Examining the Values in Our Valued Practices: Universal Design Principles as a Catalyst for Tutor Reflection

Eric Wisz
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EXAMINING THE VALUES IN OUR VALUED PRACTICES: UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES AS A CATALYST FOR TUTOR REFLECTION

by

ERIC WISZ
B.S. University of Minnesota, 2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Writing & Rhetoric in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
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Major Professor: Laurie A. Pinkert
ABSTRACT

Recent writing center scholarship has discussed the roles of valued practices in writing centers and the implications Universal Design (UD) for writing center work. This thesis extends such lines of inquiry by bringing these two conversations together to explore the potential of UD principles as a catalyst for writing center tutor reflection on valued tutoring practices. In a semester long study, data were collected in the form of individual and dialogic tutor reflection through surveys, individual interviews, reflective writing prompts, and a focus group. The data were analyzed to examine how tutors formed their tutoring practices and how they understood the relationship between UD principles and the values that undergird their work in the writing center. This thesis outlines the ways two tutors’ experiences both within and beyond the writing center shaped their interpretation and application of their center’s valued practices. Further, this thesis discusses insight from the tutors’ creative and dynamic applications of the principles of UD to their work in the writing center. Tutors’ experiences from outside the center are laminated with experiences from tutor training and writing center sessions in intricate ways that highlight the significance of both tutors’ lives outside the center and a writing center’s infrastructure in tutors’ interpretation and implementation of tutoring practices. Ultimately, the thesis argues for the importance of structured reflection that prompts tutors to examine the formation of their own practices and the values and beliefs embedded in both their individual practices and a center’s shared valued practices, suggesting strategies for facilitating this reflection through tutor writing and tutor-to-tutor dialogue.
“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;
Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

Colossians 3:23–24

Though my work in this life is marred with the stain of my sin and iniquity, when He calls me home and I stand before Him, He will see only that my soul has been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. I hope through His grace and the guidance of His Spirit, my work in some small way glorifies Him for the sacrifice He made for me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for all of their support throughout my education. Their love and encouragement nurtured my curiosity in learning from a young age and motivated me to pursue higher education. They have always been there to lovingly keep me on a path that ensures my growth and success.

I would also like to thank my committee members. It was a privilege to work with Dr. Laurie A. Pinkert, whose investment in this project and my development as a researcher and scholar, along with her knowledge of writing studies research methods and theory, was fundamental to this research and the insight it offers. Dr. Kevin Roozen’s thoughtful attitude toward research and thorough approach to analyzing data and reporting research findings has impacted my own thinking about and approach to research and data more than any other scholar. Conversations with Dr. Stephanie Wheeler have been influential to my thinking not only about this project, but about theories of learning, writing, and rhetoric generally speaking, and being able to continue these conversations is one of the things I look forward to most as I think about continuing to pursue academic work in rhetoric and composition.

I am also incredibly grateful for Chapel Hill Baptist Church in Orlando, Florida. Their support in my spiritual growth has been tremendous and invaluable. I strive to put God at the center of all my work, research or otherwise, and the members of Chapel Hill have shown me through their generosity and wisdom what it means to live for Christ. Their examples of Christian character encourage me every day.
Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank Jesus Christ for bearing the consequence of my sins. In accepting Him as my Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit has guided me in my growth as a Christian throughout my personal and academic pursuits. Indeed, the knowledge gleaned from academic pursuits is vanity without Him.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The importance of reflection in tutor development has been an ongoing conversation in writing center scholarship (Okawa et al., 1991; Bell, 2001; Smith, 2005; Mattison, 2007; Hall, 2011; Pigliacelli, 2019). Mattison called for more dialogic reflection in writing centers—reflection that happens as a conversation among tutors—and Hall took up this call in his study of his writing center’s tutor blog. Hall argued for the value of dialogic reflection in tutor development since “learning is social and dialogical, knowledgeability is a two-way street” (p. 94). This thesis further pursues this line of inquiry, examining tutor reflection in both written and dialogic forms.

Perhaps, appropriately, this is a project that not only contributes to our understandings of reflection but also grows out of my own experience of reflection, particularly dialogic reflection. When I was tutoring at the University of Central Florida’s (UCF) University Writing Center (UWC), tutors participated in weekly seminar meetings for ongoing professional tutor development. Throughout the semester, tutors video recorded a handful of their sessions and chose a segment from one of their recordings to share at a seminar meeting. During these seminar meetings, tutors collectively analyzed these video segments and discussed what the tutor did well in the sessions and how the tutor might improve using UWC’s list of valued tutoring practices.

During one seminar meeting, we were analyzing a video clip of a tutor working with a writer who identified as disabled and needed the tutor’s assistance typing his paper. To me, the session seemed very productive—the tutor and the writer were collaborating to advance the
writer’s composition, and the tutor was guiding the writer through literacy tasks that engaged the writer but were likely beyond what the writer could accomplish on his own. In other words, it seemed that the writer was learning, which is the goal of a writing center session. However, the discussion about this video clip had a different tenor than our usual conversations. While I found the session to be productive, other tutors seemed critical of the session because the tutor was not accomplishing many valued practices on the list of valued practices.

As I reflected on this disparity between my perceptions and those of others, it occurred to me that perhaps our valued practices suggested an ideal session and that these ideals imagined an abled tutor and writer. In other words, I wondered whether the beliefs and values about tutoring writing that undergird our valued practices to some extent assumed abled bodies. After I brought this up during our discussion, for the first time to my knowledge, the conversation during seminar shifted from using the valued practices as a tool to analyze sessions to analyzing the valued practices themselves and the beliefs and values that inform them. This moment prompted me and my colleague, Natalie Madruga, to analyze the list of valued practices using the principles Universal Design (UD) (Madruga & Wisz, 2019).

According to the Center for Universal Design (1997) at North Carolina State University, UD is defined as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” While originally intended for the design of buildings and other physical structures, UD has been applied to teaching, particularly the teaching of writing (e.g., Dolmage, 2008).

There are seven principles of UD:

**Equitable Use.** Useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
**Flexibility in Use.** Accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

**Simple and Intuitive Use.** Easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

**Perceptible Information.** Communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions of the user’s sensory abilities.

**Tolerance for Error.** Minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

**Low Physical Effort.** Can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

**Size and Space for Approach and Use.** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach manipulation, and use regardless of user’s body size, posture, or mobility. (Center for Universal Design, 1997)

Madruga and I wanted to see how UD principles might connect the kinds of activities that happen in a writing center, so we applied UD to the UWC’s list of valued tutoring practices.

While scholars have used the principles of UD to create a framework called Universal Design for Learning (UDL), this framework is focused primarily on classroom teaching and learning. We opted to focus on UD rather than UDL because it is more fundamental and open (arguably more universal) than UDL, which was created with the classroom in mind. As administrators, tutors, and writers who value the writing center all know, writing center work is valuable because, in part, it is distinct in many fundamental ways from the classroom. For example, writing centers focus on individualized instruction, do not provide summative feedback to writers, and cultivate peer-to-peer, rather than instructor-to-student, relationships. Analyzing writing center work using
UDL might prompt those doing the analysis to unwittingly apply assumptions about classroom instruction found in UDL to writing center work. Since UD was not designed with classroom instruction in mind, it is not embedded with assumptions about pedagogical environments and thus, I argue, allows for less restrictive application to writing center work.

In applying the principles of UD to the UWC’s list of valued practices, Madruga and I suggested revisions to a number of valued practices to better include writers with learning disabilities. This study continues to engage UD principles and the valued practices within a writing center but does so by asking other tutors who were previously unfamiliar with UD principles to reflect on the valued practices in light of UD. In doing this, I aimed to learn how tutors at the UWC individually and collaboratively negotiate varied value systems—particularly their center’s shared list of valued practices and the principles of UD—and how the introduction of UD principles can become a catalyst for tutor reflection and writing center change. At its onset, this study sought to address the following questions:

1. How do tutors in a writing center community of practice negotiate varied value systems with their community of practice’s values/valued practices?

2. How do tutors use dialogue and narratives to negotiate with each other valued practices and external value systems?

3. In what ways do tutors see Universal Design already fitting in or potentially fitting into their personal tutoring practices and their writing center’s valued practices?

In the chapters that follow, I report on a semester-long study of two tutors who experienced structured opportunities to reflection on their values as tutors and to describe the interconnections between those values, the UWC’s valued practices, and UD principles. Chapter
Two describes the site of study; the participants; the methods used to collect data, which includes a questionnaire, interviews, written narratives of experiences, and a focus group; and the methods used to analyze this data.

Chapter Three and Four present the findings of this study. The tutor participants had no previous experience with UD and were thus unaware of its origin in disability studies. The tutors were also not prompted specifically to reflect on working with disabled writers, as doing so would have required tutors to make assumptions about the abilities and disabilities of writers they had previously worked with, possibly identifying writers as disabled based solely on tutors’ perceptions of the writers. The tutors’ lack of background with UD and the fact that they were not prompted to specifically consider sessions with writers who they perceived to be disabled led to tutors to engage in expansive and unexpected reflections on and discussions of their tutoring practices.

Chapter Three discusses one such unexpected finding that emerged from across the various data collection phases of this study. What arose, in part, from asking tutors to talk about UD relative to their tutoring practices was a conversation not directly pertaining to UD or disability, but one on practice formation and development. Throughout tutors’ reflections, they drew on myriad experiences both in and outside the writing center to discuss how they form and revise their practices. Chapter Three examines how tutors’ experiences within and outside the center are laminated to in unique ways as tutors use these experiences to make sense of and enact the valued practices. Further, Chapter Three explores how tutors can be prompted to consider not just what experiences inform their practices, but also the underlying values and beliefs about writing that inform their center’s shared valued practices and how the valued practices can help
manifest these values and how they can, at times, hinder the manifestation of these values in a session. Chapter Three demonstrates how prompting tutors to consider the formation of their practices led tutors to adopt a deeper understanding of and more critical stance towards their center’s valued practices.

Chapter Four examines how tutors applied the principles of UD to their writing center work, though not always in instances where disability was present or noticeable. After overviewing how previous scholarship has applied UD to writing center work, this chapter discusses how the tutors in this study applied UD to writing center work in interesting and unexpected ways compared to previous literature on UD in writing centers. The reflections and conversations of tutors in this study open up new avenues to consider the relationship between agents as designers in writing center sessions and raise questions about how we conceptualize error within writing center sessions.

Finally, Chapter Five gives the main takeaways of this research and offers implications for writing center tutor training, infrastructure, and research. I argue that asking tutors to consider the implications of a value system, such as UD, in relation to a center’s codified valued practices can catalyze interesting discussion and insight among writing center tutors and administrators. Important to this catalyzation is allowing for tutors to engage in reflection via dialogue with other tutors. This study demonstrates that asking tutors to reflect on their valued practices in light of UD provided an avenue for tutors to reflect on the development of their own tutoring practices and become more self-aware as tutors. It also prompted tutors to consider in what ways and in what situations their list of valued practices does and does not allow them to achieve the values they believe should be present in a successful session. Finally, Chapter Five
highlights some ways that tutors’ thoughtful reflections and intricate applications of UD to writing center work suggest potential avenues for future research both in terms of investigating tutor development and exploring additional applications of UD to writing center work.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

Understanding and describing tutor development is a challenging endeavor as writing center tutors bring a multitude of experiences and identities to their work within the center and support writing that is not their own. Yet, for such sites of complex activity, it remains all the more important to trace development and experience in order to understand the habits and strategies that support and contribute to learning. Working in a similarly complex site of service learning, Pinkert and Leon (2020) describe heuristic tracing as a method for not only assessing or understanding learning or development but also “providing a space in which participants could conceptualize, articulate, and potentially change their practices” (p. 44). Extending heuristic tracing into a writing center environment, this study maintains the three elements key to this approach:

1. Heuristic tracing recognizes the contributory expertise of program participants.
2. Heuristic tracing prompts reflexivity through its design.
3. Heuristic tracing examines participant narratives for emergences. (Pinkert & Leon, 2020, p. 43–44)

To explore questions about how tutors develop and negotiate their practices and the values that inform their practices, and to investigate how tutors see UD already fitting in or potentially fitting into their personal tutoring practices and their writing center’s valued practices, tutor reflection and dialogue was collected in a semester-long study during the Fall 2020 semester. Similar to Pinkert and Leon’s (2020) implementation of heuristic tracing, the data collection was designed as a “reflexive activity,” with the goal of collecting participant narratives
while also recognizing “that participants can be prompted to not only share but also reconsider their narratives through carefully crafted combinations of open and closed ended questions” (p. 45). Tutors were queried about their most important valued practices and the connections and dissonance they saw between UD and their valued practices; their responses were collected through surveys, interviews, writing prompts, and a focus group.

**Setting**

This study was conducted at the University Writing Center of the University of Central Florida, a large very high research activity, Hispanic-Serving Institution state university in Orlando, Florida. This writing center has a staff of about 30 undergraduate and graduate tutors and conducts about 1.750 sessions per semester. Sessions are typically offered in-person and synchronously via voice and text chat online. However, because of COVID, all consultations were held over Zoom, which allows for video, audio, text chat, and screensharing, during the semester of data collection.

**Selection Criteria and Participants**

All experienced tutors (tutors who have been tutoring for more than a year) at the UWC (N=14) were invited to participate in this study. In September, I visited (virtually) the weekly seminar for experienced tutors and gave a brief presentation on the study—its goals, phases, and implications (on a personal level, center level, and writing center studies level)—and solicited
participation from the tutors. I followed up by emailing my recruitment email, along with the PowerPoint that accompanied my presentation to the current director of the UWC, who forwarded this email to tutors in an initial message and a subsequent reminder. This email invitation contained the link to the pre-interview questionnaire (the first phase of the study, described below). Initially, three tutors completed the pre-interview questionnaire. 

Two of the three participants completed all phases of the study, including the final focus group. This thesis will describe the development of the two participating tutors’ reflection and thoughts throughout the semester and investigate, in particular, how tutor-to-tutor dialogue in the focus group impacted their reflection. These two participants are Mariam and Esther (researcher-selected pseudonyms). Mariam is a 20-year-old who identifies as Hispanic and female, and Esther is a 20-year-old who identifies as white and female. Both had been tutoring at the UWC for one year at the start of this study. 

**Data Collection Phases**

Data were collected in four phases: (1) a pre-interview questionnaire, (2) an individual interview with each participant, (3) four reflective writing prompts, and (4) a focus group interview. These data collection methods mirror Leon, Pinkert, and Taylor’s (2017) multi-phased study to investigate shifting perceptions of service-learning course instructors since I was interested in investigating not only tutors’ perceptions of their valued practices, but how these perceptions might shift throughout the semester as they consider these practices in relation to the principles of UD.
The first phase collected responses through a pre-interview questionnaire. This questionnaire asked participants to select their three most important practices from the UCF UWC’s list of 20 valued practices. The questionnaire then introduced the seven principles of UD and asked participants about the relationships they see between the principles of UD and tutoring values or practices. The questionnaire asked the following: (1) how well participants felt their three most important valued practices overall incorporated principles of UD, (2) which specific principles, if any, their most important practices incorporated, and (3) which principles, if any, they felt their practices could better incorporate. Although tutors were asked to apply the principles of UD to their tutoring practices throughout this study, they were not asked to reflect specifically on sessions with writers who they perceived as being disabled, as doing so would have been asking them to make assumptions about writers’ identities, abilities, and disabilities.

After the participants completed the pre-interview questionnaire, I reached out to these tutors to schedule the second phase of the study, a one-hour interview with each of them. The following week, I conducted a Zoom interview with each of the participants. During these interviews, I asked the participants to elaborate on their questionnaire responses by unpacking the specific connections they saw between the principles of UD and their valued practices. I asked participants to give examples from sessions that demonstrated the connections participants saw between UD and their valued practices. Finally, I asked participants to elaborate on areas where they felt UD could be better incorporated into their valued practices. At the end of the interview, I notified the participant that beginning of the next phase—the first of the semi-regular writing prompts—would begin the following week.
In the third phase, semi-regular writing prompts were sent out every other Monday. Participants were asked to complete these prompts by the following Monday. A reminder email was sent to participants who had not completed the prompt by Sunday. A thank you email, along with a reminder of when the next prompt would be sent, was sent out to each participant who completed the prompt. Four writing prompts were completed throughout the course of the semester. These prompts asked participants to describe a time in the past couple of weeks when they adjusted their typical tutoring practices. Participants were then asked if they felt that their adjustment related to any of the principles of UD and to elaborate on any connections they saw between their adjustments and the principles of UD. The third participant who did not complete all the phases of this study stopped completing the writing prompts after the second prompt. As noted previously, her data is not included in this report of the results.

The final phase of the study was a two-hour focus group with Mariam and Esther, which was held at the end of the fall semester. Before the focus group, I reviewed Mariam’s and Esther’s questionnaire, interview, and writing prompt responses, noting similarities and differences in how they talked about their valued practices, applied UD to their practices, and adjusted their typical tutoring practices. These common patterns and differences, discussed in the following analysis chapters, formed the basis of the questions I asked to guide our focus group discussion.
Data Analysis

All interview and focus group data were transcribed. I then coded the transcriptions for instances when participants discussed UD, whether individual principles, multiple principles, or UD as a whole, and when participants discussed particular valued tutoring practices. These codes described what principle(s) of UD or what valued practice(s) were being discussed in a particular segment of the transcript. Table 1 presents some example codes for segments from Esther’s individual interview transcript. The first segment in Table 1 was coded as “UD: Equitable Use” since here Esther is articulating her definition of the UD principle of Equitable Use. The next segment was coded as “valued practice: be a co-learner,” signifying the valued practice “be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid role of editor and authority” since Esther is discussing her interpretation of what it means to be a co-learner for different tutors. The third segment was coded as both “UD: Equitable Use” and “valued practice: be a co-learner” since she is applying her interpretation of the UD principle of Equitable Use to her understanding of what it means for different tutors to be a co-learner. A subset of the transcripts (approximately 20%) were independently reviewed by my thesis chair and me to develop consistency in the application of codes. Then, I coded transcripts, reviewing and discussing codes with my thesis chair throughout and after the coding process.
Table 1. Example Transcript Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment of Transcript</th>
<th>Code(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, so, um, Equitable Use, first, from like what I understand it to be is that it can, the principal can be used for, like, any type of person no matter like what their background or abilities are.</td>
<td>UD Principle: Equitable Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And so, being a co-learner and a co-collaborator, you're bringing different experiences to your session. Um, and it's not going to be the same for each person. So, like, my experiences as a tutor, not only as a tutor, but as just, like, a person is going to be different from the next tutor, and the next consultant.</td>
<td>Valued Practice: Be a Co-learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, I think in this case, that first one where you're being a co-learner, co-collaborator, there's a different way that each person does it, and so, it's not strict as to who can use it, everyone can do it differently and bring different experiences to it.</td>
<td>UD Principle: Equitable Use Valued Practice: Be a Co-learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The writing prompts were analyzed using descriptive codes that described what prompted tutors’ adjustments to their typical tutoring practice, what adjustment was made, and how tutors described this adjustment relating to the principles of UD. Table 2 presents some example codes from one of Mariam’s writing prompt responses. Utterances were coded as referring to a UD
principle when the tutor explained or discussed their understanding or practices in relationship to the principles of Universal Design. Similarly, utterances were coded as referring to valued practices where the tutors defined, explained, or discussed elements relating to one or more of the valued practices that the UWC has adopted. As demonstrated in the table, the same utterance could be coded as referring to both a UD principle and a valued practice when the values and concepts of both were present. Occasionally, the same utterance could also be coded for multiple UD principles or multiple valued practices.

Table 2. Example Writing Prompt Response Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Category</th>
<th>Segment of Response</th>
<th>Code(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What prompted tutor’s adjustment?</td>
<td>Sometime last week, I tutored a student with Autism and Asperger's. This student informed me that people with this type of mental disability, to quote him, &quot;think differently&quot; than we do. I believed this to be a very interesting way to frame his thought process.</td>
<td>Writer told tutor he has autism and Asperger’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What adjustment did the tutor describe making?</td>
<td>Nonetheless, he needed longer amounts of wait time to answer my questions compared to the average student I am used to tutoring. Therefore, I had to adjust my</td>
<td>Longer amount of wait time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How did the tutor describe the adjustment relating to the principles of UD?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Category</th>
<th>Segment of Response</th>
<th>Code(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>normal tutoring practices to accommodate him. This was kind of difficult since I find long moments of silence to be awkward and, almost like it is vital that I fill them.</td>
<td>Tutor’s practices need to be equitable and useful for all writers, implying that writers have diverse abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that undergird their valued practices. Chapter Four explores how participants articulate the sophisticated relationships they see between UD and valued practices.
CHAPTER THREE: TUTORS’ INTERPRETATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF VALUED PRACTICES

In UCF’s UWC, a list of “20 Valued Practices for Tutoring Writing” (Table 3) are used to guide tutor training and development. These valued practices can also be found in Around the Texts of Writing Center Work: An Inquiry-Based Approach to Tutor Education (Hall, 2017, p. 17–18). Drafted by a group of student tutors and R. Mark Hall, the former director of UCF’s UWC, this list of tutoring moves and habits embodies the UWC’s shared communal “goals, meanings, and practices” (Hall, 2017, p. 20). These valued practices also give focus to tutor reflections on their own sessions and observation of others’ sessions and give focus to administrator observations of sessions and formative feedback based on these observations. That being said, the “20 Valued Practices” document is fundamental in the education of tutors and evaluation of tutoring sessions. Since these valued practices embody the values and goals of our writing center, Hall is clear that this list is not set or final but ought to be revisited and revised (p. 20–21).

Throughout the study, tutors were asked to reflect on the writing center’s valued practices, particularly the three that they chose as their most important valued practices in the pre-interview questionnaire. In their individual interviews at the beginning of the semester, when asked how their most important valued practices could be revised to better incorporate the principles that they felt could or should be more central to their valued practices, Mariam and Esther offered relatively few and fairly small revisions to the valued practices, such as changing the order of words. For valued practices that are deeply grounded in empirical research and
pedagogy theory, few and small revisions may be all that is called for to avoid throwing out the insight gleaned from years of research.

