

2017

## Connecting Theory and Evidence: A Closer Look at Learning in the Writing Center

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CONNECTING THEORY AND EVIDENCE:  
A CLOSER LOOK AT LEARNING IN THE WRITING CENTER

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Writing & Rhetoric  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term 2017

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to explore ideas about learning and how it happens in writing center tutorials. The questions posed for this research are the following: 1) What does learning look like in writing center consultations? and 2) What moves do tutors make to prompt learning moments? The study was created by video recording nine writing center consultations over the course of a single semester. The researcher conducted the sessions herself and worked with the same writer each time. Segments of sessions were transcribed to reveal patterns of learning at work. Reflective memos were also collected, as well as a final retrospective interview.

The results of the study showed that learning happens when tutors and writers create learning moments both together and independently of each other. Tutors and writers prompt learning by addressing four elements of writing center sessions: session activities, writer moves with the text at hand, writing processes, and learning processes. Addressing these elements in sessions leads to conversations about learning, which leads to learning taking place. This research is useful for further developing the identity of the writing center as a space that values and strives for authentic learning to occur.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my thesis committee for your guidance and confidence throughout my project. Dr. Galbreath, thank you for your positivity and enthusiasm for my work throughout the process. Dr. Truitt, thank you for pushing me to excellence. Dr. Hall, thank you for always believing in me.

I would also like to thank my fellow tutors at the University Writing Center, especially Alexandra Stepanov, Christopher Luis-Jorge, and Helen Fetscher, for your continuous care, feedback, and support after many, many pep talks and writing center sessions.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Department of Writing & Rhetoric for being behind me every step of the way, and establishing a program that encourages writers to take their writing to new heights.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As its name suggests, the UCF University Writing Center is a place for writers to receive support for writing. Students, faculty, and other members of the UCF community bring their work and meet with trained consultants who facilitate conversation and activities that lead to improvement. According to the University Writing Center (UWC) website, its purpose is “not merely to fix papers but to teach writers strategies to understand and to navigate complex situations for writing, both in and outside the University” (“About the UWC”).

This falls in line with the objectives of other writing centers, and the larger writing center community as well. Stephen North writes in his iconic essay “The Idea of a Writing Center” that it is the writers, not their texts, who are the focus of the interactions and change. Writing centers are supposed to “produce better writers, not better writing” (438). If learning about writing is a valued practice for writing centers, then it is safe to say that learning is an important part of any consultation.

As a peer writing consultant at the UWC, I have long been exposed to the idea that learning is a desired outcome of each session I conduct with a writer. Tutors regularly reflect on their practices by observing sessions to make meaning of the strategies and conversations they witness. To promote improved practices, tutors share their findings and lead discussions during a weekly tutor-training seminar.

In spring of 2015, I worked with a small group of peer tutors to analyze one of my own video recorded consultations. We analyzed tutor moves that contributed to the accomplished work, and we became convinced that authentic learning took place in this session. We successfully presented our findings, but I could not help thinking I did not have adequate

language to accurately describe the learning and how it happened. I decided to take a closer look at the conversation surrounding learning in writing center research.

Writing center scholars commonly rely on theory to provide definitions and suggestions for learning in writing centers. John Nordlof describes theory as a means to “clarify tutoring approaches and provide an impetus for research” (45-46). While theory is useful for conceptual understanding of writing center work, it leaves a gap in the knowledge of how to apply learning to practice. The lack of evidence-based data leaves researchers without the necessary tools to study learning, and tutors without the knowledge to prompt authentic learning moments in consultations. In the case of my own tutoring, I found it difficult to make learning happen when I didn’t know what it was supposed to look like in my own sessions.

As I thought back on the consultation I had in spring of 2015, where I was convinced that learning did in fact occur, I decided I wanted to enter into the conversation on learning and further understand the role it played in writing center research. I was interested to know if learning was something that could be observed in writing center sessions, and something that can be specifically worked toward. I designed a study based on this UWC consultation. This study investigates the strategies that writing center tutors employ to engage writers in demonstrations of learning.

My study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What does learning look like in writing center consultations?
- (2) What moves do tutors make to prompt moments of learning?

Studying learning is a significant and necessary undertaking for researchers in the field. Writing center scholars need to communicate what the writing center does, why it does it, and

what its goals are as a community. The study has goals pertaining to the UCF University Writing Center itself, such as enhancing tutor education and contributing to marketing and promotion of the UWC. In addition, the study will help scholars understand more about how learning happens in writing center consultations, both in this space and beyond. In particular, this research is important to four different stakeholders: 1) Writing center administrators; 2) Writing center tutors; 3) writers who visit the writing center; and 4) faculty who refer students to the writing center.

Writing center administrators can use the information about learning for program assessment as well as to improve tutor education. Writers often come in with their own expectations of what to get out of their sessions—this is sometimes closer to a “fixed” paper than a deeper understanding of writing. This conflicts with tutor goals and writing center pedagogical practices. Tutors need to be prepared for these conflicting values, and this preparation comes from knowledge about learning in the writing center and what that looks like in practice. Professors recommend the writing center to their classrooms and refer students for suggested, extra-credit, and required visits. When they do this, professors can help students place appropriate value on learning and can equip them with the knowledge of what to expect from their consultations.

This thesis is broken up into five chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced my research topic and my expectations for the project. In Chapter 2, I further examine the conversation surrounding learning in writing center practice. Chapter 3 establishes my methodology, which includes my research design and methods for data analysis. Chapter 4 is a presentation of my results and

corresponding discussion. Chapter 5 highlights limitations of the study and provides suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 1 was an introduction to my topic of learning in writing center studies. Chapter 2 serves as a review of recent scholarship on learning and how it is used in writing center research. I offer a selected overview of general academic understandings of learning, how writing center scholarship defines learning, and how beliefs about learning contrast with current research. As a framework for my project, I address recent calls among writing center scholars for more empirical research. If the purpose of writing centers is to engage writers in active learning, not just fixing papers, then we ought to ask what exactly constitutes “learning” in writing center consultations.

Scholars have conflicting ideas about the meaning of learning (Ambrose et al.; Bird; Black; Lerner). My understanding of learning stems from the work of Susan Ambrose et al. in *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. Ambrose et al. offer principles of learning to help instructors evaluate teaching approaches in support of student learning, refine approaches that advance student learning in specific contexts, and apply these learning principles to their new courses (2). They define learning as “a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning” (3). Embedded in this definition are the considerations that learning is a process, it involves change in beliefs and behaviors, and it is something that students themselves do (3).

If learning is generally seen as a process, then that process could potentially be revealed within a writing center context. Neal Lerner discusses the idea of “situated learning” as a theoretical framework for observing learning in action. He describes situated learning as

focusing less on individual behavior and more on social and cultural interactions (55). Here, knowledge comes not only from the student but also from social practices, and the identity of the student is constructed through this knowledge and social interactions with others (56). While Ambrose et al. see learning as an individual process, Lerner focuses on the student's identification with the community. He argues that the writing center is a place where situated learning can be experienced. He brings up the commonplace notion in the field that learning is occurring in writing centers (particularly that tutors are learning from their interactions with writers), but also the lack of clarity in "what this might look like in particular sessions or if tutors and students learn as partners in ways that are made visible within the tutoring session itself (58).

Lerner provides some transcription analysis for support, but his evidence only demonstrates how situated learning can work. He acknowledges this with the following:

Although the brief excerpts I have offered indicate some of the ways that situated learning might play out in writing center settings, each is relatively brief...it is difficult to imagine how much substantial learning can take place in [the time frame of the excerpts] ... nevertheless...situated learning holds much promise in helping us understand how and why students *potentially* learn in writing center sessions. (68)

In his discussion, Lerner moves away from his evidence altogether and generalizes how tutors can encourage situated learning by "embracing their role as more experienced members of their communities of practice" and offering more direct guidance in order to "make visible the thinking and problem solving that the novice writer needs to learn" (69). He concludes his article

by advocating for the “interplay between theory and evidence as having the potential to “provide our field with models of understanding to be tested against future research and practice” (71). This interplay is clearly important, but it is not entirely visible in Lerner’s data.

Barbara Bird’s “Rethinking our View of Learning” also asks scholars to think about learning in the writing center. It echoes the definition of learning from Ambrose et al. as a process rather than a product, but it extends the idea of process to include deep thinking processes, and from there, she uses the term “deep learning.” If tutors approach learning as a product, then writers will confine their idea of learning to creating that product, rather than comprehending the processes that went into creating such a product. For example, in the UCF University Writing Center, first-year composition students often come in for help composing their personal literacy narratives. They see the assignment as just another paper, and so they focus on meeting the requirements. Tutors help them to meet those requirements, and both parties feel accomplished if the writers have done what the professor has asked.

