’m just going to start by writing about my opinion on it.

Calvin: Uh, one of the things though with your opinion is to try and imagine somebody who completely disagrees with your opinion, and that is a good way to write it and define it, cause if you imagine somebody with a completely different opinion. . . . Uh because, but for instance, atheists would say that prayer is a waste of time.

Mikiella: Yeah.

Calvin: So then you could even, uh (2.0) like, like how would you answer an atheist who said that prayer was a waste of time?

Mikiella: Uh, I don’t know. (3.0) Something about meditation, relaxing . . .

Calvin: Or even, even if there wasn’t a God, prayer has been shown to have psychological and medical value. There are actual studies that have now done on how prayer makes patients heal quicker.

Mikiella: Really.
Calvin: Yeah. So uh, I have a reputation for playing devil’s advocate with the students I consult with in the writing center [laughs], so if you ever have problems trying to come up with the other point of view, come see me. You, you can ask my wife. I can argue anything, whether I believe it or not. [laughs]

Calvin went on to talk about his knack for coming up with opposing arguments for several more minutes; then he gave Mikiella some more strategies, like consulting a dictionary for ideas. Mikiella told me later, “I thought that was the conference that would never end!” In my observation log, I wrote that Mikiella seemed obviously uninterested in these episodes in which Calvin is talking about himself and his interests. She daydreamed, possibly thinking through some of her own ideas, and at times she even looked as if she was going to start writing while he was talking (e.g., facing the computer screen, looking at her notes, etc.)” Calvin, however, failed to read her cues, and eventually usurped both the conference and the writing process.

At one point in the conference, Calvin got so carried away with his own interests that he seemed to lose track of the topic. In recommending that she suggest an opposing viewpoint, he made a leap from talking about time, to talking about prayer, which may have become confusing for Mikiella. Wrapped up in his own example and interests, Calvin never gave Mikiella a chance to be involved in the meaningful process of narrowing her topic to a focus of her interest.

Other than his initial, “So, where did you plan to go with it?”, Calvin neglected to invite input from Mikiella regarding her interest in this topic. When she responded, “I don’t know,” he failed to investigate her interest in the topic any further. Instead, he offered lengthy explanations and modeled how he would do it. Mikiella showed little
interest in his input in this conference, so she never really found her own meaning or purpose in this assignment. I think that she was interested in the “time” topic, but wasn’t sure how to articulate her interest. She needed an opportunity to think through it, and perhaps talk about it, a need which she expressed three different times in the conference:

First: I don’t know, I was just, I was just thinking over it. I mean there were things (2.0), but I don’t know. I’ll probably just start writing on it.

Second: Yeah, you helped me, I just needed (2.0) . . . I have to find my opinion in what is a waste of time. I need to think about it for a few minutes.

Third: I’m just going to start by writing about my opinion on it.

Mikiella never got a chance to work through this process though, and instead seemed forced into the narrowed focus that Calvin gave her; as a result, she wrote one of her weakest essays of the year. Nine days later, after receiving peer feedback on the first draft and attempting to revise it for a second, she decided that she didn’t like the paper and started over with a new topic. Mikiella never really owned the paper or the process; thus, she was unable to write well. Calvin seemed unaware of how he contributed to Mikiella’s frustration and lack of success with writing the argument of definition; he wrote this in his reflection log after Mikiella decided to start over:

Scrap it! After writing herself into a corner from which there appeared no escape, she decided to start with a new topic. I think she has more direction this time and will come out with a better paper from the start. I will have to remember from now on to check her interest level in the topics she chooses to write on. Keeping interest level high will help her to have better results.
The two examples of Calvin’s tutoring approach stand in stark contrast to one another. Sean was behind on his assignment and had no opportunity for feedback before turning it in that evening, yet Calvin shunned any chance to intervene and move him toward a successful completion of the draft. In tutoring Mikiella, on the other hand, he felt obliged to take the reigns from the beginning, even though Mikiella made it clear that she was just beginning to explore some ideas for a topic and needed time to think through her ideas.

Calvin provided a rationale for his inconsistencies in an interview which took place late in the semester:

Krista: You mentioned wanting to take a more hands-off approach this semester, but I’ve noticed that sometimes you are much more involved in a conference than others. Can you talk about your reason for approaching conferences differently?

Calvin: It depends a lot on the student—mainly on their motivation… when they were more motivated…when they were trying, but they were just stuck. That’s when I put more into it and become more direct. I talk more and try to give more ideas and directions to go with. In that situation, I’m more willing to say things directly, like, “I understand you’re stuck there, what I might do is…” I feel like I can be more direct with a more active student because even if they take your idea, they’re not going to plug it in as you’re saying it. They’re just going to take the general advice and run with it. It will serve to trigger their own ideas. But with the student who sits back and expects you to do the work, you can’t go as far. . . . You have to hit at the edges until they start doing some work, because if you just jump in with both feet, they’ll just let you do the work.

Krista: What do you mean by “hit around the edges”?

Calvin: If I talk about anything, I try to make it something that’s not directly applicable to their paper, but to get the principle across without giving them direct material that they’re going to—in their
blasé moments—just plug into the paper. So, I might just talk about a paper I wrote or something I would do. Like, “What helped me was this and this.” I try not to become too involved though. I’ve really tried to not be a “fix this, fix this” tutor this year. . . . It’s important to make sure you hold back, especially with those that didn’t know where to get started. . . . That kind of student needs to generate their own ideas and thoughts so that the paper is theirs.

Calvin made it clear, in this interview, that he had made a conscious decision to take a more nondirective, even hands-off, approach with passive students, like Sean, out of his concern that they may take his ideas and “plug them in as his own.” However, with more active students, like Mikiella, he felt less inhibited about being directive because he had learned that they were more apt to go with their own ideas in the long run, but his direct modeling could “trigger something” useful to their writing process.

Calvin’s appropriation of the minimalist approach appeared to be misguided on a couple of levels. First, earlier in the year, he described that he felt that he was “[walking] the tightrope of trying to not be too much help and end up doing some of the work for them.” However, Calvin only seemed to respond to such a concern when tutoring passive students—ironically those students who were in most need of his help. On the other hand, he failed to realize that, of all of his students, Mikiella was the one least in need of his directive stance, yet she was the only student with which he assumed this role.

Second, Calvin in many ways appeared to misread Sean, and, as a result, he missed opportunities for helpful interaction and focused instead on strategies that were not all that helpful to his purposes. This gap became obvious in a conversation I had with Sean regarding his frustration with the Writing Center requirement:
I’d rather not come to writing center if there was some way I could get out of it. I don’t know, I just really don’t like talking to Calvin every day. It’s kind of repetitive. I feel like I’m talking to a counselor or something every single day. [laughs] He’s always like, “How’s your day? How’s your life? . . .” and all this, and I’m like [sigh] . . . . And then I feel bad because I don’t, I don’t really talk to him that much. I don’t give too much input. I’m just like, “Uh. . . ,” and kind of short with him. I don’t know . . . . I guess if we just got right to the paper, it’d probably be a lot better, cuz it’d probably go quicker, and then I could just think about working on my paper.

