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# Breaking into the tutor's toolbox : an investigation into strategies used in writing center tutorials.

Kate Brown  
*University of Louisville*

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**BREAKING INTO THE TUTOR'S TOOLBOX: AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
STRATEGIES USED IN WRITING CENTER TUTORIALS**

**By**

**Kate Brown**

**B.A., College of William and Mary, 2000**

**M.A., Florida State University, 2003, 2004**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of English  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky**

**August 2008**

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 8, 2008

by the following Dissertation Committee:

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Dissertation Director

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,

Pamela Mason Brown

and

Donald Alexander Brown,

for their constant support of my goals and dreams

and

to my husband,

Christopher Scott Warrington,

for being World's Best Husband.

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## ABSTRACT

### BREAKING INTO THE TUTOR'S TOOLBOX: AN INVESTIGATION INTO STRATEGIES USED IN WRITING CENTER TUTORIALS

Kate Brown

July 8, 2008

In this dissertation, I present the results of research conducted in the University Writing Center at the University of Louisville during the fall of 2006 and serves as an example of an empirical study blending qualitative and quantitative methods. It highlights and critiques the strategies tutors use to address students' concerns about their writing during writing tutorials by addressing two research questions: 1) What strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address higher-order concerns? And, what strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address later-order concerns? 2) How are these strategies perceived by participants in tutorials? The data revealed that tutors tend to use three of the same strategies to address both higher-order and later-order concerns: Open-Ended Questioning, Reader Response, and Suggestion. Although tutors employed more strategies to address later-order concerns, which is congruent with advice from tutor-training manuals, they used these three strategies as default strategies throughout the observed tutorials. These strategies can be used effectively to address higher-order and later-order concerns; however, when used broadly, unique problems and potential pitfalls surfaced.

The data also revealed that strategies generally assumed by writing center scholars to lessen control over the student and his or her writing can be used just as easily

as other strategies to dominate the tutorial. Other factors apart from the strategies themselves affect whether the tutor dominates the tutorial, including amount of time the tutor pauses to allow the student to answer questions or respond to suggestions, students' overall level of participation/interest in the tutorial, students' expectations for the tutorial, and tutors' listening to students' concerns (really "hearing" those concerns). Moreover, the use of praise and time spent on rapport building may have an effect on whether the tutor dominates the tutorial. These findings invite further investigation and research.



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## CHAPTER I

### VALUES AND WRITING CENTER PEDAGOGY

*I felt like I could be Socratic and that would work, and one time it didn't, and then I stopped after I asked him to think of another word for "it." Then I realized sort of how absurd that question was.*

*- Justin (writing tutor)*

In his oral history interview for the Writing Centers Research Project, Peter Carino describes his experience with the pedagogical trends of writing centers in the 1980s:

I can think of the tapes we had, and one was my own where I'm asking this poor guy question after question and rephrasing the question trying to get him to come up with this problem in his paper. And, he was this kid from Hong Kong, and he was very funny, and after a while he basically caught on, and he started putting me on; he started making jokes, giving me funny answers. You know, and a light came on where, "You know at some point you've just gotta tell them what they don't know," but if, if you were feeling guilty about that, then you'd go to conferences, and there was so much emphasis on nondirective tutoring. But I think a lot of us in our center and other centers, you know, there were times when you had to be directive, but when I look back at my old training materials, and I was just looking in one of those old proceedings at an article I had done using the taped tutorials and training – I mean, it was almost collaborative learning to a fault (laughs).

In this anecdote, Carino highlights a moment during a tutorial when his attempts to engage the student in collaborative learning backfire. Carino is not the only writing tutor who has experienced such a moment during a tutorial, when the student just cannot seem to answer the questions the tutor asks, or seems to refuse to participate in the tutorial at all. Moments like these raise the question: how well does pedagogical theory translate into writing center practice? And what assumptions underlie the pedagogical

theory often implemented in the writing center? Carino's anecdote points to the fact that pedagogical theory may often serve the political or social needs of writing centers, but, as numerous writing center scholars note, practitioners tend to go wrong when making efforts to apply these theories across all tutorial situations without recognizing the assumptions about authority, ownership, and "good" writing that inform these theories.

This dissertation presents the results of research conducted in the University Writing Center at the University of Louisville during the fall of 2006 and serves as an example of an empirical study blending qualitative and quantitative methods, a kind of research that I hope more writing center scholars will conduct. It highlights the strategies tutors use to address students' concerns about their writing during writing tutorials and critiques the theory and research guiding the choices tutors make when selecting particular strategies. Additionally, I discuss the way tutors use certain strategies in a variety of situations, as the application of these strategies is rarely consistent between tutorials.

From Collaborative Learning to the Continuum: A Brief History of Writing Center Pedagogy

Collaborative learning and the social constructionist ideology making up its theoretical foundation offered a way in the mid-eighties and early nineties for writing center scholars to resist the notion of the writing center as a place for remediation. Lisa Ede highlights this point in her widely anthologized essay, "Writing as a Social Process: A Theoretical Foundation for Writing Centers?": "as long as thinking and writing are regarded as inherently individual, solitary activities, writing centers can never be viewed as anything more than pedagogical fix-it shops to help those who, for whatever reason,

are unable to think and write on their own” (7). The strong reaction writing center scholars had toward the idea of the “fix-it shop” made famous by Stephen North in “The Idea of a Writing Center” (66) instigated landmark discussions of theoretical principles that could be applied to writing center practice. Such theories, based upon the idea of collaborative learning, raise the profile of writing centers and provide some justification for their existence— if not to the university communities in which they exist, to writing center administrators and practitioners themselves— though the compulsion to resist the notion of the fix-it shop, as Carino’s anecdote exemplifies, has resulted in well-intentioned but often counter-productive tutoring moments.