While understanding and meeting assignment requirements is useful and valuable, in only thinking about those aspects of the work, students miss the opportunity to actually understand their literacy practices and how those contribute to their identities as writers. If tutors see learning as including deep thinking, then they can guide writers to experience the deep thinking processes that can lead to deep learning (Bird 1-2). From John Tagg’s *The Learning Paradigm College*, these processes emphasize the construction and integration of new knowledge, relation of new knowledge to prior knowledge and broader theories, making learning enjoyable, meaning making, and mindfulness (81).

To push forward this thinking, Bird addresses some useful steps that tutors can take in their sessions. She notes that tutors can “get students[s] to talk about ideas in the paper”; “ask prompting questions”; encourage the student as a writer”; “ask the student what he or she already knows about the topic” and “express interest in the student’s ideas through direct statements” (4-5). Bird uses these steps as a form of assessment for her tutors, a way for her to evaluate “the level at which [her tutors] teach or encourage students to engage in these deep thinking processes” (4). While this work is, as she states, “clearly an indirect measure of student learning,” she cares more that her tutors “intentionally try to draw students into deep thinking processes” (4).

Bird’s article indeed brings forth a new way to view learning in the writing center, but she practically withholds the data that she uses to get to this view. She briefly mentions the 15-20 tutoring sessions she observes and records each semester, where she “code[s] nearly every verbal exchange tutors make, including how and when tutors teach these...thinking processes” (4). While her theoretical framework is certainly useful for the writing center, her presentation of the data that informed her work would have further supported and enforced her ideas. Undergraduate researcher Molly Wilder makes her coding system more evident in her work, explaining the different linguistics markers that she uses and providing examples of discourse that show, as she calls it, student engagement as it relates to tutoring success (95). Wilder’s descriptions and samples of data are helpful in understanding her approach as well as the results she finds in her study.

The inclusion of theory in Bird’s article would be celebrated by writing center scholar John Nordlof, who describes theory as a means to “clarify tutoring approaches and provide an

impetus for research,” and he points to the idea of a theoretical framework as “an important asset in itself and complement to a research agenda” (45-46). That being said, theory is not enough on its own. Several writing center scholars are encouraging scholarship to “move beyond a reliance on lore or anecdote and develop more rigorous standards for research on what we do” (46). Instead of just talking about how writing centers work, scholars want to take action to improve research standards. If this can happen, then not only will the scholarship improve, but writing center practices as well.

One such call for more empirical research that Nordlof points out is from Dana Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue, who argue for the importance of research that is “replicable, aggregable, and data supported” (18), or RAD for short. In “Theory, Lore, and More: An Analysis of RAD Research in the Writing Center, 1980 – 2009,” they assess articles from *The Writing Center Journal* and their use of evidence-based practice for research. They say that present scholarship supports its claims with little more than anecdotal evidence and personal experiences (16). As a result, the authors call for a change in how writing center scholars “conceptualize, conduct, compose, and support research” (29).

This type of evidence-based research is not completely absent from writing center research, however. Isabelle Thompson’s “Scaffolding in the Writing Center” is a microanalysis that discusses the verbal and nonverbal strategies of an experienced tutor during a single writing center consultation (417). The article looks at the talk of three types of tutoring strategies--direct scaffolding, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational scaffolding-- as well as hand gestures, body postures, facial displays, and several other nonverbal elements (426).

Thompson uses this data to make a case for the importance of the “cognitive and motivational readiness to learn,” but she does not discuss what that learning actually looks like. This reflects the larger body of writing center scholarship that needs more RAD research not just as a whole, but to identify learning moments in particular. My current study is presented as an integration of theory and empirical data that shows evidence of authentic learning in the writing center.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

In Chapter 3, I present my research design and the approach I took to understanding how learning works in writing center consultations. I took a qualitative approach to this study, which, as Jackie McKinney states, “seeks perspectives and personal stories” (54). Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy describe in *The Practice of Qualitative Research* a process tied to qualitative research known as analytical induction, a practice of moving iteratively between data collection, data analysis, and theory generation (35). They articulate that qualitative approaches attempt to “[understand] the subjective meanings that individuals give to their social worlds” (33). In this study, I sought a deeper understanding of learning in the context of writing center research. The way that I interpreted meaning had an impact on my research findings, just as the way my research participant’s interpretation of learning had an impact as well.

### **Research Questions**

In developing this project, I wanted to know if learning was something that I could see when it happened, how I could observe learning at work, and what those “learning moments” actually look like. I also wanted not only to observe those moments, but also to think about the moments that led up to them, and the role that tutors play in initiating learning in a session. My study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What does learning look like in writing center consultations?
- (2) What moves do tutors make to prompt moments of learning?

### **Research Site**

The site where I conducted my research is the University Writing Center (UWC) at the University of Central Florida. The UWC is a place that offers one-with-one or small-group tutoring for writers working at all stages of the writing process. Students come in seeking support for anything from homework assignments to job applications to personal writing. The Writing Center operates by giving 45-minute sessions to students. My thesis chair, Dr. R. Mark Hall, is the Director of the UCF University Writing Center. He gave me permission to use this place as my research site.

### **Participants**

This study had two participants. I was the researcher for this project, but I was also the writing consultant who conducted consultations as data for the study. I was familiar with tutoring, tutor-training, and writing center research before I began the project. Before students become tutors in the UWC, they are required to take a tutor-education course. I took this course, ENC 4275: Theory and Practice of Tutoring Writing, in the fall of 2014, and I began to practice tutoring that semester. Then, in spring of 2015, I was hired on as a paid tutor.

In that semester I met a writer I'll call Cassidy, the other research participant for this study. Cassidy is a student who regularly visits the UWC. She is a creative writing major who often comes into the center to discuss her short stories. The first time Cassidy and I worked together, she wanted to talk about a story she had written on her own, outside of class, simply to get some feedback. That was a consultation I happened to record for a previous UWC project, known as a video case discussion. In my presentation of that project, I tried to explain why I was so pleased with our session and how I thought learning took place in it. Cassidy kept coming

back to visit me, and that is how our unofficial recurring consultations started. I wanted to explore the dynamics of my consultations with Cassidy. I had known right away that Cassidy was interested in learning, so after I concluded that video case discussion, I asked Cassidy to be involved in this project about learning.

I didn't realize it at the time, but my experiences with Cassidy laid solid groundwork for a case study, so that is the approach I ended up taking here. Case studies are a valued method for studying writing, and tutoring writing in particular. In *Strategies for Writing Center Research*, McKinney outlines case studies as in-depth profiles of people, groups, or classes within populations or settings. Researchers combine methods and collect data that is planned and systematic (94). Hesse-Biber and Leavy state that case studies can lead to a complex and nuanced understanding of "a problem, issue, or phenomenon within its social context" (256).

Isabelle Thompson's microanalysis of a single tutoring session demonstrates that a limited sample size can be quite effective (444). My data might have looked different if I did research with other tutors and/or writers involved, but I was specifically interested in the events surrounding Cassidy. I felt that despite a small sample size, I could still gather plenty of data sources to find meaning about learning in writing center tutorials.

### **Data Collection**

Over the course of the spring 2016 semester, I conducted nine writing center consultations to observe learning moments that happened between Cassidy and me. My study involves triangulation, which Hesse-Biber and Leavy define as "using [multiple] methods to get at the same research question and looking for convergence in research findings" (280).

Triangulation is particularly important for case studies, as they “always [necessitate] the use of multiple methods and data sources” (265). I take a data triangulation approach, using several sources of data in the study to enhance the validity of my research results (51).

My data sources include the following:

- Video recordings and transcriptions
- Reflective memos
- Retrospective interview

#### Video Recordings and Transcriptions

I video recorded each of the consultations I conducted with Cassidy. The camera was situated on the table where we were having the session, but it didn't appear to influence the session in any way. Cassidy was always tolerant of being recorded, and we hardly ever acknowledged the camera in our sessions. As the semester progressed, I regularly watched the video recordings and reflected on them. I used them to change my tutoring approaches throughout the study.

Once I collected all of my data, I watched the video recordings again very closely and selected excerpts from our sessions that seemed important and relevant to my study. I thought back to my understanding of learning as “doing,” as engaging in action. I thought about these two questions as I went through my recordings: 1) What are the “patterns of talk” that are happening? And 2) How do these contribute to the work of the session? I found patterns of talk that revealed underlying actions on both my part and that of the writer. These actions led to some

sort of shift in the operation of the session. I selected excerpts from our sessions that illustrated these patterns of talk, their corresponding actions, and the resulting shift in session activities.