Sean indicated in his last statement that his motive in getting right to the paper had more to do with getting the conference over with then getting help from Calvin, so I asked him if he felt like he had received the help he needed in Writing Center. Sean had this to say:

Um. . . I think that, uh, most of my, most of my encouragement and improvements come more out of English class. Mrs. Blank is an awesome teacher and she seems to understand me more. She knows how to get me to be a better writer. She always makes me feel good about the things I’m good at, like putting creative thoughts in my writing, but she’s also in my face about what I need to do to improve. She lets me know what I need to do, and I do it. My writing is way different than it was at the beginning of the year. But, writing center really doesn’t help me too much. With Calvin, uh. . . Let’s see. . . I’m trying to see if I can think back to a paper where it’s really helped. . .

At this point, Calvin had worked with Sean for most of the semester, yet Sean was unable to point a time when he received useful help from Calvin. What he did recall about the conferences, however, was his frustration over small talk. Sean’s description of the help he had received from his teacher throughout the year implied that he was, in fact, interested in learning to write better. His motivation is further evidenced in his first week
of conferences, in which he was talkative and motivated. However, once he realized that Calvin would not help him with his writing, as his teacher had done, he checked out, appearing uninterested, undisciplined, and unmotivated.

Calvin’s misunderstanding of the wants and needs of these two writers led him to assume a role and appropriate strategies which were unaccommodating to his students. Furthermore, his conceptual understanding of collaboration and student agency seemed impeded by his misguided notion that minimalist strategies are intended for passive students only. Mikiella consistently revealed to Calvin that she was fully capable of coming up with workable topics and developing those topics with her own ideas. She also demonstrated that she would come to him when she had questions—a perfect set-up for a minimalist tutor. Yet, Calvin, because he valued her motivation and interest in writing, crossed that line of providing too much help, even when it was neither needed nor requested. On the other hand, Sean, who expected the help of a tutor who valued his strengths and helped him improve on his weaknesses, was left to struggle through the assignments alone.

Default Tool Appropriation and Context-Based Appropriation

In this section, I will address Calvin’s tutoring according to both Default Tool and Context-Based types of appropriation. I have decided to address them together based on a prevalent overlap of the two types during my coding process. More specifically, Calvin often resorted to default tools based on his response to competing motives of other activity settings.
As explained earlier, Calvin negotiated his tutor role and strategies based primarily on two things: (1) his assessment of a student’s motivation, which he based primarily on their willingness to talk; and (2) his conscientious resistance to tutor in ways he taught in the Navy, opting instead for a more minimalist tutor role. In doing so, however, he clearly struggled to make sense of when to apply that role (as revealed in the previous section), and how to appropriate tools supporting such an approach (which I will attempt to address in this section). This struggle for grounded tool appropriation became clear even before he began tutoring. In tutor training, he described a protocol that he would engage in at the beginning of each response-based conference: a series of questions designed to get the student to self-assess their writing and reveal to him the area in which they are most in need of assistance. Given Calvin’s prior experiences with teaching and learning, it is not surprising that he would opt for a more rigid strategy for beginning a conference. His strategy was useful, in that he put the student in charge of examining their own writing and determining the help needed. However, his process of working through preset questions involved a more tutor-directed approach than he was ready to recognize. After all, he was the one determining what they should be looking for (e.g., what constituted good writing in the text) in order to reach that problem area.

Calvin’s struggle to understand how to appropriate practical tools in a way that supported his newly conceptualized role continued throughout the semester. Although Calvin had appropriated a number of practical tools during his previous semesters of tutoring in the Writing Center, he was now critiquing those tools against a conceptual
lens of minimalist tutoring—or at least his surface understanding of what that approach entailed. Consequently, Calvin stopped using many of the tools he had previously appropriated, specifically those which were more directive in nature.

For example, one of the strategies that he was most proud of was one that he developed in working with students with organizational problems. Early in the semester, he would have the student watch as he, using highlighters, divided their various topics according to color. This process gave the student a visual representation of how their essay could be rearranged to achieve a more orderly flow. During the rest of the semester, whenever the student encountered problems with organization again, he would pull out his packet of highlighters and have the student work through the same process. Minimalist tutors would frown on this strategy, arguing that it is too directive—that the tutor is too involved in the process of changing the paper. However, there was no denying it worked for some of his students, and the students actually enjoyed applying the strategy on their own after he had modeled it. Unfortunately, strategies like these were tossed by the wayside as Calvin aimed instead for more nondirect strategies, even though he wasn’t sure what those were.

Calvin clearly had a problem. He had embraced a new theory-driven approach, but he had no clear understanding of what strategies he could employ with such an approach. As he struggled to find methods that he could employ in the conference, he became more and more oriented to a routine in his practice.

Calvin went into almost every conference with an idea—a sort of checklist—of what he thought the student should know about their current assignment. This routine was based on two things. First, he applied his own idea of what he thought would make a
paper good. Second, he applied what the instructor had shared with him regarding the assignment and what parts students may need help with. Those two items of focus were employed as a routine to guide the conference—a checklist of sorts that he would go through with each student.

The problem with his approach is that his idea of what they should strive for was often based on what he had done in his own writing. For example, he spent considerable time with both Sean and Mikiella on the need to include opposing positions as part of their defining process in the argument of definition essay. He did so because his he remembered writing a definition paper in which he relied primarily on the strategy of defining by negation. Sometimes this kind of “it-worked-for-me” approach was useful if it helped the student generate ideas for ways to approach the assignment, but it also ran the risk of being irrelevant to their topic or to the processes that would best serve them. For example, in a conference with Mikiella, he stressed the importance of making sure the point of her argument came through to the reader; in doing so, he gave her the following advice based on his own writing technique:

You need to make sure your point is clear, and the best two places to make it clear are your introduction and conclusion, and then your body supports this. Make sure everything in your paper ties into it clearly. Actually, you can be a little less clear in the introduction, and that can help the reader discover as they go along, but in the conclusion, you really need to tie it together so that at that point they go, ‘I get it. I understand.’ So you can even be a little unclear in your introduction and it really doesn’t hurt your paper, as long as you are solidly clear in your conclusion so that the reader can walk away feeling, “’Aha, I get it. I know what she’s saying.'”
Calvin may have been able to make this method work, but a less experienced writer, who is already struggling with making her point clear, as noted by her teacher, is not likely to benefit from the advice to be a little *unclear* in her introduction.

In the second part of his routine, Calvin attempted to recommunicate the teacher’s expectations, as well as provide a description of what the student should do to meet those expectations. The reason the instructors communicated with the tutors was to make sure the tutor understood the parameters of the assignment, as well as alert the tutor to any problems to watch for that may come up in the student’s early drafts. For example, after assigning the causal argument, the composition instructor advised the tutors to make sure the students had a plan for incorporating research in support of their arguments, and to check to make sure they had researched appropriately and cited according to MLA documentation. The following conference between Calvin and Sean captures the teacher-based part of Calvin’s routine:

**Calvin:** Now remember, whatever note taking you do, make sure you write down your sources because we haven’t dealt with sources a whole lot since the argument of evaluation way back in last semester, so just be careful of that because, remember, plagiarism, accidental or on purpose, is a big no-no.