These moments, when the tutor believes he has failed to make the student a better writer or even to help the student produce better writing, sometimes occur when tutors are making their best attempts to adhere to the nondirective pedagogy that writing center scholarship has embraced. The emphasis on the individual responsibility of the student to bring ideas and knowledge to the writing tutorial is based upon an antiquated notion of ownership that is often challenged in mainstream composition scholarship. Writing center pedagogy emphasizing nondirective methods rose out of the process movement, in which scholars like Peter Elbow asked writing teachers to encourage students to see themselves as “authors” with important things to say. For example, some teacher-response scholarship of the 1980s warned of the dangers of having an “ideal text” in mind that might conflict with the student’s goals for his or her work (Brannon and Knoblauch). Instead of considering an “ideal text,” Lil Brannon and Cy Knoblauch argue that teachers should be sensitive to student goals and comment accordingly. A nondirective approach to tutoring fits nicely into this model of response because it encourages questioning

writers about their goals and, ideally, students' responses should help tutors to guide the tutorial based on what they discover about students' goals for their work.

Although collaborative writing, the social-constructionist movement, and the process movement offered writing centers a way to assert their value within the university community and to counteract concerns about plagiarism and "fixing" students' papers, Sharon Crowley's argument that composition remains entrenched within current-traditional pedagogy and its hierarchical power structures (Composition 191) rings true in the writing center when we take a closer look. In part, the theoretical base of nondirective tutoring has roots in what Richard Young and James Berlin call the "New Romanticism." In this school of thought exemplified by scholars like Elbow,<sup>1</sup> the tools students need to become successful writers already are present within them. This explains the use of open-ended questioning or Socratic questioning in order to draw knowledge from the student, because the belief is that the student knows what his or her text must do or say, and the tutor's job is to elicit that knowledge from the student. Jeff Brooks's suggestions for minimalist tutoring support this New Romantic position, particularly when he discusses the defensive stance he suggests tutors should take when dealing with difficult or uncooperative students. He explains, "There are many students who will fight a non-editing tutor all the way. Some find ingenious ways of forcing you into the role of editor....Don't underestimate the abilities of these students; they will fatigue you into submission if they can" (4). Brooks assumes that students have the ability to recognize and correct sentence-level problems and visit the writing center because they prefer to have their papers corrected by someone else. This assumption might work, depending

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<sup>1</sup> Elbow would not likely categorize himself as a New Romanticist. However, Young's discussion of New Romanticism, in particular, seems to position New Romanticism as a set of beliefs informing Expressivism (a label which Elbow is comfortable with). Therefore, I collapse the two terms here.

upon the specific writer the tutor is dealing with; however, it will not hold true for all writers. If the tutor continues to adhere to New Romantic ideology that assumes the necessary knowledge resides within the student, he or she may continue probing and prodding the student to locate all of the problems in her paper for the entire tutorial, but to no avail. Arguably, this would not be a very helpful tutorial for the student. Placing the student in the role of authority does not accurately represent the context in which he or she is writing or the realities of the university that he or she must negotiate; such thinking denies the complexity of our students and the academic context.

Tutors come to this understanding when minimalist methods fail, as Justin's quotation in the epigraph and Carino's anecdote reveal. They recognize the futility of trying to draw something out of a student that isn't there, or more specifically, expecting a student to have familiarity with academic expectations when they do not. Both Justin and Carino are pushing students, with their use of minimalist strategies, toward a pre-determined idea of the knowledge a college student *should* have or toward knowledge necessary to create what is assumed to be *good* writing. Although their minimalist methods are different from the lecturer-passive learner model often associated with current-traditional pedagogy, the values of each model are the same. Crowley explains, "The easy accommodation of process-oriented strategies to current-traditionalism suggests that process and product have more in common than is generally acknowledged in professional literature about composition, where the habit of contrasting them conceals the fact of their epistemological consistency" (212). Writing center theorists often recognize Brooks's minimalist tutoring as extreme but, nevertheless, a useful combatant to concerns about tutors stripping authority away from the student. However, when



viewed in light of Crowley's argument, minimalist tutoring, as well as process, expressivism, New Romanticism, social-constructionism, and collaborative learning each reflect current-traditional values.

### Current-traditional values, Ownership, and Authority

Brooks's minimalist tutoring reflects concepts of ownership often connected with expressivism and the process movement. Process scholars emphasize student ownership of texts including words, ideas, or stylistic features that make up the text as a whole. Nondirective tutoring respects students' ownership of their texts to the extent that tutors should not touch or infringe upon the text in any way. Some scholars have made well-known theoretical arguments challenging this concept of student ownership of texts. For example, David Bartholomae's argument in "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow" suggests that teachers unfairly make students feel as if they have authority over their texts, an authority that does not reflect the notions of authority that students face within the university system. He goes on to argue that academic writing is embedded within a context of power and authority, and

To offer students academic writing as something else is to keep this knowledge from our students, to keep them from confronting the power politics of discursive practice, or to keep them from confronting the particular representations of power, tradition and authority reproduced whenever one writes. (481)