I transcribed the segments that I chose to analyze using Magdalena Gilewicz and Terese Thonus' model in "Close Vertical Transcription in Writing Center Training and Research." Gilewicz and Thonus argue that when tutorial transcripts show conversational language as "primarily written, not oral," it "misrepresents temporal placement of speaker contributions, and it 'edits' out linguistic and nonlinguistic contributions that are judged essential" (26). Close vertical transcription looks slightly different than the traditional playscript format of transcription that researchers may be used to. Gilewicz and Thonus believe that "close vertical transcription, because of its greater depth and complexity, more accurately captures the writing center tutorial as a speech event" (26). Their essay discusses how they used close vertical transcription as part of tutor training, and how "tutors' analysis of transcripts of their own sessions increased their understanding of interaction and modified their practice" (26).

The following excerpt from Gilewicz and Thonus's article describes how to read these kinds of transcripts:

Close vertical transcriptions are read from left to read, top to bottom, in paired lines called *turns*. However, the reading of this type of transcript is linear only up to a point. Each participant's speech occupies one or more lines that can be overlapped or cut off by the speaker on the line just below....When noticing a gap in a line of speech, the reader should glance below to see how the other speaker fills it. New turns after one speaker has

finished are signaled by the speaker's designation (T, S, etc.) and a line of speech beginning at the left margin. (30)

### Reflective Memos

Immediately after each consultation, my writer and I wrote brief reflective memos stating our thoughts and observations about the session that had just occurred. This usually lasted around five minutes, and took place inside the Writing Center. Cassidy and I sat together, but we didn't speak or look at each other's notes during this time. My goal for the reflective memos was to identify demonstrations of learning that took place in the session. I noted moments I thought were important and relevant, and those that possibly showed indications of learning. Cassidy did the same.

### Retrospective Interview

After the final consultation, I held a retrospective interview with the writer. Before the interview, I had watched each of my sessions and selected segments to watch with Cassidy. I chose a total of three segments, each from a different consultation. During the interview, I had Cassidy watch these segments with me. Then we had a conversation about what we saw and heard. McKinney refers to this type of data collection as "stimulated recall" (60), where a tutor asks a writer questions about specific points in the session. The researcher uses artifacts to prompt insight and "stimulate a response in the interviewee" (61). The artifacts I used were the recordings of the sessions we discussed. McKinney acknowledges the challenge in drafting questions that don't lead participants to intended answers (64). I wanted to avoid posing leading

questions about learning. So, these questions were largely open-ended. They can be found in Appendix B.

My fourth data source was to collect consultation notes. Before the study began, I thought I would be able to conduct consultations with my writer, operating as a normal tutor, and concurrently take notes on what was happening in the session, operating as the researcher. I quickly found that this approach was not very effective. It was difficult for me to try and play these roles at the same time, and my interests as a researcher often conflicted with my obligations as a tutor to conduct a typical session. While using consultation notes as another method of data collection ultimately didn't work out, the attempt helped me begin to recognize my own participation in the study and how that impacted the research and results, something I didn't see clearly at the beginning of the project.

## **Methods of Analysis**

### Discourse Analysis

Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" highlights the need for studying writing center discourse by "describing [tutorial] talk: what characterizes it, what effect it has, how it can be enhanced" (56). McKinney says that researchers approach discourse analysis "with a belief that how speakers and writers use language is interesting and important for what it might tell us about the relationship of the speakers and writers involved at both the interpersonal level and the cultural level" (40).

Conducting a discourse analysis with my writer allowed me to closely study how learning was demonstrated in our consultations through our relationship as tutor and writer. The specific

type of discourse analysis I conducted is a conversation analysis, which examines the discourse between individuals (41). According to Peter Mortensen, researchers use conversation analysis to “attempt to make sense of talk from the perspective of its participants” (106).

Laurel Johnson Black uses conversation analysis to examine the talk of her student-teacher conferences and those of others. She initially supposed that her conferencing reflected her honest, nurturing character, but her close study revealed much more:

What I learned from analyzing transcripts of my conferences is how great a distance lay between my image and my words, my goals and my practice. Despite any perceptions I may have had about the “personal” nature of student-teacher conferences, the academic patterning of the classroom and the cultural patterning which the classroom reinscribes carried over to my conferences and undermined my efforts at equalizing power and engaging in real conversation and cooperative learning. (11)

While my analysis explores tutoring sessions rather than student-teacher conferences, it is conceivable to draw parallels from the two situations. Black discovers the distance between her goals and her practices, and I did the same by studying the talk in my sessions, discerning the distance between my goals for learning and the actual practice of learning that took place. As mentioned in my section on data collection, I conducted my discourse analysis by transcribing my data using Gilewicz and Thonus’ method of close vertical transcription. This method allowed me to have a more intimate understanding of the interactions that took place in the sessions.

## Grounded Theory

My data analysis utilizes principles of grounded theory. This approach was developed and made popular by Bernie Glaser and Anselm Strauss, two researchers who explored generating theory in order to posit various approaches for research and analysis regarding qualitative data in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Kathy Charmaz's book *Constructing Grounded Theory* examines grounded theory and its iterative processes of data collection, analysis, and reflection (10). Through these processes, theory is generated from (or grounded in) the data (Hesse Biber and Leavy 308). Taking a constructivist approach to grounded theory allows for recognition of the researcher's subjectivity and involvement in constructing and interpreting data (Charmaz 26). Grounded theory is becoming a more popular approach to analysis in writing center studies (McKinney 135).

Using grounded theory begins with looking over data in order to find initial codes that may be literal or descriptive. The words in the codes may appear in the data itself, or may be used to describe what is happening in the data. Another type of coding is focused coding, which leads to interpretation from the researcher. Focused coding involves generating more interpretive analytical codes that allows researchers to build, define, and clarify concepts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 310-311). Focused coding allows researchers to "separate, sort, and synthesize large amounts of data" (Charmaz 10). I further describe my coding process in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 has discussed the research questions, study design, data collection, and methods of data analysis. I've introduced my process of coding and finding recurring patterns that have emerged from the data. In Chapter 4, I address these patterns in greater detail, and discuss what these patterns have taught me about learning in my consultations.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study has been presented as an inquiry into demonstrations of learning in writing center research. I have been exploring the following research questions: (1) What does learning look like in writing center consultations? and (2) What moves do tutors make to prompt learning in the writing center? In this chapter, I present the results of my study.

I found that each of my data sources showed different findings from different times in my study. My first data source, video recordings and transcriptions, provided insight into the consultations themselves, but this is the only source that did so directly. My next data source, reflective memos, occurred right after the sessions ended, even though they reflected on what had just happened in the sessions. My third data source, the retrospective interview, was also reflective on the research experience as a whole, and involved referring back to previous sessions, but it still did not occur in the sessions themselves.

That being said, my methods of data collection allowed me to capture data sets that were complementary to each other, yet effective in their own right. The video transcripts showed me the most about learning, so those results and analysis take up the bulk of this chapter. However, my findings are supported with relevant evidence from the other two sources throughout the chapter as well, though not so prevalently.

Chapter 4 is organized into several key sections. First, I give a presentation of the patterns I observed while conducting my sessions. Then, I further explore my first research question of what learning looks like by presenting four significant patterns of activity that demonstrated learning. With each, there are associated prompting moves by the tutor. Chapter 5 provides implications of these results.

### Patterns of Learning at Work

To arrive at the coding process, I watched the recordings of each consultation I had with Cassidy. I wrote memos on each consultation, describing and summarizing what I saw, and decided which moments to transcribe. When choosing my segments, I paid close attention to what Cassidy and I were saying in our discussions. As I stated earlier, here are the questions I considered: 1) What are the “patterns of talk” that are happening? And 2) How do these contribute to the work of the session? I selected clips that showed evidence of learning-as-doing, according to Ambrose’s definition of learning by which my study is grounded.