**Sean:** I think I’ll be all right with that. She already told us . . .

**Calvin:** And if you do any research on the Internet, make sure you don’t forget to get the info you’ll need, or at least get the web address so that you can get back to the site to get the information later. One of the easiest ways I’ve found, because you have to copy out the address, is to print a page out because it will have the address right on there for you. Or you can go to a file and copy the page onto a disk or cut and paste the address. Just make sure that in some way you either get it on disk or on paper because I’ve tried to go back before to go and find the exact page again. It’s rough.

**Sean:** Yeah, I just print mine out when I find something I really need.
Calvin: Just make sure you have it documented somehow, so you don’t forget. . . . Like I said, my big concern is we haven’t done a lot with sources since last semester, so keep that in mind. Mrs. Blank’s claws will come out if she suspects plagiarism. . .

Sean: Yeah, I know.

Calvin: . . . and rightly so but . . .

Sean: We have to have a works cited too, don’t we?

Calvin: Also, there’s no qualifiers or limits on the sources. But especially when dealing with the internet, be real careful of some sights that don’t have anybody to hold them accountable for accuracy, because those tend to be weak sources. Something that’s part of a school or a reputable organization, those are usually a little stronger because they have peers who will hold them accountable for what they post and things like that. So just use strong sources when you start researching it. And just remember, Thursday’s the first draft. Do you have any questions?

Sean: No.

In my researcher log, I noted that Calvin had covered the exact same information with Mikiella that same day. In these conferences, Calvin brought up all of the problems and suggestions the teacher mentioned, but did so without regard for whether or not they were issues that Sean needed help with. Furthermore, he seemed to skirt the needs that Sean did have when he failed to answer the only question Sean asked in the whole conference.

Instead of using the instructor-provided information as a gauge of what to look for in the student’s writing, Calvin assumed the role of a supplemental teacher and transferred her list into a sort of scripted plan for the conference: a list of reminders and advice that he would recite to the student. Calvin sometimes implemented this ritual at the most inopportune times. For example, in one conference with Sean, Calvin provided a long monologue of what Sean needed to make sure he had done before turning the paper in for a grade. Sean, however, had not even written the paper; it was irrelevant for
Calvin to spend ten minutes on concerns aimed at revision, when Sean had not yet completed a first draft. When I asked Calvin about his focus on the instructor’s points of interest, he had this to say:

One thing I want to make sure students understand is their teacher’s expectations for the assignment. Some of them don’t get it right away when she tells them these things in class. They need to hear it two or three times before it soaks in. So, I try to focus on those things the teacher has told me to watch for. I tell the student, “Those are the things you need to make sure you’ve done before turning in the paper.”

Though his motive for the strategy (i.e., getting students to understand the teacher’s expectations) was fitting, his method for repeating and describing these expectations without any rhyme or reason was probably not the best use of his conference time.

By the end of the semester, even his students had memorized his routine procedure for working through each conference. As I transcribed the last conference of the semester between Calvin and Sean (a conference that I was not able to observe due to my involvement in end-of-term interviews), I was shocked to hear this personal greeting from Sean:

Good afternoon, Mrs. Stonerock. This is Sean here. Calvin is busy with Mikiella right now, so I thought I’d take this opportunity to give you a quick run-down of what’s about to happen. Today Happy is going to ask me how my day is, and I’m going to tell him it’s going great. He’s going to ask me if I’m excited that the semester is over, and I’m going to say, you bet! Then he’s going to ask me if I have my work done, and I’m going to tell him that I’m gettin’ there. Then he’s going to remind me of all of the due dates that I might not make, and all the stuff that Mrs. Blank is wanting done, and I’ll tell him that I’m pretty sure that I can handle it and that I’ll get them taken care of. Then, he’ll end the conference with—say it with me now—“Well, if ya need any help, give me a holler!” By the way, I hope you have a great summer. Today’s date is May 1st.
Interestingly enough, Sean wasn’t far off in his prediction of this conference that followed:

Calvin: Howdy. How ya doin?
Sean: Great, great.
Calvin: So, how are you getting along on your cause paper?
Sean: My causal, I’m working on my third draft. I got my second draft back and it was pretty good.
Calvin: How about your portfolio? Remember, everything’s due in it next week.
Sean: Portfolio is already done
Calvin: Do you have your favorite work picked?
Sean: I think my favorite work may be my presentation.
Calvin: Have you written out your uh, your, your rationale?
Sean: Nope. . . haven’t done that yet. Guess you’re right, it’s not done.
Calvin: Ah, tsk-tsk, you said it was done!
Sean: I didn’t say nothing was done. What are you talking about? I said my portfolio was done.
Calvin: That’s part of your portfolio, your rationale of your best work.
Sean: Okay. You got me.
Calvin: Uh-huh? I’ll bet your glad the semester’s almost over, huh?
Sean: You can’t imagine.
Calvin: Hey, Thursday will be our last day.
Sean: That’s right. [exaggerated tone] How sad. You gonna have a party?
Calvin: I’ve got too much to do.
Sean: [pointing to Calvin’s happy-face tie] Ah, Happy won’t be happy.
Calvin: Well, make sure you’ve got your portfolio next time. Bring your portfolio in.
Sean: Okay. I can do that. We’ll go over it together and have a good ‘ole time.
Calvin: And if you need anymore help today, just give me a holler!

In sum, in response to his intent to approach the tutorials with more a minimalist role, Calvin had to find new approaches to replace the more directive ones he had used
his previous years of tutoring. As noted in his response to tutor training, though, Calvin was not yet ready to relinquish his control of the agenda of the conference. Calvin had a dilemma: he needed to find a routine—a new routine—on which to base his agenda for the conference. Therefore, Calvin developed a procedural routine based on two strategies: (1) he appropriated the default tools—specifically strategies based on his prior experiences and success with writing; and (2) he employed strategies based directly on an outside context—his interpretation of what the composition instructor expected of the students. Rather than striving to meet the immediate needs of his students, Calvin combined these strategies to form a predictable, routine-bound agenda that he applied to each student conference.