The power structures that scholars (Bartholomae; Trimbur "Peer Tutoring"; Grimm Good Intentions; Bloom; Delpit) argue govern notions of authority and authorship in academic writing often prevent some students from easy access to academic conventions and accepted protocol. The values Lynn Z. Bloom discusses in her article "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise," similarly affect writing center pedagogy, tutor-training, and interactions between tutors and students. The ongoing battle

against tutors writing papers “for” students or offering “too much” help, which has had lasting effects on the pedagogical approaches presented to tutors during tutor-training and, in turn, on pedagogical practice, parallels the battle against plagiarism waged in composition classrooms. As Bloom points out, “From sea to shining sea, as promulgated by American colleges and universities, the cardinal sin of plagiarism is a heinous affront to the middle-class value of honesty, manifested in respect for others’ property” (659). Respect for others’ property, in pedagogical practice, has translated to spatial tensions often discussed in writing center scholarship (McAndrew and Reigstad; Gillespie and Lerner; Ryan and Zimmerelli; Brooks; McKinney; Papay) and has sometimes resulted in pedagogical mandates instructing tutors not to touch a students’ paper or hold a pencil during the tutorial in order to resist urges to write on or infringe upon the students’ property. The most extreme example is Brooks’s well-known explanation of minimalist tutoring:

- 1) Sit beside the student, not across a desk – that is where job interviewers and other authorities sit. This first signal is important for showing the student that you are *not* the person “in charge” of the paper.
- 2) Try to get the student to be physically closer to her paper than you are. You should be, in a sense, an outsider, looking over her shoulder while she works on her paper.
- 3) If you are right handed, sit on the student’s right; this will make it more difficult for you to write on the paper. Better yet, don’t let yourself have a pencil in your hand. By all means, if you must hold something, don’t make it a red pen!
- 4) Have the student read the paper aloud to you, and suggest that he hold a pencil while doing so. (Brooks 3)

Though no other scholar emphasizes the spatial element of ownership and authority as adamantly as Brooks, the residual effects of his scholarship appear in various tutor

training manuals. For example, Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli suggest in The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors that tutor and student sit next to each other. They explain, “Such a setup is the best arrangement for tutoring; it suggests that you are an ally, not an authoritarian figure who dispenses advice from behind a desk” (18). They go on to also recommend that the tutor allow the student to control the paper: “Keep the paper in front of the student as much as possible. If you are working at a computer, let the writer sit in front of the screen as well as control the keyboard. This placement reinforces the idea that the paper is the student’s work, not yours” (19).

In Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferences, Donald McAndrew and Thomas Reigstad access these spatial tensions to distinguish between three kinds of tutoring: 1) student-centered; 2) collaborative; and 3) teacher centered. McAndrew and Reigstad suggest that student-centered and/or collaborative tutoring is “most productive with most writers” (25). During their version of a student-centered tutorial, the student directs the tutorial and does nearly all of the talking. In this kind of tutorial, the tutor suggests strategies or alternatives based on the student’s questions or concerns. In a collaborative tutorial, both tutor and student “share equally in the conversation, in the problem solving, and in the decision making” (26). McAndrew and Reigstad’s explanation of teacher-centered tutoring is worth quoting at length:

In this type of tutorial, the student sits more passively as the tutor reads through the piece and, often pen in hand, asks questions about mechanical errors, supplying alternatives and the reasons for them when the writer isn’t forthcoming about them. The tutor dominates the talk, relying on closed, leading, or yes/no questions, and little of the talk is off-the-paper. The teacher-centered tutor issues directives for revising both HOCs and LOCs.<sup>2</sup> (26)

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<sup>2</sup> Higher-order concerns and lower-order concerns

McAndrew and Reigstad make certain to mention that during a teacher-centered tutorial, the tutor usually holds the pen. Teacher-centered tutorials, which they do not recommend unless the tutor has a very limited amount of time to work with the student, involve a violation of the student's ownership of the paper because the tutor takes control of the pen to mark on the students' work. This move violates the recommended nondirective methods many of the manuals suggest.

However, whether the student maintains ownership of his paper during the tutorial and writes suggestions that the tutor makes in the margins himself or if the tutor feels pressed for time and begins writing on the student's paper, making suggestions and possibly even making corrections, the tutor's goals are the same – to help the student make his writing move closer to the academic standard. As this example suggests, North's proclamation that writing centers should strive to produce "better writers not better writing" has since taken a more realistic turn, a turn that is best articulated by Paula Gillespie in her 2007 oral history interview: "if we don't work with the writing, we're not helping a student, and if we don't show them that we're taking them from one level to another level, I don't think they're going to come back here just to talk about the way they wrote it" (61). Gillespie's statement takes into consideration student expectations for coming to the writing center as well as a necessary attitude that keeps writing centers afloat. If writing centers do not help students improve their writing, they will lose their place as essential academic support centers at the university.

Accepting the role of the writing center to improve student writing implies acceptance of a common definition of "good" writing and, in turn, the hegemonic structures of authority and authorship that tutors, administrators, interdisciplinary faculty,

and the university tacitly share. Tutor-training manuals urge new tutors, with their new-found roles of academic authority, to become accepting parts of this hierarchy by holding up pedagogy anchored in values that emphasize the responsibility of the individual learner as best pedagogical practice. Gillespie and Lerner do so when they explicitly contrast “editing” with “tutoring.” In their discussion, they hold up editing as a behavior that tutors should not engage in because “after all, it’s the writer whose name is going on that paper, who’s paying for those credits, and who’ll be getting the grade” (25-6). This statement echoes Bloom’s discussion of self-reliance and responsibility as a middle-class value, because, as Bloom recites, “The Lord helps those who help themselves” (659).

The moral message ensconced in middle-class values also may be partially to blame for the phenomenon of tutor-guilt that is often discussed in writing center scholarship. For example, Susan Blau and John Hall, in their article, “Guilt-Free Tutoring: Rethinking How We Tutor Non-Native-English-Speaking Students,” discuss the difficulty tutors have shifting away from nondirective tutoring: “Going against practice—especially in tutorials with NNES students—seems to be the cause of guilt and frustration in our center and others” (23). Students feel guilty moving away from nondirective tutoring because once they implement a more hands-on approach, they perceive they are crossing the lines of respect for others’ property and individual responsibility representative of the values that influence writing center pedagogy. If they help a student “too much” by providing words, sentences, or ideas for the student, they become no more than an accomplice to the student’s moral crime.