Once I completed my transcripts, I went through each of them and did initial coding. Since I’m defining learning as doing, as engaging in action, I used gerunds as my codes to show the connection between speech and action, what we were saying and what we were doing. I marked segments with a (W) when they corresponded to the writer, and (T) when they corresponded to the tutor. Table 1 shows a sample of my initial codes:

*Table 1: Samples of Initial Coding*

Transcript Excerpts	Initial Codes
T: I know we read this part out loud, but we didn’t go in depth and talk about it. Actually I’ll read this again out loud.	Telling writer my plans
T: And so, this is the transition where he goes from outside the house with his neighbor, and then walks into his bedroom.	Clarifying an idea
W: Right.	
T: Okay.	
W: I was wondering if it should be “there” or “here” at that last part? Lived here or there, I	

<p>was just like, “I don’t know.” Like with the tenses and like the positioning I was like, is there <i>there</i> or here? ‘Cause I feel like here is now (1 sec) there might have been then. I don’t know. I don’t know.</p>	
<p>T: No that’s—I understand your confusion for sure. Um, let’s start with the first “there” that you use in that first sentence. “In the dark, the new smell of fresh fish on me mixed with the old smell of fish in there.” Now where exactly are you talking about when you say “there”?</p>	<p>Sympathizing with writer</p> <p>Asking a question for clarification</p>
<p>W: In his house.</p>	
<p>T: In his house, right. “Mixed with the old smell of fish in there.”</p>	
<p>T: So—</p>	
<p>W: I used <i>there</i> twice, for both of them, so</p>	
<p>T: You did.</p>	
<p>W: So I’m like, trying to keep it consistent but I’m not sure if that’s the right one.</p>	<p>Explaining thoughts behind idea</p>
<p>T: So we know that you’re talking about the house. But do the readers know exactly what you’re talking about?</p>	<p>Considering reader’s point of view</p>
<p>W: Yeah ‘cause the paragraph before—“My fingers had begun to bleed again, smearing against the doorknob as I walked into my room.” That’s supposed to be “house” actually. Or apartment I actually think it is. But, um (1 sec) and then he says, “in the dark,” so, do you think there should be more of a transition into the house? Or is it fine saying that he walked into the apartment and then in the dark?</p>	<p>Asking for opinion / advice</p>
<p>T: I think—I mean it’s pretty clear that he’s going into his apartment. I think that you</p>	<p>Answering question directly</p>

<p>wouldn't need a bigger transition than that. Um, I'm sure you could have one if you wanted, but I think we understand, like, you're talking about the darkness that's inside the new place. So I think that's okay. Um, when you say, "the old smell of fish in there," I do think that—</p>	<p>Offering reassurance</p>
<p>W: Should it be here? That's what I was wondering. I was like, it's weird. 'Cause he's in there now. (.) And he's the person kind of telling the story. But it's like from a different perspective, it's not now. So I don't know.</p>	<p>Asking question directly related to story</p> <p>Giving up authority</p>
<p>T: It sounds like a simple thing but it's really not, is it? Um, well let's see what happens when we put "here," I'm gonna read the sentence again and I'll say it with "here." (reads from paper): "In the dark, the new smell of fresh fish on me mixed with the old smell of fish in here." Um—</p>	<p>Telling writer the plan</p>
<p>W: It sounds weird.</p>	<p>Evaluating own idea</p>
<p>T: It sounds weird?</p>	
<p>W: Yeah.</p>	
<p>T: Why do you think it sounds weird?</p>	<p>Asking question for clarification</p>
<p>W: (2 sec) I think it's because here sounds like present tense to me while there fits it better. 'Cause it's clearly in past tense, it's like "mixed," so it's past. And then (2 sec), and then here? I don't know. It just sounds weird. It might just sound weird because I don't know?</p>	<p>Offering opinion</p> <p>Evaluating own idea</p>

Once I completed my initial coding, I wrote memos on my findings and looked for trends in the data. I realized that some codes were much more prominent than others, and some were more relevant to my questions about learning. Here I moved into focused coding.

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, focused coding “allows for the building and clarifying of concepts: a researcher examines all the data in a category, compares each piece of data with every other piece, and finally builds a clear definition of each concept, which is then named” (311). I looked at my current codes, refining them and grouping like codes together. I gave each focused code a corresponding color. Then, I went back through each of my transcripts and looked for my focused codes. Table 2 shows a sample of my focused codes, corresponding to Table 1:

*Table 2: Samples of Focused Coding*

Transcript Excerpts	Focused Codes
<p>T: I know we read this part out loud, but we didn't go in depth and talk about it. Actually I'll read this again out loud.</p> <p>T: And so, this is the transition where he goes from outside the house with his neighbor, and then walks into his bedroom.</p> <p>W: Right.</p> <p>T: Okay.</p> <p>W: I was wondering if it should be “there” or “here” at that last part? Lived here or there, I was just like, “I don't know.” Like with the tenses and like the positioning I was like, is it there or here? ‘Cause I feel like here is now (1 sec) there might have been then. I don't know. I don't know.</p>	<p>Establishing session activities</p> <p>Clarifying writer move</p>

T: No that's—I understand your confusion for sure. Um, let's start with the first "there" that you use in that first sentence. "In the dark, the new smell of fresh fish on me mixed with the old smell of fish in there." Now where exactly are you talking about when you say "there"?

W: In his house.

T: In his house, right. "Mixed with the old smell of fish in there."

T: So—

W: I used there twice, for both of them, so

T: You did.

W: So I'm like, trying to keep it consistent but I'm not sure if that's the right one.

T: So we know that you're talking about the house. But do the readers know exactly what you're talking about?

W: Yeah 'cause the paragraph before—"My fingers had begun to bleed again, smearing against the doorknob as I walked into my room." That's supposed to be "house" actually. Or apartment I actually think it is. But, um (1 sec) and then he says, "in the dark," so, do you think there should be more of a transition into the house? Or is it fine saying that he walked into the apartment and then in the dark?

T: I think—I mean it's pretty clear that he's going into his apartment. I think that you wouldn't need a bigger transition than that. Um, I'm sure you could have one if you wanted, but I think we understand, like, you're talking about the darkness that's inside the new place. So I think that's okay. Um,

Explaining intention behind writer move

Anticipating impact of writing

<p>when you say, “the old smell of fish in there,” I do think that—</p> <p>W: Should it be here? That’s what I was wondering. I was like, it’s weird. ‘Cause he’s in there now. (.) And he’s the person kind of telling the story. But it’s like from a different perspective, it’s not now. So I don’t know.</p> <p>T: It sounds like a simple thing but it’s really not, is it? Um, well let’s see what happens when we put “here,” I’m gonna read the sentence again and I’ll say it with “here.” (reads from paper): “In the dark, the new smell of fresh fish on me mixed with the old smell of fish in here.” Um—</p> <p>W: It sounds weird.</p> <p>T: It sounds weird?</p> <p>W: Yeah.</p> <p>T: Why do you think it sounds weird?</p> <p>W: (2 sec) I think it’s because here sounds like present tense to me while there fits it better. ‘Cause it’s clearly in past tense, it’s like “mixed,” so it’s past. And then (2 sec), and then here? I don’t know. It just sounds weird. It might just sound weird because I don’t know?</p>	<p>Evaluating idea</p> <p>Discussing session activities</p> <p>Evaluating idea</p>
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I found that the data revealed some interesting findings about learning in my consultations. First, I expected these patterns to work independently of each other. I was surprised to find that the patterns often interacted with each other in complex relationships.

Sometimes one type of activity prompted another learning moment. Sometimes this could be seen immediately, and sometimes it could only be seen across multiple sessions.

Second, while I assumed that the patterns would operate independently, I expected each demonstration of learning to have a directly connected prompting move by the tutor—in other words, I thought that the tutor was almost always the one to prompt the learning. However, I found that tutors do sometimes make moves that prompt learning moments, but learning can also take place without the tutor's direct influence.

As I studied the patterns of learning that occur in consultations, I grew in my understanding of the components that actually make up a writing center consultation. Most sessions had four clear elements present: session activities, the writer's moves with the text they brought in, the writer's general writing process, and the writer's learning process. No matter what, the sessions always contained these elements in some way.

The patterns for learning that emerged were related to addressing these key areas of the session. I use the word “address” because the writer and I did a variety of activities surrounding these areas—for instance, we talked, or asked questions, or took notes. This lines up with my definition of learning from Ambrose et al., who state that “learning is not something done *to* students, but rather something students themselves do. It is the direct result of how students interpret and respond to their *experiences*—conscious and unconscious, past and present” (3). The activities we did in the sessions came from Cassidy interpreting and responding to the four components of the session. She used metacognitive skills, which Ambrose et al. describe as “the process of reflecting on and directing one's own thinking” (as cited in National Research Council, 2001, pg. 78).

I decided to divide up my results and analysis into these four sections. In each, I discuss patterns that show demonstrations of the writer's learning. I also discuss patterns of moves that were prompted by me, the tutor. I show these patterns primarily through segments of my video transcripts, since those usually provided the most relevant and useful data. I occasionally supplement my sections with support from my other two data sources as well, which were the reflective memos and the retrospective interview.

When it came to describing the patterns that emerged, I originally thought I'd be able to give equal weight to the patterns that showed what learning looked like as well as the moves that I made to prompt those learning moments. However, this didn't end up happening all the time. In some cases, the prompting moves were directly related to and could be seen in the same data as the learning it prompted. However, sometimes the prompting tutor move was not directly associated with that particular instance, but rather displayed itself in a later moment. With this in mind, each section contains patterns for learning and patterns of prompting moves, but their connections to each other vary.