The Need for Reflection: A Cross-Tutor Analysis

It is important to note that both Derrick and Calvin had moments of successful appropriation of the tools learned in tutor training. For example, many times Derrick engaged his students in collaborative conversation in a way that fostered active and meaningful problem-solving on the students’ part. And at times Calvin’s routine modeling of his own writing experiences did serve to trigger an idea for Mikiella. However, these tutors’ practices were shaped primarily by how they responded to those moments when the tutorial did not quite go as envisioned in tutor training. As the tutors conceptualized their role and practice, those moments of successful appropriation were often overshadowed by the moments of the tension. Therefore, in this study, I tried to pay attention to what the tutor was learning in those moments. In other words, I sought to examine how the tensions themselves developed the tutors’ expertise.
Derrick and Calvin responded to moments of tension in radically different ways. This difference is most evident when examining their entries in their tutor reflection logs. As explained in chapter three, in order to decenter my voice as researcher, I provided the tutors no direction or instruction regarding what they should write in their reflection logs. Rather, the tutors were encouraged to reflect on their practice in whatever way they were led. In Derrick’s log, he wrote primarily about what he was learning as a tutor. He raised questions regarding the appropriateness of his strategies, and he voiced frustrations over the tensions he encountered while trying to assume a more facilitative, rather than directive, stance in the conference. For example, consider the following entry, written a third of the way into the semester:

Jason is making me crazy. The kid has to be the most stubborn person I know. It’s so hard to figure out if he’s doing it intentionally, but every single time we conference, he tries to get me to tell him what to do. I’ll ask him questions to try to get him to work through some of the solutions on his own, but it’s like he totally ignores me. He turns it back on me every time, with questions like, “Well, what do you think I should put here, Derrick?” He’s so relentless about it too! Then I get mad because sometimes I get so worn out that I end up doing exactly what he wants me to do! Sometimes I don’t even realize I’m doing it until after the fact! It’s like he tricks me into it. I leave the conference thinking, “Oh my gosh, he did it to me again!” Then I go and meet with Sandra so I can feel good about myself again. 😊 I’ve learned to tutor Sandra last so I can feel like I’ve done something right at the end of the day.

In almost every entry, Derrick took opportunity to reflect on what he was learning about the way he interacted with the students. These entries subtly changed throughout the semester. At the beginning, Derrick voiced concerns with doing the job “right” and understanding the difference between the kind of tutoring he had done in the dorm and
the kind he was expected to do in the Writing Center. As the semester proceeded, though, Derrick became more reflective about the complexity of negotiating that role, especially in terms of meeting the many expectations involved: the students’ expectations of him, the Writing Center directors’ expectations as voiced in training, and his own expectations for fulfilling the ideal tutor role that he had articulated at the beginning of the semester.

Furthermore, Derrick seemed to use both the debriefing interviews and his reflection log as venues for working through and trying to make sense of some of the tensions he was encountering. In debriefing interviews, I had to say very little to get Derrick talking. Our conversations sounded more like vent sessions than interviews. As a matter of fact, I don’t believe he ever referred to them as interviews; rather, he would come up to me after a long day of tutoring, plop down across from my desk, and say something like, “You ready to talk?” or “Man, I need to vent.” He even admitted that by the third week of the semester, he “kind of forgot that the tape recorder was running.” When I did ask questions, his responses were not rehearsed, calculated responses intended to justify his practice; rather he was painfully honest about the frustration and uncertainty he felt when things didn’t go so well, the satisfaction he felt when they did.

In sum, Derrick had positioned himself as a learner. He began the semester with an initial conception of the ideal role he planned to assume. However, he soon realized that that ideal wasn’t so easily implemented in real-life tutorials. During those moments of apprehension, he allowed his ideal to be stretched. He learned to tutor in ways meaningful for the students, while at the same time respecting the advice and guiding theories he had learned in training. Did he tutor in ways that sometimes grated against the facilitative role advocated in training? Absolutely. Yet, more often than not,
Derrick’s moments of altered appropriation were representative of moments in which he had to make a difficult decision regarding which goals and motives to pay attention to as he negotiated his role in the conference: the students? the Writing Center’s? the composition instructor’s? the basketball coach’s? his own? Given Derrick’s pragmatic approach to his own education, it was not surprising that the students’ grade-driven motives sometimes superseded the more lofty goals of the Writing Center. Yet, he never lost sight of the goals and objectives of the Writing Center. Throughout the semester, he continued to aim for that facilitative, enabling tutor role. In other words, Derrick learned what it meant to integrate what he was taught in training with the reality of working with real students with real needs and goals.

The characteristic that most stood out about Derrick was his desire to see his students succeed. He cared about them. Though his relationship with Sandra had just developed that semester, he wanted “more than anything to see her succeed, because, doggone it, she deserved it!” Labeling her the “quintessential tutee,” Derrick appreciated her work ethic that was, in his words, “way beyond” anything he had ever done; furthermore, he regarded her as a “good thinker, an excellent learner, and—by the end of the semester—a fairly decent writer.” Jason and Neal were friends that Derrick had come to know well, since they were his teammates on the College basketball team. Although these two rarely made it easy for Derrick to tutor in ways he intended, and although neither writer improved as he had hoped, Derrick still respected their motives and helped them achieve their goals, even if that simply meant “making the grade” in Composition class and remaining eligible to play ball the next fall. Derrick positioned himself as a peer to these students and committed to learning alongside of them.
Calvin’s response to tensions stood in stark contrast to Derrick’s. Calvin never wrote a single entry in which he reflected on his practice. Rather, his entries read more like evaluative summaries of his students. He wrote about their strengths and their weaknesses, in terms of both writing and interacting in the conference. While Derrick’s log was replete with questions regarding the efficacy and appropriateness of his practice, Calvin never once raised a question about his practice or positioned himself as a learner in any other way. Throughout the semester, Calvin maintained the front of a seasoned veteran tutor that could “give any student the help they need to become a better writer, as long as the student is willing to learn.” Calvin had many leadership skills; he was confident, composed, experienced, intelligent, and articulate. Yet, in many ways—in the Writing Center, at least—he was a leader without any followers. This came through from the very beginning when the other tutors challenged his opinions expressed in tutor training, and it continued as his own students became more and more disengaged from his conferences. Even when his students were not responding well to him, Calvin never did voice any self-doubt regarding his tutoring; rather he regarded their lack of motivation with a toughened resignation, refusing to accept any of the blame for the students’ change in attitude.

The findings clearly suggest that both Derrick and Calvin encountered moments of vulnerability and uncertainty. However, while Derrick openly engaged in a messy search for answers to his many questions that emerged through the semester, Calvin was content to conceal his own uncertainty behind a mask of established success. The process that Derrick was engaging in was none other than the process of learning made possible through rigorous reflection.
Calvin, unfortunately, remained stagnant in his practice. In many ways, I think that Calvin had to know that he was missing the mark with his students, especially Sean, who had become increasingly short with him throughout the semester; yet he was unwilling to ask those critical questions to get at the “why” behind his failed attempts at connecting with students. Perhaps one reason for this disconnectedness involved his eager acceptance of his outsider status. In tutor training, he boasted that students saw him as older and wiser and looked up to him as an authority figure. Instead of bridging the gap with his students, he seemed to capitalize on it. More specifically, his perceived status became his rationale for dominating the conference agenda.

According to Britton (1988), Derrick and Calvin were “cumulatively building their own rationales for what they were doing” (p. 16) as they went through training and then actively participated in the Writing Center setting. With Derrick, these rationales were informed by his willingness to reflect on the real and competing goals and purposes which shaped the decisions he was making while tutoring. With Calvin, these rationales were built upon self-confidence and an abstract ideal based on a single article that he read during the three weeks of tutor training—an article that advocated one very narrow approach to tutoring.

**Conclusion**

Through this study, I have come to realize that the greatest barrier to successful tutoring is an unwillingness to reflect on one’s failures and learn from them. Before tutors can achieve a level of mastery of appropriation, they must first understand and experience the complexities of their roles. They must become interested observers of
their students, paying attention to their needs and adapting their strategies accordingly.