Alice Gillam et al. claim that “tutors frequently evaluate their tutoring effectiveness in terms of their use of authority” (166). For example, one of the tutors in

Gillam et al.'s study explains, "I was doing everything that you guys (the research team which included her teacher) have told me not to do. Everything. I was being extremely directive. I felt bad – like I had brutalized my way into becoming one of the authority figures she secretly hates" (191). Gillam et al. believe this kind of evaluation results from the conflicting roles that a tutor must take on: that of peer, tutor, and expert. They explain that "contributing to tutor confusion about role and authority has been our tendency to represent collaborative learning roles for the tutor in prescriptive either/or terms" (195). Tutors struggle with the desire to be helpful to students, to help students improve their writing, and to uphold the values of the writing center and the academy. These often conflicting roles provoke ethical dilemmas that tutors must address on a daily basis. Irene Clark and Dave Healy argue that nondirective tutoring became the "only writing center approach" (245) as a reaction to the fear that tutors would do the work for the writers, that plagiarism was happening in the writing center. Therefore, if tutors used nondirective approaches, they could avoid offering words or ideas to the writer, thus allowing the writer to maintain ownership of his or her work. Clark and Healy rightly claim that, "it is worse than simplistic to require that writing centers withhold helpful information and refrain from helpful practices out of a misguided sense of what is ethical" (255).

What many tutor-training manuals miss when they warn tutors about exerting too much control over a student's writing is that comments of any kind (directive/nondirective) exert control over a student's paper. Richard Straub, writing of teacher response explains that when we discuss methods of commenting on student writing in dualistic ways, we "reinforce the dichotomy between directive and facilitative response and perpetuate, however unintentionally, the notion that some comments control

student writing and others do not and the notion that there is a particular level of control – and a particular style – that is optimal in teacher response” (225). Writing center scholars, similarly, are perpetuating, however unintentionally, the idea that nondirective tutoring is a preferable pedagogical method that exerts very little if any control over the student’s writing.

Along the same lines, Janet Auten points out that students often perceive teachers’ attempts to downplay their authority as dishonest: “In attempting to de-emphasize teacher authority and product-oriented commentary, teachers can slip into linguistic sleight-of-hand, a ‘covering-up’ of assertion which confounds their intentions and actually sabotages student-teacher communications. In that case, our well-meaning avoidance of what may appear to be authoritarian editing is translated into trickery” (13).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, not only can tutors’ attempts to diminish the appearance of authority during a tutorial be ethically suspect if they withhold information from students in efforts to encourage student responsibility for their texts, but this behavior can also instigate bad-faith relationships between tutors and students.

#### Authority and Authorship: The Academy vs. The World

Academic notions of authorship tend to differ from non-academic notions of authorship. As Ede notes, academic understandings of authorship are relatively new (“Writing”) and, to extend her observation, these understandings seem to be strictly limited to the academy. For example, Kelly Ritter, in a study investigating internet paper mills and student ideas about authorship, finds that students tend to view college writing “as an economic rather than an intellectual act” (603). According to Ritter, few students perceive themselves as authors, and few students believe that co-authoring a project

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<sup>3</sup> See also Mackiewicz “Hinting” and Riley and Mackiewicz “Resolving”

(writing collaboratively) constitutes authorship. Based on this data, she is concerned that students' understandings of authorship, which also seem to be society's understandings in this consumer culture, may lead students to find more ownership in texts they have bought (online or otherwise) than from texts they have struggled to create (617). Ritter's work is a convincing suggestion that the idea that students feel a strong sense of pride, ownership, and authority over texts may be merely idealistic.

Rebecca Moore Howard traces current ideas about authorship to expressivist pedagogy that values personal discovery and authenticity; therefore, "The binary opposite of this notion – necessary, it would seem, for the notion to have meaning – is plagiarism and writers who purloin the thoughts and expressions of others" (794). This ideology about plagiarism that enforces often harsh punishment on students engaging in varying degrees of plagiarism, from patchwriting to purchasing documents on the internet, ignores reasons why students may plagiarize, historical approaches to authorship, as well as the complexity that technology like the internet brings to concepts of authorship and ownership. Ritter's and Howard's conclusions do not suggest that writing center scholars should give up the effort to make students feel like "writers" or that students are able to make valuable contributions to the academy. However, their arguments do suggest that scholars should rethink the concepts of authority and ownership that have shaped much of our tutorial practice. For example, warnings of the detrimental effects of "appropriating" a student's text seem *inappropriate* in light of their conclusions that students may not necessarily consider themselves as owners of the text in the first place.

Table 1 from Gillespie and Lerner's The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring synthesizes the values of ownership, responsibility, authority, and space, discussed earlier



in this chapter, showing how each of these values informs recommended tutoring practice. Additionally, within their recommendations lie clear indicators of the assumptions about “good” writing that underlie the pedagogical strategies they recommend.