### **What Does Learning Look Like in Writing Center Consultations?**

#### Learning Happens When: Tutors and Writers Discuss Session Activities

For each of our consultations, the setup was basically the same: Cassidy came into the Writing Center with a short story she was working on, whether for class or just for pleasure. At first, she didn't have an idea of how she wanted our time to be spent, or a preference for how we worked together. In our very first consultation, I came up with a quick, arbitrary way for us to work together. I asked Cassidy if I could read one page at a time silently, and then we could

discuss it. She agreed. That was all there was to our initial talk of session activities—neither she nor I stopped to consider *what* we were actually doing or *why* we were doing it.

After some time, Cassidy realized that she did care about how we worked together. She had remarked previously that she didn't want swear words in her stories to be read out loud, but hadn't considered the general benefits of reading out loud. This transcript shows more.

T: We can just finish this page and then read the whole next page. (looks at paper). So, I know you said that you prefer when there are swear words to read silently. Do you still prefer, do you want to try to read out loud today if there are no swear words? Or do you still prefer to read silently?

W: Um, there are gonna be swear words, but if you wanna just jump over them – like, it helps me to hear you read it out loud ‘Cause then I get to hear how it sounds to

T: Okay

W: someone else. So that's really helpful. But then I also don't like swear words being said out loud that I wrote it makes me feel weird. Um, so, you can read it out

T: yeah yeah

W: loud and then just skip over the words, yeah

T: I'll just skip the swear words, sure, sure.

T: Yeah, that's great to hear that it helps you hear how it sounds. And again, stop me any time, otherwise I'll just go probably to the end of the next page.

Some key moves happen here that show us Cassidy's thought process at work. First, Cassidy remarked upon her previous realization that hearing swear words out loud is uncomfortable to her; hearing them makes her “feel weird.” Second, Cassidy made the distinction between keeping the swear words in her story and having them read out loud. She herself placed them in her creative short story, and knew they were there for a purpose. She didn't take them out, when she most certainly could have. Third, Cassidy determined that

moving forward, reading swear words out loud would not be a useful practice to her. Fourth, despite this, Cassidy didn't want that notion to stop us from reading the work out loud. She made an even more crucial discovery—she had found a session activity that *was* useful.

Cassidy was the one who realized explicitly that it was helpful to hear her work out loud “to hear how it sounds to someone else.” I had only asked how she wanted to move forward; she was the one who decided it was appropriate to think about why this move was right for her. She thought about the *why* before she determined *what* to do next. After reaching this conclusion that hearing her work out loud was helpful, she gave me permission to continue in that pattern—“you can read it out loud and then just skip over the words.” Cassidy learned that there was a method that worked for her, and I wasn't aware of it until she told me. In this way, I learned, too.

### *What Moves Do Tutors Make to Prompt Addressing Session Activities?*

#### Tutors Negotiate Authority in Setting an Agenda

In the above excerpt, I laid out the options I saw for how we could continue with the session. I acknowledged her discomfort in hearing the swear words, and asked if she would like to continue reading the work silently. I also asked if she would like to “try to read out loud today if there are no swear words.” I knew what I wanted to do, but I decided to give Cassidy the option. I let her have the authority in this moment, but I attempted to make the option of reading out loud more appealing by using the word “try,” to remind her that we could easily switch to a different method if this one proved ineffective. In the end, Cassidy preferred me reading out loud after all. In this excerpt from one of her reflective memos, she elaborated.

I learned how my story sounds when Ali reads it. The way the words flow and

interact is really important to me. Upon hearing her read and her opinion on those words gave me a position to see my words more effectively.

In asking Cassidy how she preferred the document to be read, I got her to think about which method is most effective for her. I didn't know she would tell me that reading out loud was actually helpful. Moments like these happened multiple times throughout our sessions. Once we established that certain session activities worked well, we kept them, and when we came to activities that didn't work, we put them aside. With this process, Cassidy and I both had a fluid, active role in setting the agendas for our subsequent sessions.

#### Learning Happens When: The Tutor and Writer Address Writer Moves with the Text at Hand

When the stories that Cassidy brought into the Writing Center were for her creative writing classes, she told me what her professors were looking for. When the stories were written just for fun, she told me what she was hoping to do with them. Either way, the objective was to make the story better. This is a common occurrence in writing centers, especially at the UCF University Writing Center. Writers don't often state that they want to learn something, or leave the session a better writer. Instead, they usually enter a session with a particular piece of writing that they want to improve.

Since Cassidy's focus was usually on her text, especially early on in the study, she spent a considerable amount of time talking about the rhetorical moves in the text. In the following transcript excerpt, Cassidy talks about the writing moves she made regarding a particular story she wrote.

W: I didn't want to include a fishing scene in this story but I did after a while 'Cause I think  
T: yeah

W: that's really important but (2 sec) I didn't want to do it but So I might change it, but I  
T: ummm

W: want to see how it plays out at the end.

T: Yeah. Well I do have, we're out of time so we're gonna have to finish, but I have just a really  
quick suggestion, something to think about Something that may keep this here, but  
W: Okay Mm-hmm

T: but also line up more. Assuming that your character gets more outside of his head  
W: Okay.

T: throughout the story, what if he responded in a really physical way That wasn't all  
W: Mm-hmm

T: about dialogue? At this moment (2 sec) and I don't know how that would work  
W: Mm-hmm Mm-hmm

T: But what if he were to do something drastic instead of (.) say something really,  
W: Mm-hmm

T: really long? Because then if he does, like (.) if his dialogue or whatever does  
W: Mm-hmm Mm-hmm

T: contribute to the emotional like high point at the end (.) or if there was some sort of thing (.)  
like some sort of outburst, or something like that worked later on And we really see like  
W: Mm-hmm

T: the pinnacle of him coming out of his head later, you could still have this time show that  
there's something she said that made him snap.

W: I like, I really like that. Like, I like, um, the idea that (4 sec) (grabs paper) okay

T: You can write if you want.

W: Um

T: Do you want to take some notes?

W: I, I'm just, like, I really like the idea of a physical outburst but I'm trying to figure out how (1  
sec) 'cause he (4 sec) No, no, I can definitely see it happening already and

T: Yeah, it'd be tricky

W: I'm just like (.) the thing is I'm trying to figure out how I'm gonna weave in the effects it has on her, because he doesn't (.) like to me he's not the kind of character who would hit a lady

T: yeah

W: He has too much trouble with his mom and how much she hates [him] so he's looking for motherly affection all the time As much as he (2 sec) you know (1 sec) he wants (.)

T: Mm-hmm

W: her to like him so I can't imagine him hitting her at all.

T: Right, right.

Here, Cassidy ruminated on the choices that went into the current version of her text. Some of her dialogue only revealed fragmented details of her thought process, such as when she said, "I didn't want to include a fishing scene in this story but I did after a while 'cause I think that's really important. So I might change it, but I want to see how it plays out in the end." These statements didn't give full context or explanation. I was never particularly sure why Cassidy didn't want to include a fishing scene, or why she thought it would be important. Yet, the brevity of those statements suggest that it didn't necessarily matter if their meaning got across to me.

Cassidy seemed to be reminding herself of her position with this specific move. She referred to herself several times in this span of thoughts alone (*I didn't want to include a fishing scene / I did / I think that's really important / I might change it / I want to see how it plays out at the end*). These "I" statements suggest that the thoughts did not involve me. She didn't ask questions or suggest for me to do something or respond in any way. This positioning set up Cassidy to understand her current status in order to conceptualize how to change her text.

Once I made a suggestion for revising (which will be momentarily discussed in more detail), Cassidy further talked out her writing moves to ensure that they kept consistency. She conducted a mini analysis on one of her characters to see how he would act in a certain situation.

She mused that “he’s not the kind of character that would hit a lady[.] He has too much trouble with his mom...as much as he, you know, treats Annabella so poorly he wants her to like him...” To provide some context, this story was partially about a middle-aged man and his relationship to his elderly neighbor, Annabella. Cassidy considered having the man hit the elderly lady to highlight his violent response towards something she said to him. However, after talking out her thoughts, Cassidy concluded that having the man hit the elderly neighbor would not be the right choice. It was the talking out that led Cassidy to this decision, and in doing so, she grew a deeper understanding of her characters, and by extension, the moves she made in her writing.

#### *What Moves Do Tutors Make to Prompt Addressing Writer Moves?*

##### Tutors Suggest Revision Options

Regarding the transcript excerpt above, I gave a specific suggestion for where Cassidy could take her work. I framed this suggestion as “something to think about.” I wasn’t intending to do the work for Cassidy, or to necessarily make the process less about learning for her. At the same time, I wasn’t exactly thinking about learning when I made this suggestion. I had listened to Cassidy talk about the characters in her story, and her discussion provided me with an understanding of what those characters were like.