Table 3. University of Central Florida University Writing Center’s Valued Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Valued Practice as Stated by UWC</th>
<th>Shortened Form as Referenced in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish rapport with writer.</td>
<td>Establish rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learn assignment requirements or rhetorical situation, including the writer’s understanding.</td>
<td>Learn assignment requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learn about writer’s processes, beliefs, and attitudes toward the writing task.</td>
<td>Learn about writer’s processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Set reasonable expectations and negotiate with writer what to work on and why.</td>
<td>Set reasonable expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Address writer’s learning beyond the specific task.</td>
<td>Address writer’s learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ask questions and use directives to engage writer in active learning</td>
<td>Ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Address writer’s concerns.</td>
<td>Address writer’s concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Focus on only a few specific issues to work on in a single consultation.</td>
<td>Focus on a few issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Valued Practice as Stated by UWC</td>
<td>Shortened Form as Referenced in this Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Prioritize global concerns that interfere with meaning before less significant local errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.</td>
<td>Prioritize global concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>When addressing sentence-level errors, target selected patterns of repeated problems. Avoid a scattershot approach.</td>
<td>Target selected sentence-level patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Create opportunities for writer to demonstrate learning by talking, practicing writing strategies, and problem solving.</td>
<td>Create opportunities for writer to demonstrate learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Demonstrate active listening. Avoid dominating the conversation. Make effective use of wait-time.</td>
<td>Demonstrate active listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Offer specific, useful suggestions for revision.</td>
<td>Offer specific suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Use, explain, and recommend writing resources, print and online.</td>
<td>Recommend writing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Collaborate with the writer to make a plan for work after the consultation. Sum up that plan in the session notes.</td>
<td>Make plan with writer for after the consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Invite writer to return to the Writing Center; schedule a follow-up consultation.</td>
<td>Invite writer to return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Valued Practice as Stated by UWC</td>
<td>Shortened Form as Referenced in this Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Use tone and body language to facilitate learning.</td>
<td>Use tone and body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid roles of editor and authority.</td>
<td>Be a co-learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Model strategies to find answers and to solve problems. Be willing to say, “I don’t know.” Don’t pretend expertise.</td>
<td>Model strategies to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>After the consultation, write detailed session notes of work done and recommendations for what to do next.</td>
<td>Write detailed session notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, during the focus group at the end of the semester-long study, when in dialog with each other, Mariam and Esther seemed to be much more comfortable criticizing entire valued practices as unnecessary or poorly articulated. Mariam went as far as to mentioned that she “hated” the valued practices as a whole, though she did not seem to be using this word in its strongest sense. Many of the valued practices Mariam and Esther were comfortable suggesting be thrown out were the valued practices that they felt were getting at the same idea. It seemed to take a semester of deep reflection on the valued practices for the apparent redundancy in the practices to be articulated. However, as Mariam brought up, one does not need to be extremely familiar with the valued practices to realize that they are all getting at the same thing. In fact, according to Mariam, it was evident to her initially as a new tutor that they’re all getting at the same thing:
I remember reading these, actually, Esther, because when he handed them out to us, and I was, like, looking through, and I was, like, also freaking out because I was like, I'm not gonna remember to do all of this. But then I was, I was reading through it, I was like, this is kind of all saying the same thing, and then, like, I was, like, then I stopped freaking out. And I was like, no worries.

It seems as though a semester of deep reflection on the valued practices reminded Mariam of something that was evident to her when she first read the valued practices.

In this chapter, I analyze tutors’ responses to show the ways that the presentation and use of valued practices in the center may contribute to an idea that they are a checklist of steps to be followed rather than a handful of fundamental, empirically grounded beliefs about the teaching and tutoring of writing. This chapter analyzes narratives in which tutors describe shifts in interpretation and implementation. Reflection on these valued practices can redirect writing center stakeholders such as tutors toward the values that underlie these valued practices and even lead stakeholders to examine and revise these practices if they do not align with current values.

Role of Values and Dialogic Reflection in the Writing Center as a Community of Practice

In Lave’s (1991) and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) discussion of learning in communities of practice, they claimed that learning and practitioner identity development are inseparable processes. In contrast to conceptions of learning as the internalization of knowledge, Lave and Wenger proposed that learning is “increasing participation in communities of practice,” which “concerns the whole person acting in the world” (p. 49). There are some key implications to this
conception of learning. Peers learn mostly in relation with other peers, or near peers, rather than
teachers. Participation, rather than simply observation, is key in this model as participation
allows apprentices to be absorbed into the “culture of practices” rather than simply observing it.
Often seen as “informal,” sharing stories among peers and community members is central to
learning in communities of practice.

Though much learning is done in participation, theories of communities of practice also
emphasize the importance of dialogue between peers in learning and identity development
processes. The role of dialogue and narrative in communities of practice are further explored by
Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011) and Wenger-Trayner, showing how dialogue can create
productive changes and developments in communities of practice. One way valuable learning is
created in communities of practice is through practitioners sharing stories about their
experiences. These stories are called “grounded narratives.” Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat noted
a productive tension between “ground narratives” and “aspirational narratives” when members of
communities of practice share stories about their practice with each other. On one hand, ground
narratives are actual accounts members of a community of practice tell each other, including
“formative events that have shaped the development of a community or network, the activities
that members engage in, the interactions and experiences they have, and the roles people play”
(p. 16). On the other hand, aspirational narratives are stories members tell each other about what
their community of practice should be over time, including defining what success looks like
within the community of practice. These narratives influence each other. How a community talks
about what has happened is influenced by what they believe should be happening, and how a
community talks about what should be happening is influenced by what has happened.
Wenger-Trayner laid out a framework for the value created by social learning. In this case, the term “value creation” means the creation of a valuable product, service, idea, disposition, etc., not necessarily the creation of a shared value—as in belief or goal—or valued practices within a community of practice. Different types of value are distinguished in the model. The model is recursive, and learning happen as community members move between the various types of value creation. The five types of value are immediate, potential, applied, realized, and transformative value. This framework begins with social interaction. For example, immediate value might be tutors at the UWC participating in seminar and discussing the video clip of the tutor working with a disabled writer. The potential value could be insight from this discussion—new approaches or tutoring moves that came up in the discussion and the idea that our tutoring practices may need to be expanded to better included writers with disabilities. If tutors take this potential value and apply it in their practice, they have enacted applied value. Realized value would occur if the modifications to their practices improve their sessions with writers. Finally, transformative value would occur if the list of valued practices were revised based on the realized value, thus—since the valued practices are foundational in tutor training and development—transforming the way the UWC discusses and teaches tutoring. Although a community-of-practice-wide revision to the fundamental valued practices and communal values and beliefs that undergird these valued practices only occurs in the transformative value stage, the other four stages are necessary for this transformative value to be realized. Additionally, the process of achieving this transformative value is a recursive process. For example, tutors many apply something they took away from the seminar discussion and then have conversations (applied value), notice a result of this application (realized value), informally discuss this
application and result with other tutors in the breakroom (immediate value), and then have new ideas of how to further revise their practices (potential value).

Wenger (1998) further developed theories of communities of practice by considering the relationship between reified artefacts and moments of practice in facilitating social knowledge and practice development, learning, and identity formation in communities of practice. He argued that meaning is created and that practice and learning are done in communities of practices through participation and reification. Participation is the active process of engaging in the work of a community of practice and has the potential to shape both members and the community of practice as a whole. Reification is the projection or abstraction of oneself or one’s practices onto the world, “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’” (p. 45). Reification can include writing down a law or procedure, creating a form or tool, even speech involves reifying experience into words. Reification makes abstract ideas, such as shared values or ways of knowing, concrete, but in doing so, it also disconnects and removes the abstract ideas from their lived experiences. Participation and reification are not mutually exclusive or opposites and can take place together, meaning that when an abstracted idea is reified and decontextualized, this reification will then be put back into a new context through practice. Through processes of participation and reification—as meaning is continually enacted and abstracted—meaning shifts as it is negotiated by community members. The UWC’s list of valued practices is, for example, a product of reification, an abstraction of center values and encouraged practices. Tutors engage in participation when they enact these valued practices in sessions and then reify these experiences when they discuss their practices with others.
Wenger (1998) also discussed how communities of practice interact with each other through brokers and boundary objects. Brokers are practitioners that move between communities of practices—introducing elements of one into another. Boundary objects are artifacts, concepts, and other reified forms that move from one community of practice to another. Our knowledge is situated within communities of practice, which are situated within larger constellations of communities of practice, and, thus, is always negotiated between the specific experiences of members of a community of practices and the broader histories and institutions in which those communities are situated. As writing tutors are developing their values and valued practices, they are negotiating their lived experiences in and outside the writing center with the larger constellation of artifacts and infrastructure—physical and social—of writing center studies.

Although not explicitly in the realm of theories on communities of practice, Star and Ruhleder (1996) and Grabill (2007) discussion of infrastructure can assist us in conceptualizing the writing center as a community of practice. These scholars argued that infrastructure includes not just the physical elements of a system, but also the standards, people, and practices of communities. According to this understanding of infrastructure, valued practices and the values tutors hold that inform these practices are part of a particular writing center community’s infrastructure. A local writing center’s infrastructure is necessarily interconnected with the infrastructures of tutors’ other communities of practice, which may have similar or opposing values, and the larger infrastructure of writing center studies, which is built from professional activities such as writing center scholarship and conferences.

In their work on writing center administration and tutor development, writing center scholars such as Geller et al. (2007) and Hall (2011) have conceptualized writing centers
communities as communities of practice. These scholars have applied Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s theories of communities of practice to writing centers to discuss the ways in which tutors engage in mutual learning as they develop their practitioner identities as tutors of writing. According to a communities of practice framework, much of tutors’ learning comes from sharing experiences and practices through conversations with each other, both in formal tutor development settings, such as tutor training seminars, and informal settings, such as casual conversations among tutors. Geller et al. and Hall discussed how creating an environment conducive to the collaboration and negotiation of practices that Lave and Wenger emphasized in their work on communities of practice allows for tutors to develop a deeper understanding of and critical reflection toward their tutoring practices.

Many of Geller et al.’s (2007) recommendations consider how to prompt dialogue and discussion between writing center practitioners in informal settings. Conversations, Geller et al. argued, should focus not only on codified writing center studies knowledge but also on unique and difficult moments in practice during which tutors questioned or negotiated their typical tutoring practices. Instead of focusing on codifying tutoring practices, they suggested that community members engage in mutual learning by sharing experiences, perspectives, and histories in everyday, informal moments. Using the trope of the trickster, Geller et al. suggested looking to moments of chaos, uncertainty, and ambiguity—moments that are outside the realm of reified knowledge—to prompt learning. Codifying practices takes them out of context, removes practices from the singularities and contingencies of situations that give practice much of its meaning. Tricksters prompt us to renegotiate the reified, to be tacit and spontaneous, rather than predictable. Only teaching reified knowledge without prompting adaptable practice discourages
tutors from considering “on-the-ground practices [that] contradict implicit or explicit writing center ‘policy’” (p. 21) that could prompt flexible tutoring approaches. Instead, emphasizing reified knowledge affords tutors only a hollow sense of expertise that results in tutors having false competence—a false belief that they already know how to handle every writing situation. Geller et al. called for writing center directors to pay attention to interaction between participation and reification to encourage tutors to develop shared knowledge and practices but also question and flexibly adapt and revise their shared knowledge and practices.

Geller et al. also advocated for a diverse staff—members who have a wide variety of histories. Drawing on Wenger, Geller et al. noted that shared beliefs and histories and agreement are not required for communities of practice—diversity allows for production of new meanings when conflicts arise. Individual members’ histories impact what they bring to the community of practice. Geller et al. saw the past as something we flexibly reconstruct as we develop identities. They suggested we challenge experienced tutors to “get lost” (p. 56) when they practice at times to prompt revision to our conceptions of our histories and identities. Geller et al. also discussed ways of fostering a “pedagogy of becoming”—making connections between prior knowledge, both explicit and tacit, and new knowledge to disrupt certainty and show that everyone is an ongoing learner. In order to prompt conversations about learning, identity, and histories in writing center communities of practice, Geller et al. suggested “playful, creative work, work that is organic, work that grows from our writing center staffs, not work that is imposed upon them by a one-size-fits-all template” (p. 83). They presented examples from their own centers, such as tutor-made videos and journals that give tutors the freedom to write in in whatever manner they choose.
Geller et al. (2007) ended their book on writing center communities of practice by discussing the possibility of tutors explicitly taking on the role of brokers in their writing center community of practice, openly leading fellow tutors in lessons and discussions about knowledge from other communities of practice. In bringing in values, ways of knowing, and practices from other communities of practice, tutors are potentially creating moments to facilitating an explicit revision of their center’s local infrastructure.

Hall (2011) also examined dialogic reflection in tutor development and found that reflection through dialogue encouraged tutors to discuss “local knowledge generated in its particular writing center context” as well as “take up and engage—perhaps to question and maybe even dismiss—expert knowledge generated by writing center specialists” (p. 84). By focusing on reflection and negotiation grounded in dialogue, tutors engage in social learning processes during which they are prompted to draw on their histories and experiences outside of the center and on their reflections on uncertain or ambiguous situations in sessions for which the body of writing center scholarship had not prepared them. Thus, tutors are encouraged to not solely rely on writing center scholarship to form their tutoring practices, but also draw on their histories outside the center and own critical reflection. In doing so, writing centers develop their own set of local valued practices that reflect the uniqueness and diversity of their own center’s context and staff.
Results

This section analyzes the various ways that Mariam and Esther discussed interpreting and implementing the UWC’s valued practices throughout the data collection phases. Table 4 shows Mariam and Esther’s most important valued practices per their responses on the pre-interview questionnaire. Mariam and Esther shared two practices in their three most important: establish rapport and be a co-learner. Their agreement on the importance of these two practices was a prominent topic of discussion during the focus group. Additionally, Mariam chose learn assignment requirements in her three most important, and Esther chose demonstrate active listening in hers. The importance of the three valued practices that each tutor chose and their reasons for choosing them grounded much of the discussion during the individual interviews and focus group.
Table 4. Mariam’s and Esther’s Most Important Valued Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Mariam</th>
<th>Esther</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish rapport with writer.</td>
<td>Be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid role of editor and authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learn assignment requirements or rhetorical situation, including the writer’s understanding.</td>
<td>Demonstrate active listening. Avoid dominating the conversation. Make effective use of wait-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid role of editor and authority.</td>
<td>Establish rapport with writer.</td>
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In this chapter, I focus on the ways that tutors understood and interpreted the values practices, with particular attention to the experiences and resources that they drew on to explain and embody these practices. As mentioned in Chapter Two, interview and focus group transcripts were coded for instances when tutors mentioned, directly or indirectly, specific valued practices. In further examining these instances, I noticed themes in how the tutors interpreted and embodied these valued practices with regards to their prior experiences and the larger writing center community infrastructure. These themes are explored in the following sections. While this chapter does not address their discussions of UD principles in full, it is important to note that these comments about their valued practices were often made before, after, and when the tutors
were connecting the valued practices to UD principles (an activity discussed at length in the next chapter).

Mariam: Bringing Experiences Beyond the Center into Tutoring

**Impact of Personal Experiences on Practices**

Mariam mentioned that establishing rapport was her most important valued practice, emphasizing in her pre-interview questionnaire the importance for tutors to “take about 5 minutes just talking to them.” Establishing rapport allows Mariam to, as she claimed in the questionnaire, learn about writers’ “different cultural backgrounds,” languages, abilities, and struggles. Additionally, in establishing rapport, Mariam is also establishing a type of equal tutor-writer relationship. While asked about working with an unenthusiastic writer during the individual interview, Mariam discussed how she,

I guess I just kind of, you know, try to befriend them in a sense, and it's all goes back to, you know, being a co-learner and being equals and being like, “Hey, you know, yeah, sometimes professors can be kind of annoying, but let's talk about it and see why did she give you this bad, you know, bad feedback”…So, I guess just again the befriending them and taking a step back…When you get the writers that are like really eager, and it's just so easy. The session just flies by because they're so open to advice. But, and you have to with the writers that are not really that open and not really that eager, you have to kind of
just take five minutes to be like, “Hey, I'm cool too. It's fine. Let me show you what's going on.” So, and then they listen to you, so, you know, it usually works out.

Miriam’s emphasis on the importance of establishing rapport is grounded in her belief that an equal, teammate relationship between tutor and writer leads to productive learning and that this equality is prominently manifested in the ways a tutor establishes rapport.

Establishing rapport seems to be important so that Mariam can enact another one of her most important valued practices—be a co-learner. Mariam understands this valued practice of co-learning through a discussion of her own learning preferences. She prefers having a “teammate” instead of a “boss,” so she attempts to replicate this relationship in her sessions:

Again, I feel like if as like tutors, they made us be like, “Oh, you have to be like an authoritative position,” like, not a lot of students would listen to us. I think because we always are like emphasizing that tutors and students are equals, student writers are equals, I think that's a big reason why we get a lot of as much work as we've done as we can because, you know, I don't know. Personally, I don't like when someone is, you know, like beating down on me and telling me what to do over and over and over again. And I think when it's just like someone like, “Hey, I'm just like you, and we're collaborating,” and I think that's just so much more effective at getting work done, and I think it's a method that works with everyone. Like I think everyone is so much more open to that kind of method of just having like a teammate instead of having like a boss. You know what I mean? It's something like that. So that's why I think it's just, I don't know, like a method that's renowned and can be used with everyone.
Mariam experience as a learner colors the way she imagines the ideal tutor-writer relationship and how she implements being a co-learner in her sessions. The work of writing center work—learning—will not get done, according to Mariam, if co-learnership is not established and maintained, so tutors need to be flexible to establish and maintain this co-learnership.

Just as Mariam’s belief about the tutor-writer relationship impacts her goals when establishing rapport (present herself as teammate), Mariam’s personal experiences as a writer also impact what she tries to learn about writers when establishing rapport. In discussing the valued practice learn about writer’s processes, Mariam reflected on her own writing processes and the ways her writing processes deviate from “typical” writing processes traditionally taught in the writing classroom (e.g., making an outline and then a rough draft):

So okay, so when it says writers’ processes, I've learned that everyone writes differently, like everyone has a different writing process. For me it's like I have to feel it in that moment and whatever happens on the paper happens. Like, I'm not really, like, a rough-drafter or like a pre-planner, an outliner, it just comes out on the paper, I'll usually like revise and edit that, and then whatever. But not everyone writes that way, and so I guess as a tutor, I had to be flexible and kind of figure out in those moments that I’m building rapport and getting to know them, like, early on in the session what are their writing processes. And, you know, and then in that way accommodate them based off of that, like, “Okay, do you need an outline? Let's create an outline,” or, “Oh, do you just want to take, like, five minutes to write? Okay, I'll go to the bathroom really quick. You write out your ideas. I'll be right back.”
Through this reflection on how her writing processes deviate from others’, Mariam acknowledges the diverse array of writing processes that writers have coming into the center. Thus, Mariam concludes that establishing rapport is important to learn about writers’ writing processes. Ultimately, Mariam relates her own writing processes to others’ to better understand how to flexibly accommodate writers’ diverse writing practices. So, Mariam’s experiences as a learner/student and values about instructor/tutor-student/writer relationship informs how she presents herself while establishing rapport. And her experiences as a writer (not being “a rough-drafter or like a pre-planner, an outliner”) impact what she tries to learn about writers when establishing rapport. Through her reflection, we see that Mariam’s experiences learning and writing outside of the center have an evident impact on her tutoring practices.

*Impact of Past Sessions on Practices*

In addition to her experiences as a student outside the center, Mariam might also emphasize this practice of establishing rapport in her tutoring because of her past experiences in the center as a tutor. During the first sessions she co-tutored as a new tutor, she and her co-tutor did not take time to establish rapport, and the session initially went poorly:

> It was my first time ever co-tutoring. Um, it was like my third day at the writing center. And so we sat down. It was me, Mary [experienced co-tutor], and this other girl who was a freshman, [first semester of first-year writing]. She was just doing some standard paper that, they have like four assignments they do throughout the semester, and she was just doing like the first one. And we did not establish rapport at all. Mary just jumped right
into the assignment. It was Friday, like six o'clock. She wanted to go home. I wanted to go home. So, she really just did not take any time to. But also, I was a newbie, so in retrospect, I wasn't really going to question her and be like, “Hey should we establish rapport?” So, I kind of was just like, “She knows what she's doing whatever happens, happens.” And Mary was just like, “Oh, so let's see the paper. Let's see the assignment.” And she pulled up the assignment, and she was like, “This is not right,” like she was like, just basically she started hounding the freshman girl with questions after question after question. I'm sitting there. I'm not saying anything. And so, she has two people who are older than her, more experienced than her were just like, you know, it was literally like the authority versus editor, you know, kind of role displacement. And I guess, like, it was just not clicking, and this girl starts crying.

This memory stayed with Mariam and was very impactful—she clearly recalls the stress of being in this situation:

Yeah, and I was freaking out. And I was like, “Oh my God,” and then I just see in the corner of my eye [assistant writing center director] walk by. And I'm like, “Oh, everything’s falling into place. This is perfect. My first session and [assistant writing center director] sees that me and Mary are making a girl cry.”

This early session had an impact on how Mariam reads, prioritizes, and enacts the valued practice of establishing rapport. It is fundamental to her practice because one of her earliest tutoring experiences demonstrated the value of establishing rapport by showing what could happen when rapport is not established. It is not only experiences outside the center, but,
obviously, experiences in the center that impact how Mariam understand and implements valued practices.

_Lamination of Experiences Within and Outside the Center_

With regards to experiences outside the center, Mariam also pulls from experiences seemingly disparate from writing center work and laminates them with experiences from within the center in a way that impacts her valued tutoring practices. Mariam relied on her experience as an older sister in the stressful moment in the session described above. Mariam was a new tutor during this experience. Because of/despite this, she draws on her experiences as a sister to handle the situation:

And so, I at the time. My sister was also a freshman, and it was her first year at UCF. So, I really already felt like, you know, some kind of sisterly, I guess, bond to this girl, and I was like, “You know what, I'm going to take off my writing tutor hat for a second and put on my therapist hat.” And I was like, “Hey, so it's like college sucks, doesn't it?” And I was like, I was like, “You must feel like really stressed out, and you don't know what the hell's going on, and you miss your family,” and I just really was like, you know, and she calmed down. And she like, stopped crying, we got her a tissue box. And she was like, “Yeah, I'm, like, so stressed out. Like, this is my first assignment. I don't know what I'm doing, and I really feel like I was doing it wrong already, and you guys just confirmed that” and all this stuff. And I was like, “Hey, let's just take a second. You know, go
ahead, finish, finish your crying. And then we can go back, and we can try to make it better.”

Although Mariam created a distinction between her work as a tutor (“my writing tutor hat”) and helping someone work through emotions or stress (“my therapist hat”), she acknowledged that the emotions and stress of writers impact the work that happens in a writing center session, circling back to the importance of establishing rapport of uncovering writers’ emotional states and adjusting her work as a tutor accordingly:

But I feel like had we asked her in the beginning and been like, “Hey, what's up,” she would have been like, “Yeah, I'm really stressed,” we would have been like, “Hey, it's cool. You know, like, it's whatever, we'll figure that out together.” But we didn't, and we just got right into it. And so, we already built up on the stress that she had, and she just cracked.

This was not the only time Mariam discussed bringing in experiences from her family life to her tutoring approach. She also discussed her experiences with listening to her mom’s accent: “My mom is an immigrant, so I'm used to, you know, people having an accent and being able to, you know, pick up on what words should sound like.” She then connects this experience to writing tutor advice from the former writing center director, tying together family experience and tutoring knowledge: “So, you know how he [former writing center director] talks about having, like, an open ear and, like, just being able to, like, adjust your ear to when you are speaking to someone with an accent.” Finally, she relates her personal experience and the former director’s advice to her work in sessions as a tutor:
I do that all the time when I'm speaking with a multilingual writer who, you know, doesn't speak Spanish, just because I'm used to hearing my mom have an accent, so it honestly, it has helped me so much when I tutor, being able to figure out what they're saying.