**Table 1**

Contrast between “Editors” and “Tutors” from Gillespie and Lerner (45)

<i>Editors</i>	<i>Tutors</i>
Focus on the text	Focus on the writer’s development and establish rapport
Take ownership of the text	Make sure the writer takes ownership
Proofread	Start with higher-order concerns and worry about correctness last
Give advice	Ask questions
Read silently	Ask the writer to read aloud
Look mainly for things to improve	Comment on things that are working well
Work with an ideal text	Trust the writer’s idea of a text
Make corrections on the page	Keep hands off and let writers make corrections; help them learn correctness
Tell writers what to do	Ask them their plans for revision

Gillespie and Lerner recommend that tutors act like “tutors” not “editors.” In this table, “tutors” are encouraged to promote the individual responsibility of the student for the piece of writing. The student’s responsibility extends to intellectual responsibility: “Make sure that the writer takes ownership,” “Trust the writer’s idea of the text,” “Ask them their plans for revision” as well as spatial responsibility, “Keep hands off and let writers make corrections” (45). These encouraged behaviors contrast with the discouraged behaviors of an “editor” who would “Take ownership of the text,” “Work with an ideal text,” “Make corrections on the page,” and “Tell writers what to do” (45). Despite the apparent differences between the two roles Gillespie and Lerner outline, both roles share ideas about correctness. “Tutors” are encouraged to help students “learn correctness”

rather than to make corrections for the student, but overall, although Gillespie and Lerner warn of envisioning an ideal text, the emphasis on correctness in both columns suggests that the text a student should work toward is at the very least, “correct.”

### Correct Me If I’m Wrong: Correctness and “Good” Writing

Like Gillespie and Lerner, most authors of tutor-training manuals encourage tutors to address higher-order concerns before later-order concerns but not at the expense of correctness (Harris Teaching; Ryan and Zimmerelli, Clark Writing at the Center; McAndrew and Reigstad; Capossella; Meyer and Smith). In her discussion in Chapter 4 of Teaching One-to-One, “Diagnosis for Teaching One-to-One,” Harris makes apparent the assumption that students come to the writing center with writing problems that tutors should work to diagnose and correct. Her definition of diagnosis, however, is not simple: “Diagnosis is a highly complex act because, like writing, it is a set of intertwining processes that can and do occur simultaneously. We must consider what the student is doing, what the writing reveals, what lenses we are looking through, and what is involved in the skills needed” (79). For Harris, diagnosis is not synonymous with error correction but does include locating specific “skills” the student potentially lacks which adversely affect his or her writing.

Similarly, Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith’s tutor-training manual The Practical Tutor designates a three chapter section to “Composing Processes: Correcting.” These chapters offer tutors strategies for addressing sentence-level errors, punctuation, and working with dialects and patterns of error, specifically marking “‘Standard Written English’ as Everyone’s Second Dialect” (206). Meyer and Smith make apparent what exists as one of the basic assumptions shaping tutoring pedagogy: Standard Written

English is the standard of “good” writing that tutors, faculty, administrators, and the larger academic community tacitly accept. They explain that “It demands more complex syntax than and different choices of vocabulary from standard spoken English” (219), a claim that shapes their approach to tutor-training; when compared to other tutor-training manuals, theirs appears grammar-heavy with an unusual inclusion for such manuals of a chapter on Spelling and Vocabulary (Chapter 13).

The influence of a writing standard that emphasizes correctness not only creates friction with students’ notions of authority and ownership, but also effectively bars non-middle class students or students, who have not been immersed in American values throughout their lives (like many ESL students), from fully participating in a tutorial and thus meeting tutors’ expectations. Anne DiPardo’s essay “‘Whispers of Coming and Going’: Lessons from Fannie” reveals the difficulty a tutor, Morgan, faces when trying to implement nondirective tutoring without critically listening to a Native-American student, Fannie, and her understanding of literacy that might have informed Morgan’s pedagogy beyond her classroom training. Nancy Grimm, however, points out that “writing center discourse so strongly focuses on holding individuals responsible for problems that are systemic, DiPardo’s essay did not have the impact it should have” (“Attending” 11). Grimm rebukes Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood’s claim that the greatest value of DiPardo’s essay is the “insight it offers into an individual student and tutor as they negotiate a relationship” (Murphy and Sherwood 55), claiming instead that “the essay’s greatest value is the insight it offers into how the African American tutor and Native American student are caught in the racialized authority of a tutor-training program

that restricts opportunities to create context and make alternative meanings” (“Attending” 11).

Composition scholarship supports Grimm’s argument that the focus on the individual that writing center pedagogy has historically emphasized can be damaging for some students. For example, Lisa Delpit has made a similar argument arguing that the values governing education in America must be made explicit to students, specifically students of color, to whom these values have not been made explicit in the past. She explains, “If such explicitness is not provided to students, what it feels like to people who are old enough to judge is that there are secrets being kept, that time is being wasted, that the teacher is abdicating his or her duty to teach” (573). Moreover, she argues that if these values are not made explicit it will “ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it” (571). Considering Delpit’s call to make the power structures more visible for students who have traditionally existed outside of the culture of power, the conclusions of some writing center scholarship addressing these underprepared students, and specifically ESL students, is not surprising.