Cassidy was presented with a problem in her story that made her character appear to act in an inconsistent way, and she was trying to think of how she could solve this problem. With the information that Cassidy gave me, I suggested a possible end result. I was generally vague, suggesting that she have her character “do something drastic instead of say something really,



Once Cassidy had talked through her understanding of the characters, she was able to figure out how to make the pieces come together. Not only was she able to answer her own question, but she was able to develop her ideas right on the spot. Later, in our retrospective interview, I showed Cassidy the video clip that corresponded with this particular moment in the session. I asked her why it was helpful for me to make this suggestion, and she responded:

I think that it was, if I could bring it down to something, it was a real understanding for what I was trying to do and what the story was about. I felt like you followed me throughout all of that. That's when we got down to the specifics or the nitty gritty, we were on the same page. When you made the suggestion, it wasn't out of context. I couldn't be like, well that doesn't really match. You completely understood what I was trying to do, what it was about, and what had happened in the story and how we could go about it. So that's why it worked really well.

Cassidy recognized that my suggestion came at the appropriate time. By the end of the session, we had held an entire conversation about her story, and I gained a deeper understanding of the moves she was trying to make. That understanding is what made my suggestion in context and effective. And by making that suggestion, Cassidy learned how to improve a fundamental aspect of her story.

### Learning Happens When: The Tutor and Writer Address the Writing Process

In my consultations, learning happened when Cassidy was able to take the moves she was making in her work and connect them to her overall writing process. I saw Cassidy gradually turn her attention from the current text at hand to her identity as a creative writer. When she explained or provided backstory for the moves she made in her text, she usually had an explicit, well-thought-out reason for why she did what she did. Sometimes this was for the narrow purposes of her story, but other times her moves were the results of decisions she had made long ago about the type of writing she wanted to do and how she wanted to do it. These types of moves were part of her writing process. The next transcript shows Cassidy explaining to me some moves that she made regarding verbs, pauses, her approach to events, and the beginning of the story.

T: So, how do you feel about how you've written your story?

W: Um, (1 sec) Like I didn't notice there was a problem with verbs, 'cause I have a tendency towards like (2 sec) using verbs more than I, I don't know if I should, but like it's just a tendency towards (.) wanting to show a lot of things together in little clumps and like little vignettes, if I can call it that. Like, these things happen together and these things happen together, and because of that, I have a tendency toward a lot of verbs in one sentence. Um, (3 sec) so I don't know exactly how to separate them because like, also, periods mean a lot to me in terms of pausing an image or pausing a situation, so I'm always like really weary about putting a period somewhere or using a comma, stuff like that. (3 sec) So, um, I don't know what to do. (laughs)

T: Okay, let me ask you this. Why do you feel that you use too many verbs?

W: Someone told me that yesterday. (laughs)

T: And how do you think that that impacts your story?

W: Um (3 sec) the verbs or the person?

T: Just the idea of having, say, too many verbs in your story. How does that—what does that do?

W: Well, are you asking me why I use so many?

T: No, I'm asking like, like (1 sec) if you think this is a bad thing, why is it a bad thing?

W: (2 sec) I didn't think it was a bad thing. (laughs)

No, I just

T: Oh you didn't think it was a bad thing! I'm

W: Yeah, like I kind of, like what I wrote is like—also, it makes it a little difficult to

T: sorry, I didn't mean to assume!

W: understand, like, um, I want to take sort of an abstract approach to a lot of the events that happen, um (1 sec) I'm not a fan of telling people what happened (1 sec) I'm a fan of telling them what's going on, and then them figuring out what happened. So, um, a lot of the times, tons of verbs can like kind of cloud that image. Um, like, so most of my questions on my paper is, is this clear? Is this too much? Do you know what's happening here? Like the first paragraph, um, a couple of problems there, like... is it clear what happens in that opening scene? (2 sec) 'Cause a lot of people get confused by, um, going specifically into the refrigerator, 'cause it can be read as like, going into the refrigerator to get something out (gives literal hand motions), or like, her going into the refrigerator um, I kind of wanted it to be a little bit vague, um, but I feel

T: right

W: like after going into the refrigerator and then the crushing of the bones and the sagging of the cheek, and then later on actually seeing that event happen in a more, I guess, contextual setting can kind of (.) clarify it? But if it's confusing I can get rid of it.

T: Okay, so you're specifically, what you're really thinking about, definitely the verbs in your whole thing, specifically in your introduction, or in the beginning of your story, and how that impacts the clarity of your writing. Right. (1 sec) Um, I understand what you are saying

W: Yes.

T: when you say (1 sec) you don't really wanna just tell everybody what's happening, you want them to figure it out. (Cassidy nods.) And so, let's keep these verbs in mind in general, but especially in the parts where you, you don't just wanna tell them what's going on, you want them to experience this moment but not just saying this happened and then this happened and then this happened. Right?

W: Right. And also this story kind of happens out of order. Like, this opening paragraph, um (2 sec) is actually after the events. This is her reflecting on what has happened, and I realize I have

a tendency towards that. I didn't notice that until just now. In like three different stories I've done that.

This excerpt shows Cassidy first expressing her concern with using too many verbs. While Cassidy was still concerned with how verbs were used specifically in this story, she communicated what verbs mean to her and how she used them in her writing—as a result of “wanting to show a lot of things together in little clumps and (like) little vignettes.”

She also expressed concern for how to separate the condensed verbs, since she had particular feelings about using periods and verbs. According to Cassidy, “periods mean a lot to me in terms of pausing an image or pausing a situation.” Because of this, she was “always like really wary about putting a period somewhere or using a comma.” The attention that Cassidy had towards these elements extended beyond the situations in which they were used in the text in that moment. She clearly allowed her prior knowledge and experience with these concepts to inform her choice about whether or not to use them and how to do so.

Cassidy made her intentions clear beyond the ways that she uses punctuation or parts of speech. She also described the “approach” she took to writing this story, calling it “abstract.” This serves as another illustration of Cassidy addressing the rhetorical choices she made, but she further connected these moves to her writing process. Her next sentence was key: she told me, “I'm not a fan of telling people what happened. I'm a fan of telling them what's going on, and then [letting] them figure out what happened.” This was a theme that Cassidy was describing which was true for more than just the text at hand.

Cassidy was describing a concept that was engrained in her writing process. She stated this to me, and I could see this to be true in the multiple stories that she brought in over the

course of the study. After telling me about these intentions, she brought the conversation back to her verb use by remarking, “Tons of verbs can kind of like cloud that image.” Once more, Cassidy was partaking in her own self-initiated analysis of the moves she made, as informed by her writing process, to see how they worked in the story.

Towards the end of the transcript excerpt, Cassidy made a final important realization. After taking some time to think about her choices in creating this text, she mentioned to me that “this story kind of happens out of order. Like, this opening paragraph um is actually after the events. This is her reflecting on what happened...” Cassidy was further providing context for me to understand how to think of the story. Instead of the story starting at the beginning as one might expect, she explained that the events in the story are not constructed in sequential order, and instead, parts of the story consisted of characters reflecting on past events. Yet, when she was speaking about it, Cassidy then said “I realize I have a tendency towards that. I didn’t notice that until just now. In three different stories I’ve done that.” This may be one of the clearest examples from my study that shows Cassidy arriving at a point of learning as a direct result of talking out her thoughts. She addressed her own writing process and noticed a pattern that happened not only in this story, but in multiple stories she had written.

### *What Moves Do Tutors Make to Prompt Addressing the Writing Process?*

#### Tutors Clarify

In that same transcript, Cassidy relayed a lot of information about verbs, the introduction, and her intentions for the story. She also had questions regarding if the story was clear overall, as well as if it was clear in certain moments, such as in the beginning. She told me how her

intentions for vagueness might impact the audience's understanding. With this dense conversation, I wanted to make sure that I understood what Cassidy was saying, so I restated the points she had made.

First, I remarked upon her question about verb use, saying that she was “really thinking about, definitely the verbs in your whole thing, specifically in your introduction, or in the beginning of your story, and how that impacts the clarity of your writing.” My key words reflected those she had said to me previously, which were “verbs,” “introduction,” and “clarity.” Cassidy interjected to let me know that so far, my thoughts were in line with her thoughts.

Then, I addressed the next point she made, which dealt with her intentions for the story and how those actually played out. I let her know that we were on the same page by explicitly noting “I understand” and communicating a shortened version of her intentions, by saying “you don't really wanna just tell everybody what's happening, you want them to figure it out.” JoAnn B. Johnson calls this move paraphrasing, and finds it useful because it “forces the student to consider deep structures, highlighting the success or failure of various sections of a written piece (39). Again, Cassidy approved of my statement, this time by nodding.