These layers of personal experience (experience listening to her mom, experience of receiving advice on listening from the former director, and experience working with multilingual writers in sessions) impact how Mariam understands “wait time” as it is written in the valued practices:

And then also wait time is a big factor in those kind of sessions too, like, give them a second because they're thinking primarily in their native tongue, but they're also trying to think in English as well because they're learning it, so that also takes some time.

Roozen and Erickson (2017) argued that disciplinary and literacy development involves a coming to together of identities and practices from across various lifeworlds or domains of life. Similarly, Prior (1998), Leander (2001, 2002), Prior and Shipka (2003), Prior and Schaffner (2011), Roozen et al. (2015), Roozen (2020) studied how previous experiences across domains of life become laminated—"coordinated and juxtaposed”—in new situations to “serve as resources for discursive action and self-positioning” (Roozen, 2020, p. 4). Here we see Mariam drawing on experiences across her domains of life in forming her tutoring practices—pulling on practices and identities from seemingly disparate social contexts and physical sites. These past experiences inside and outside the writing center are being laminated to form tutoring practices with multilingual writers.

Above Mariam discussed how she empathized with the writer keeping in mind her prior experiences at home and in the writing center. Additionally, she tries to relate multilingual
writers’ experiences of learning a new word or concept to her experiences learning something new:

And then I also do this thing where I'm thinking, I go back, and I'm like think to a time where I didn't know what this meant, like, I'm like, what, how would I try to figure out what this word, if I had no idea what it meant? And I try to put myself in their shoes for a second.

Mariam then went on to mention that this empathizing exercise also helps her understand the importance of wait time in sessions. Mariam better understands the purpose of wait time since she is able to draw on her personal experiences of listening to her mom and learning something new to understand why multilingual writers may need wait time when encountering an unfamiliar English word. Thus, wait time is an important part of her practice. Her prior learning experiences inform her implementation of wait time, just as they inform the way she imagines the ideal tutor-writer relationship and how she implements establishing rapport and being a co-learner in her sessions. The examples in this section illustrate how prior experiences both inside and outside the center, though in Mariam’s case, frequently outside the center, inform her ways of reading and enacting valued practices.
Esther: How Experiences in Sessions and Tutor Training Shape Tutoring

Impact of Personal Experiences on Practices

Like Mariam, Esther also discussed personal learning preferences influencing her tutoring practices in her individual interview:

I am visual, so I, if I am talking about a metaphor with, you know, a writer, then I'll say, like I did this recently. So, like, I'm like, “hand in hand.” I want to have something hand and it goes in hand. [does motion with hands]

Esther uses her gestures to visualize metaphors during sessions, a habit she picked up because she learns material well visually.

Impact of Tutor Training on Practices

Tutor training also obviously influences how tutors read valued practices. Esther used the term “storehouse” from tutor training, applying this term to make sense what “avoid role of editor and authority” means in the valued practice be a co-learner:

And avoiding the role of editor and authority. So yes, at all times we want to avoid, we are we are peers. We are not here to lecture. We are not a storehouse. We are here to collaborate with our writers.

Here Esther understands avoiding the role of editor and authority to mean avoiding being a “storehouse” of information, an idea that comes up in the center’s tutor training. Esther gives a more in-depth understanding of this valued practice, contrasting a tutor’s role as “peer” with a
more authoritative position that is sometimes necessary for the tutor to assume in the collaborative tutor-writer relationship:

However, sometimes we have to make the decision to either say, “Okay, let's move on.” We do have to have some sort of, I don't want to say power because it kind of is a different connotation than what I mean by, but some sort of power to be able to move this session along because we do only have 45 minutes, and it's our responsibility to continue moving along to make sure we can get as much work done. And so, there's a flexibility in, um, you know, being able to make those decisions.

For Esther, being a co-learner means not being a storehouse. However, Esther acknowledges that in being a tutor who is a co-learner, she at times might have to step into a more authoritative position than a strictly equal peer.

**Impact of Past Sessions on Practices**

Esther reads/sees flexibility built into these valued practices. Based on her reflections throughout the study, Esther seems to use her experiences from prior sessions to think through the flexibility of the valued practices. In particular, avoiding the role of authority is a flexible practice for Esther, not an absolute one. This approach to this valued practice impacts how she enacts her identity as a tutor in terms of the level of authority she takes on:

We had a writer who came in, and he expressed to us that he had ADHD and Asperger's. Um, so, with that in mind, so he expressed that to us. So, with that in mind, there were some, you know, moves that we had to make to give the writer what he needed. Um, you
know, sometimes a writer will come to us expressing, like, certain needs or disabilities that we have to be mindful of. So, we knew that we would have to be the ones, kind of a little bit more in that authoritative role because that's what the writer needed.

In this case, the writer’s cognitive disabilities called for an adjustment to the aspect of the be a co-learner valued practice that asks tutors to avoid the role of authority. Indeed, what prompted this research in the first place was the argument that this list of valued practices assumes an abled bodied tutor and writer. The list of valued practices suggests a certain ideal tutor-writer relationship and writing center session. For those with learning abilities outside what is traditionally classified as “normal,” their ways of learning may not be imagined in what the valued practices suggest a session should look like. This is what Esther found in the example she discussed above—avoiding the role of authority was not productive for the writer’s learning.

Because she views the valued practices as flexible, Esther saw no issue with deviating from these practices and taking a more authoritative role as she saw fit.

Along these same lines, Esther flexibly implements the valued practice of allowing for wait time in this session:

And we also had to be aware of wait time and when wait time started to become ineffective because there was some point where we asked the writer to perform a task—we asked him to go back into it was like an article to go back, take out evidence, and put it in this outline we created together. And we realized that either the time we gave him, he still needed our help, um, because he was getting stuck, so we realized that we did have to go back and do it with him and become more of that authoritative role, but again, because that was what we believed the writer needed in this session.
Esther realizes the obvious point that more wait time is not always productive and adapted accordingly, balancing allowing the writer to think through and work on tasks with taking control of the session to ensure the writer was productive and engaged.

While we do not know from this study whether Esther had this nuanced, flexible view of this valued practice discussing authority and wait time when she started as a tutor or if her view of this practice became more nuanced over time as she encountered writers of various abilities, Esther provides nuance, depth, and “ambiguity” to her view of what authority looks like in a writing center session. Authority on the part of the tutor cannot be entirely avoided because, particularly with Zoom, it’s built into the structure of the technology facilitating the session:

As a tutor in Zoom, you are given him a sort of authoritative role that maybe wasn’t there before. Um, and it’s very slight. It’s very slight. Because you are the one controlling the environment, you are the one controlling the room. You are the one that gives them permission to share their screen or not. Um, you can stop sharing their screen if you want. If you want to share your own screen, you can stop that. You have the ability to annotate. So, there's this like type of authority that you do get with Zoom. So, this value practice is, you know, because it's not changing in environment. It is reminding us as consultants that you do, you, like, you, even though you have this kind of power now, you have a little bit more control the session, you, in terms of content, you are still a co-learner, you're still collaborating with them. It's just that you have the control over the environment, but that shouldn't affect how you do your sessions.

So, if, as Esther believes, tutors are pushed into a position of authority by default, perhaps, this valued practice of avoiding the role of authority is a way of communicating with tutors to, at
times, minimize ("keep in check") the innate authority that they have in the session. Esther has identified times when tutors exercising their authority can be productive, but she also seems to suggest that a tutor’s authority should not undermine the fundamentally co-learner relationship between tutor and writer:

Again, we don't, like we aren't the authority. We are not, like, I know you're not the authority. We don't have, you know, we are not the same power as a teacher. But, to a certain extent, we do have a level, a degree of power in a session. So, it's important that we keep it in check. And I think active listening in, you know, explicitly stating “demonstrate active listening,” I think, like, effectively keeps us in check by having it just stated out like that.

Like Mariam, the relationship between tutor and writer is important to Esther, and it is fundamentally a co-learning relationship. According to Esther, occasionally, more authority is called for during a session, such as when she was working with the writer with ADHD and Asperger’s. Otherwise, Esther suggests that the tutor being authoritative is a “slip”:

Some sessions, you know, as a tutor, I might slip a little bit, and I might go back into the role of editor or authority, but the way this is written, if I was, if I'm being a co-learner, there's not going to be a ton of error in their learning.

Esther seems to suggest that tutors innately have authority and should, most of the time, attempt to minimize it. This nuanced interpretation of this valued practice comes from Esther’s understanding of valued practices as flexible.

Digging further into the nuances of the writer-tutor relationship, Esther uses other identity labels with she is familiar from outside the writing center (“peers,” “friends”) to
construct their identity as a tutor in the center: “We don't have to be like, we can talk to our peers like they’re peers, like they would be, you know, our friends, to a certain extent, you know, all within good reason.” A tutor-writer relationship that is both nuanced and flexible implies a dynamic quality to the relationship. The tutor and writer are peers and friends; the tutor should avoid an authoritative role, unless it is necessary to move a session along or assist a struggling writer. Again, Esther’s experience as a tutor seems to have led her to a sophisticated understanding of the tutor-writer relationship.

When asked about revising valued practice discussing being a co-learner, Esther crafted a revision that involving a positive construction of the relationship (what a tutor is), rather than emphasizing a negative definition of what the relationship is not:

So, avoid role of editor and maybe we could flip it on its head and focus on like being a peer instead of like an authority. Instead of avoid authority, say, and remember your role as peer, remember they are your peer, or keep in mind that they are your peer, something like that.

I wonder if, for Esther, this positive, rather than negative, construction allows for more flexibility in the tutor’s position in the tutor-writer relationship—in essence, a more intricate construction of the identity of “tutor.”

There were other instances where it is evident how Esther sees “ambiguity” built into the valued practices. She claimed that for her the most ambiguous valued practice is establish rapport:

Each person is different. Establishing rapport is probably, in my opinion, one of the most ambiguous, um, you know, valued practices that we have because it can literally look like
anything. It could look like anything. It could be, you know, relating to the topic. It could be relating on, you know, like, a different level like you have the same major, but it's not, you know, you could if they mentioned they went out of state, and, you know, you can be like, “Oh, I'm also from out of state.” So, there's like a lot of different ways that this can look like, and also tutors will approach it in different ways. Um, you know, again, the way I establish rapport, I like to ask questions. I like to get to know them, but for some tutors that might not be the way that they go about it. That might not be the way they relate to. So, it's really whatever that consultant wants or, you know, feels like is the best for them.

As Esther continued to talk about establishing rapport with the writer, she, similar to how Mariam discussed prior experiences affecting how she understands and implements the valued practices, indicated how previous experiences in sessions might have cultivated her flexible reading of this valued practice. Esther discussed how even when the tutor and writer have nothing in common, strong rapport can still be established simply by both parties being invested in the task at hand:

She just was really like engaged with the writing, really knew her style, and knew exactly what she wanted to talk about. Obviously not every writer’s like that, but because she was so engaged, we were connecting on wanting to work on this writing, and I think that was the rapport. We both really were engaged. We were really excited about writing, so it doesn't have to be super specific.

This seems to be a more sophisticated understanding of rapport than the approach of “ask them how their day is going and what their major is” that many tutors use to establish rapport. It is
possible that as Esther gained more experience tutoring, she was able to construct more intricate significance for this valued practice, understanding what is truly important about establishing rapport (showing a mutual interest in a common goal, rather than acknowledging potentially superficial characteristics about the writer). To investigate this further, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study of how tutors understand the valued practices over a year or two, starting when they first begin working in a writing center.

Lamination of Experiences Within and Outside the Center

In addition to the possibility that moments sessions allowing Esther to develop deeper understandings of the valued practices, the manner in which Esther understands her knowledge and experiences from outside the center in light of what she has learned in tutor training also helped Esther gain more intricate understandings of the valued practices. Earlier, we saw how concepts from tutor training impact how Esther read “avoid role of editor and authority.” For Esther, tutor training class gave apparently intuitive things more meaning. Esther initially thought wait time was a pretty intuitive concept. As she said, “It's one of those things, like, we all know what wait time was.” However, “it wasn't until [former writing center director] in the class was like, ‘This is what wait time is, and this is what it's used for’” that she realized the full extent of its pedagogical utility.

The tutor training course did little to deepen her understanding of other concepts from the valued practices that Esther felt were more intuitive given her prior experiences. For example, Esther felt that “active listening is something I think that you learn in, like, primary school. So
again, I think that one's pretty straightforward.” Later in the interview, Esther mentioned how the active listening required in a writing center session was different than the active listening she was told to practice previously as a student:

Listening and active listening is something that you do learn as, you know, a kid in school. At least I that's, that was my experience that we learn about, you know, turning our ears on, listening to the teacher when you're supposed to. And it's kind of interesting that it's like, you know, flipped this time, like you are the tutor, but you have to continuously be listening. So, I think, you know, that simplistic word of demonstrate active listening, like, it does effectively communicate because we've been told this pretty much all of our, like, academic careers.

As opposed to using active listening as a student in order to show a teacher that you have understood a set of directions, tutors use active listening in a more sophisticated way to learn about the writer’s understanding of the task at hand and to encourage the writer to utilize conversational space to develop their ideas. Yet, for Esther, the practice of active listening is easily transferred from one context, being a student, to another, being a tutor. In this case, Esther understanding of this element of the valued practice—demonstrate active listening—is more so influenced by her broader history as a student in school than as a student in the tutor training course.

Still, tutor training is part of the social infrastructure of the writing center that impacts how tutors read and implement valued practices. Beyond the syllabus, assignments, and lesson plans, peer-to-peer dialogue that is part of the tutor training course also gives meaning to the valued practices. As Esther recalls, “When we first got these principles or we first were taught it,
given it to us in the class, we did have to take time, like in groups to kind of break down what each one means.” The nature and significance of this peer-to-peer dialogue in early tutoring training is worthy of investigation in another study. Though not taken from early, or even formal, tutor training, the next section examines peer-to-peer dialogue at the end of this study between Mariam and Esther to better understand how dialogic reflection impacts how tutors make sense of valued practices.

**Focus Group: Center Infrastructure and Practice Formation**

In the previous two sections, we saw that throughout the course of the semester during which data collection took place, Mariam and Esther articulated and developed their interpretations of and attitudes towards implementing the valued practices. Although there were many similarities between how Mariam and Esther interpret and implement the valued practices, we see slight differences in their dispositions towards the valued practices as well. Esther emphasized flexibility in her reading and implementation of the valued practices more so than we heard from Mariam. We heard Mariam draw more from her experiences outside the center to make sense of these practices and her roles as a tutor. This is not to say that Mariam did not see the valued practices a flexible or that Esther did not draw on her experiences outside the center to construct her tutoring practices. What we see is that when asked to reflect on the valued practices, there were slight difference in what the participants emphasized in their reflections. The fact that tutors’ reflections on valued practices vary is no surprise in and of itself. While the previous sections gave us insight into what tutor reflections of valued practices, this section will
show what happens when the tutors, with their unique attitudes towards the valued practices that were explored and developed in this study, dialogue with each other about the valued practices. More than simply a sharing of perspectives that in some regards overlap and in other regards differ, from this dialogue we see continued development of tutor reflection and generation of insight that neither tutor produced on their own. This section will present key reflective moments from the focus group with Mariam and Esther, during which I asked about points of similarity and difference from their interviews and writing prompts, and discuss the new reflection and insights that emerged from this dialogue.

**Impact of Context on Values Tutors See in Documents**

LeCluyse (2013) and Hall (2017) have discussed how writing center documents are imbued with values and beliefs about writing and writing pedagogy. This is certainly the case with a list of valued practices. Importantly, like any document, the context in which tutors read and use this document impacts how tutors make meaning and understand the values transmitted in the document, as we saw when Esther used something she learned in tutor training—that a tutor is not a “storehouse”—to understand what “avoid role of authority” meant in the valued practices. In the focus group, Mariam and Esther further discussed contextual factors that impacted how they saw themselves and their peers build relationships with the list of valued practices. As we see the importance of the context around this document of valued practices, we will see that trying to understand how tutors make meaning, internalize, and put into practice these valued practices apart from understanding the context of the document containing these
practices will give us a shallow, at best, and sorely misinformed, at worst, understanding of how tutors make sense of this document.

The authorial ethos that a reader derives from a text is in part dependent on the reader’s prior experiences and relationship, if any, with the text’s author. This is certainly the case with the list of valued practices. Mariam’s and Esther’s reading of the list of valued practices was colored by their previous knowledge of and professional and educational relationship with the director who presented the list of valued practice. Hall (2011) noted that his pedagogical choice in designing his tutor training course shaped the dialogic reflection in which tutors engaged in his center’s reflective activities. Similarly, a director’s choices in designing a valued practice document shaped how the tutors understood, applied, and talked about these valued practices. In fact, the ethos of the director who presented the document, and who the tutors perceived as having written the document, remained in the document after he was no longer the director of the center. Even though the former director created this list with a group of tutors (Hall, 2017), Mariam and Esther were not aware of this fact and discussed the list of valued practices as if he were the sole author.

Mariam: They’re very [former writing center director]-y. You know what I mean? Like, I can feel him in them.

Esther: And his presence.

While all texts are the site of negotiated meaning-making experiences, it seems that the author of the list of valued practices has, for better or worse, a particularly heavy hand in the meaning making process, since tutors, in this case, read a specific individual’s presence in(to) the document.
In her individual interview, Esther brought up how a concept from tutor training, the “storehouse” model, influenced how she read the valued practices. Mariam did not talk about tutor training or development in relation to her understanding of the valued practices during her individual interview. Yet, when Esther brought up tutor training in relation to the valued practices again in the focus group, Mariam latched on to this idea. Throughout the focus group, Mariam discussed how her experiences in tutor training and development caused her to look at the valued practices a certain way and how the reflection she did during this study and in the tutor development seminar taught by the center’s new director during the same semester as this study had shifted her perspective. Possibly due to the tutor development curriculum or the directors’ different personas, Mariam felt that under the old director, the valued practices were inflexible:

I felt like nothing could be changed, and but with [current writing center director], it feels like different. It feels like that there is the room for change, and there is the room for evolution, and there is, like, things that can be improved and changed for the better. And she's allowing us that opportunity, whereas with [former writing center director] that was not even a thought, not even a discussion…And yeah, I definitely think the valued practices should be changed, and that's only a thought that I was having recently because of seminar this semester. Never have I even fathomed that until she was the one who actually, like, was bringing it up. And also, you were bringing it up as well. And I was, like, true, like, why are we even, like, sticking to these rules? Like, at a certain point you have to break the rules. The rebel in me.
To say that tutors’ perceptions of the director’s, or whoever presents the valued practices, values, beliefs, and persona impacts how they read these valued practices, such as how flexible they perceive the practices being, is a true, at least in the case of Mariam and Esther, but general statement. More specifically, Mariam mentioned how the former director’s potential administrative and research interests influenced how she understood and put into practice the valued practice write detailed session notes. Mariam did not think that this valued practice was very important, that it should even be a valued practice, because, given the way in which session notes were taught in conjunction to director’s research interest, she does not see, in their current form, them being valuable to the writer’s learning:

When we were taught session notes, they were like, write the first two sentences of what the assignment was, like what class was it for, what did you guys do in the session. And I'm like, the student doesn't care for any of that information. They lived it with me an hour ago. And that's why, that's why they don't read it because it's literally, like, redundant, and, and I remember asking [former writing center director] like, “Why do I have to write this in the first two sentences?” And he was like, “Oh, that's for me and [the assistant director] to, like, analyze or something.” And I was like, oh, cool, but it's an email that I'm sending to them. You know what I mean?

When being taught how to write session notes in tutor training, Mariam was being taught how to enact the valued practice on writing session notes. In enquiring further into the reason for the format of session notes, she uncovered that the directors’ research interest informed how the writing of session notes was taught and, ultimately, how the valued practice dealing with session notes was taken up by tutors.
More important than the director’s persona in how the tutors read and enacted valued practices seemed to be the purpose of the valued practices within the center’s tutor development activities. The fact that the list of valued practices is used as a tool to evaluate tutor performance during session observations, and that the list is structure and presented in light of this activity had a significant impact on how tutors made meaning of the list. As Esther said,

It's, they're flexible, and they can be used like different ways, but I think, though, maybe it's the way they're presented as they’re 20 valued practices. It's a list. Maybe it's the way that they're presented that, like, I end up pretty much, I don't want to generalize, I don’t know, but the majority of tutors see them as rules. I totally agree with that, like, and I think it's, like, the way that maybe we're taught them that they're presented, how they’re used to grade our observations. They used to observe us and have the 20 value practices, like, with them. And so, they would, like, check it off. So, I think just the way that they've been used has really made them feel like rules. And I think on their own when you just read, like, one, like, I'm just, I'm looking at it like right now, just, like, establish rapport with the writer or address writer’s concerns. Those are really flexible for every tutor, but we feel like, oh my God, I have to, like, say hi to them, say, “How are you?” “How's finals?” And then I have to address their concerns, but I also have to focus on global and local, so, like, I think it's just how they're presented.

Esther noted that the fact that the valued practices are presented in this form as a list (following a vague chronological structure for a session) with boxes for directors to assess tutor implementation of the practices makes her question her attitude of flexibility toward the valued practices. While during her individual interview, she discussed the large degree of flexibility saw
in each practice, when prompted to view the list more holistically after hearing Mariam’s perspective in the focus group, she was reminded of how the list is used in observations and how that makes her, and she believes likely other tutors, approach the valued practices as steps or rules, rather than flexible guidelines.

In response to this, Mariam differentiates what she sees as the two purposes of the list of valued practices: a training tool used to evaluate tutors while observing sessions and a document that codifies the center’s principles when it comes to tutoring. Mariam and Esther both agree that the list of valued practices was repetitive in some places. In discussing why they felt this is the case, Mariam said,

Also, another thing that I wanted to add is that the value practices essentially were a training tool, and that's why some of them are repeated because I feel like [former writing center director] was like this needs to stay in their brain, and they need to know that they need to do this, and it's important, so I'm going to write it, like, three times, so hopefully they grasp onto it.

Mariam then went on to differentiate the repetition of important practices in a training tool from a document that outlines principles of tutoring writing:

So, it's not so much, like, our principles, per se, like, what we hold close to us in the writing center, like, what we think is most important to do in every session. It's, I really honestly and again, yeah, it definitely was a training tool because that's what they would use to grade us when they would observe us. So, and they would literally be, like, different, like, notations like not present or present and not seen or some stuff like that.
Mariam’s seems to be posing an interesting question: Can (or should) a single document serve as both a training tool for tutor observations and a codification of center principles? Broadly speaking, how many purposes can a single document serve? Ultimately, Mariam believed that a training-tool document should be separate from a center’s principles document (which Mariam does not believe is entirely necessary):

And, so yeah, I think that there should be a different set, like, okay this is what you should be doing it every session. This is what we're using to train you. But principle-wise this is what you should be keeping in mind. And then also, again, there should maybe be, like, a separate list. Not even a list just the mental list like, hey, this is common sense. Do this, so.