A large portion of ESL scholarship supports the use of directive tutoring in order to display to ESL students common writing conventions, grammatical constructions, or accepted styles (Powers, Blau and Hall “Guilt-Free”; Myers; Newman; Harris “Cultural”). Similarly, much of this scholarship encourages tutors to play the role of cultural informant by answering students’ questions and/or providing information about academic, local, or national culture (Blau, et al.; Blau and Hall “Guilt –Free”; Myers; Harris “Cultural”). However, in attempts to de-emphasize individual students’ responsibility within tutorials, some ESL scholarship engages problematic

characterizations of students who speak languages other than English, making few distinctions between categories, including ESL, international, bilingual or multilingual. These terms are often used interchangeably and fall under the blanket of ESL. Recent research, however, takes us in the right direction because it acknowledges that students who speak languages other than English present unique challenges to tutors because they often bring different expectations to the tutorial than English-only speakers bring. Harris discusses several of these expectations in her essay “Cultural Conflicts in the Writing Center: Expectations and Assumptions of ESL Students.” She surveyed eighty-five international students at Purdue University in order to gain a clearer understanding of their expectations for writing center tutorials. She discovered that “ESL students, then, perceive consultants to be more immediately helpful, more approachable, more practical, and more personal than teachers are, but the students expect consultants to work on errors and difficulties in specific pieces of discourse, not on the larger, more abstract level of writing skills and processes” (210). ESL students also “expect the tutor to take control of the session – to diagnose and convey to the student what needs to be learned, much like a teacher is expected to lecture and deliver information” (211). Though these expectations vary among cultural groups, Harris’s study reveals that ESL students’ expectations are often at odds with popular writing center pedagogy, where tutors are encouraged not to appropriate the student’s paper, to allow the student to provide the content of the tutorial, and to address global issues before local issues. Harris’s conflation of the categories International and ESL is certainly problematic, but her conclusion that the studied students’ expectations of a tutorial differed from other students’ expectations provides an important challenge to dominant pedagogical models.

Similarly, Beatrice Mendez Newman (2003) discusses ways Hispanic borderlands students' needs differ from other students' needs in the writing center. Newman offers a set of three guidelines writing center tutors should follow when addressing the needs of these students: 1) recognize the types of writing produced by Hispanic borderlands students and "deconstruct" what the writer has done to help him/her move to higher levels of literacy (54); 2) adopt a more directive approach to tutoring (58); and 3) remember the context from which Hispanic borderlands students' academic problems emerge (59). Newman's guidelines, like Harris's survey results, complicate the sometimes easy acceptance of value laden writing center pedagogy.

The students Newman discusses in her essay are students who have one or more parent of Mexican origin. As Newman writes, "These students fit neither the traditional ESL nor non-traditional student definition, yet they pose specific challenges to writing center workers at borderlands institutions and at institutions in other parts of the country where these students are recruited in an effort to diversify student bodies" (44). A bulk of writing center scholarship addresses the appropriate pedagogical strategies to best serve groups that provide unique challenges for tutors: ESL students (Edlund; Powers; Blau and Hall; Blau, Hall, and Strauss; Bokser; Harris "Cultural;" Myers; Petric; Friedlander; Riley and Mackiewicz; Newman), Learning Disabled Students (Neff; Neff-Lippman; Scanlon), non-traditional students (Haynes-Burton) and increasingly diverse native populations like the Hispanic Borderlands students Newman discusses. Though the discussions of such student groups in this body of scholarship are often quite rich, the pedagogical turn that leads these scholars to proclaim that more hands-on methods may better serve these students speaks less about the students themselves and more about the

problem-solving schema in which tutors work. Again, the idea that the writing center is a place where writers can come to learn to become better writers (North) and produce better writing (Gillespie) sets-up a situation where tutors become problem-solvers, diagnosing writing problems for student writers in order to make them and their writing closer to achieving a standard set by the academy or even by the tutor. The problem-solving goal may explain why problematic categories like ESL, Hispanic, International are rarely questioned in writing center scholarship because these groups are marked as a larger group of problem-students that tutors desperately need quick and effective strategies to address. Due to the nature of writing center tutorials (time constraints, one-time visits) the pedagogical imperative takes precedence – an imperative which simplifies and negates the complexity of tutor-student interaction and the situatedness of tutors and students within the writing center, the university, and the world.

### Conclusion

The pretense that writing centers occupy an “anti-space” (Vandenburg 59) not influenced by power relations and ideology about what constitutes “good writing” and “good writers” has been dismissed (Vandenburg; Grimm “Attending”; Grimm Good Intentions; Trimbur; Carino) though the remnants of these arguments surface in tutor-training manuals that promote notions of ownership, authorship, and authority that fail to acknowledge the values governing and shaping writing center pedagogy.

Recent rallying cries to challenge the power structures that prevent certain students access to the academy or thwart their success with the goal of establishing a more equitable writing center environment and higher-education system are saturated with hope but fail to offer practical steps toward this goal (Papay; Grimm “Attending”).

However, writing center practitioners must move in this direction. A place to begin may be to acknowledge and investigate the assumptions about ownership, authority, and writing shaped by values that influence our pedagogy, a task which I hope to have begun in this chapter. Second, research and analyze real, face-to-face tutorial interactions, looking at strategies tutors use to address topics in student writing, student expectations for the tutorial and for their writing, and the degree to which these elements reflect the values we seek to challenge. Only when we recognize the depth of our commitment to these values can we begin to move toward change. And finally, recognize that it is not the pedagogical strategies themselves that are saturated in current-traditional, hierarchical values, a belief which authors of tutor-training manuals seem to put forth. Rather, as the data in this study suggests, it is the way tutors employ the strategies that determine whether students feel excluded from or included in the academic world they find themselves in and whether they leave the writing center with better writing and as a better writer.

The following chapters conduct such an analysis of real, face-to-face tutorials, observed and videotaped during the fall of 2006, then transcribed and analyzed. Chapter 2 includes a critique of writing center research that often unintentionally, like the tutor-training manuals discussed here, lend support to hegemonic power structures, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the methodological approach implemented in the study of face-to-face tutorials. Chapters 3 and 4 offer discussion and analysis of the strategies tutors used to address higher-order and later-order concerns as revealed in the research data. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation with a brief summary of material discussed in



previous chapters and subsequent recommendations for tutor training informed by my research findings.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM IN THE WRITING CENTER

Like composition scholarship generally, writing center scholarship reflects an imbalance of research methodologies, with the bulk of writing center research relying on observational research. As I will go on to demonstrate, these qualitative methods are sometimes patchworked together without a guiding methodological framework or have a guiding methodology that is not made transparent in the scholarly write-ups. Writing center scholars and practitioners can learn from such informal studies, tutor and administrator observations, and well-informed discussions of tutorial situations; however, the imbalance of methodologies limits the kinds of information we can gather and thus affects the breadth and depth of our understanding of writing tutorials.