They must also become reflective observers of their practice, and in doing so, be ready to adjust their strategies as insights are gained. And finally, as in any learning situation, they need practice. The tutor training program served to introduce the conceptual and practical tools to these tutors, but it wasn’t until Derrick and Calvin entered the conference arena—the real activity of one-on-one tutoring—that they could begin to understand the complexity of the peer-tutor role. It wasn’t until the tutors were confronted with the uncertainties and contradictions of tutorial activity that they were able to engage in the moment-by-moment problem-solving and meaning-making processes that lead to their development as tutors. Introduction, observation, reflection, practice, and negotiation—as with any learning processes, these were the essential components of learning to tutor.
CHAPTER 7

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In his introduction of *Embracing Contraries*, Peter Elbow (1986) writes about the negotiation between his “hunger for coherence”—neatly devised theories of pedagogy—and his “hunger for natural incoherence of experience.” He explained, “This dilemma has led me more often than I realized to work things out in terms of contraries: to gravitate toward oppositions and even to exaggerate differences—while also tending to notice how both sides of the opposition must somehow be right. My instinct has thus made me seek ways to avoid the limitations of my single point of view” (p. 9).

The dilemma Elbow described is a common one for educators. It speaks to that distance between our idealized conception of what we would like to be and do, and the reality of what we do in the real-time moments of teaching. It also speaks to our sometimes desperate attempts to appropriate neatly packaged theories and tangible pedagogies that will not only empower our students, but also make us feel good at the end of the day.

Tutors, especially novice tutors, also encounter such dilemmas. In a brief stint of training, these tutors often expect to come away with the knowledge, understanding, and tools to lead their students to success, or at least considerable improvement, in their
writing. This is no easy feat, for as Kail and Trimbur (1987) suggest, even their job title, peer tutor, is a mere contraction in terms which implies multiple and sometimes competing roles that the tutor must assume. Faced with this daunting challenge, these tutors search to grab hold of something useful to take away from training and into the conference setting. In doing so, tutors’ initial conceptions of their role are replete with contradictions—both explicit and implicit—between the ways tutors describe their roles and the real ways they apply those roles to specific conferencing contexts.

This research revealed what happened when two tutors, having gone through training, attempted to apply their “ideal” to the “real.” These tutors went into the semester with a tutor ideal in mind—a conceptualized role that was shaped not only by tutor training, but also according to their own prior experiences with teaching, tutoring, and learning to write. First, we encountered Derrick, a novice tutor who approached the “real” activity of the conference setting with a reflective curiosity that drove him to modify his ideal notion of how he should tutor according to a number of real factors: the needs and goals of his students, the goals of the Writing Center, and his own desire to satisfy both—sometimes competing—motives. Then we encounter Calvin, who, though he had more experience—or perhaps maybe because he had more experience—was a less successful tutor. Calvin approached the “real” activity of conferencing as a seasoned veteran who had a solid grasp of his role, yet his grasp quickly loosened as he sought to reconstruct that role according to a minimalist approach to tutoring (Brooks, 1991) that he had read about in tutor training.

As revealed in chapter six, both Derrick and Calvin were confronted with a web of competing motives while conferencing in the Writing Center. As the researcher of this
studied, I was struck by those moments, while analyzing and making sense of my data, when I saw myself in these tutors as they negotiated the tensions that they encountered. I saw myself in Derrick, as he voiced frustration over those moments when he struggled to appropriate strategies which would support both the mission of the Writing Center and the expectations and goals of his students. I saw myself in Calvin when he hid behind a mask of confidence and competence, all the while realizing that his approach was not panning out quite as expected.

During my first years of teaching composition, restructuring the first-year writing program, developing a writing center, and tutoring in the Writing Center, I faced tensions that were not all that different from the ones I had observed in these tutors’ practices. Like these tutors, I often seemed pulled in contrary directions, which led to a pattern of self-contradiction and doubt about my own competence as a writing teacher.

I, on one hand, envisioned a program that would empower first-year college students, giving them the needed opportunities to practice academic writing in a safe, supportive space. On the other hand, I felt an indescribable obligation to respond to their texts with an almost knee-jerk reaction, pointing out every error and shortcoming I noticed. Even after years of training for teaching first-year writing, my perceived professional obligation to uphold some standard of what is considered acceptable, academic writing has never subsided. I am not alone in my quandary. Rose (1987) reported that teachers are often made to feel “negligent and vulnerable” if they do not “attempt to clear up an error” (p. 111).

My colleagues were often the culprits in feeding this perception of my obligatory role. They expected those of us working with first-year students to “fix” these
shortcomings before they encountered these students in their classes. Part of this “fix it” mentality stems from the way first-year composition, as well as other first-year general education requirements, have been given “gatekeeper” status. To many faculty and administrators, successful completion of these first-year courses represented a rite of passage: The student had reached a point of readiness for the more rigorous academic work expected in upper-level courses. In casual conversation in the faculty lounge, my colleagues would tease with comments like, “Hey, you’re going to take care of teaching them how to write before they get to my class, right?” While their comments were said in jest, they weighed on me with heavy obligation. I knew it was unfathomable that I could “fix” students’ writing problems in two semesters, and I refused to set such an unattainable goal in my development of a writing program, but their comments echoed in my mind every time I graded an essay or secretly questioned whether a student was “college material.”

As I negotiated these competing voices, I was constantly compelled to reexamine my own attitudes and biases toward basic writers and at-risk students, as well as the academy in which they are situated. Though I fully intended to develop a program that served and empowered these students, I cannot say with any amount of confidence that I never return to that place in which I worry over students’ preparedness for the expectations they will face in other academic contexts. Furthermore, I find it utterly impossible to separate those concerns from my practice as a writing teacher and writing center director.
These tensions that I’ve encountered reinforce the truth of what Hull et al. argued in 1991 and Mina Shaughnessy (1977) argued decades earlier: that the focus on what was wrong with students persistently overshadows teacher development. Hull et al. (1991) wrote:

We have come to see our courses [i.e., remedial writing courses] as entry points to the academy, safe ground where students who have not had sufficient experience with academic reading and writing can make up for lost time, and do so without censure. Often, however, these new understandings come mixed with deeply held, unarticulated assumptions about remediation and remedial students, deficit assumptions that have been part of educational thought for a long time... (p. 315).

To ignore these deeply held assumptions is impossible in the context of an educational institution. Instead, we must consciously examine our assumptions and ideologies to consider how our deep-seated attitudes toward both institutional goals and the students we teach might influence our practice.

Summary of Findings

For this case study, I employed ethnographic methods as I followed two tutors through a three-week tutor training program and a fifteen-week semester of tutoring in order to examine how peer tutors develop their approaches to tutoring in the writing center. More specifically, this project set out to (1) investigate the principal settings—both educational and personal—that shaped tutors’ developing roles and practices, (2) explore the ways tutors negotiate tensions which arise as they attempt to appropriate the
teaching tools presented in tutor training, and (3) consider the contextual factors which shape tutors’ appropriation of the teaching tools.