Esther did not respond directly to the idea of two separate documents for tutor evaluation and principle articulation. She brought the conversation back to the presentation of the valued practices in their current document. Esther sees valuable ideas in the document but expressed concerned about “the manner in which it was presented” that she felt “really trips people up,” causing them to treat the practices as a list of rules, rather than guidelines that articulate “worthwhile” ideas for tutoring writing. Esther’s insight on the connection between the presentation of the valued practices and how tutors take up and implement these practices prompted Mariam to remember seeing how the close association between the list of valued practice and observation significantly impacts how tutors interact with the document:

Yeah, I agree with you. The manner that it was presented was also something that really, like, traumatized I guess because I can literally remember, like, seeing my other, like, tutors in the break room, like, just staring at it before they would get observed, like,
trying to remember to do every single thing on the list, and I'm just like, what if, like, there's not an opportunity for you to say, “I don't know” in the session because you actually knew everything that you were talking about, so you never say the words “I don't know.”

For Mariam, like for Esther, this disposition towards the valued practices goes back to when the document was first introduced to tutors. Mariam continued by discussing how she saw the director’s framing of the valued practices impacting the current new tutors’ attitudes towards the valued practices:

So, I agree, and I think that's also why [current writing center director] was having such a big problem with the newbies because of the way that she presented it. They were like, oh, we have to do this every single session, like, and I remember the newbies being like, “Why didn't you do valued practice, like, five?” And I'm like, “What are you talking about?” Yeah. You need to chill. It's fine.

When some of the new tutors observed one of Mariam’s session, there questions for her pertained to why certain practices were not present in the session. While Mariam believed that were concerned about the execution of every practice in a session, she did not share this concern. Again, this misplaced focus in their attention while observing her session ultimately, for Mariam, is a product of how the list of valued practices was framed in tutor training.

Above, Mariam and Esther discussed how the perceived flexibility of the valued practices is impacted by the presentation of the list of valued practices—particularly the initial presentation of the list in tutor training. Mariam tends to see the practices are not being very flexible, in large part due to the persona of the director who she believed was the author of the
valued practices. Esther discussed the valued practices as fairly flexible in her individual interview but during the focus group began considering how their presentation might make tutors perceive them as inflexible. Her insight about the presentation of the valued practices prompts Mariam to further examine why she perceives them as inflexible in relation to their purpose to evaluate tutors during observations. Now, we leave the initial presentation of the valued practices in tutor training and explore how experience in sessions deepens tutors’ understanding of the valued practices.

*Continued Lamination of Tutors’ Experiences in the Center*

Although the initial presentation of the valued practices has a lasting impact on Mariam’s and Esther’s perceptions of them, it is evident from their discussion of the valued practices that experiences in sessions, in observing sessions, and in reflecting on their tutoring and their observations gives more depth to their understanding of the practices.

This may seem self-evident, but as tutors applied valued practices in their sessions, they developed a deeper sense of the significance of the valued practices. When discussing the importance of the valued practice learn assignment requirements, tutors recalled moments from sessions that demonstrated the importance of this practice, particularly asking to see the writer’s assignment prompt. Mariam remembered sessions during which the writers tell her, “I just want you to look at grammar,” and while reading their writing, she recalled, “remembering the rubric in my head, I see that they did something wrong.” These moments prompt her to shift the focus
of the session to “not focus on grammar because this assignment is just completely horrible.”

Esther agreed:

But you're so right because I've had, yeah, like, when you look at the rubric and then they're like, “Oh, just check my grammar,” and then you go, and you're like, they're missing so much, like, there's so much missing.

For Mariam and Esther, the significance of this valued practice of learning the assignment requirements is related to the experience of having a writer wanting to address surface-level concerns without realizing that they did not sufficiently address the assignment prompt. In other words, a particular type of interaction with writers in sessions allowed the tutors to more deeply understand the value in the practice.

Observations were another avenue discussed by the tutors, particularly Mariam, that allowed them to see the valued practices in action and develop a deeper understanding of what they could, and should, look like in practice. Mariam described an observation she did of one of Esther’s sessions and saw how well Esther established rapport, which makes her think about her own practices:

I was just saying that, like, yeah, building rapport. Again, it's, like, also a major thing, and even in observing some of Esther’s sessions, Esther does it really well, like, she always comes in with, like, a smile on her face, a bright attitude, and I think that it kind of just, like, eases the tension. Sometimes I struggle with building rapport because I'm very straightforward. I'm like, “Oh, hey, what's up? You’re sophomore, cool. Let's start working” because I just want to, like, help them.
In discussing how she observed Esther establishing rapport, Mariam articulated a deeper understanding of what establishing rapport should look like in practice and compared this understanding to her own practice. Mariam acknowledged that establishing rapport is more than polite formalities; it can be a way to establish a certain tenor for the session if done well. Importantly, reflection on observations and one’s own tutoring is key to giving the valued practices such deeper meanings. After commenting on Esther’s effectiveness in establishing rapport, Mariam pictured her own rapport establishing practices, which she found lacking. She then went on to narrate what the reflection she just did—remembering Esther’s session, identifying what went well, imagining her own practices relative to Esther’s, and then articulating what she could improve on:

But I definitely think of that, yeah, like, yeah, and also how Esther was saying that, like, just, you know, watching yourself tutor, like, in the back of your head, like, teaches you things, like, seeing right me right now, like, talking about is like making me realize oh shit, I should have done that.

As Okawa et al. (1991), Bell (2001), Smith (2005), Mattison (2007), Hall (2011), and Pigliacelli (2019) have pointed out, reflection, even if it is not through observation, is valuable to tutor development. Later in the focus group, the participants both expressed the growth they derived from the semi-regular reflections they did for this study. As Mariam said, the reflections “helped me evolve and learn as a tutor from my own practices.”

As we have discussed so far, the initial presentation and framing of the valued practices impacts tutors’ relationship and uptake of these practices. Not only how the practices are physically displayed on the page, but how they are situated within and articulated with relation to
the work of the center, are important to how tutors approach these practices. Particularly, who
does this presentation and framing (e.g., a director) and what tutors know about the motives (e.g.,
administrative and research interests) of this agent is important. Experience in sessions and with
observations, and reflection on these experiences, gives them access to community-shared
experiential knowledge that allows them to engage in deeper discussions of valued practices. Of
course, this deeper understanding of valued practices is aided by all the activity that happens in
the writing center community alongside practice. For example, tutor development activities can
prompt reflection and deeper engagement with valued practices.

According to Esther, valued practices should be easy to read and understand for tutors. During their individual interviews, both tutors admitted when discussing the concept of
“rhetorical informant” that they did not have a strong understanding of the term “rhetorical.”
Esther talks about how she came to understand this term through discussion of grammar
conventions in tutor seminar. This has allowed her to better understand her role as a “rhetorical
informant” and implement this valued practice in her sessions:

I think I got it now, but like, I think I only got it, like, in maybe the past year, um,
because of the writing center. Um, so, I kind of see this as, like, I, talking about like
conventions and talking about the effects that they have. So, like bringing to light, and I
think this is kind of what I, like, learned this year from seminar, like when we talked
about grammar and stuff, how you really, you know, when you talk about grammar and
the writing center, you talk about the choices and the effects they make, so recently, I've
been doing in my sessions is like, “Okay, you have a comma here, but it could be this,
this, or this,” you know? “And this is the effect it has on it,” and then I'll give them, like,
a demonstration. And so, I think that's what, like, a rhetorical informant is, like, letting the writer know what effects that their writing has on you as a reader.

On one level, we can learn from this that it is important to not assume that tutors have strong understandings of what terms like “rhetorical” mean. On another level, even if tutors are given a definition of “rhetoric,” knowing what it means to be a “rhetorical informant” is not at all an easy or intuitive step from knowing the definition of “rhetoric.” Esther did not learn a definition of “rhetoric” and then from there, work out her understanding of her role as a rhetorical informant. Rather, she learned how to inform students about the rhetorical effects of their grammar choices and from there came to an understanding of what “rhetorical informant” meant.

What this suggests is that perhaps there is more interpretive room on the tutor’s side when it comes to valued practice than we might assume. There is a lot of room for tutors to make sense of these valued practices with their knowledge, experience, and values from both inside and outside the center, of which we should be mindful. In discussing what “rhetoric” means, Mariam noted that this somewhat ambiguous term leaves, for better or worse, a lot of interpretive room in the valued practices:

My point is I think that also, like, again, the valued practices in general is what I'm trying to say is that they're very open to interpretation. Like, I really was just, like, you know, rhetoric means something to Esther than it means something different to me to than [another tutor] or any person in the writing center.

The process of tutor sense-making of valued practices—the potential wide variety of ways tutors come to understand valued practices—could be further studied.
Interestingly, Esther does not see her practices as the valued practices themselves, but as practices that she has derived from the valued practices. According to Esther, her practices “all have come, stemmed from the valued practices, though I think they might look different now because I've just refined it so much.” The fact that Esther does not see the valued practices and her practices as the same seems to also suggest as certain gap between valued practices and practices instantiated that allow for room for tutors to interpret the valued practices. This gap also seems to allow for all tutors’ other identities and experiences, both in conjunction with the document of valued practices and apart from it, to shape tutors’ practices.

**Uncovering Goals of Valued Practices Through Dialogic Reflection**

In focus group conversations, tutors’ examination of the valued practices brought them to this idea—that valued practices are all getting at something. By examining valued practices, we can be brought to deep reflection in what ultimate values our valued practices are pointing us towards. Here we see Mariam discussing how a number of valued practices all seem to focus on the writers’ learning:

It says create opportunities for writer to demonstrate learning by talking, practicing writing strategies, whatever, and then it also says be a co-learner. I feel that in creating opportunities for the writer to demonstrate learning, essentially, you're already a co-learner. So that's kind of the same thing. That's one. And then there was another one. Again. Yeah. So, create opportunities for learners, or for writer to demonstrate learning by talking, practicing writing strategies, and problem solving, and then it also says ask
questions and use directors to engage writer in active learning. It's like kind of all saying the same thing but differently. Like, isn't asking questions and using these directives similar to, like, problem solving strategies and that, like, they all incorporate learning, but they're all just kind of saying it differently, but just in the slightest way, so I feel like they're kind of very similar.

In identifying similarities between a number of different valued practices, Mariam is homing in on the values behind the valued practices—the beliefs about writing and a “successful session”—embedded in this document and throughout the local writing center community (influenced in part by the larger writing center studies community of which it is a part). In this case, Mariam is getting at the focus on the writers’ learning that is central to this particular writing center’s practices. The former director of the writing center who facilitated the development of these practices emphasized the importance of active learning and allowing the writer room to demonstrate learning, beyond one or a handful of valued practices. One of his primary questions he would ask after a difficult or puzzling session was “What did the writer do to demonstrate learning?” The writer’s learning undergirded the valued practices as the value that these practices point us towards. Thus, a number of these practices all seem to get at the writer learning and the tutor-writer relationship necessary to facilitate this learning. In seeing this, Mariam is starting the articulate the relationship between values and practices, a relationship that is not explicit when the list of valued practices is read as a list of rules.

Mariam then goes on to identify another pattern in the valued practices and begins to circle around the implicit value behind this pattern:
And then also learn about writer’s processes beliefs and attitudes toward the writing task, I think, is also a big part of rapport. Like, that’s, like, I don't know, a key thing that you should be doing when you're building rapport and, and honestly when I am asking them, like, “Hey, how do you feel about this assignment, like what do you, like, you know, how's your attitude?” like, you know, like, just general things like that, they're slowly opening up to me, that is essentially rapport. They're trusting me more and opening up to me and telling me this information.

Here Mariam brings the conversation back to the practice of establishing rapport that Mariam and Esther both find so important. We also see Mariam begin to articulate the importance of rapport and of learning the writer’s processes and attitudes. Axiomatic to writing center work is that each writer is a unique individual that requires unique pedagogy—otherwise, there would be no reason to pursue one-on-one tutoring when classroom pedagogy would be much more efficient. Again, in drawing the connection between the valued practices of rapport and learning the writer’s beliefs and attitudes, Mariam is working to uncover an implicit belief about writing center work underlying these practices—the writer is a unique individual and learner, and we should attempt to accommodate their individuality as a writer and learn as much as possible.

In response, Esther wonders what error looks like in writing center work. She questions, “What is a bad session? What, is it when you, like, don't learn? So, it's like some of those questions, too, I think it's just, like, everything is very subject to interpretation.” In wondering what constitutes a bad session, Esther seems to imply that it is not obvious that not following the valued practices is what constitutes a bad session. Again, the valued practices seem to be pointing the tutors to something larger that defines a “good” and “bad” session, but it is not the
valued practices themselves. Esther suggests that the writer’s learning is what defines if a session is good or bad, not necessarily the valued practices. While this might seem obvious, if tutors become too caught up with the valued practices as a list of rules, these larger values become hidden in a type of tutoring-practice legalism.

All this careful examination and consideration of valued practices, in tutor training, in observations, in tutor development, and in dialogic reflection in this study, brought tutors to examine the fundamental values of what constitutes a “good” session that are embedded in the valued practices, in conjunction with the contextual factors that give the list of valued practices meaning for tutors. Based on this study, this type of reflection is what careful examination of valued practices can offer tutor development. Valued practices can become an end in and of themselves (rules that must be followed, memorized in the breakroom before a session), but it is important to remember that they are a means to an end—they are tools we use to bring about whatever it is we deem to be a successful session. A “successful session” is defined in part by the list of valued practices. It is the implicit thing all the valued practices are pointing us towards. But a successful session is also defined by tutors’ prior experiences and the physical and social infrastructure and context around the valued practices.

Uncovering Personal Perspectives of Valued Practices Through Dialogic Reflection

Encountering Mariam’s perspective on the valued practices prompted Esther to think about why she had the perspective on the valued practices that she articulated throughout the
study. Interestingly, in this particular moment of reflection, Esther talked about seeing the valued practices as rules instead of guidelines:

I keep seeing them as, like, rules. Like, it's ingrained in me that these are the things, like, these, like, no matter how much, like, I tried to like be, you know, do my practice, but like, see these as far as guidelines, like, they are still ingrained in me as being the things to base all practices off. So, that makes sense.

Esther's comment is particularly insightful because, as previously discussed, during throughout the data collection process, she had been talking about the valued practices as guidelines, not rules. Her repeated references to the valued practices as guidelines, not rules, might less so reflect a deep-seated confidence in them not being rules and more so a grappling with shifting her view of them from rules—a view that is “still ingrained” in her—to guidelines. Through the reflection done during this study, Esther and Mariam were both able to more explicitly articulate and realize their attitudes towards the valued practices.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Mariam’s and Esther’s individual interviews and the focus group, we see them use both grounded and aspirational narratives—narratives about their experiences and about their values and goals as tutors. The narratives they tell, particularly the grounded narratives, give us interesting insight into what it means to be a broker in a writing center community of practice. Brokers are not an occasional identity that tutors assume. Geller et al. (2007) discussed how tutors who went to a week-long art and writing class offered primarily for neighborhood teachers
and suggested that that tutors with enough legitimacy in the eyes of other tutors, such as the two tutors who attended this course, can explicitly take on the role of brokers in the writing center as well—openly bringing in what they’ve learned from other communities of practice to the writing center. While moments of explicit brokering to the rest—or a large portion—of a community takes a certain legitimacy that tutors may not always have in the eyes of their peers, tutors constantly act as brokers in their individual understanding of their community-specific practices. These individual experiences get folded into the tutors’ experiences in the center and the complex reification-participation process that practice entails. For example, Mariam’s experiences within her family, as a sister and daughter, impacted how she tutors, being able to play a sisterly role in sessions when a writer is stressed out or being able to carefully listen to a multilingual writer like how she listens to her mother when she speaks English.

Importantly, when Mariam brought these experiences into her work in the center, they were quickly folded into her practices and her understanding of the list of valued practices—in other words, her recursive participation-reification process as a practitioner. Mariam’s first memory of donning a sisterly role is vivid in her mind because it was a nervous experience for her. When asked about the importance of establishing rapport in her practice, she discussed this session and how her being a sister played into this session. In other words, brokerage happened nearly simultaneous with participation (Mariam thought to be like a sister towards the writer only moments before actually being like a sister). Then, upon reflecting on this session in light of the valued practices, Mariam’s experience in this session became fundamental to her understanding of the importance of the valued practice establish rapport. While her individual interview might have been the first time Mariam explicitly articulated this connection between this session and
her understanding of the valued practice, the fact that this session came to mind when asked about the valued practice establish rapport indicates that it is something that has likely at least implicitly impacted how she reads and enacts this practice. Similarly, when thinking about how it applies to her work as a writing tutor, Mariam’s experience listening to her mother speak English is for Mariam closely associated with advice from the writing center’s former director, her experiences tutoring multilingual writers (participation), and her understanding of wait time in the valued practices. As Mariam continues to work with multilingual writers and continues to talk about and reflect on these sessions in tutor training and conversations with her fellow tutors, layers of participation and reification are added to how she makes meaning from and enacts these valued practices.

As tutors are brokering outside experiences into the center at an individual level, the participation and reification that result from this brokerage inevitably colors a tutor’s dialogue with other tutors. In this regard, tutors are constantly brokering, bringing in experiences from communities outside the center into their practice and conversations with colleagues. Although Mariam does not discuss being a sister or daughter of a multilingual mother with Esther, these experiences have impacted how Mariam approaches and thinks about the valued practices, so there is no reason to believe that her conversation with Esther would have been the same had not Mariam brokered these experiences into her writing center work.

Tutors and the experiences they bring into their writing center work make up in part the infrastructure of the writing center. The list of valued practices is also part of this particular center’s infrastructure. We see that these infrastructural elements have an impact on one another. Tutors apply prior experiences as students, sisters, daughters, friends, etc. to interpret and
internalize valued practices. Other elements of this particular writing center’s infrastructure, such as scholarship discussed in tutoring training (e.g., the concept of a “storehouse” model of tutoring), how tutor evaluation is conducted (e.g., through observations), and director’s administrative and research interests impact how tutors understand and take up a document like the list of valued tutoring practices.

It is important that we recognize that other infrastructure elements impact how flexibly tutors view a center artefact, like the list of valued practices. Mariam noted how the attitude of the center’s new director toward the valued practices led Mariam to perceive that there was more room for “evolution” in terms of developing the valued practices. On one hand, this list of valued practices for tutoring writing is grounded in empirical writing center research. There, thus, should be a sense of stability to the list since it is grounded in years of research and theory. On the other hand, as Hall (2017) noted, this list is not meant to be definite and should be flexibly adapted and revised. Thus, tutors should view the list with a disposition of reflection and adaption. Directors might view documents such as this list as relatively flexible or relatively inflexible depending on the purpose they hope the document to serve. However, tutors might have a different perception of this document given the context in which it was presented to them.

At the UWC the list of valued practices presented to tutors is the same form used for tutor observation assessment, with boxes next to each valued practice to note its presence or absence in a session and any additional notes on how the practice was or was not implemented. Upon being presented with the practices, tutors are immediately made aware of another element of the writing center infrastructure—session observations—and its relation to the list of valued practices. As Mariam and Esther noted, this presentation causes tutors to take a less flexible
stance towards the valued practices. Depending on how the director wants tutors to take up the valued practices, this could be an affordance or constraint of the list of valued practices.

Along the lines of Geller et al.’s (2007) discussion of trickster moments and a “pedagogy of becoming” and Hall’s (2011) discussion of questioning expert knowledge, the focus of this study on UD and, particularly, flexibility prompted tutors to discuss moments of uncertainty and caused tutors to question codified knowledge. Moments that deviate from what writing center communities might conceptualize as a “normal” session, such as working on a paper in Spanish, working with a writer with learning disabilities, and encountering technological issues with Zoom, prompted tutors to discuss with each other ideas they might not have encountered in typical avenues of tutor training, such as how writers might demonstrate flexibility, when valued practices might do more harm than good, and how the intersection of complex elements of the session might prompt tutors to adjust their practices.

These generative moments are examples of immediate value in Wenger-Trayner’s types of value of social learning. As a result of these trickster moments, we can imagine that other types of value outlined by Wenger-Trayner’s might be generated. For example, with deepened perspectives on the complex elements influencing tutor choices during a sessions, Mariam and Esther might have left the focus group with potential value—new ideas or dispositions that would allow them to flexibly enact tutoring practices in response to this complexity in their future sessions. In actually enacting these new ideas or dispositions, they will experience applied value from these moments of insight from the focus group and then consider its realized value in observing the success or lack thereof of the applied insight. If the adjustments they make to their practices or overall tutoring approach or disposition yields positive results in terms of writer
learning in their sessions, Mariam and Esther might share these moments with their peers and writing center director in conversations about the center’s valued practices. If others in the center act on the insight from Mariam’s and Esther’s sharing of their experiences, either by changing their own practices or revising the center’s valued practices, the center as a whole might experience some degree of transformative value—a shifting in their shared values and practices. Importantly, in order to see the generation of all of these types of value of social learning, tutors must continue to reflect and dialogue about this reflection so that they can share their experiences, articulate the value they gain from their experiences, and potentially transform others through this process.

The focus group offered a window into the potential transformative value of dialogic reflection. The discussion of the principles of UD, such as flexibility, in relation to valued tutoring practices caused the tutors to become more critical of the valued tutoring practices. While Mariam’s and Esther’s conversations demonstrated understandings of the valued practices that are in constant flux—Mariam and Esther were continually relating experiences they had within and outside the center to how they read and apply the valued practices—it took explicit prompting for them to begin to question their fundamental assumptions about these practices. Mariam’s attitudes towards the valued practices were most drastically changed over the course of the semester-long study. Additionally, Mariam and Esther cited activities in the tutor training seminar led by the center’s new director in which they participated simultaneously with this study as having an impact on their fundamental approach to the valued practices. During the seminar this particular semester, conversations were focused on multilingualism, which could explain in part why multilingualism also frequently came up in the tutors’ reflections and
conversations. Esther mentioned how the change in directorship, along with external factors such as Corona virus, and this study led her to reflect on a revise her fundamental attitude towards the valued practices:

I think, also, it's because of Corona [virus]. Like, in the spring, we had to pivot so much, and, like, in the summer, we just kind of like were winging it. Like, we had these, like, committees developed, like, all these new things that they had never done before. Like, we were in the, the video committee. Mariam was the head, and so, like, it was obviously new things. And, like, with [the current director] coming on as, like, you know, our leader, and then, [the current assistant director] coming in, and, like, it just was an opportunity, I think there's so much other, like, change that had, like, was going on, I think it was such an opportunity for her to be like, alright, let's kind of reevaluate our practices, and let's, like, look at what's going on. Is this really the best time? And, like, she just expressed to us in the potluck, like, that she was really worried about this transition, and I had never, was worried about the transition, never, and, like, she did it so well, like, with trying to find, like, that balance of the old and new and allowing us, what I really liked was allowing us to, like, think about the practices, and we evaluate them for like ourselves, instead of just, like, you know, [the writing center director, assistant director, and administrative staff] just doing it, like, on their own. Like, [the director] really, like, included us in the conversation. And definitely doing this study, like, literally doing this, I thought, like, so much more about, like, the writing, like, the valued practices and, like, how they, like, translate into seminar and how I write about them
here. So, like, yes, I have definitely, the semester has made me rethink the valued practices and how we use them.