Specific methodologies yield unique information. For example, a case study “aims to provide a rich description of an event or of a small group of people or objects” (MacNealy 195). Rich description in a case study is the product of extensive observation within a specific context; therefore, because of its small scope, a case study can offer a detailed understanding of the interaction within the context. However, it is difficult to generalize such observations over a variety of contexts. Mary Sue MacNealy points out that case studies are hypothesis generating because the “insights into events and behaviors” they provide often merit further study (195). For example, Margaret Weaver’s study of Anissa, a deaf student in the writing center, problematizes the notion of the writing center as a place where conversation happens. Weaver presents in-depth

explanations of her interaction with Anissa and analysis of Anissa's course work.

Through these discussions, we learn that Anissa, who has been accused by faculty members of having difficulty "conceptualizing" instead of expressing herself (276), is a very bright student whose first language, American Sign Language (ASL) interferes with her ability to write in Standard Written English (SWE); this interference is partially due to lack of understanding on the part of professors and other academic support staff about the differences between ASL and SWE. Weaver's case study provides clear insight into Anissa's specific situation, which can inform professors and others who have worked with Anissa about the reasons she has struggled with writing. Though we cannot assume that the interference between ASL and SWE affects all deaf students based upon Weaver's research, we can conduct further research to find whether Weaver's conclusions about Anissa's writing difficulty may be true for other deaf students.

Similarly, quantitative methods of data collection have limitations. Griffin et al.'s discussion of the results of the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP) national survey offers a broad picture of writing centers but does not offer detailed information about individual writing centers and tutorial contexts. Unlike case studies, "Surveys provide a way to describe a population in quantitative terms" (MacNealy 148). For example, Griffin et al.'s study provides results that answer broad questions, like what percentage of writing centers responding to the survey are affiliated with English departments? (The answer is 29%). But, this survey cannot tell us the ways that being affiliated with the English department affects tutor-training at, say, the University of Louisville. Both Weaver's case study of Anissa and Griffin et al.'s discussion of the WCRP survey contribute to knowledge in our field, but each offers different kinds of knowledge.

One of the most common missteps in writing center research is the use of context specific case study data to explain or account for events in a separate context. For example, in her chapter “Recent Developments in Assisting ESL Writers,” Jennifer Ritter sets up her discussion of ESL writers using Judith Powers’s scholarship. Ritter explains that in ESL tutorials, “it seems the dynamics of the tutoring too often change from nondirective to directive approaches. In fact, this change is documented by Judith Powers, who noticed that tutor roles shifted from that of collaborators to informants when they worked with ESL students” (55). However, Powers’s essay is a reflection upon the struggles she and her colleagues at the University of Wyoming had when dealing with a dramatic influx of ESL students into the writing center. Powers claims, “Neither reading aloud nor editing by ear appears to work for the majority of ESL writers we see, however. Few beginning second-language writers ‘hear’ the language ‘correctly,’ and many are more familiar with written than with spoken English” (371). Though there is little doubt that this is what Powers observed in the writing center at the University of Wyoming, her personal reflection is not enough for scholars to conclude that reading aloud and editing by ear does not help ESL writers to learn to correct their writing. Similarly, Powers’s reflections are insufficient for Ritter to convincingly claim that when tutoring ESL students, tutors often switch from nondirective to directive tutoring.<sup>4</sup>

Pointing out the limitations of a reflective analysis like Powers’s does not mean that her claims are unsupportable. In fact, research by Alister Cumming and Sufumi So support the claim that tutors tend to use more hands-on strategies with ESL students.

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<sup>4</sup> Another problem also arises when scholars, including Ritter and others, equate the group of ESL students Powers worked with at the University of Wyoming with all ESL learners. Moreover, the label of “ESL” is problematic when used to identify groups of students who may have few similarities. See Ortmeier-Hooper for a detailed discussion of this last point.

Ritter mentions Cumming and So in a citation string but nevertheless relies on Powers to support her claims, even though Powers relies on personal observation in one, context-specific, location.

Another concern with some writing center scholarship is that instead of using case studies and personal observations as valuable hypothesis generating resources, scholars allow the dominant pedagogical theory (still couched in current-traditional rhetoric<sup>5</sup>) to dictate the direction of the scholarship. Ritter, for example, paraphrases Powers: “we need to devise strategies that are both appropriate for ESL writers and more compatible with writing center philosophy” (55). However, Powers makes this claim in her article not to argue for using nondirective methods, which represent “writing center philosophy” for Ritter, but to suggest that tutors become aware of the difference in ESL writers and native-speaking writers,<sup>6</sup> and thus revise their tutorial strategies. Powers explains,

Our experience of the past two years has convinced us that we will increase the effectiveness of ESL conferencing only when we understand, accept, and respond to the differences between the needs of ESL and native-speaking writers. Attempts to reform or reshape the participants in the conference are unlikely to prove effectual; we must reexamine and revise the method itself. (375)

Powers connects the revision of tutorial strategies with the revision of writing center philosophy to account for writers’ individual differences and pointedly questions current writing center pedagogy’s effectiveness for ESL students. Ritter, however, misunderstands Powers’s point and uses the quotation to support her argument that tutors should still try to uphold nondirective methods in ESL tutorials. In fact, Ritter concludes her essay by asking tutors to take her points into consideration to “help to ensure a better fit between ESL tutoring and the nondirective approach of writing centers” (60). Ritter

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<sup>5</sup> See Crowley.