Several conclusions emerged from this analysis. First, I learned that although tutor training was considered the primary source for providing tutors the conceptual and practical tools that would guide their practice, the two tutors had their own unique ways of making sense of the training which developed as the tutors drew upon a range of tools and resources. Specifically, the way they made sense of their training, and the extent to which it would guide their tutoring practice as they started the semester, was largely influenced by various personal and educational activity settings—each with its own set of motives, values, practices, and resources. Some of these settings were physically bound (such as the college retention committee, the athletic program, the first-year writing program, and the writing center), and some were not (such as the tutors’ prior experiences with teaching, tutoring, and learning to write, as described in chapter five). I learned that incongruence and clashing goals across activity settings are inherent to the nature of development; more specifically, tutors developed their approaches to tutoring as they negotiated the competing motives and emerging tensions at work in writing center conferences. This process of negotiation in many ways marks the beginning attempts at successful appropriation.

Perhaps most importantly, I learned that the most productive, successful learning and development occurred when tutors and directors paid attention to those tensions, reflected on them, and learned from them in a way that honed their conceptualization of their roles in the writing center setting. The marked difference between Derrick’s and Calvin’s developing expertise as writing tutors rested in their different ways of
responding to tensions and reflecting on their failures. In other words, tutors learned the most when they approached the setting as learners. This finding reiterates Elbow’s (1986) suggestion that we must openly wrestle with the vicissitudes and perplexities of our role as educators. Such advice has far-reaching implications.

Implications for Institutional Goals for Support

The implications of my findings reach beyond the Writing Centers and tutorial programs to the many other educational contexts with which we intersect. As voiced earlier, I sometimes have to remind myself that the responsibility for supporting at-risk students, specifically basic writers, does not rest solely with the writing center or the first-year composition courses. Nor does it rest with other first-year courses, tutorial programs, or a retention committee. I am often struck by the number of my colleagues who do not see themselves as particularly implicated in the college’s goals for support and retention of students, even though these students’ need for support stretches far beyond what the Writing Center and other tutorial programs can satisfy. In order to reach institutional goals of support, all educators must enter this conversation and wrestle with questions regarding the appropriateness of support programs and efforts. In order to encourage this growth of conversation, writing center directors must continue to make visible the motives and goals of the writing center by offering workshops and presentations on not only the services available by the writing center, but also the ways other faculty can implement similar support services for writing in their own disciplines.
Implications for Writing Centers and Tutorial Programs

Before I can begin to unpack implications concerning tutor training and practice, I must first address larger questions involving the situatedness of tutorial programs and writing centers in colleges and universities. Perhaps we must start with a very basic question: Whom do we exist to serve? Murphy (1991) suggested the following:

On most college and university campuses, writing centers are instructional hybrids composed of a balance between administrative aims and the traditional practices of writing instruction. . . . Essentially, the dispute centers upon whether writing centers will serve instructional aims of self-efficacy and self-enrichment or administrative aims of the quantitative assessment of identifiable literacy skills (p. 123).

While Murphy’s observation of the writing center’s situatedness within educational contexts rings true in theory, most writing center practitioners would be inclined to answer the earlier question with something like this: Tutorial programs, such as the Writing Center course described in this study, exist to serve the students. Programs like our Writing Center course should be in the service of providing students whatever they need to proceed with their goals in the academy, be it practice, one-on-one tutoring, explicit teaching, modeling, accountability, or even motivation and encouragement.

We learn from this research study that while conceptualizing an ideal, we must not overlook the real. As such, in recognizing the real goals and expectations that students bring to the program, as suggested in the answer above, we must not fail to appreciate or interrogate the real space that such programs and courses occupy in the university. In other words, as we grapple with whether our guiding goals and espoused
theories truly fit our clientele, we must also consider whether our remedial courses and support programs are connected, as Rose (1987) suggests, to the academic communities in which they are located.

Such grappling insists that we ask, perhaps, a new question: To what extent should our motives serve the pragmatic goal of equipping these students with the “tools” of the academy? I believe that the first step in answering this question involves being quite honest with our tutors, our students, and even ourselves about the expectations of the academy. Bartholomae (1997) argued that we should be explicit about the power, tradition, and authority inherent in academic writing. To pretend that writing classes occupy a space free from traces of power and authority “keeps this knowledge from our students” and keeps them from “confronting their situatedness within power politics” (p. 481). This is not to say that we exist solely to impose rigid standards on students’ writing. But Bartholomae (1997) is suggesting that we recognize that our programs are occupying a real space which is heavily influenced by traditional power structures. It is only after grappling with such basic questions regarding the goals and motives of the Writing Center, or any tutorial program for that matter, that directors can begin to rethink tutor training, as well as their own idealized notions of tutoring and their own expectations for tutor practice.

Implications for Training

The findings presented in chapter six are in many ways humbling for me—especially in the case of Calvin, whose success with tutoring appeared to decline following tutor training. Throughout this process of observation and reflection, I have
repeatedly returned to the question of what I had hoped to achieve in training the tutors. Specifically, what did I hope to offer these novice tutors? In reflecting upon this question, I cannot deny the extent to which I was driven by the motive to somehow salvage my idealized notion of the successful conference. In constructing an ideal, I realize now that I was trying to safeguard the Writing Center from becoming the Center of years past, in which tutors incessantly slipped into editing roles or wrote paragraphs of terminal comments on students’ papers in an attempt to control their revision process.

In the Writing Center, I envisioned tutors who would facilitate meaningful, collaborative conferences aimed toward long-term benefits of the writer. In aiming for such an ideal, I now realize that I overcompensated in trying to offer the tutors the conceptual and practical tools to reach that ideal. Consequently, in selecting required reading for the tutors, I aimed for texts which would challenge their notion of the tutor as a pseudo-teacher or editor. Many of these texts were biased toward a more facilitative, nondirective role of the writing tutor. Though I drew my own conceptualization of the writing tutor’s role from a number of theoretical approaches and a broad repertoire of useful tools for practice, the lopsided emphasis on nondirective strategies in both the required readings and the training session discussions resulted in an equally-lopsided bias for a nondirective approach—most notably in the case of Calvin. Furthermore, an overemphasis on theoretical concepts (e.g., collaboration, ownership, autonomy, etc.) in many of the training discussions contributed to the tutors’ idealized conceptions of their roles and the goals they would aim for, yet the tutors often lacked understanding for how to select and appropriate practical tools which would support such goals.
In scanning sample syllabi for tutor training courses and reading collections of essays aimed toward teaching tutoring processes, I realize that this pattern of overcompensation reaches beyond my own experience. I am overwhelmed at the bias I’ve found for a nondirective approach toward tutoring. In researching tutor training programs and resources, I have encountered course after course, book after book, and article after article devoted to teaching tutors how they can tutor in ways that will force students to be the ones who are solely responsible for the improvement of their texts. In theory, such approaches sound wonderfully empowering. Yet, so little has been done to connect these theories to practice.

Those of us situated in the real conference setting must eventually begin asking yet another set of questions: Are we really doing what we claim to be doing? And if so, are we seeing the results we had hoped for? I’ve realized through this study that we must address questions like these before we can begin to rethink our tutor training programs. In not doing so, we run the risk of contributing to many of the tensions our tutors will face.