Reified artefacts, such as the list of valued practices, have a certain inertia that must be overcome for tutors to allow their experiences in and outside the center to lead them to question fundamental beliefs about the artefact. Again, this inertia need not always be overcome—it can at times provide a sense of stability that allows for effective facilitation of the training of new tutors. However, particularly for experienced tutors, overcoming this inertia to uncover unstated beliefs and assumptions that inform how we interact with the reified artefact can lead to formative reflection and considerations on how to revise the artefact to better reflect values held by members of the local writing center community.
CHAPTER FOUR: TUTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF VALUED PRACTICES AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

When initially asked to apply the principles of UD to their work as tutors in their pre-interview questionnaires, Mariam and Esther came up with creative and dynamic applications. Mariam focused on how the valued practices serve the needs of writers: “similar to the second principle concerning flexibility, I believe that several valued practices pertain to being flexible and accommodating to students based on their specific tutoring needs.” Esther, on the other hand, focused on how the valued practices were usable by tutors: “Writing center tutor practices start with being simple and intuitive to use. Each one is written as being attainable for tutors to put into practice regardless of their background.”

The way tutors applied UD to their writing center work varied throughout the study. When the tutors’ perspectives were shared with the other in the focus group at the end of the study, their dynamic applications of UD were made explicit, which launched into a fascinating conversation in which the tutors attempted to articulate the complex conceptualizations that informed how they had been applying UD to their tutoring. For example, during this conversation, Mariam attempted to explain how she conceptualized the elements of a writing center session in relation to Esther’s own conceptualization that she had just articulated:

I see it a little bit differently, but kind of the same. I kind of see, like, in my head, like, a circle, and all the arrows are pointing. So, it’s, like, flexibility that it points to the tutor, then it points to, I guess, no. It would point to then diverse abilities, then writer, and then flexibility, and it’s just, like, a circle that goes like that with those four things tutor, writer,
flexibility, and diverse ability, and everyone is just kind of, like, tied into it like that if that makes sense.

This chapter explores the tutors’ various ways of applying UD to the writing center from throughout the study and the generative nature of the bringing together of these perspectives during the focus group.

**Universal Design in Writing Center Studies**

A handful of writing center scholars have analyzed writing center practices in relation to disability studies and, particularly, UD (Kiedaisch & Dinitz, 2007; Babcock, 2008a, 2008b, 2017; Hitt, 2012; Daniels, Babcock, & Daniels, 2015; Rinaldi, 2015; Ryan, Miller, & Steinhart, 2017; and Kleinfeld, 2018). In this regard, UD is, to some degree, integrated into how the writing center community at large thinks about and formulates its values and valued practices. However, conversations of disability and UD in the writing center community is still niche, budding at this point—though gaining traction, as evidenced by the publication of the sourcebook *Writing Centers and Disability* edited by Rebecca Day Babcock and Sharifa Daniels in 2017—and has not been meaningfully integrated to many centers’ tutor training and development programs. Consequently, as Babcock and Daniels noted in the introduction to their sourcebook, there is a lack of consideration for disability in writing center practices. Similarly, Rinaldi argued that disability is an afterthought in many writing center sessions. Indeed, in centers like the UWC, conversations around disability and UD have not made their way into tutor training and development activities. Without explicit discussion of disability and UD in tutor training and
development, individual tutors and writing center communities of practice are at risk of formulating and enacting practices that consider only the needs, habits, and learning preferences of abled writers and tutors. These practices could neglect the needs, habits, and learning preferences of writers and tutors with disabilities.

The research and analysis that has been done by scholars considering disability and UD in writing centers recommended that writing center practitioners take an approach that is grounded in the social model of disability, which was introduced into composition studies by scholars like Dolmage (2008) and Price (2011). In this model, disability is not simply physical and does not reside solely in the bodies of disabled people. Instead, disability is created when physical and social structures and cultural conventions exclude certain bodies. The implication of this model is that disability is not something that is “different” or deviant from a “typical” session (Kiedaisch & Dinitz, 2007; Hitt, 2012; Rinaldi, 2015; Ryan, Miller, & Steinhart, 2017). Rather, tutors should see disability as an expected and welcomed aspect of writers’ diverse needs and preferences.

Many scholars, such as Kiedaisch and Dinitz (2007); Babcock (2008a, 2008b, 2017); Hitt (2012); Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels (2015); Ryan, Miller, and Steinhart (2017); and Kleinfeld (2018), argued that disabilities and Universal Design emphasize the importance of flexibility and adaptability in tutoring practices. Kiedaisch and Dinitz argued that UD—or, more specifically, Universal Design for Instruction (UDI)—is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach; it is instead a flexible design that can be adapted in diverse ways. They applied UDI to assess and redesign the University of Vermont Writing Center, suggesting a number of tutoring practices, such as questions to ask students at the beginning of a session, and physical design elements to make
writing centers more accessible. Hitt discussed the importance of explicit dialogue to understand tutees’ learning preferences and negotiating effective tutoring practices. She saw multimodality as an extension of multiliteracy and, along with Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels, emphasized using multimodal resources depending on tutees’ learning preferences.

Indeed, encouraging tutors to have conversations with writers about their own learning preferences and habits is another popular point of discussion in the literature. In addition to Hitt (2012) and Daniels, Babcock, and Daniel (2015), Rinaldi (2015) and Ryan, Miller, and Steinhart (2017) also proposed that tutors, through meta-discourse, dialogue, and questions, allow writers to be the expert on themselves and talk about their learning preferences and needs. Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels also recommended helping writers map out their work process for an assignment and using explicit dialogue during sessions to discuss writers’ processes and habits.

Fundamental to flexibility is a continuous reflection and adaptation of codified writing center values and beliefs. Kleinfeld (2018) advocated cultivating “an ethic of imperfection” in writing centers, which emphasizes “that there often isn’t a ‘right’ or ‘correct’ way of doing something” and the importance of “allowing yourself and others to make mistakes, own them, and learn from them.” In a similar vein, Ryan, Miller, and Steinhart (2017) drew attention to our implicit assumptions about collaboration—arguing that when “tutors rigidly adhere to our institutionalized definitions of collaboration, no matter how well intentioned the theory behind them, then the writing center will become a place that erects barriers rather than a place that breaks them down” (p. 269). Flexibility means continuous examination of the knowledge and assumptions fundamental to our work.
Additionally, Bokser (2005) examined the issue of writing centers’ roles in pedagogy of belonging—how tutors mediate between instructors’ expectations and students’ home cultures and identities. Bokser proposed listening as a rhetorical strategy to balance academic assimilation with incorporating students’ cultures and experiences into their academic identities. Listening, Bokser argued, promotes a flexibility and open-mindedness when tutors work with writers with different cultures and experiences as their own. While Bokser does not explicitly talk about disability in writing center work, she argues that emphasizing rhetorical listening allows tutors to be more flexible working with a diverse array of writers.

Babcock (2008b) asserted that certain writing tutoring conventions, such as nondirective approaches and prioritizing global over local concerns, can discriminate against students with disabilities. Babcock (2008b) addressed the fairly common belief in the writing center community that editing and proofreading are not a part of writing center work. Citing her previous research (Babcock, 2008a) and the research of others, Babcock argued that deaf students and students with learning disabilities often time need help with editing and proofreading. Babcock (2008a; 2017) found through observations of tutoring sessions with both deaf and hearing tutees and interviews with the tutees, tutors, and interpreters that deaf students may find it difficult to understand nondirective tutoring techniques, arguing that these techniques “are based on aural/oral processing of language or Hearing cultural values” (Babcock, 2008a, p. 28). In order to serve their role and best help students learn and grow as writers, writing centers should address the needs of all students, including those who need help with editing and proofreading. Babcock (2008b) noted that many writing centers have policies against editing and proofreading, which she claims is in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and section
504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 since under law colleges taking federal funds are required to give students needed accommodations. Babcock (2008b) argued that writing centers need not to edit or proofread papers for students but rather “offer help at every stage of the writing process” (p. 66).

While the existing literature on UD and the writing center suggests adaptations that centers and tutors make to create more inclusive space and practices for writers with a wide range to abilities and ways of learning, these studies do not examine how tutors perceive the principles of UD. How do tutors see UD in relation to their individual practices and their center’s shared valued practices? How does UD prompt tutors to reflect on their practices? What new insight do tutors generate about their practices and the values they hold about tutoring, learning, and writing that inform their practices when tutors are asked to reflect on their practices in light of UD both individually and in dialogue with each other?

Results

This section discusses the various ways that Mariam and Esther applied UD to their work as tutors throughout the study. Table 5 and Table 6 show Mariam’s and Esther’s most important valued practices and the principles of UD that they felt related to these practices per the pre-interview questionnaire, respectively. As we saw in the Chapter Three, Mariam and Esther shared two of their three most important valued practices: establish rapport and be a co-learner. Mariam selected learn assignment requirements as the other practice in her top three, and Esther selected demonstrate active listening. Both of the tutors felt that Equitable Use, Flexibility in
Use, and Simple and Intuitive Use related to their valued practices. Additionally, Esther related Perceptible Information and Tolerance for Error to her practices as well.

Table 5. Mariam's Most Important Valued Practices and Related Principles of UD

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<tr>
<th>Most Important Valued Practices</th>
<th>Principles of UD Related to Valued Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish rapport with writer.</td>
<td><strong>Equitable Use.</strong> Useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn assignment requirements or rhetorical situation, including the writer’s understanding.</td>
<td><strong>Flexibility in Use.</strong> Accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid role of editor and authority.</td>
<td><strong>Simple and Intuitive Use.</strong> Easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.</td>
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Table 6. Esther’s Most Important Valued Practices and Related Principles of UD

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<tr>
<th>Most Important Valued Practices</th>
<th>Principles of UD Related to Valued Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant. Avoid role of editor and authority.</td>
<td><strong>Equitable Use.</strong> Useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate active listening. Avoid dominating the conversation. Make effective use of wait-time.</td>
<td><strong>Flexibility in Use.</strong> Accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish rapport with writer.</td>
<td><strong>Simple and Intuitive Use.</strong> Easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Perceptible Information.</strong> Communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.</td>
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In this chapter, I focus on how the tutors applied the principles of UD to their practices. While analyzing the transcripts and writing prompts, I noticed that the tutors applied the valued practices to a variety of people and elements in the session and writing center at large. In applying the principles of UD to their writing center work, the tutors also assumed different design “users” as well. Thus, as discussed in Chapter Two, when exploring the data, I paid attention to the implicit assumptions tutors were making about to whom or what the principle of UD was being applied and who or what was the “user” in their verbal and written responses.

Neither Mariam nor Esther was familiar with UD prior to this study, and thus, they were not necessarily aware of its origins in disability studies. Throughout the study, Mariam and Esther were asked to identify moments in which they made adjustments to their tutoring practices and to discuss whether and to what extent they saw those adjustments relating to the stated principles of UD: Equitable Use, Flexibility in Use, Simple and Intuitive Use, Perceptible Information, Tolerance for Error, Low Physical Effort, and Size and Space for Approach and Use. In response, the tutors discussed sessions with writers who identified as disabled, writers who did not indicate whether or not they identified as disabled, multilingual writers, monolingual

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<th>Most Important Valued Practices</th>
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writers, older writers, younger writers, etc. In discussing their applications of UD principles to situations that involved a range of writers with diverse backgrounds or abilities, I do not want to conflate multilingualism or age or other individual characteristic with disability. Disability is an individually embodied experience that, while inseparably influencing and influenced by other experiences of a disabled individual, is not equivalent to other experiences, such as speaking a particular native language. Nor, did I note this conflation in the reflections of the tutors as they did not associate UD with disability. This chapter demonstrates the ways these tutors discussed UD principles as generative across contexts and in relation to sessions to who and did not identify as disabled or abled. In part, what makes Mariam’s and Esther’s considerations of UD in relationship to writing center work so interesting is the wide range of situations to which they applied UD.

**Mariam: Writer as User; Session, Tutor, and Practices as Objects of Design**

*Diversity of Writers Prompts UD*

When Mariam applied the principles of UD, such as Equitable Use, to the valued practices, she understood that writers are diverse and have a wide array of abilities:

I’m when it says useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. I don’t know. But the diverse abilities part stuck out to me because I was like, each student is diverse, and they have their own set of abilities. And not every student is going to be the same.
In her individual interview, Mariam described a number of ways that writers were diverse. Languages are part of writers’ diverse abilities:

I’m also a multilingual speaker as well. So, whenever I am like, you know, establishing rapport with the writer. I kind of, if I feel or sense an accent, I’m like, “Oh, where are you from, and what is your native language, and how many languages do you speak?” And whatever, whatever, and usually I’ll find out, you know, that they are diverse and have multiple abilities and can speak, you know, multiple languages.

When discussing the practice of establish rapport in relation to the UD principle Flexibility in Use, Mariam explained how she also sees language preferences of writers as part of their diversity:

So yeah, if when you’re establishing rapport with the writer, you’re finding out their preferences. Like I said before, like finding out would they rather the session be in their native language, would they rather, you know, us speak English for all the language or all the session. You know, just finding out what they prefer. Sometimes I even asked them, so like, “What can I do to best help you?” And I guess that in essence is their preference of what how they want the session to go.

As the previous quote indicates, Mariam sees establishing rapport as a way for her to learn about writers’ preferences and abilities. Below Mariam describes a time when she was working with a dyslexic writer. She learned about his dyslexia while talking to him at the beginning of the session:

One time when I was establishing rapport with the writer, and I found out I had to accommodate his abilities of, like, reading because he, he told me, he was like, “Oh yeah,
I’m dyslexic, so if you see me taking a long time to read something, don’t think it’s, like, because I’m ignoring you, I’m not paying attention. It’s just that I need more time to read this in the sentence.” So, I was like, “Yeah, that’s fine.” So, in, and it was perfectly fine. And I had just had to, you know, accommodate his abilities and how you preferred the session to go and just giving him more wait time.

Mariam described how frequently while establishing rapport with writers she learned about their abilities and preferences (language, learning, and otherwise). In her pre-interview questionnaire, Mariam articulated that establishing rapport is the most important of her valued practices, in a large part because it allows her to learn about writers’ abilities and preferences and adjust her tutoring practices accordingly. It could be that Mariam saw a deep connection between this valued practice and the principles of UD because she already highly valued this practice.

Later in the interview, we also discussed Mariam’s perception that the valued practice establish rapport also fits the principles of Simple and Intuitive Use because it can be implemented no matter the writer’s ability and preferences:

Like where [UD] says [in describing simple and intuitive use], “regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level,” you can really build rapport with any student. Um, you know, and it’s a simple easy thing to do. Like I said, it just takes, like, a few minutes, and it’s something that everyone is like, “Oh, they’re just trying to get to know me, you know, figure out what’s going on.” And yeah, like I said, regardless of their experience, knowledge, language skills, whatever. I think it’s something that you should do for every session, and it will help you and benefit you in every session.
Whereas discussing establish rapport in relation to Flexibility in Use prompted Mariam to discuss explore how this practice allowed her to learn about writer’s diverse abilities and preferences, relating this practice to Simple and Intuitive Use prompted her to discuss how this practice can be used, and is beneficial to use, with every writer.

For Mariam, establishing rapport is a good practice that can be done with every writer because she can learn about their diverse preferences and abilities and adjust her practices accordingly. A number of elements can prompt her to practice such flexibility. As she discusses in the excerpts above, writer’s language preferences or disabilities can prompt Mariam to adjust her practices in the session. In one of her writing prompts, she discussed working with a writer with autism and Asperger’s who required more wait time for learning:

This definitely correlates to being flexible. Again, I needed to quickly first, pay attention to what tutoring methods worked for him as an individual. Then secondly, I needed to adjust and adapt to his way of learning. Which basically required long periods of quiet time so that he could think efficiently.

For Mariam, flexibility on the part of the tutor is important to maintain the co-learner relationship with writers that Mariam values, as discussed in the previous chapter, given writers’ different learning preferences. Mariam also uses her own experiences learning new things to try to understand the diverse ways writers learn and how tutors should be flexible to accommodate writers’ diverse ways learning. She applies her own learning experiences to further emphasize the importance she sees in equality in the tutor-writer relationship:

I think being a being a co-learner in general, you really have to be flexible with the way that they're learning because I feel like every student learns differently. Some students
you can tell them, “Hey a comma goes here,” but others you have to show them, like I'm always have to be like a visual, or like you have to show me how to do it 10 times before I get it that one time. Like, you can't just tell me how to tie the knot, so I guess just being flexible in the way and figuring out how do they learn and then being like, “Okay, let me help you co-learn this way” I guess. Um, and again, yeah, just, you know, avoiding role of editor and authority because that never really gets any work done, and you just have to be their equal I guess all the way.

Again, according to Mariam, the tutor must be flexible in light of the writer’s, as the principle of flexibility in use states, “individual preferences and abilities,” which includes ways of learning. When discussing the valued practice about being a co-learner in light of the principle of flexibility in use, Mariam saw a strong connection between this practice and principle of UD, saying, “I think being a co-learner in general, you really have to be flexible with the way that they’re learning because I feel like every student learns differently.” She also emphasized being flexible in light of writers’ ways of learning when discussing the valued practice create opportunities for writer to demonstrate learning:

This is literally, like, this valued practice I feel like is literally saying, “Be flexible” because with each writer, you’re going to have to find different, you know, ways of problem solving, different ways of learning and teaching them. There’s just, I don’t know. You have to adjust the opportunities that you give to every writer differently depending on who that writer is, so when it says create opportunities for a writer to demonstrate, you know, how they learn, how they, you know, their strategies, how they
problem solve, I don’t know, to me, that’s the definition of, like, being flexible and tutoring.

Learning abilities on the part of the writer are one element of a session that has prompted Mariam to enact flexibility on her part as a tutor. Another element is the writers’ language backgrounds. In her interview, Mariam discussed frequently adjusting her practice to incorporate upspeak when working with multilingual writers:

With multilingual writers I realized I realized that this works where I’ll be like, I’ll read a sentence, and, you know, like upspeak? You know how like you’ll do that? So, um, I’ll use up speak for them, and they’ll be like, “Oh, maybe that sentence isn’t correct because she raised her voice at the end.” So, I’ve adjusted, and I’m flexible, and I adjust, you know, the ways that I tutor for those specific types of students because they pick up on that more, and they’ll be like, “Oh yeah, maybe that sentence is wrong.” You know? So, I guess it’s just like little tips and tricks that you pick up along the way as you’re tutoring for those kinds of things.

In addition to the writer’s language background, the writer’s language practice within the session or assignment had prompted Mariam to be flexible. In another writing prompt, she discussed working with a writer whose assignment was in Spanish. Mariam explained, “I had to be flexible and adjust my tutoring practices by reading her work slowly, rather than the normal reading pace I am used to.” While Mariam spoke Spanish, she had less experience reading and writing Spanish than she did English. Thus, when working with a writer on a paper in Spanish, she needed to adapt her practices to the writer’s needs and abilities.
Mariam brought up a few other elements of a session that may prompt flexibility on the part of the tutor. First was the writer’s motivation level during the session:

I think it’s just by finding out how the writer feels about the paper you as a tutor also have to be flexible because you will get those, you know writers who come in with a really negative mindset of they don’t want to do the assignment, or the professor gave them negative feedback on the assignment already, and they don’t want to be at the writing center. And so, you kind of have to, you know, accommodate how they’re just simply feeling about the session already first right off the bat and adjust your tutoring style to, you know, make them feel comfortable and also reassured and also, you know, that you’re capable of just helping them to begin with, if that, and learning some requirements and rhetorical situation. And yeah, so yeah, just asking them the rhetorical situation. Yeah, I’ve definitely had some writers before that they’ve come in and they just really don’t want to be there, or you get the writers that just want the extra credit, and they’re just like, I want a quick look over, and then I want to leave. So just feeling the writer out. Definitely. You have to be flexible and be like, “Okay, this is actually how the session is going to go,” kind of.

For Mariam, the valued practice learn assignment requirements is key to her flexibly adapting to writers’ level of motivation or enthusiasm during a session. Learning about the assignment and the writer’s attitude toward and understanding of it has helped her be flexible in adjusting her tutoring practices to create an engaging and productive session for the writer.

Relatedly, Mariam is also flexible in her tutoring practices because writers have different writing processes:
Because if you really don’t know how they tackle writing, usually, then you’re not going to really be able to help them. Because there are tutors that’ll be like, “Yeah, you know what we need to do an outline like right now,” and I’m like, “Oh, just write.” And then they’re like, “No, I don’t know what I want to write.” And I’m like, “Okay, fine. Let’s jot down your ideas. Come on.” So, so that’s what we end up doing.

In other words, the variety of writer’s processes prompts Mariam to be flexible in working with writers.

*Contextual Factors in Session Also Prompts UD*

Besides a writer’s characteristics (e.g., language background and practices, attitudes towards writing, and writing practices), other elements of the session that the writer may have no control over have prompted Mariam to be flexible. The most prominent example of this is technology. Mariam discussed how tutoring over Zoom requires flexibility on her part:

Because, okay, with Zoom, it’s so much harder to be a co-learner, because you can’t, you know, just point at their paper and be like, this is where you see something going on wrong. It’s, you have to really adjust your tutoring methods, and instead, you know, you find yourself using like the annotating tool.

In order to enact the valued practice of being a co-learner when tutoring over Zoom, Mariam needed to adjust her typical in-person tutoring practices given using tools in her new technological context.
In one of her writing prompts, Mariam discussed an example of a combination of technology and a writer’s abilities inciting flexibility. In this instance the writer did not have a webcam or a mic and did not know how to use the chat box on Zoom:

I had to be flexible, as this principle states, and adjust my tutoring methods of just using Zoom, to now also using a phone call. I also had to be flexible in the fact that she did not have a webcam, which makes it a little weirder to tutor because you can’t see the other person at all. I was just talking to two black screens (one for the writer and one for the tutor observing me). Usually, I use facial cues to see if a writer truly understands what I am saying. However, in this session, I had to tune my ears and listen to her voice more to see if she understood me. For example, did she hesitate? Did she use upspeak? Etc.

What prompted flexibility in this case were the technological constraints and the writer’s ability to use the technology that was mediating the session. Mariam also related this experience to the principle of UD Tolerance for Error, which was further explored in dialogue between the participants in the focus group.

_Tutors as Objects of Design_

Mariam believes that learning about a writer’s preferences and abilities is beneficial regardless of the writer. She later further applies the definition of Simple and Intuitive Use that she mentioned above to writing center sessions:

So yeah, like, regardless of, like, let’s say for example, their current concentration level, like, they really are not focused on the session, they really don’t want to be there, or they
do really want to be there, or regardless of their writing skills, if they’re, you know, like an amazing awesome writer versus if they’re, you know, struggling or building up their skills, no matter what’s going on, I feel like if you just take those two seconds to build rapport, it’ll be, like, extremely beneficial.