Once that was established, I discussed this idea once more using different words, and this move specifically prompted a new line of thinking on Cassidy's part. In the transcript, I rephrased Cassidy's intentions as “you don't wanna just tell them what's going on, you want them to experience this moment but not just as saying this happened and then this happened and then this happened. Right?” My intention with this statement was to emphasize the potential bluntness or straightforwardness in which Cassidy could describe the events in her story, rather than the possibility of not telling the story in order.

Yet, my presentation of this idea prompted Cassidy to let me know that she wasn't looking for the story to be told as a series of chronological events. Before she told me, I hadn't even realized that the events were out of order. This systematic clarifying and checking of understanding allowed both Cassidy and me to gain insight into elements of the story, but more importantly, Cassidy's writing process. Through illustrating to me with the examples from the text, Cassidy taught me more about different aspects of her identity as a writer.

#### Learning Happens When: The Tutor and Writer Address the Learning Process

In our sessions, Cassidy and I were able to make progress by addressing session activities, writer moves with the text at hand, and Cassidy's writing process. Yet, I knew Cassidy was learning from our time together when she connected our activities to her learning process. In the next segment, I asked Cassidy about reading out loud, an activity I've discussed several times throughout this thesis, but here Cassidy elaborated even further on what this means for her.

T: Did you like hearing me? Did that work better for you, do you think? Hearing it out loud?

W: Immensely. 'Cause, I actually read my stories out loud, but it's gotten to the point where reading out loud is like reading in my head now. So I read it and then I ignore a ton of stuff. I

T: yeah

W: can't keep myself completely to every word now, so, I've kind of overused the tactic, to

T: yeah

W: the point where it doesn't work for me anymore. So hearing someone else read it's like, oh they took a pause there, that's exactly where I wanted, so I put that in the right place, so.

T: Yeah, yeah. And it's good that it's helping you hear, like just get a different idea, helping you, I think, understand more of the way you write. But I did notice that you weren't taking notes,

you were listening, which is awesome. It's just interesting to me, because before when I was reading silently, I would see that you would like take notes and stuff like that. So it seems like it's different for you when I'm reading it out loud. I'm wondering why it was better for you this time to listen, rather than take notes. You know what I'm saying? I just thought that was

W: Mm-hmm

T: interesting.

W: Because I guess when you're reading it in your head, I just get obsessive over my work, and I'm like, everything's wrong, I need to fix it all. Someone's reading it and it's probably wrong, it's all wrong. But when you're reading it out loud, I'm listening to the choices that I made come out of your mouth, and I'm just like, okay there's nothing wrong with that. I heard it. It sounds fine to me. And like I guess looking at it I'm like, everything's wrong, I need to fix it all. And I think that when I hear you read it, it works better for me because I can hear whether or not it makes sense, and it's not just in my head and obsessive.

Clearly, this conversation went beyond simply how we conducted the session, or the moves Cassidy made, or how Cassidy writes. She addressed the move of reading her stories out loud to herself, and stated that the method was not very practical for her. According to Cassidy, when she reads her work out loud, it's "like reading in my head now. So I read it and then I ignore a ton of stuff. I can't keep myself completely to every word now." Later in the segment, Cassidy did some analysis on the initial primary way we read through Cassidy's writing, which was by me reading silently. Cassidy realized that not only was this not the best choice for her, but it actually did more harm than good. She explained that "when you're reading in your head, I just get obsessive over my work, and I'm like, everything's wrong. I need to fix it all."

Then, she brought up another session activity that we did later, which was me reading out loud. With this, she said that "when you're reading out loud, I'm listening to the choices that I made come out of your mouth, and I'm just like okay, there's nothing wrong with that. I heard it. It sounds fine to me." Cassidy differentiated between these two activities and described her

response to them and the way that she processed them. Before, she didn't have any methods to compare to, because we only tried reading her work one way.

Cassidy not only came to new realizations about her learning process, but she also engaged in a concept known as transfer. This term is defined by the National Research Council as “the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts” (51). Some important connections between learning and transfer are that “initial learning is necessary for transfer,” transfer is “an active, dynamic process,” and “new learning involves transfer based on previous learning” (53). Cassidy used transfer when she connected the ideas of me reading her stories out loud and her reading them out loud to herself. The first method, the method that we were currently using in the session, was working for her. We had never even tried the second method before in a session, so she brought in knowledge she had learned from outside the consultation. Cassidy further used transfer when she explained her thinking about a third method, which was me reading the story silently. This was a method we had used previously, which Cassidy determined wasn't useful for her.

Cassidy was able to analyze the impact of using three different types of activities related to reading out loud, all of which occurred with her in separate contexts, yet she talked about them all in the same discussion. This was a clear demonstration of learning on Cassidy's part, and learning in particular about how she herself learns.

*What Moves do Tutors Make to Prompt Addressing the Learning Process?*

## Tutors Ask Questions for Evaluation and Reflection

In the excerpt above, I asked Cassidy several significant questions that led to her revealing responses about her learning process. First, I asked if she liked hearing me. That phrasing was an intentional way to start this part of the conversation. I used the word “like” because I didn’t want Cassidy to feel restricted in her response, as if there were a right or wrong answer. I knew that in asking whether or not Cassidy “liked” this activity, the focus was momentarily off the idea of effectiveness. Cassidy could have enjoyed this process without it being useful for her. So, while I wanted to make Cassidy feel comfortable, I also wanted to draw the attention back to usefulness. I asked if the process “worked better” for her, rather than just if it “worked” for her. In this way, I encouraged Cassidy to think about this moment not only in its immediate effect, but its effect in relation to the other activities she had done before. Cassidy responded appropriately with her in-depth analysis of her learning at work.

## **Final Thoughts**

Going into this study, I thought that learning was something that would happen to Cassidy, and it was something I would be responsible for. I thought there would be clear moves I would make that prompted Cassidy to learn. While certain patterns did emerge from my consultations, my moves in particular weren’t always what led to learning. Rather, it was the combination of writer and tutor moves together. Additionally, I thought that learning was something that was more important for the writer. But I realize that was really important. My growing understanding of learning throughout the processes helped Cassidy learn in the consultations. This learning happened for both me and Cassidy when we talked about learning. It emerged from the conversation.

When my consultations with Cassidy began, she seemed to consider herself *part* of her own story, instead of *in control* of her story. My first few consultations didn't really show evidence of learning, because learning wasn't an objective I had for the sessions, even though I thought it was. Cassidy was focused on the writing, and so was I. But as we established and developed our relationship, the sessions became more about Cassidy as a writer. We became more comfortable talking about metacognitive processes – what was happening and why.

Chapter 4 has served as a presentation of my results from this study. I detailed patterns that demonstrated learning as they appeared in four different components of my sessions, along with the moves that I made which prompted learning moments. I described my process of using grounded theory to find patterns of learning that emerged from my data, and illustrated what those patterns looked like in different moments throughout my study. In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of my study and what future work with research like this might look like.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE WORK**

Chapter 4 described my results in this study of what learning looks like in writing center consultations, as well as how tutors make moves to prompt learning moments. Chapter 5 serves as a discussion for implications of my research using four categories of activity: writing center use, tutoring practices, tutor education, and future research.

### **Writing Center Use**

The writing center has long been recognized as a place that values learning over product output. Keeping learning at the focus can, and should, impact the way that writers use the writing center. Writers may not know what to expect when they visit the writing center for the first time. If they expect to leave with a perfectly drafted or edited paper, then they will probably leave disappointed and discouraged. If writers do know what to expect ahead of time, then the tutor can work with them to reorient their goals and approach the sessions with learning in mind.

While writers often come to the writing center for a quick fix, my study shows that authentic learning happens over time, when tutors and writers have a chance to establish and deepen their relationships. A single consultation may not lead to learning in the same way that multiple consultations would. Writers should consider coming into the writing center multiple times, especially to work with the same tutor if possible.

The University Writing Center offers recurring consultations, where writers can make standing appointments with the same tutor throughout the semester. If writers sign up for recurring consultations, they can work with the tutor not only multiple times throughout the term,

but they can also develop long term goals and activities with the tutor to ensure that their time together is the most conducive to learning. At various checkpoints throughout the term, the University Writing Center has its writers do an informal assessment of their recurring consultations, in order to ensure that they are on the right track. This practice encourages tutors and writers to stay focused on making learning happen in their consultations, and it should be happening in other writing centers as well.