While a few writing center practitioners are beginning to consider how such nondirective approaches miss the mark with students, this study brings to light the way trainers, in embracing such an approach, can also miss the mark in training tutors.

Ultimately, we must return to the two important factors which should guide the goals of a writing program: 1) the expectations and goals of the students themselves; and 2) the fact that the very existence of Writing Centers and related tutorial programs are based on an assumption that students need to be supported in learning and practicing the kinds of writing and thinking that they will need in order to succeed in college. In doing
so, we must strive for a balance between being open and honest with students about the very real expectations at work in the academy, while at the same time providing these students with the tools they will need to succeed in their academic endeavors.

In returning to these goals, we must give back to tutors the freedom to respond as honest readers to these students’ texts. We must avoid sending a message to tutors that telling writers what to do somehow contradicts the goals and motives of the Writing Center. A tutoring strategy which involves finding problems in the text and expressing those as the reader of the text is an honest approach which may, as Walker and Elias (1987) suggest, be closer to empowerment than the minimalist, hands-off approaches that have become ingrained in tutor training.

In addition to providing tutors with conceptual and practical tools which will guide their practice, trainers must also nudge novice tutors toward the realization that they will learn most from moments of reflection—a reflection that Dipardo (1991) described as “endlessly restless, searching, uneven, [and] messy” (p. 176).

One way of establishing this pattern of reflection would be to build into initial training regular opportunities for tutors to reflect on their prior experiences with teaching, tutoring, and learning to write in order to bring to the forefront those tensions which will inevitably influence both their notion of what it means to teach writing and what it means to write well. Since tutors can easily default into modes of instruction based on their own experiences in the classroom, critical reflections on their past experiences are crucial in order to bring to light the gap between the teacher role they’ve observed or experienced versus the tutor role they are expected to assume in the Writing Center.
Trainers and directors must also be prepared to offer ongoing support for tutors. They must invite tutors into conversations regarding the clash of motives inherent in conference activity so that tutors can expect these tensions and learn to negotiate through them in a way that will further hone their effectiveness.

Gillespie and Lerner (2000) moved beyond arguing that reflection leads to improved tutoring to offer the following advice to tutors regarding their ethical responsibility to reflect, question, and constantly learn:

> Your sense of writing center ethics will determine just what you believe your and the writers’ responsibilities are to be. . . . Thus, the way you treat writers and the opportunities you offer them are important to think about. An essential part of being an ethical tutor is to be constantly examining your belief systems. Certain students will challenge those beliefs with their behavior, but rather than dismiss the behavior as wrong, think about why you believe as you do and how your actions demonstrate those beliefs (p. 152).

By placing reflective practices at the forefront of tutor training, tutors will learn to engage in these processes as part of their practice.

**Implications for Tutors**

I ended chapter six with a summary of the tensions each tutor faced, as well as a discussion of the ways each tutor’s negotiation of the tensions shaped their developing role and their success in appropriating the tools presented in tutor training. I also described the way in which Derrick’s commitment to reflecting on his role contributed to
his success. On the other hand, Calvin’s nonreflective stance, even in light of failed attempts and missed opportunities, hampered his ability to appropriate minimalist tools in a meaningful way.

As suggested earlier, in order for novice tutors to succeed in supporting their students, they must be willing to reflect their practice. This reflection must go beyond an evaluation of isolated strategies which combine to form a “what-worked-for-me” approach. Rather, tutors must be urged to resist the front of confidence, comfortability, and competence, and instead embrace the uncertainties which characterize their complex roles. Only through problematizing their practice and reflecting on the competing motives which shape their tutor role will tutors be able to strive for the level of mastery appropriation that Grossman et al. (1999) describe.

Furthermore, tutors must resist the temptation to cling to overly idealistic theories and overly simplistic strategies, and instead aim for what Murphy and Sherwood (1995) describe as an “informed practice”—one marked by the development of a broad interpretive frame for understanding his or her own work which can be applied to new situations, and one marked by the development of a broad repertoire of tutoring strategies that reach beyond tutoring rules to further refine the “know-how” of good tutors which only comes “from a willingness to reflect on their efforts and keep learning” (p. 4). In developing such a repertoire, Harris (1986) suggested that tutors not lose sight of the key interpersonal activities inherent in the assistive process of tutoring: activities such as teaching writers to persist through drafting and revision, and encouraging them to do so;
coming to the conference eager to help and willing to work hard; finding the balance between offering supportive, yet honest, feedback; remaining patient and being a good listener.

By striving for a practice which is reflective, honest, grounded, and relevant, tutors will become more successful in meeting the goals of the writing center, the expectations of the academy, and the needs of their students.

**Implications for Research**

In this study, I applied ethnographic methods to a case study design in order to test my assumptions of the relationship between tutor training and tutor practice. Self-study research needs to continue along this vein. Directors should consider the advice of Neulieb and Scharton (1994) to move toward ethnographic research models in order to provide a rich testing ground for the assumptions which guide their centers. In such models, the researcher must take into account the assumptions which underlie the birth of the centers. They should also aim to describe the current setting of the center and its participants, as well as the cultural history of the center, while at the same time seeking to triangulate these descriptions with various informed perspectives.

As a starting point, we should seek to explore the gaps between what we theorize in the writing center and in tutor training, and what we practice in real tutorials, since, as Hobson (1994) suggests, “writing center theory, to a large extent, is not based on the same foundations as the practice it is most often called upon to justify.” In seeking to
confront this “ideal” with the “real,” we must be mindful to pay attention to the many past and present settings—each with motives, goals, and practices—which inevitably bear on the development and practices of directors, teachers, and tutors.

Frank (1999) explained that when we become ethnographers of our own classroom cultures—by observing activity, analyzing transcripts, and “reflecting on reasons why we do certain things”—we “bring to light knowledge of the everyday life” of these settings (p. 53). In doing so, writing center directors can help tutors gain access to the explicit as well as the implicit factors that shape the development of their roles and practices. Without engaging in this kind of careful and critical reflective analysis, we cannot possibly predict or see the specific tensions which inevitably shape the activity of the center. Only through analyzing the activity can the myriad of competing influences and clashing motives become visible, and only through making them visible can we begin to learn from them. Frank (1999) summarized the potential for ethnography to improve practice:

By using ethnography to reflect on what we do . . . we can examine and analyze the instructional strategies we use and discover the reasons why we use them. In this way we can make visible the links between theory and practice. By slowing down the language and action of the [setting] . . . we can put what we do into concrete terms. We can chart our events and catalog our language to systematically examine practice from an insider perspective. As a group, we can use our professional language to observe learning . . . and explain this learning to ourselves, to our colleagues, to our newest members. . . (p. 99).
Finally, the writing center field will benefit from further studies on the transfer from tutor training to practice. Such research should take into account an activity-theory approach in order to look more closely at the many activity settings and personal histories which shape tutor development and to better understand the socially mediated development of tutor roles and practices. By doing so, this research provides writing center directors and tutor trainers a more powerful means of promoting change within various activity settings, such as writing centers, the first-year writing programs, basic writing programs, and tutor training programs.
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APPENDIX A

BEGINNING-OF-TERM STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: ____________________________ Age: ____________________________

1. Where did you grow up (e.g., city & state)?

2. What is your first language?

3. What are your reasons for attending college?

4. What is your major?

5. What are your educational and career goals?

6. What kinds of writing were you required to do in high school or in any other previous academic experience you have had?