Here Mariam clearly outlines the writer as the user since it is the writer whose language skills and concentration level are the focus of this principle. Taking, as Mariam says, “two seconds to build rapport” is simple and intuitive because it will be “extremely beneficial” to the session.

Just as in applying the principle of Simple and Intuitive Use to establish rapport, Mariam stated that this practice could be used with any writer, Mariam gave a similar argument for the valued practice be a co-learner—it can be implemented with any writer:

Regardless of their experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level, regardless if they’re black, white, male, female, older than me, younger than me, I always should be a co-learner is how I incorporate it into that one. And I should never really feel like I have authority over them ever.

One element that is varied about Mariam’s interpretation and application of the principle of Simple and Intuitive Use to the valued practices is what exactly is simple and intuitive for whom. For example, is the session (object of design) simple and intuitive for the writer (user) because the tutor (designer) learned the writer’s abilities and preferences and adjusted their practices accordingly? This would be a traditional application of the principles of UD since the components of design (object of design, user, and designer) are all clearly defined and discrete.
We see something close to this traditional application of the principles of UD to the valued practices when Mariam applies the principle of Equitable Use to her practices. In one of her reflective writing prompts, Mariam discussed her tutoring practices as the object of design:

As a tutor, my tutoring practices need me to be equitable and more importantly, useful for every student. Therefore, I need to adjust how much wait-time I gave this student in order to best help him complete his assignment.

Since she as the tutor is adjusting her practices (how much wait time she is giving the writer), she could be conceptualized as the designer, adjusting the object of design, her practices.

In her individual interview, however, Mariam discussed herself the tutor as the object of design when applying the principle of equitable use to the valued practice learn assignment requirements. Here she suggested that she as the tutor should be useful to all writers (users):

“That word useful and this one really stuck out to me because I was like, how can you be a useful tutor if you don’t really know what assignment you’re helping them with?” She similarly discussed herself as the object of design when considering how writers’ native languages are part of their diverse abilities when she stated, “I aim to be a beneficial and useful tutor to all my writers, regardless of their native tongue.” Here Mariam aims to make herself as a tutor equitable to writers given the diversity that writers bring to sessions. She used similar language in discussing how learning assignment requirements helps her as a tutor be useful to all writers. In her individual interview, Mariam talked about a time when asking a writer about his paper’s requirements and learning that he was not familiar with MLA allowed her to be more useful as a tutor:
So, by asking him that and seeing that the teacher did require MLA format and that he especially was not familiar with it and seeing his understanding of MLA format, I think that I was able to be more useful as a tutor to him and take a step back and be like, “Okay, let me show you this website called Purdue OWL,” and blah, blah, blah, blah. And, and, you know, make myself, I guess, I don’t know, a better tutor for him, if that makes sense, and find out again what he was able to do and what he was not able to do.

As a sidenote, we can see here a fruitful opportunity to extend this application of UD to beyond writing center work. While instructors might consider the usability of their assignment prompts for their students, writing tutors also become users of these prompts in writing center sessions. This consideration raises questions that could be further explored in future studies about objects of design, like assignment prompts that, while designed outside the center, come into the writing center and interacts with users perhaps not considered in their initial design.

In terms of seeing tutors as the objects of design, Mariam also believes that tutors have to be flexible:

Because again, like, I would say a big part of your job, I don’t know, percentage wise, I’m trying to, like 75% of your job is being flexible, like, with the writer, who they are as a person, as a student. Do they care about the assignment? Do they just want to get in and get out? Will even listen to your opinion?

When reflecting on the list of valued practices in light of the principles of UD, Mariam saw the list as communicating to her to enact principles of UD (“this valued practice I feel like is literally saying, ‘Be flexible’”). Again, she’s the object of design—the entity that should enact the
principles of UD when interacting with the user (writer)—and she believes that the valued practices are pointing her in that direction.

Additionally, in her application of Tolerance for Error to her work, Mariam discussed herself as the object of design in light of the technological constraints and the writer’s ability to use the technology that was mediating the session. As she wrote in the writing prompt response discussing a writer’s difficulties with Zoom technology:

I had to tolerate the technical errors of Zoom and her mic not working properly. Also, she struggled for a long time to just figure out where the chat box was located. So again, just a lot of patience and tolerance.

Here again Mariam is applying the principles of UD to herself as a tutor. In this example, the error that she must tolerate comes from both the technological context (the writer’s mic malfunctioning) and the writer’s own knowledge and abilities (the writer not knowing where the chat box was located). Questions of what constitutes error in writing center sessions, who or what causes error in writing center sessions, and who or what in the session must tolerate error are further explored in the focus group.

**Flexibility on the Part of Writer**

Breaking from the traditional application of UD to a tutoring session, Mariam also mentioned that the writer in the session she tutored in Spanish needed to be flexible as well. Since Mariam was less experienced than her writer in reading and writing Spanish, she recalled how her writer
was very understanding of my mistakes (misspelling and mispronouncing of Spanish words). She would even correct me along the way, but not in a condescending way. I could tell she wanted me to improve, therefore I repeated the same behavior when it came to helping her with English.

Rarely do we think about how the principles of UD might apply to a user. In a sense, it seems antithetical to UD to require the user to be flexible their interactions with an object of design since UD gives us guidelines for how to adjust design to fit users’ current needs and abilities. However, if we think about a writing center session—the interaction between tutor and writer situated in a historical and cultural time and space—as the object of design (as opposed to solely the writing tutor), writers become co-designers of the writing center session. This notion of writers as co-designers raises the possibility of them considering and practicing principles of UD as they co-construct sessions with tutors. The idea that it might be necessary for writers to practice some of the principles of UD, such as flexibility, for sessions to be successful is something that struck me from Mariam’s response, particularly because it seems to reflect Mariam’s emphasis on an equal, co-learner tutor-writer relationship discussed in Chapter Three. I brought up the idea of writers being flexible again in the focus group to learn more about the participants’ thoughts on this.
Esther: Tutor as User, Valued Practices as Objects of Design

Tutoring Practices as Objects of Design

While Mariam, for the most part, was focused on herself, her practices, or the session as the object of design in her application of the principles of UD, for Esther, the valued practices were primarily the objects of design. In other words, Esther believed that the valued practices should be what are simple, intuitive, flexible, and tolerant to error. Thus, for Esther, tutors are the users; tutors are the ones with diverse backgrounds and approaches. Esther explained her perspective clearly applying the principles of Simple and Intuitive Use, Flexibility in Use, and Tolerance for Error to the valued practices in her pre-interview questionnaire:

Writing center tutor practices start with being simple and intuitive to use. Each one is written as being attainable for tutors to put into practice regardless of their background. Listening, establishing rapport, and identifying patterns within a writer’s work are basic principles that clearly layout the role of the tutor. Because of this simplicity, flexibility in use is also applicable to writing center practices. Though these valued practices can be followed by every tutor, every tutor has different approaches to how they work with writers. The practices do not limit what tutors need to say or do for learning to occur, but rather give tutors room to carry out this principle in whatever way that works for them. Though it is not explicitly stated in the list of valued practices, we discuss in our writing center studies how not every valued practice will be used in a session. This is why there is some tolerance for error. The list is not “rules,” but guidelines. Unintended actions
make me think of going off topic in a session. Even though it may negatively impact the session, the valued practices help tutors to correct these errors.

In her individual interview, I prompted Esther to elaborate further on how these principles apply to her tutoring practices. For Esther, practices should be equitable because they should be able to be used by all tutors (the users):

Equitable Use, first from like what I understand it to be is that it can, the principle can be used for, like, any type of person no matter, like, what their background or abilities are. And so, being a co-learner and a co-collaborator, you’re bringing different experiences to your session. Um, and it’s not going to be the same for each person. So, like, my experiences as a tutor, not only as a tutor, but as just, like, a person, is going to be different from the next tutor and the next consultant. So, I think in this case that first one where you’re being a co-learner, co-collaborator, there’s a different way that each person does it. And so, it’s not strict as to who can use it. Everyone can do it differently and bring different experiences to it.

In contrast to Mariam, Esther is focuses on tutors’, rather that writers’, diverse experiences that they bring to a session. For Esther, valued practices should anticipate tutors having diverse experiences, which inform diverse tutoring styles, and be able to be used equally by all tutors.

Similar to explanation above as to why being a co-learner is equitable, Esther explained that the valued practice demonstrate active listening is a practice that is equitable because there are many different ways to show active listening:

So again, going back to, like, everyone has a different way of doing things and different way that they bring to the, to the session. So, for example, like demonstrating active
listening can mean a lot of different things. It could mean that you are, like, repeating back to them what they said to make sure that you understand it, it could be body language, could be nodding along, could be, you know, it could also be not nodding along and just looking or writing. Taking notes that could be active listening, and as well as how, like, a person makes effective use of wait time. Um, that anyone can do—you just have to stop talking and that’s kind of what wait time is and pretty much anyone with any ability could just like stop and wait, as well as listen, this is something that everyone can do.

Since active listening can be practiced in many different ways, there are options for tutors of all abilities and backgrounds to practice active listening. Esther also believes that practicing wait time is equitable since it is something everyone can do, though she admits it can be “difficult for some people. It is sometimes very difficult for me.” However, Esther does believe that everyone is capable to utilizing wait time.

In a similar manner, Esther discussed how the practice of establishing rapport is equitable because anyone can do it in a variety of ways:

So, similar I would say to the other two, but I would say even more. This is, I think, more so than the other two, is that each person is different. Each person has a unique personality. But at the same time, anyone can do this. Anyone can establish rapport. It’s just a matter of how people go about doing it. For example, I like to take time at the beginning of my sessions to ask about, like, their day, how their work is, like, is going, how classes are, and then throughout the session if there’s something that either I relate to or that I find really interesting and I know would engage them, I asked them more about
it. And we, I take a little bit extra time in my sessions to build that connection. However, that might not be the case for other tutors. Other tutors might do it differently. They might wait till the end when they’re doing, you know, what comes next. That’s where they might be established rapport. So again, it is very easily transferable between tutors. While establishing rapport at the end of the session has the obvious implication that this rapport would have no direct effect on the work done during the session (Esther was attempting to respond to my interview questions on the spot and likely just did not consider this constraint in the moment), Esther’s response still leads us to consider how the process of establishing rapport might be different for different tutors, given their different personalities. Esther here implied that no matter one’s personality, they can find a way to establish rapport, making this valued practice of establishing rapport equitable to all tutors.

Valued Practices as Flexible Recommendations, Not Mandates

Esther discussed how the valued practices, in addition to being equitable to tutors, were also very flexible in how tutors could enact them. For example, Esther explained how the non-authoritative role presented in the valued practices is flexible. Esther brought up one session with a writer with ADHA and Asperger’s whom she and her co-tutor felt required a more authoritative approach from the tutor:

We had a writer who came in, and he expressed to us that he had ADHD and Asperger’s. Um, so with that in mind, so he expressed that to us. So, with that in mind, there were some, you know, moves that we had to make to give the writer what he needed. Um, you
know, sometimes a writer will come to us, expressing like certain needs or disabilities that we have to be mindful of. So, we knew that we would have to be the ones, kind of a little bit more in that authoritative role because that’s what the writer needed. And we also had to be aware of wait time and when wait time started to become ineffective because there was some point where we asked the writer to perform a task, we asked him to go back into it was, like, an article, to go back, take out evidence, and put it in this outline we created together. And we realized that either the time we gave him, he still needed our help. Um, because he was getting stuck so we realized that we did have to go back and do it with him and become more of that authoritative role, but again, because that was what we believed the writer needed in this session.

On one hand, the tutors are being flexible in this instance by adjusting their typical non-authoritative role of a more authoritative one. On the other, from Esther’s application of the principles of UD to the valued practices, the valued practice that tells tutors to “avoid role of editor and authority” is also flexible. Rather than being a hard and fast rule, it is a flexible guideline.

To Esther, the language of the valued practices should and does allow them to be flexible when up into practice. It seems that Esther does not read “avoid role of editor and authority” as “do not be an authority,” but rather “most of the time it is not beneficial to be an authority.” Similarly, the rest of this valued practice—“be a co-learner and rhetorical/cultural informant”—is not a mandate either to Esther:

Again, with the flexibility and the way these are written, it is very flexible, and anyone can use them. And, like, being a co-learner and cultural informant. So, the way it’s
written out is it doesn’t say, “Don’t do this. Don’t like, you know, don’t say this. Don’t talk at this point.” It’s not telling you exactly what not to do or what to do.

Just as the valued practices, for Esther, encourage, but do not mandate, that the tutor not be an authority, Esther also believes that the valued practices encourage, but do not mandate, that tutors focus on global rather than local concerns. In one of her writing prompts, Esther discussed the valued practice prioritize global concerns in relation to a session during which she worked with a multilingual student on her personal statement. Esther describes how the student came to the session with a number of specific questions about local concerns in her statement and took the reins early on in the session. Esther did not feel that the session or writer’s learning was negatively impacted by her not steering the session into a discussion about global elements of the writer’s personal statement:

In this instance, the valuable practices were flexible because I was able to focus more on the local concerns instead of global concerns in the session. I was not forced to move the session in explaining a personal statement when that was not what the writer needed. In our studies at the writer center, we have discussed how multilingual writers may need to focus more on local concerns instead of global concerns because meaning could be lost. The manner in which I tutor is not limited, as I am able to make these decisions freely. There are not step-by-step instructions that I need to follow.

Prioritizing global concerns is, for Esther, a suggestion, rather than required “instructions” for her to follow. Here again we see how Esther understands the valued practices as being flexible or how she imbues the valued practices with flexibility in reading and applying them.
Ambiguity of Error in Tutoring

Esther’s perceptions that the valued practices are flexible, allowing tutors to use them as guidelines rather than mandates, also relates for Esther with the practices being tolerant to error. If a tutor does slip into an authority role during a session when it is not prudent to do so, Esther believes that this error can be easily corrected and oftentimes negligible:

So, um, there’s, there’s both a lot of room for error and a lot of room for like making up any error. Like, it’s not going to be like a super big deal if you do make a slight error, like let’s say, it says avoid role of editor or authority. Some sessions, you know, as a tutor, I might slip a little bit, and I might go back into the role of editor or authority, but the way this is written, if I was, if I’m being a co-learner, there’s not going to be a ton of error in their learning.

Tutors can act as authorities during sessions—sometimes, like in the previously discussed example of the writer with ADHA and Asperger’s, it is beneficial to do so, and other times, it may not be. Even if it is not beneficial for tutors to be authorities, tutors, according to Esther, need not get stuck in this role to the point that it becomes detrimental to the writer’s learning.

Esther similarly felt that the valued practice establish rapport is tolerant to error because a tutor can mess up while establishing rapport but has many options to correct and establish good rapport with the writer:

There’s, there’s a ton of room for error for this. You can make, like, a bunch of mistakes, but at the same time, it also remedies itself. So, like you could accidentally say something in the attempts to establish rapport and then remedy it by saying something else that’s
also in the vein of establishing rapport. Um, so there’s just a bunch of room for error and fixes in this, in this case.

For Esther, the valued practices are also tolerant to error because they do not present or make obvious what error is, allowing for a range of practices and corrective measures to be implemented without dire consequences. In the excerpt below, Esther compares how we approach error (or lack thereof) in writing center sessions to how we approach error (or lack thereof) when discussing grammar with writers:

So, it’s kind of the, again, the way these are in are kind of hard to make errors because it’s not presented as there being one in the first place. So, demonstrate active listening, avoid dominating the conversation. So, like, avoid dominating the conversation is the only place where there might be error, but again there’s, it’s not considered an error. So, like, even when we talk about the writing center, we, you know, in, like, grammar, we don’t like to say grammar mistakes, we just like to say we revise them, which is all language. It’s all language. Technically, is it a grammar error? Yes, but language wise, we are not presenting as an error, we’re presenting as a revision. So, the way these are written, there’s error, and there’s room for error, but it’s not presented as one.

When we approach grammar rhetorically in writing center work, we discuss grammar choices and their rhetorical effect on readers, rather than grammar choices being right or wrong. In this parallel, Esther seems to indicate that tutoring moves in writing center work are approached the same way—not as being either right or wrong, but as an array of choices with a range of consequences on writers’ learning.
In fact, in one of her writing prompts, Esther discussed a session during which her writer was a fellow writing center tutor and her mentee within the writing center. During the session, which was being observed by another tutor, they discussed the mentee’s poetry, which is something Esther and her mentee had done before outside of the writing center. She attempted to follow the valued practices, but ultimately found that not focusing on the valued practices and talking to her mentee as she had done when they discussed his poetry outside of the center resulted in a productive session. In reflecting on this session in relation to the UD principle Tolerance for Error in her writing prompt, Esther found, “There was no adverse consequences for not sticking to the usual ‘tutoring moves.’ Rather, to a certain extent, by breaking free of them we were still able to produce a collaborative session.” In this case, not only was not following the valued practices not and “error” to Esther, but it was what actually allowed for the writer to best learn in the session. For Esther, the valued practices might not only allow for error, but at times they may not even be the measure of what qualifies as error in writing center work. If Esther sees “error” as adverse consequences in terms of the writer’s learning, then it may be entirely unrelated to the valued practices if deviating from the valued practices allows the writer to best learn.

Variation in Object of Design

Like Mariam, Esther also occasionally discussed tutors as the objects of design. In the writing prompt in which Esther reflected on the session with her mentee, at one point, she framed herself as the object of design in applying Flexibility in Use to herself as a tutor. In this writing
prompt, she noted that she as a tutor, as opposed to the valued practices, needed to be flexible. At the same time, she discussed how the valued practices can possibly restrict the tutor’s flexibility:

In the beginning, I would say that the valued practices prevented me from being flexible in terms of the complete list. However, the building rapport valued practice really was the basis for this entire session. I was able to center my entire session off this one valued practice and it lead to success. This rapport looked different than my other writing sessions because we didn’t meet each other in a session, but rather we work together. Rapport doesn’t always look the same, which allowed be to be flexible in how I approached the session. He knows me and my tutoring style, and I know his tutoring style which I think allowed us to be more collaborative and honest.

Esther found that the valued practice of establishing rapport was the most important valued practice in the session and that she was able to flexibly put it into practice. The other valued practices restricted her flexibility. In her reflection on this session, the valued practices were the object of design when she discussed Tolerance for Error. However, she was the object of design in her discussion of Flexibility in Use because she was the one, not the valued practices, enacting this principle. We see here that Esther is subverting the traditional application of UD. In a single writing prompt, Esther implicitly acknowledges that multiple components to the writing center session are designed (i.e., the valued practices and herself as a tutor) and are thus subject to analysis by the principles of UD. In doing so, she deviates from the notion that design involves a single object of design with which a single user or type of user interacts.
Another time Esther framed herself as a tutor as the object of design was when she was talking about active listening and mentioned that tutors need to be flexible in how they apply active listening in their sessions:

It’s about, like, what the tutor kind of feels, like, what their own, you know, moves and their own practices, and it’s different for each tutor, but like in sessions, you have to be able to be flexible with, with what you’re doing because you never know what’s going to come up, or you never know what you might learn about the writer as you’re moving on. Um, you know, sometimes writers do need a lot of time to think, some don’t. Some are able to come up with an answer or, you know, if we asked him a question, they’re able to come up with an answer like that. But some writers need time to think about it. So, you have to be flexible in like how long you give them, understanding when, again, that time becomes ineffective, as well as, like, active listening. Active listening to one writer might be really engaging in back-and-forth conversation super and, like, you know, rapid pace, but for another that might not work for them. So, you have to be flexible in how you’re going about a session.

Consideration of Key Tutoring Concepts Prompted by UD

When asked in her individual interview to discuss the relationship between the UD principle Simple and Intuitive Use and the valued practices, Esther framed the valued practice as the object of design, breaking down the language of the valued practice to examine its simplicity and intuitiveness. Esther is seeing the valued practices as the objects of design because, again,
the valued practices are the things that users (in this case tutors) interact with to accomplish their goals (tutoring). Esther discussed how the practices were simple and intuitive for tutors to understand, rather than how she or her practices were simple or intuitive for writers to understand. For example, in discussing the valued practice “establish rapport with writer,” Esther explained,

So, this, even though I said earlier that this was the most ambiguous one, in terms of its use of, like, flexibility, and it changes between each person, um, I think, I mean, in terms of language, I think rapport is a, you know, well-known word. I don’t think it’s, like, that complicated of a word. So, again establish rapport with a writer. Okay, like, it’s, it’s kind of, like, okay this is something that I should be doing. Now the manner in which I do it might be, you know, different or, you know, maybe that’s the thing that’s not straightforward, but the valued practice and its language is.

Other valued practices Esther at first claimed were also simple and intuitive to tutors. However, when I asked her to elaborate on why these practices were simple and intuitive, she began to second guess herself and ultimately concluded that the practices were not as simple and intuitive as she initially believed. An example of this is seen in her discussion of the practice be a co-learner:

So, I think for this one I’m like looking more at this specific language that we use to establish these valued practices, like specifically, you know, co-learner and rhetorical cultural informant. I don’t think, I mean, I kind of look at this in a different way. Because to me, this is clear; however, I actually don’t know if this would be that clear to someone who wasn’t at the writing center or who wasn’t, you know, um, familiar with English
rhetoric. Um, because I’m kind of looking at this a different way because I mean rhetorical and cultural informant, I see it as, you know, someone who can bring their own experiences and to a session. Um, but, or not even our own experiences, that’s kind of the cultural part, but the there’s a certain level of expertise that we have in writing and, you know, writing conventions. Again, we don’t like to say, whereas, you know, authoritative, but there is just a little bit. We have a different perspective on it than our writers because we’ve had the class. We’ve done a lot of research on it. Um, but I think, you know, co-learner is pretty straightforward, as well as avoid a role of editor and authority, so language-wise, I think it’s pretty straightforward. The only thing that might get trippy is the rhetorical and cultural informant.

In applying the principle of Simple and Intuitive Use to this valued practice, Esther broke down the valued practice and determined which terms she believed were intuitive and which required specialized knowledge. In fact, in the excerpt above, we see Esther work through her definitions of cultural and rhetorical informant, talking her way through the distinction between the two. Initially, she defined rhetorical informant in terms of tutors bringing in their prior experiences, but then decided that this was what they did as cultural informants. Then, she defined rhetorical informant in terms of tutors’ knowledge of academic writing conventions. In attempting to determine the intuitive and non-intuitive elements of this valued practice, Esther worked through and articulated understandings of her role as a tutor, likely further developing these understandings in doing so.
“Wait time” was another concept that Esther found to not be as intuitive as she initially thought when I asked her to explain why she believed the valued practice demonstrate active listening is simple and intuitive:

So, this one, it kind of, um, I think this one is pretty simple and straightforward, with the knowledge, you have to have at least some sort of knowledge behind you in terms of like wait time. I was not, like, it’s one of those things like we all know what wait time was, but it wasn’t until [the former director] in the class was like, “This is what wait time is, and this is what it’s used for.” Um, so again, if someone did not take this class, if someone did not, you know, at least have someone didn’t tell them what wait time was, it’s just not a spoken thing, so I’m like, now that I’m talking this through. I’m thinking that this, this one does not relate to these three. But, um, active listening is something I think that you learn in, like, primary school. So again, I think that one’s pretty straightforward. Avoid dominating the conversation. I mean, that one’s again pretty straightforward. There’s not much you can go into with that one, so that the first half is pretty is, I think, very fairly clear. It’s the wait time half that might not be so much.