When faculty refer students to use the writing center, they may often have misconceptions about writing center practices and philosophies. They sometimes adopt the mentality of the writing center as a proofreading service, and they promote the center to their students as such. This can further complicate sessions when writers tell tutors that their professors sent them to “have their papers reviewed” or “get their grammar checked” before turning in their assignment.

Faculty should be educated on how students can make the most of the writing center, and when they refer their students, they can build expectations of learning to occur. The University Writing Center offers several opportunities for outreach and promotion, such as classroom presentations, tabling, promotional materials and information on its website. Writing centers should do more of these practices to engage with professors from the very start, so that they can help establish realistic expectations for the students they are sending.

### **Tutoring Practices**

Even if expectations for the writing center are flawed, tutors and writers have the chance to focus their sessions on learning when the appointment starts. Tutors can concretely address

learning and how it can happen with their writers. My study demonstrates that four common elements in consultations are session activities, writer moves involving the text at hand, writer processes, and learning processes. Rather than waiting for conversation surrounding these topics to occur naturally, tutors can get a head start by addressing these elements early on in the consultations. They can specifically talk about the session activities that would be most useful and line up with goals that the tutor and writer have. They can address the work that the writer brought into the session, if the writer did indeed bring in any writing, and use it as a foundation to uncover the writer's writing process. Further, the writer and the tutor can do activities that show the connections between the writer's writing process and learning process. Once these areas are understood, tutors will have a much better idea of what the writer needs from the session, and they can move forward accordingly.

To further encourage learning in the sessions, tutors can make some specific moves supplementary to the ones addressed earlier in my study. Tutors can begin their consultations by clearly explaining the workings of the writing center. This is helpful when writers come in with their own set of expectations, which may have come from earlier appointments that didn't keep learning at the forefront, or perhaps from faculty who gave them incorrect thoughts for what to expect. It may be just as helpful if a writer has never visited the writing center before and doesn't come in with a pre-conceived notion of how the sessions will work. Regardless, tutors can quickly and easily provide an overview of the goals of the writing center, before moving into discussing how they can navigate the session with those goals in mind.

## **Tutor Education**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the University Writing Center places value on observing and reflecting upon tutoring practices. When tutors enter their tutor training course, right away they are immersed in writing center theory and put those ideas into practice when they begin tutoring. If tutors don't understand the importance of learning from the start, it may be more difficult to impart that focus later on. Tutor training is a great place for tutors to begin thinking about how they can arrive at authentic learning with their writers. Tutors can read scholars such as Ambrose et al., Neal Lerner, and Barbara Bird, scholars whose work heavily influenced this thesis. They can do reflective activities that are created in order to emphasize the learning happening, rather than products being created or revised.

Several activities exist at the University Writing Center that tutors use to reflect on their own tutoring practices. I mentioned video case discussions in Chapter 1, which provide an opportunity for tutors to physically see the work happening in their consultations. Tutors video record sessions with their writers, and then present clips to the other tutors and lead them in discussion about what is and isn't working. My study shows that learning can happen as a direct result of tutors prompting writers, and sometimes that prompting and learning can be seen. Yet, this learning can sometimes be more difficult to capture in single fragments of consultations.

Rather than focusing on isolated instances that happen in sessions, tutors and administrators can approach video case discussions with these ideas about learning that favor more long-term exposure to the UWC. If tutors have recurring writers, they can record those sessions to talk about the specific learning that they see happening over time with that writer. If tutors don't have recurring writers, they can still record their consultations and keep learning in

mind as they tutor. In the time that tutors present their video case discussions, they can point to demonstrable learning moments as well as prompting tutor moves, but they should also discuss the learning happening in the session as a whole. If the tutor had addressed session activities, writer moves with their text, the writer's writing process, and their learning process within the consultation that they recorded, then those would be excellent moments to showcase within their discussions.

### **Future Research**

This study had some limitations which affected the process, but future research can keep these limitations in mind and work to improve them. When I created this study, I thought I would be able to pinpoint moments of learning that could be reproduced, practically without fail, to induce learning. While I did see demonstrations of learning at work, the moments didn't exist separate from the situations in which they were contained. Future scholars could use the patterns of learning that emerged to create heuristics and strategies for encouraging these patterns to emerge more often.

I conducted sessions with only one writer, who came into the Writing Center for a specific situation—she wanted to improve in her creative writing abilities. I attempted to conduct the sessions as typically as possible, without my study interfering in the process. But as I was collecting data, I was an active participant in the study, so my involvement inevitably affected the process. I had my own thoughts and observations which I shared with Cassidy in the middle of our sessions. This was completely intentional and an important part of my study, but if a researcher who collected data had not conducted the observations themselves, their results might

look quite different. Future researchers could reproduce this study as observers rather than tutors, and determine if the patterns that emerge are different or say different things about learning.

Throughout the span of my research project, I conducted nine sessions with my writer and video recorded the entire length of each forty-five-minute session. I transcribed several pages' worth of segments from five or six out of nine of those sessions and conducted reflective memos after each consultation. This was a very large collection of data that proved difficult to break down, synthesize and interpret. A future study could be more focused with less consultations and more tightly analyzed data. My reflective memos and retrospective interview served as useful data points, but they did not give me the kind of insights that I expected they might. So in the future, a researcher could either collect more data that took place outside the direct consultations, or they could divert their attention away from this and only focus on the consultations themselves.

My project was a case study that looked at the interactions between me and a single writer over time. That time allowed Cassidy and me to understand each other more and learn together, but in the end, I gained insight into how a particular writer learns. Future research could involve studying demonstrations of learning moments with multiple writers and possibly multiple tutors, in order to see if or how emerging patterns are the same or different.

In addition, more research needs to be done on patterns of learning that emerge in writing center sessions. Scholars should conduct studies that focus on the interactions between the tutor and the writer, but they should also study the independent moves that tutors and writers make in their sessions. This will allow for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of not just what patterns emerge, but the complex relationship they have with each other.

## **APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

*Title:* Connecting Theory and Evidence: A Closer Look at Learning in the Writing Center

*Principal Investigator and Contact Information:*

Dr. R. Mark Hall

Program Director of University Writing Center

(407) 823 – 0504

Campus Location: CNH 148

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*Student Researcher:*

Alexandra Valerio

University of Central Florida

Class of 2017

*Purpose of Study:*

I am a senior studying Writing & Rhetoric at the University of Central Florida. As part of my honors undergraduate thesis, I am conducting a research project in the Department of Writing & Rhetoric. I am working closely with my supervisor, Dr. R. Mark Hall, who will be the main contact person for the project. I would like to know if you would be interested in participating in my research study. My goal is to understand how learning occurs in writing center locations, and to see how tutors prompt these learning moments.

*Procedures:*

You will be asked to conduct three writing center consultations with me which will take place over the course of the spring 2016 semester. These consultations will be video recorded, but they will occur as regular sessions. Once this is done, I will interview you to discuss your consultations and any moments you felt were particularly important. Then, we will watch one consultation together that we recently conducted. We will both identify learning moments together.

*Confidentiality:*

The information you provide for this study will be strictly confidential. Your name will not appear in my transcripts or anywhere in my honors thesis project. Other than my supervisor, I am the only one who will watch or have access to the recordings of the consultations in which you participate.

*Note about Voluntary Nature of Participation and Statement Regarding Compensation:*

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decline from participating or may discontinue your participation at any point during the process. We cannot compensate you for your time, but your participation will be vital to our project as we seek to understand learning in the writing center.

*Information About This Study:*

Should you have any questions about this research, you will have the opportunity to ask all your questions and have them answered by emailing or calling the principal investigator, Dr. R. Mark Hall. His contact information is included at the top of this letter. All inquiries are confidential.

*Participant's Agreement Statement:*

If you agree to take part in our study, we would appreciate you signing your name and date on this form and sending it back to us in the stamped and addressed envelope within two weeks of your receipt of this letter.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have read all of the information provided above, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As soon as we receive your informed consent letter, we will send you an email regarding times to meet and conduct our consultations.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Researcher's Name and Affiliation

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Supervisor's Name and Affiliation

## **APPENDIX B: RETROSPECTIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Interview Questions for Writer**

- 1) Are there moments from this consultation that stand out to you as especially noteworthy or important?
- 2) Why did you choose those moments, and what do you think makes them noteworthy?
- 3) Would you say that you “learned” anything from this consultation? If so, what did you learn?
- 4) Do you see anything that you did which you think demonstrated or showed you learning? If so, what? Describe that learning.
- 5) Did I do anything that you think may have prompted or enabled your learning? If so, what?
- 6) If you can remember, what prompted your question / statement / action \_\_\_\_\_ during this part of the consultation? How / why was that useful to you?
- 7) In this part of the consultation, I asked / prompted you to \_\_\_\_\_. Do you remember what you were thinking at this moment? If so, what?

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