7. What kinds of writing do you engage in outside of the classroom (e.g., personal journal, work-related, email, etc.)?

8. Do you enjoy writing, in or out of the classroom? Please explain.

9. What do you think about college life so far, both in and out of the classroom?

10. Have you encountered any specific challenges in your classes? If so, please explain.
11. What would you like to get out of your Composition class this semester?

12. What would you like to get out of Writing Center?

13. Do you think the Writing Center can help you achieve your goals? Please explain.

14. At this point, do you feel comfortable in the Writing Center? Can you be here?

15. What kind of tutor would you like to be paired with?

16. Describe at least three characteristics of what you consider to be an “deal” tutor.

17. Do you have any advice for us in the Writing Center?
APPENDIX B

BEGINNING-OF-TERM TUTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: 
Age: 

1. Where did you grow up (e.g., city & state)?

2. What is your first language?

3. What are your reasons for attending college?

4. What is your major?

5. What are your educational and career goals?

6. What kinds of writing were you required to do in high school or in any other previous academic experience you have had?

7. What kinds of writing do you engage in outside of the classroom (e.g., personal journal, work-related, etc.)?

8. Do you enjoy writing, in or out of the classroom? Please explain.

9. What have you learned from tutoring in the Writing Center thus far?

10. What do you hope to offer students in the Writing Center this semester?
11. At this point, do you feel comfortable in your role as a tutor? Please explain.

12. Do you feel you have been given adequate support and training to serve as a tutor?

13. Do you feel you need more? Please explain.

14. Write a one-sentence job description for the position of Writing Center tutor.

15. Describe what you consider to be a successful tutorial session.

16. Describe at least three essential characteristics of the "ideal" tutor.

17. How well do you fit that "ideal" model?

18. Which of the following best represents the role the tutor should assume in the Writing Center tutorial: friend, coach, guide, sounding board, evaluator, critic, or teacher? Please explain.

19. Which, if any, of the above is the role the tutor should avoid assuming in the Writing Center tutorial? Please explain.
20. What do you hope to get if anything out of Writing Center this semester?

21. Is there anything you would like to see changed in the Writing Center?
APPENDIX C

RESEARCHER OBSERVATION LOG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor: ________________________________</th>
<th>Date: _________________</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutee: ________________________________</td>
<td>Week: _________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of conference (minutes): __________</td>
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**Conference Activities:**
Include notes concerning the nature of the activities and the approximate percentage of time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generating content or topic</td>
<td>___%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conveying information and strategies</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to writing</td>
<td>___%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating students</td>
<td>___%</td>
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</table>

**Descriptive Log:**
On pages that follow, provide descriptions of the tutor-student conference, including major shifts in activities and roles, specific moments of consensus and conflict, Samples of tutor and student language, and notes which will supplement transcribed audio-tapes (factors omitted, e.g., body language).
APPENDIX D

WRITING CENTER LOG

STUDENT: _____________________________________________________

TUTOR:  ___________________________________________________________________

TERM:  ___________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Direction Given</th>
<th>Tutor Comments</th>
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APPENDIX E

END-OF-TERM TUTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

1. What successes have you experienced in the Writing Center tutorials this semester? Please explain.

2. What specific challenges have you encountered in the tutorials this semester? Please explain.

3. How would you assess your work with each of your students this semester?
   - Mikiella:
   - Sean:

4. How would you describe your students' levels of involvement in the tutorials? Their level of motivation? Have you made an attempt to involve and motivate them? Please explain.
   - Mikiella:
   - Sean:

5. What specific needs have each of your students brought to the Writing Center?
   - Mikiella:
   - Sean:

- Mikiella:

- Sean:

7. Read and reflect on your attached responses to following questions on your Beginning-of-Term Questionnaire. How would you change or add to your responses now?

Describe what you consider to be a successful tutorial session.
“A session in which the student has been able to comprehend a weakness in their writing and understand not only how to fix it, but also how to avoid it in the future.”

Describe at least three characteristics of what you consider to be an "ideal" tutor.
“Patience, to work through a student’s writing problems. Wisdom, to know when to push and when to aid. Professionalism.”

How well do you fit that “ideal” model?
“Not to be arrogant, but fairly well. I am always praying my challenges do not exceed my wisdom.”

Which of the following best represents the role the tutor should assume in the Writing Center tutorial: friend, coach, guide, sounding board, evaluator, critic, or teacher? Please explain.
“All, but most importantly a Guide. The tutor should never become to much of the others, or they risk creating a crutch system for the student.”
Which, if any, of the above is the role the tutor should avoid assuming in the Writing Center tutorial? Please explain.
   “Sometimes friend, for obvious reasons.”

8. What have you learned from tutoring in the Writing Center this semester?

9. Is there anything you would like to see changed in the Writing Center?

10. Is there anything you would like to see changed in the training sessions?
APPENDIX F

LEVELS OF DATA ANALYSIS
APPENDIX G

SAMPLE PAGE OF CODED TRANSCRIPT

Derrick-Sandra
Side B / Counter: 031

WP D  What have we, what have we changed?
C/SA S  //I think I’m going off. Like on a rabbit trail. [Laughs]
        D  //Going off in
        kind of, different directions?
S  Yeah.
D  What um...
S  Do you want me to get this out?
D  Yeah. If you don’t mind. (1.0) I’m trying to recall everything we went
    over last time. Okay.

[reading, 5.0] (unclear 1.0) now to witness to others (unclear 2.0)… Good
question.

D  Why don’t you give me like (3.0) //’Bout seven hours, because I’m a ...
S  //two hours? [Both laughing]
D  ...very slow reader.
S  //I am too. (Laugh)
[Time lapse for reading, 46.0]

Aff D  I like your opening paragraph. (1.0) I think it hits, uh, a lot of good ideas.
        (1.5) I’m just kind of talking out loud as I go, so I don’t...
        //That’s ok
S
C/SA D  Now, is this your definition of a call, or is this uh something [S is laughing
Q in the background] you got [half laughing as he speaks] from uh like a
dictionary or something?
S  Um
A D  Cause, if this is your definition of a call, I’m…
S  //Most of it is. The elaborated parts.
Aff D  This is good. This is really good. (reading) “A call is a decision, a name,
or a label (unclear 0.5) a visit, or a way of sending for someone or
something. It’s a spiritual gift in a usable heart.” Is that yours?
### APPENDIX H

### LIST OF CODES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>APPROPRIATED CONCEPTUAL TOOL</th>
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<td>R/O</td>
<td>Relevance &amp; Ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>C/SA</td>
<td>Collaboration &amp; Student Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>WP</td>
<td>Writing as a Process</td>
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<table>
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<td>Questioning</td>
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<td>Pos</td>
<td>positioning</td>
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APPENDIX I

FINAL CODING CHART

Final Coding Chart: Type of Tool Appropriation by Episode

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Appropriation</th>
<th>Surface</th>
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<th>Context-Based</th>
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