Again, examining the valued practices through the principle of Simple and Intuitive Use prompted Esther to break down the principle into its key components and decide which ones are easy for tutors to understand and which require some additional explanation.

For Esther, the UD principle of Perceptible Information was closely associated with Simple and Intuitive Use. Esther noted the importance of the valued practices communicating information effectively to tutors “regardless of ambient conditions.” For example, Esther
discussed how the valued practice of be a co-learner is something tutors can understand and apply in all sessions, regardless of the technological context of a session:

It’s kind of interesting going back to like Zoom regardless of ambient conditions, like, all of these valued practices still count in Zoom in a different environment. So being a co-learner. Again, it has to, I think also has to do with the ease of how it’s written, the communication is simple. So being a co-learner and not, yeah, and being an informant. Avoid role of editor and authority. So, I think it’s communicating the idea. Um, it is definitely dependent on, you know, the simple use of it in what we talked about, but it is communicating the idea that this is what you need to be doing, like, as a tutor, like, your role in the session, you are not there to talk over, you’re not there to be the teacher, you are there to learn with them and collaborate with them. So, I think this one does serve its purpose, and especially avoid, avoid role of editor that is very clear. It communicates very clearly you are not editing this paper in the sense that, like, going through and nitpicking and saying change this, change this, change this. You’re talking about, um, you know, the rhetorical situation, um, of it. So, um, yeah, I think this one communicates it pretty, pretty effectively in all mediums.

**Focus Group: Varied Applications of UD Synthesized and Developed**

As we have seen in the previous two sections, Mariam and Esther each have unique and insightful applications of the principles of UD to the valued tutoring practices. Mariam tended to view tutors and their practices as the object of design to which the principles of UD were applied
and the writer as the user of the tutor and their practices. For Mariam, writers come to sessions with diverse experiences and abilities to which the tutor must adapt in order to facilitate a successful session, though Mariam also discussed a particular moment when working with a writer whose paper was in Spanish in which the writer must be flexible as well. Esther saw, for the most part, the valued practices as the object of design and the tutor as the user of the valued practices. From this perspective, tutors are diverse, with various experiences and ways of working with writers, and the valued practices should be flexible so that all tutors can implement them to construct a successful session, though, as Esther noted, implementing all of the valued practices are not always necessary to have a successful session. The focus group at the end of the study was a fascinating dialogue between these two tutors with their unique reflections and insights, during which new insight was generated that neither generated on their own during their individual interviews or writing prompts. By sharing their perspectives, the tutors were prompted to develop new applications for UD in writing center sessions and consider the complex ecology of a writing center session that prompts implementation of UD in tutoring practices.

**New Application of UD Prompted by Dialogue**

In her individual interview, Mariam discussed writers as diverse users of the centers tutoring services. It was important to Mariam to recognize the diverse language backgrounds and ways of learning that writers bring to a session. In the focus group, Mariam extended this line of thinking, commenting on how both writers and tutors are diverse. Because of this diversity
across the various actors within a session, Mariam emphasized that tutors have to be flexible, or have an open-minded:

I think also a big part of the writing center is just, like, being open minded because everyone’s a different human being. Everyone learns differently. Everyone has their own, like, beliefs and cultural background. And not only that, like, does that influence them as a person, but that influences how each tutor individually tutors as well. Um, so yeah, I just think that you always, like, especially being a writing tutor, you definitely have to have an open mind.

Traditionally, we would say that an object of design (such as a tutor) being flexible in light of a user’s (a writer’s) diverse abilities. In her individual interview, Mariam discussed various objects of design (the session, her practices, and herself as a tutor) in relation to a discrete user (the writer). Mariam obscures this clean distinction that user and designer are discrete, arguing that it is the diverse abilities of both the writer and tutor that prompt flexibility on the part of the tutor.

In her individual interview, Esther often focused on applying the principles of UD to the valued practices themselves, rather than to the tutor. In the focus group, possibly because Mariam was applying the principles of UD to herself as a tutor during the focus group as she did during her individual interview, Esther also applied the principles of UD to herself as a tutor more than she did in her individual interview. For example, in elaborating on one of her sessions that she wrote about in one of her writing prompts, she discussed her being flexible as the tutor:

In the beginning it was, like, being flexible and, like, realizing what the writer was coming in for and kind of going off of the valued practice that we had. And it’s kind of, like, assessing the writer’s understanding, like, you know, okay, I can be flexible today.
Like, I can just help her with this, like, assignment, like, I can just help her understand the assignment.

As discussed in the previous section, Esther did apply the UD principle of flexibility to herself as a tutor a few times in her writing prompts. This session was one of the sessions that Esther discussed herself as a tutor being flexible in her writing prompt response. This response in the focus group more closely aligns with her response in her writing prompt (discussing how she was flexible), rather than her responses in her individual interview (discussing how the valued practices were flexible). Again, this could be due to the fact that Mariam was also applying the principles of UD to herself, rather than the valued practices, or it could simply be due to the fact that Esther was already applying principles of UD to herself and the valued practices in her writing prompts.

**Flexibility Prompted by Complexities of Sessions**

During the focus group, an interesting connection between the technological and linguistic components of writing center sessions came up when Mariam and Esther were discussing tutors being flexible in light of writers’ diverse language skills and backgrounds. Esther brought up how she is flexible in how she writes session notes, which are sent to the writer after the session, because of writers’ diverse language abilities:

I think I’ll also mentioned, like, even though I don't particularly like this one, this valued practice, but with the session notes, um, you do have to be flexible with those. Like sometimes if you are working with a multilingual writer, like, you, like, depending on, I
think, where they are at with their language skills, like, you have to be cognizant of what you're writing in those session notes. And that goes both ways. You have to make sure that, you know, you're not using, like, extreme, like, extreme, like, high-level words where, like, even if it was someone who does speak English, like, as their first language, that they wouldn't understand. And but at the same time, you also have to understand, like, that they are still, like, they're not like dumb. Like, you can't, like, be, like, condescending in your session notes, but you do also have to, to a certain degree, like, recognize where their language skills are. Like, I had a session—I think I wrote about it in this—with a multilingual writer from Saudi Arabia, and she was coming to me for her, she was coming to me for a few things, but, like, knowing the, like, she had to use Google Translate in our session to communicate with me, so I wanted to make sure that in my session notes I was being as clear as possible, and going, like, writing to where she was at instead of either asking her to come up to a native speaker’s level or to potentially go, like, below what, you know, her level of understanding and language is. So, I think there's definitely a balance in the flexibility with that one, even though I don't think [this valued practice] is probably necessary to be on this list.

Esther’s response prompted Mariam to consider how writers’ language backgrounds and abilities can shed light on technological constraints of the session. Mariam discussed how the application used to send session notes to writers, TutorTrac, does not correctly produce certain letters and symbols from non-English languages. It is at this intersection of writers’ languages and technological constraints that Mariam learns to be flexible as a tutor:
But I, really quick going off of what Esther said. I agree. It's not, nothing personal. It's not that we're dumbing it down. It's that we just want them to understand. We want the message to get across. But at the same time, you know, like, I also want to encourage them to learn better words, but at the same time, I want them to know that I'm trying to say, hey, this is the link to your resources, you know, so it's, like, there's two sides to it. But also, something I really hate about TutorTrac is the symbols thing because I literally hate TutorTrac. I hate the website. I hate valued practices. I'll just go off. But, no, with, right, like, I wanted to send, I always want to send my session notes to Spanish-speaking students in Spanish, and TutorTrac decides to correct and then do all these weird things with the symbols that it looks so weird, and even, like, if you type your session notes outside in Google Docs, it's already weird, but it underlines every word, and it thinks that is incorrect because it recognizes it's not English, but the tildes then, it, like, makes them weird symbols too, and I was just like, why is this like not having an Equitable Use right now like? Why can I not write my session notes in Spanish? Like, what the heck? And even [another tutor], like, I've talked about this with [this other tutor] multiple occasions, and I'm like, “I hate TutorTrac because I can never send anything in Spanish.” And she goes, “Yeah, I know. I honestly just send it to like their personal email.” And I'm like, “Oh, that's such a better idea.” So yeah, it's really frustrating.

Writing center sessions involve complex people bringing together their complex histories in complex ecologies. Mariam works with writers in their native languages when possible but cannot communicate with them in their native languages outside of the session due to a constraint within the larger writing center infrastructure: TutorTrac not accepting Spanish
vocabulary and symbols. (This issue might have a relatively feasible remedy, depending on how difficult it would be to get TutorTrac to accept Spanish vocabulary and symbols.) It might be more accurate to think about flexibility on the part of the tutor being enacted as a result of the intersection of these complex people, histories, and ecologies, rather than as the result of only a writer’s native language or only technological constraints.

Mariam discussed how the intersection of the interpersonal and technological dimensions of a session look different with a change in the technological context—tutoring over Zoom:

When they, like, cover their mouse over something, and I’m like, oh, they probably want to change it, and, like, instead of reading body language, I’m reading like mouse language, if that makes sense. And, like, I’m thinking of, yes, and I’m like, “Okay,” I’m like, “wait, why are we clicking over there? Did you want to change it?” And they’re like, “Yeah, I don’t really like that sentence,” and it’s honestly happened to me like a few times now. And so, it’s like, for valued practice number 17, “use tone and body language to facilitate learning,” how can you do that if you’re just looking at my face? You know what I mean? So, and sometimes they’re, like, also sitting in the dark. I can’t even see their face, so I’m like, I can’t tell if they’re like in a good mood or in a bad mood. I’m really, like, honestly listening more to their voice.

Through dialogue with Esther and me, Mariam reflected on how technology shapes the way tutors do interpersonal communication during a session and how she flexibly applies valued practices in her sessions in light of the technological-interpersonal facets of the session.
Mariam brought up another interesting connection between the technological interpersonal dimensions of a session, this time focused more on the tutors’ ways of interacting. She recalled a session she had over Zoom that Esther had observed:

Mariam: Also, another big part of being flexible, not only in just, like, with multilingual writers, but simply with technology because we have to be so extremely flexible now that we're tutoring just through Zoom. Like, Esther, remember that session that you observed me, and, like, we literally did not get started until, like, 20 minutes later…[remark about how Esther was frozen for a second.]…You observed me in a session, and we literally did not get to start the session until, like, 15 minutes in because she couldn't figure out how to work Zoom. Do you remember that?

Esther: That was so, well that was what my observation report was on that.

Mariam: Yeah, and it was so terrible. And so, like, again, like, not only is flexible, like just, you know, with your tutoring, but, like, who you are as a person, like. And Esther also, like, was like, “Mariam, you did a good job because you were positive that entire time, and I would have been pissed,” and inside I was so frustrated and angry. But flexible, like, with who you are, I guess, is also another thing and flexible with technology for sure. Like, people don't know how to turn on their mics or their cameras, and you just have to take it, like, one step at a time and help them so that for the next session they do know what they're doing. So, and I guess that does kind of tie into the set reasonable expectations and negotiate with the writer what to work on and why, even with technology because by the
time that we only have, like, 15 minutes left, I was like, “Hey, let's just briefly
like skim through it. And what's your main concern here like so we can address it
because I want you to leave this session happy?”

In this case, Mariam and Esther discussed how technology—and the writer’s ability or lack
thereof to navigate an application like Zoom to facilitate interpersonal interaction—can have an
affective impact on the tutor and shape the tutor-writer interaction and focus of the session going
forward.

In this vein of the complexity of writing center sessions with regards to the interpersonal,
Mariam recognized that tutors need to be flexible because sessions are not solely about
transmitting knowledge about writing. Writers are indeed humans with varied ways of going
about interpersonal interaction. The ways in which writers do interpersonal interaction are tied
up with writers’ different cultural and language backgrounds, all of which tutors must keep in
mind and to which tutors must adjust in sessions:

Yeah, we’re, like, rhetorical informants, but I feel like we kind of do other things too as
well. Like, we, we, I guess console because you also have to, like, pick up on them, like
emotions too, so it’s more than the rhetoric thing. However, the culture thing though I
think is very much there in every session, especially, like, you know, when you have
multilingual, like, writers, and, and, you know, you have to pick up on, like, their culture
and, like, how they are, how they speak, how they just simply talk to you, and sometimes,
like, I have to learn like, oh, don’t take it personal that they’re not giving you eye contact.
It’s probably something that’s part of their culture that they’re not want to look you in the
eyes. Or, like, I also, like, they wrote their sentences this way. Like, what language is it
that they read, like, right to left? Arabic or something. Yeah. And so, this girl that I was tutoring was structuring her sentences in that way. It was so weird, and I was, and then she told me that she was Arabic, and I was like, oh, that makes sense. So, so, you have to, like, adjust and, like, give them the benefit of the doubt I would say. So, that’s why I think that cultural informant is pretty important.

For Mariam, writers bring a lot of complexity to writing center sessions. Her acknowledgement of this complexity can be seen in her discussion of the valued practice learn assignment requirements or rhetorical situation, including the writer’s understanding.” For Mariam, learning the writer’s understanding of an assignment/rhetorical situation is more important than solely the tutor learning the assignment and rhetorical situation. Mariam believed that this valued practice should emphasize learning the writer’s understanding of the assignment/rhetorical situation, that it should be made the main focus of this valued practice, rather than a prepositional phrase at the end. As she said in the focus group, “Like, how do they feel? Like, do they, are they one of those, like, ‘I hate writing. I can’t stand it. I suck at it.’ Or are they somewhat confident. Like, I always like to feel them out first.” Although her response focuses mostly on a certain affective component that writers bring to sessions, the fact that writers’ language and cultural histories and ways of writing and interacting with others are complex could be part of the reason why she believed that learning about the writer’s understanding of the assignment/rhetorical situation is more important for the tutor than learning the assignment/rhetorical situation for themselves. Additionally, Esther recognizes, as she did in her individual interview, that the affect of writers is part of their complexity and the complexity
of writing center sessions. For Mariam, learning the writer’s understanding is important in part because it allows the tutor to learn about the affective dimensions of the situation.

Building off of the complexity of writing center sessions—particularly diverse ways of interpersonal interaction that both tutors and writers enact in sessions—Esther steers the conversation toward her application of the principles of UD to the valued practices and her belief that valued practices that are flexible are better than a set of strict rules to follow during a session.

Esther: So, I guess, like, what we’ve been saying, like, each session is different from the, from the rest. Like, each session and, like, the personalities, like, the vibe. Like, sometimes it’s hard to explain, but it’s, like, the vibe you get from people. Like, you know, like, sometimes you make a really good connection with a writer, and, like, honestly, I’ve had situations where writers have come to me, and they’ve said to me, “I’ve been to the writing center. I’ve had a session.” And then they’re like, I’m not gonna say who but, like, “I’ve had a session with so and so, and it just, like, didn’t work out.” And I was like, “Got it.” So, then I kind of, like, try to, like, you know, make it better. So, like, each connection that you make with a writer can be really great for one tutor and really bad for another tutor. So, like, again, like, I’ve had, there’s this one writer that keeps coming to me, and she had a session with someone, like, back in the day, and now she only comes to me.

Mariam [jokingly]: It’s me. She hates me. I know.

Esther: This is for Eric’s study, but I will tell you later about this. Like you just have, like, I would rather be able to like make organic connections with people because I’m a
different person than, you know, say the next tutor. I would rather make those connections for myself, based on who I am, than having a set of rules that tells me what I can and can’t do because, like, establishing, like, rapport with the writer, like, that can mean so many different things, like, at, you know, establishing rapport to me that could also be, like, in, like, their paper’s really, really interesting. I get really in depth, like, with people’s papers. I get excited about their topics, and I like to ask them questions even if it doesn’t have to do with, like, their writing because I know that’s what they love, and I want to know what other people love and, like, that’s my thing. But it might not be the next tutor’s. So, and it might not always work out for me. So, I’d rather, like, be able to do that and have someone else be able to do their thing than there be, like, a strict set of rules.

Here Esther brings in her unique perspective on how to apply the principles of UD to writing center work—applying the principles to the list of valued practices to ensure that they are able to be easily and flexibly implemented by all tutors.

*Conversation About User of Object of Design Extended by Dialogue*

Based on the ways that Mariam and Esther applied the principles of UD to writing center work in both their individual interviews and writing prompts, I asked them during the focus group who or what in the session they believed ought to demonstrate flexibility. In their dialogue in response to this question, Mariam and Esther agreed that tutors have to be flexible in light of
writers’ language backgrounds and that writers also have to be flexible in light of tutors’ language backgrounds. For example, Mariam discussed how both herself and her writer demonstrated flexibility during her session discussed in her writing prompt in which the writer’s assignment was in Spanish:

When the student in particular, she had Spanish homework. And so, it was hard for me because I had to. This is where the flexible part comes in because I can speak Spanish very well. I understand it very well, but like reading and writing, I never really did that. Like, in my childhood, I learned Spanish, and I went to preschool, learned English, and then, like, my Spanish was that, like, that’s it, so, it was very hard, and I just had to, like, take it step by step. And, like, in that second session when I was giving my bilingual writer wait time my, in this first session, my writer had to give me wait time because I was like, give me a second. I need to read the sentence, like, three times just so I know that what you’re saying is what I’m thinking. And, like, just not only that but the instructions. And yeah, and I told her, straight up, and I guess this also applies to one of the valued practices of being like, hey, I’m not an expert, I was like, I don’t know the grammar. I was like, the truth is I don’t know what’s going on there.

I also asked about who or what in sessions need to be tolerant to error. Mariam discussed how tutors and writers need to be flexible and tolerant with each other, and both need to be flexible and tolerant with technology:

Yeah, like, I think it was, like, she could see me; I couldn’t see her; she could hear me, but I couldn't hear her. So, it was like we each had like one sense, and I was, like, using the chat box. It was like bird box, literally. And I was, like, using the chat box to, like,
communicate with her. And then, she was like, okay, okay. And I was like, “Let's just do, like, a phone call.” So, we literally have the phone call. She can hear me, but I still again, like, the entire session, I have no idea, I think, what that girl looks like. Yeah, nothing's coming to my brain. So yeah, and then also tolerance for error because I typed the wrong phone number, and I was calling some random person. I missed it by one number. And so then, I was like, oh my God, and then she had to send the phone number again, and then it was just, like, we were both making flaws throughout that session, like, she not knowing how to work with Zoom and turn on her camera and all that stuff and me not being able to, I was trying to create a solution but still was, like, slacking, and this entire time were like we losing like 10, 15 minutes of the session. So, it was just, like, so frustrating too, um, and on top of that she also, I think, I don't know if it was me or her who was having really bad signal too, so, like, was, like, literally, like, all my words were, like, freezing up as well. So, it's just like tolerance for error and also just, like, error in general, meaning, like, outside forces, things that you can't control happening, which again also ties into flexibility, but yeah, on both parts. And yeah, I think tolerance for error, like, is, again, like, not only just, like, the tutor’s tolerance for error, but also the writer’s tolerance for error. Like, she was always like, “Why am I not getting a phone call?” because I was calling someone else. So, on both people.

I prompted them to extend this line of thinking further by asking more explicitly about who has to be tolerant to error, who can commit error, and where does error come from. With regards to who has to be tolerant, Mariam said,
I would say that it's definitely part of the job as a tutor to be tolerant for error, and if you're not, you're not doing your job. For the writer, they don't have to be tolerant for error, but if they're a decent human being, I hope they are because definitely as a tutor I've made mistakes and definitely as a tutor have writers been mad at me for making those mistakes and, like, sending maybe the wrong link, or not, forgetting to send my session notes, or who knows what something I did, but, but as a decent human being, they could be, like, just courtesy, “Hey, you forgot to do this, this, and this,” you know and understanding, but they don't have to do that.

Mariam acknowledged that tutors can commit error and that writers should be tolerant to this error out of respect, but do not have to be. Esther agreed with Mariam with regards to tutors being able to commit errors and held writers to a slightly higher standard, arguing that we should expect them to be tolerant to tutor error:

Esther: Yeah, I honestly, I think for me, I do think that writers should have a tolerance, or I honestly, I expect writers to have at least some sort of tolerance for error when they come to one of the sessions as a UCF student and being, coming to a peer tutor, I expect them to have some sort of tolerance for error and knowing that we are their peers and not a teacher. We're not experts, but you do learn a lot about some people. Like, Mariam, did you see in the email? Did you see that, like, email thread between [writing center coordinator] and this one girl who wanted, like, Chicago, a tutoring session on, like, Chicago style. Did you see that whole interaction?
Mariam: Can you give me one second? My parents just got home, and they’re greeting my dog. So, I'm so sorry. Hold on, I'm going to move to another room.

Esther: Um, I’m trying to think what I was saying. Okay, there was, yeah, there was a, so, there's an email chain. So, it was between, like, this girl who wanted, like, you know, basically, long story short, it, like, expected tutors to be experts. But we're not experts. So, like, they have this expectation for us that we were and got upset that we, that's not who we are. So, I do expect writers come in to have a certain level of tolerance for error, and I will say, on the whole, that they do. I've had one that they definitely weren't. But like, I make so many mistakes in sessions. Like, I don't know everything. I make a lot of mistakes. I even, like, I mean, even in just this, like, I'll be, like, thinking of something, say it, and then be like, wait no when I had, like, more time to think about it, and I'll backtrack. So, I do that a lot in sessions, and I feel bad about it because I feel like it confuses writer. So, that's something I know I have to work on. But in general, they have been pretty tolerant towards my, like, missteps. Um, but, like, they don't have to. You're, like, totally right, and they don't have to have that when they come in. It's just nice, and I do expect them to come in as a UCF service being a UCF student and having a certain level of integrity, but like, you don't. You can't make anyone do anything. Um, but if they don't have it, like, you know, that tolerance for error, then I think problems start to arise, and, like, I've never done it—I don't know anyone who has—like you can end the session, like, if they don't have a tolerance for error.
For Esther, the fact that writers are UCF students means that tutors can expect a certain level of respect from them in terms of tolerating errors that tutors make.

Mariam, however, questioned how tolerant we should expect writers to be and when they are justified in their intolerance toward certain practices or lack thereof. In response to Esther, she pointed out, “But, but in some ways, they're justified in being upset. We call ourselves the writing center. How does everyone not know Chicago style?” The extent to which these tutors believed that writers should tolerate tutor error was left unresolved in the focus group.

Mariam then went on to discuss how tutor error might not be entirely individual. Tutor error could be a reflection of error in tutor training:

And who does that fall upon? Like, whose fault is that? Like, is that something we should be learning in seminar? You know what I mean? Or is that something that, like, all tutors should be, like, teaching themselves? Like, Eric, this seminar, we had a refresher on commas because no one knows how to freakin’ use commas, and we're all like 20 years old, and no one knows where they go. So literally, like, half of seminar was dedicated to [current writing center director] giving, like, a grammar refresher. So, at a certain point is it, like, something that we should change about ourselves or something that we should just communicate it better that we are not experts on our, like, our website or, you know, like, our principles or who we are, like, you know? So, I see it from their perspective. I also see it from ours as a tutor myself. But I would also be upset if I dedicated my time make an appointment, I'm struggling with Chicago style and make the appointment, and the person I made the appointment with doesn't even know what they're doing either.
For Mariam, tutor errors could be manifestations of gaps in tutor training. Or what the writer perceives as error could be due to dissonance between writer expectations of writing center work and actual writing center work. Mariam suggested that this dissonance could be ameliorated if the role of the writing center is more clearly explained on the center’s website.

Mariam and Esther also both agreed that errors can come from not just the writer and tutor, but other, outside forces as well. Mariam listed a few examples during the focus group:

Errors can come from my lack of sleep—me—outside forces for sure. My Wi Fi just randomly went out in a session, and I was like trying to fix it, and I was like, I have no idea what I'm doing, and I'm bothering my dad at work, and I'm like, how do I reset this and didn't even know where it was located. So, it's, like, random outside forces too. Or, like, a big outside force for tolerance for error is coronavirus. I should be tutoring people face to face, and I'm not, so that's, like, you know, there's big ones. There's little ones. And then there's just little things like hey, I'm human too. I forgot to do this, or I didn't do it correctly, or I told you the wrong thing. So, I'm sorry, but it happens. There's nothing you can really do about it.

Again, this dialogic reflection drew both the participants’ and my own attention to the many complex factors that constitute a writing center session and the many avenues on which error, issues, or road bumps can enter the session.
Application of UD to the Center as a Whole

During the individual interviews, writing prompts, and focus group, Mariam and Esther applied the principles of UD to themselves as tutors and to the list of valued practices. There was also a moment during the focus group when Mariam applied the principles of UD to the center as a whole. Mariam argued that the writing center as a whole should be equitable to all students, whose diverse abilities include many different language backgrounds:

Why I said equitable use because I feel like everyone deserves an equal opportunity to get help at the writing center, and I’ve actually talked to this with [current writing center director] because I was like, if we know that we’re having multilingual writers come in, why not have multilingual tutors hired? Why not have one tutor that speaks Russian, one tutor that speaks Chinese, one tutor that you know speaks Japanese? And, and that way they can get better help. It’s equal opportunity for everyone, rather than, hey no offense Esther or no offense to Eric, let’s have just one English native speaker tutor them. And then there’s, like, that disconnect, and I get it’s, like, a challenge. I get it teaches you lessons, but at the end of the day, I’m like, everyone should get the same session. If I’m making a session, I want to have, like, an English speaker, and, and if I’m speaking Spanish, I would like to have a Spanish speaker. But then, the way the [current writing center director] explained it to me with that, like, then only those tutors will get Spanish speakers, and I’m like, so what’s the problem though? I’m like, that’s, that’s their job, and that’ll be their job.
For Mariam, making writing center sessions equitable to all writers involves this work, not just tutors considering the equitability of their own practices or tutors and directors considering the equitability of the list of valued practices, but also viewing the center more holistically and considering equitability at this level.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

When asked to analyze their practices in relation to the principles of UD, Mariam’s and Esther’s responses match in many ways the previous scholarship. Both of the tutors focused on flexibility being central to their role as a tutor. Both of them emphasized the importance of establishing rapport to learn about the writer’s unique abilities and preferences, similar to Bokser’s (2005); Hitt’s (2012); Daniels, Babcock, and Daniels’ (2015); Rinaldi’s (2015); and Ryan, Miller, and Steinhart’s (2017) recommendations to allow writers to express how they learn best.

Mariam’s and Esther’s discussion of UD was not limited to only sessions with writers with disabilities. Indeed, the wide range of sessions and writers that came up in Mariam’s and Esther’s reflections and conversations demonstrates that UD is not only useful for thinking about sessions with writers with disabilities—all writer, regardless of their disability status, bring their unique cognitive processes, abilities, and histories to sessions. In this sense, this study confirms that sessions with disabled writers, as writing center scholars generally agree, are not atypical or deviations from the “normal.”
Sessions with multilingual writers frequently came up in Mariam’s and Esther’s reflections and discussions. Language histories have a large impact on writers’ abilities in writing center sessions. Esther discussed how she flexibly adapted the valued practice prioritize global concerns in a way that resonates with Babcock’s (2008b) argument that writing centers refusing to help writers edit could ignore the needs of deaf students. Esther related her experience working with a multilingual writer on local concerns in her personal statement to what she had read in her tutoring seminar—multilingual writers may need more explicit instruction with local concerns since meaning can get lost due to local concerns as well as global concerns. A rigid interpretation of the “prioritize global concerns” valued practice might have caused Esther to ignore the most pressing needs of the writer with which she was working.

Perhaps the most interesting insights from this study are the ways that the tutors applied UD to writing center work in ways previous scholarship has not. While, as discussed above, scholars have applied the principles of UD to typical tutoring practices, the writer is often conceptualized as the user in these applications. Esther’s idea of analyzing valued practices through UD with the tutor as the user is, as far as I know, a novel application of UD to writing center work. UD can not only help us consider how tutoring practices can be revised to better assist writers, but also how the language of these practices, their presentation to tutors, and the discussions and activities that happen around these valued practices in tutoring training and development can be revised to make these practices easier for tutors to understand, implement, and adapt in sessions as they see necessary.

Mariam and Esther also discussed how the principles of UD can be applied to the writer in their conversation about how flexible they should expect the writer to be during a session.
Additionally, they discussed how elements beyond the writer’s abilities and attitudes, such as technological concerns, can prompt both the tutor and writer to be flexible. Ultimately, in bringing their different perspectives and insights together, Mariam and Esther articulated sophisticated conceptualizations about the agents, human or nonhuman, in writing center sessions and how the principles of UD can be applied to relate different agents and elements of the sessions to each other. For Mariam and Esther, diversity—resulting in variation between writing center sessions—comes from many elements and agents within the session and, thus, the principles of UD can be applied to various elements and agents within the session, such as the tutor and his or her practices, the writer, and the valued practices that inform the tutor’s practices.

Importantly, dialogue between Mariam and Esther prompted both to consider the other’s and new applications of UD to writing center work. For tutors to more deeply consider the complexities of writing center sessions, it seems important that they engage in dialogue about their conceptions of writing center sessions relative to principles of UD. Mariam and Esther applied the principles of UD to their tutoring practices in different ways. Broadly speaking, Mariam applied the principles of UD to herself as a tutor, her practices, or the session. For example, for the principle Flexibility in Use, Mariam believed that the user, the one with individual preferences and abilities, is the writer and that she should be flexible to accommodate these preferences and abilities. Esther, on the other hand, primarily applied the principles of UD to the valued tutoring practices. From Esther’s application, tutors are the ones with “a wide range of individual preferences and abilities,” and the valued practices should be flexible to accommodate these. During the focus group, I brought up these two different applications of UD
to the valued practices, which spark an interesting conversation during which Mariam and Esther attempted to create conceptual mappings of how the various characteristics of tutors and writers impacted each other, how tutors should position themselves to respond to the complexities of tutors’ and writers’ abilities and characteristics, and what role the valued practices play in helping tutors navigate these complexities during sessions. Esther attempted to synthesize her and Mariam’s perspectives and conceptualize the session by saying the following:

Correct me if I'm wrong, if they [her and Mariam’s application of UD to the valued practices] are the opposites of each other. Um, but I kind of see it as a line, like a chain of command, not commanded, an assembly line, like, I don't know what I'm saying, but like a line. Okay. They all connect together. So, like, tutors have to be flexible because of writers being diverse. Like, tutors have to accommodate because writers are diverse, and everyone is different, comes with their different backgrounds, different stories, but at the same time, the valued practices also need to be, like, flexible because writer or tutors are diverse, and the way that tutors do things are different. And they have different backgrounds, and they have different abilities. So, I think every, everything connects together. So, you start with the valued practices need to be flexible for the tutors to be diverse and flexible in order to accommodate to writers who are diverse and flexible.

Indeed, the histories, abilities, and preferences tutor and writers bring to sessions and how these histories, abilities, and preferences interact is complicated. It is not easy for Esther to create a simple visualization of the interpersonal intricacies that take place during a session.
Esther’s attempt to conceptualize the diversity displayed by tutors and writers and how tutors and valued practices respond to this diversity prompted Mariam to attempt to explain her own conceptualization:

I get what you're saying now. I see it a little bit differently, but kind of the same. I kind of see, like, in my head, like, a circle, and all the arrows are pointing. So, it's, like, flexibility that it points to the tutor, then it points to, I guess, no. It would point to then diverse abilities, then writer, and then flexibility, and it's just, like, a circle that goes like that with those four things tutor, writer, flexibility, and diverse ability, and everyone is just kind of, like, tied into it like that if that makes sense. Like, I don't know. That's how I see it in my head. But they all kind of, like, point to the other, and they all kind of have a little bit of each other in the other. So, but honestly, I think that a big part of the job though is accommodating and being flexible for the writers with diverse abilities. However, I do agree that tutors also have, you know, diverse abilities as well, like one to two might be really great at grammar, and the other might not be. And one might be great in, like, screenwriting, and the other might not be. Like, it's just all different, like, writing strengths and weaknesses, which is fine, but I think that at the end of the day, the job is being flexible for the writer, and that's what your main focus should always be, so sometimes you have to adjust and maybe improve on your own personal weaknesses to be a better tutor.

In attempting to apply UD to their tutoring practices, Mariam and Esther came up with a variety of possible ways to conceptualize the interaction between tutor and writer and the role that the principles of UD should play within a session. They unpacked what they saw as the
important elements of the complex histories, abilities, and preferences that tutors and writers bring to sessions. Additionally, they discussed how other factors, such as technology, factor into tutor-writer interaction and how the principles of UD help them navigate the complex ecology of a writing center session.

Finally, Mariam’s and Esther’s reflection and conversations offer interesting thoughts about the question what error looks like and where it comes from in sessions. Error might not only be thought of as just something writers can commit and that tutors must adjust to. Error might be something that tutors can commit, perhaps in being authoritative in a session to the detriment of the writer, and correct for provided that the valued practices afford room for adjustment and correction. Error might also be something that comes from neither the writer or the tutor. It could be unanticipated hiccups, such as technological issues, for which tutors and writers must both adjust. In contrast to these conceptions of error, Esther questions whether error ultimately exists in writing center work. As Kleinfeld argued for cultivating “an ethic of imperfection” in writing center work that recognizes “that there often isn’t a ‘right’ or ‘correct’ way of doing something,” Esther does not seem to think of writing center work as being made up of “right” and “wrong” choices, “good” choices and “errors.” Instead, perhaps, there are different tutoring moves and different consequences of those tutoring moves in terms of the writer’s learning and the relationship between the tutor and writer. In this case, “error” may not be a particularly helpful concept for examining tutors’ choices and consequences. In all, in applying UD to their valued tutoring practices, Mariam and Esther developed and articulated conceptions they had about writing center work that allowed them to reflect on their innate beliefs about the tutoring of writing and their roles as tutors within writing center sessions.
CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR TUTOR TRAINING, WRITING CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

At the onset, this study sought to examine how tutor negotiate varied value system with their writing center community’s values and valued practices, how tutors use dialogue to negotiate valued practices and external value systems, and in what ways tutors see UD fitting in or potentially fitting into their and their center’s valued tutoring practices. To answer these questions, this study introduced tutors to the principles of UD and asked tutors to engage in dialogic and written reflection to discuss the relationship they perceived between UD and their valued practices.

While the original research focuses of this study were accomplished in part, what emerged from asking tutors about their valued practices in relation to UD was slightly different than the implicit assumptions embedded in these research focuses. These research focuses implied that prompting tutors to consider UD in relation to their valued practices might lead to discussion of other external value systems that inform tutor practices. While the project inevitably led tutors to talk about UD, instead of talking about other value systems in relation to UD, tutors mostly talked about experiences in sessions, in the center, and outside of the center. Much of the discussion from tutors focused on negotiating UD and their experiences with the valued practices. This focus on experiences, rather than other external value systems, makes sense. When asked to consider their practices in relation to UD, examining experience to determine points of congruence, incongruence, and ambiguity between UD and valued practices seems more sensible than to consider how another value system mediates the relationship
between the two. Further, I did not anticipate at the beginning of the study learning so much about the formation of tutors’ practices by asking them to reflect on their practices in relation to UD, which turned out to be the main focus of Chapter Three.

The findings of this study have important implications for tutor training, writing center infrastructure, and future research in writing center studies.

**Implications for Tutor Training**

This study demonstrates that the complexities of tutors’ practices are developed with a composite of experiences from within and outside the writing center. Experiences being a student, sister, daughter, and friend inform how tutors form their practices and interact with writers. As tutors act on these experiences in the center, they obtain new significance. For example, Mariam was used to listening to her mother’s accent but added a new layer of understanding to this practice as a tutor from talking to the previous writing center director about having an “open ear.” Through dialogic reflection some of the outside experiences that impact tutors’ practices were brought to light. Should centers continue to pursue dialogic reflection as a means for tutor development, they could consider directing tutors to pay attention to what out-of-center experiences come up in these conversations as having an impact on tutors’ practices. Tutors could be encouraged to consider how their unique experiences outside of the center has allowed them to develop their personalized approach to tutoring and conceptualization of their role as a tutor. Doing so could promote a reflective, self-aware disposition in tutors while also highlighting the diverse ways tutors can approach sessions and implement tutoring practices.
Along these lines, this study reinforces further importance of engaging tutors in structured reflection and dialogic reflection on their experiences. As noted at the end of Chapter Three, both Mariam and Esther told me that the reflection process they under during this study, in conjunction with activities in their tutor development seminar, helped them more deeply reflect on their tutoring practices and develop a heightened awareness of how and why they implement and adjust their practices. Mariam and Esther commented that they found significant reflective value in the writing prompts, which asked them to describe a moment from one of their recent sessions in which they made an adjustment to one of the typical tutoring practices, relate this moment to any (or none) of the principles of UD they felt connected to this moment, and write about how this moment related to their chosen principles of UD. In analyzing their writing prompt responses, I could see them reflect and develop as tutors. In interviewing each of the tutors, facilitating the focus group, and analyzing the transcripts from the interviews and focus group, I could also see their development through verbal reflection, particularly in the dialogic reflection with each other in the focus group. Throughout the course of the semester, each had developed their own understanding of UD and application of UD to their tutoring practices and the list of valued practices. Bringing together these different perspectives in the focus group seemed to be very formative for Mariam and Esther as it generated insight for both of them that neither generated in their individual interview or written reflections.

In applying UD to their sessions, Mariam and Esther often related UD to what Geller et al. (2007) call “trickster moments”—moments of uncertainty—in their sessions. In fact, in order to prompt Mariam and Esther to (re)consider their values and practices in light of UD principles, the writing prompts given to the tutors asked them to discuss moments when they adjusted their
typical tutoring practices. In discussing moments of uncertainty and adjustment, Mariam and Esther articulated how and why they revise their practices and develop new ones. Asking tutors to identify and perform written reflections about changes in their typical tutoring practices and reasons for and effects of these changes, whether in relation to the principles of UD (which I recommend) or not, has great formative potential in terms of tutor development. Having tutors discuss these reflections with each other further increases this formative potential, as Hall (2011) argued.

Perhaps the most important takeaway for tutor training is the value of bringing in a value system, such as UD, to the writing center and having tutors reflect on their practices and the center’s shared valued practices in light of this particular value system. As I argue above, I think UD is a particularly useful for facilitating meaningful reflection on valued tutoring practices since UD prompts tutors to reflect on a wide range of sessions that tutors may or may not consider “typical.” The discussions of UD principles were key to prompting Mariam and Esther to generate the data that led to the tutors’ insights about their valued practices. Indeed, applying UD was a way for tutors to uncover and talk about what values and beliefs they see as important in their writing center community of practice and their own practices. Conversations of valued tutoring practices and UD also prompted tutors to consider the purpose of their valued practices—what deeper values and beliefs are these valued practices pointing use toward and, hopefully, helping us enact in sessions? Mariam and Esther were prompted to consider how valued practices might at times hinder achievement of these values and beliefs within sessions and ways their codified list of valued practices can be revised and reframed to promote these values and beliefs in sessions. Centers could introduce tutors to the principles of UD and through
written reflections similar to those used in this study and conversations between tutors, prompting similar conversations in which tutors further realize their relationship to their valued practices and the values they and the larger center infrastructure imbues in the valued practices.

Implications for Writing Center Infrastructure

This study also highlights the ways that infrastructural elements of the writing center—what texts are being read in tutor training and development courses, how the practices are presented, who is presenting these practices, and the role that the list of practices plays within other writing center activities—also inform tutors’ interpretation of the valued practices. Conversations in tutor training and development around the valued practices that prompt tutors to explore why these particular practices are valued by the center and in what ways these practices might be adapted across sessions could help tutors see the valued practices as guidelines that point them to a certain goal instead of a checklist that needs to be performed every session. Using the same document listing valued practices in tutor training and tutor assessment, even if this assessment is framed a strictly formative, might lead tutors to hold inflexible attitudes toward the valued practices. While it makes sense to assess tutors with the same criteria used to train them, using different documentation to introduce the practices in tutor training and to give tutors written assessment, along with explicit framing of the valued practices as guidelines both in tutor training and assessment, could help tutors develop a more flexible disposition towards valued practices.
The study exposes the complexity of writing center infrastructure. Particularly when viewed through UD principles. For example, this study poses error as an important element of writing center infrastructure. In thinking about who or what elements of a writing center session must be tolerant to error, Mariam and Esther considered the many different sources of error in a session (e.g., writers, tutors, technology) and who or what in the session must be tolerant to this error (e.g., writers tutors, valued tutoring practices). As Esther noted, error is often a nebulous concept in writing center work and defining it as deviating from a standard set of valued practices may not always present an accurate representation of error. If we define error not as good or bad practices, but as a measure of how we accomplish our goals of writing center work and manifest our values about teaching and tutoring within a session, then deviating from valued practices might at time help avoid error. For example, abandoning or revising valued practices within a session may be more beneficial to a writer’s learning that strictly adhering to the valued practices. Indeed, error remains an element of writing center infrastructure that might be more fully examined and theorized. It is also important to continue, to the extent centers are already doing this, locating error and acknowledging room for improvement not just in tutors but in infrastructural elements of the writing center. When we see error and improvement in relation to larger infrastructural elements of the center, we can realize new avenues of improvement. For example, Mariam’s discussion of error as dissonance between writer and tutor expectations might prompt us to consider how centers can better describe their work to potential clients on their websites, and her issues with TutorTrac prompt the question as to how infrastructural elements like TutorTrac can be better designed to facilitate tutor-writer interactions in languages other than English.
Implications for Further Research

Future studies could look at how tutors’ attitudes towards the valued practices are changed through an intensive reflection on the valued practices in light of an external value system such as UD. Though we can see, particularly in the focus group, how in sharing their perspectives, Mariam and Esther articulated more sophisticated understandings of the ecology of a writing center session, their relationship to the valued practices, and the possibility for UD in writing center work, no data was collected with the explicit intent to gather attitudes towards valued practices and writing center work before and after the study. While both Mariam and Esther admitted that this study and the work they were doing simultaneously in their tutoring seminar led them to a more flexible attitude towards the valued practices, it could be interesting to learn more about how tutors’ relationships to valued practices are changed after intensive reflection on these valued practices.

Along these lines, future research could also look at tutors’ attitudes towards valued practices from when they first begin as novice tutors to when they have a year or two of experience. Esther’s nuanced interpretations of the valued practices seemed to have been developed through experience implementing the valued practices in sessions. Studying how tutors develop their understandings of valued practices over a longer period of time could lend insight into tutor development and how to better present and engage tutors with valued practices throughout their trajectories as tutors.

Finally, UD in writing center work is a fruitful avenue for future research as well. Previous literature discusses UD in relation to how common tutoring practices can better serve
writers of various abilities and in relation to writing center infrastructure, both of which Mariam and Esther discussed throughout this study. Mariam and Esther applied UD to sessions with writers of all different abilities. Many sessions on which Mariam and Esther reflected and that they discussed were focused on the multilingualism of writers. Indeed, the tutors found many principles of UD, such as equitability, flexibility, and perceptible information relevant to their experiences working with multilingual writers. Within the complexity of a writing center session, Mariam and Esther demonstrated that UD can be applied in many different ways. UD can be applied as if the writer were the user and the tutor the object of design or the tutor’s practices as the object of design and the tutor the designer. At times, such as their conversation about writers being flexible, the writer was a part of the object of design or a co-designer, which makes sense given that tutors and writers collaborate construct sessions together. Esther demonstrated how the tutor can be conceptualized as the user and the valued practices as the object of design, the thing being used by the tutor. Research could further explore the ways in which UD can be applied to sessions with writers across diverse language backgrounds, help us make our practices more usable not just to writers but to tutors as well, and better understand the ways in which tutors perceive the collaborative nature of session construction with writers.
APPENDIX: IRB EXEMPTION LETTER
August 31, 2020

Dear Eric Wisz:

On 8/31/2020, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Writing Tutors’ Perceptions of Valued Practices through Universal Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Eric Wisz</td>
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<td>IRB ID</td>
<td>STUDY00002084</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant ID</td>
<td>None</td>
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Documents Reviewed:
- Wisz_HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly Review Writing Tutors_Perceptions of Valued Practices through Universal Design.pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval;
- Group Interview Questions.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions;
- Group Interview Scheduling E-mail.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Individual Interview Questions.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions;
- Individual Interview Scheduling E-mail.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- IRB Wisz 2084 HRP-254-FORM Explanation of Research Writing Tutors_Perceptions of Valued Practices through Universal Design.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
- Pre-Interview Questionnaire.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;
- Recruitment E-mail.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;
- Semi-Regular Writing Prompt Reminder E-mail.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;
This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, in-person research is not permitted to begin unless you are able to follow the COVID-19 Human Subject Research (HSR) Standard Safety Plan with permission from your Dean of Research or submitted your Study-Specific Safety Plan and received IRB and EH&S approval. Be sure to monitor correspondence from the Office of Research, as they will communicate when restrictions are lifted, and all in-person research can resume.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Kamille Birkbeck
Designated Reviewer
REFERENCES


Madruga, N., & Wisz, E. (2019, October 18). *A university writing center’s valued practices examined through a disability studies lens* [Conference presentation]. International Writing Center Association 2019 Convention, Columbus, OH, United States.


Harrington, M. Lea, & S. Mitchell (Eds.), *Working with academic literacies: Cases. studies towards transformative practice* (pp. 205–215), The WAC Clearinghouse.