<sup>6</sup> As mentioned earlier, her use of the terms “ESL” and “native-speaking” are not without controversy.

allows writing center theory to guide her conclusions rather than to seek productive inquiry. Instead of using Powers's research to generate valuable research questions such as, "Why do tutors tend to be more directive with ESL students?" or even "Are tutors more directive with ESL students in my writing center?" and if so "Do ESL students find these tutorial sessions to be helpful to them?" Ritter, without question, accepts the dominant writing center pedagogy and thus accepts the assumptions about authority, ownership, and "good" writing this pedagogy contains when she asks: how can we make ESL tutoring *fit* with writing center philosophy?

Relying on an anecdotal methodological framework in writing center scholarship and failing to recognize both the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology leaves much writing center scholarship on shaky ground, placing writing center research in a marginal position. Though writing center scholars have often embraced their marginal position within the university and have argued to maintain this liminal space, the mainstreaming of writing centers brought on by an increase of distance learning programs, WAC programs, and the recognition that writing centers are an essential academic support resource for students at most major universities has brought writing center scholarship to the attention of a wider academic audience. Writing centers can continue to assert their value not only by providing a high-quality and necessary service to the academic community but also by maintaining a rigorous research agenda that directly affects their ability to assist student writers. If we want to be more effective in our tutoring, we must be more rigorous in our research methods.

Writing center scholarship might pay attention to some of the warnings the composition community has received regarding its reliance on specific, unvaried research

practices. Richard Haswell, for example, argues that NCTE and CCCC are “at war” with certain kinds of scholarship, including “empirical inquiry, laboratory studies, data gathering, experimental investigation, formal research, hard research, and sometimes just research” (200). Haswell points out that several composition scholars (Reynolds; Berkenkotter; Charney; and Barton) have “lamented” the exclusion of these kinds of scholarship in NCTE and CCCC sponsored publications and conferences but with little effect. Some writing center scholars have noticed a similar trend within writing center research and have made efforts to support methodological pluralism.<sup>7</sup> Some of these efforts include awarding Cindy Johanek the NWCA Outstanding Scholarship Award for her book Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition that argues for methodological pluralism and encourages an acute awareness of research context; the Writing Center Journal’s editors (Boquet and Lerner) asking specifically for submissions of writing center research “related to or conducted in writing centers” (Boquet and Lerner 86); and Alice Gillam’s statement reflecting the view of Gillespie et al. in their important book Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation. Gillam writes, “we believe that methodological pluralism can encourage ethical, self-reflective approaches to inquiry,” and she challenges writing center researchers with Gesa Kirsch’s call for composition researchers:

Only by understanding the nature and assumptions of various research methodologies can scholars [and practitioners in writing centers] make informed decisions about the relevance, validity, and value of research reports. And only through shared, critical reflection on various research practices can [writing center

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<sup>7</sup> When I encourage methodological pluralism, I do not do so in favor of any one kind of research methodology. I, like Gillam et al., believe that “Such pluralism, in other words, does not mean an uncritical acceptance of all forms of research; rather, it demands a rigorous self-critique and an equally rigorous effort to understand the work of others” (xxvi). Also, I hope that encouraging methodological pluralism will lead writing center scholars to familiarize themselves with various, possibly unfamiliar, research methodologies and their affordances in order to conduct research yielding a variety of data, instead of limiting their discoveries to data only made by observation.

researchers] come to define the emergent [field of writing center studies] for themselves. (Kirsch 247-248 qtd. in Gillespie et al. xxvi-xxvii)

Numerous reasons exist, of course, why writing center scholars have relied primarily on purely observational research. Three of the most salient are convenience, funding, and time constraints. Writing center researchers are usually administrators and teachers too. Professionally, they are spread too thin and have few funds to spend on research. Conducting research involving a variety of data collection instruments, both qualitative and quantitative, is often time consuming and expensive, whereas observational research allows administrators to mine their daily experiences in the writing center. Moreover, because of their busy schedules and numerous responsibilities, it is likely more convenient to conduct research in their own writing centers with students who are present at the same time the administrator has planned to be in the writing center. Writing center scholars may also have had little methodological training and/or experience with text-based research, which could explain the source of some discomfort with embarking on a research study that looks at tutorial interaction as text.

### Methodology

The goal of this study is to research and analyze real, face-to-face tutorial interactions, looking at strategies tutors use to address concerns in student writing, at student expectations for the tutorial and for their writing, and at the degree to which these elements reflect the values that form the base of writing center pedagogy. Doing so offers an understanding of writing tutorials that will inform and improve writing center pedagogy. I analyze the tutorials based upon the concerns addressed and strategies the tutors use to address these concerns during the tutorials. I also look closely at interviews with both tutor and student to gain a clearer understanding of both parties' expectations



for the tutorial, perceptions of the effectiveness of the tutorial, and understandings of the strategies employed to address concerns during the tutorial.

I began with these two research questions:

- What strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address higher-order concerns? And, what strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address later-order concerns?
- How are these strategies perceived by participants in tutorials?

Writing center research has explored tutors' use of strategies to address concerns in student writing with a tacit acceptance of the values and assumptions about authority, ownership and "good" writing that governs much of the pedagogy recommended in tutor-training manuals, which I discussed in detail in Chapter 1. Acceptance of these values and assumptions limits what we know about writing tutorials. Therefore, I analyze strategies with the goal of challenging these values and discovering the degree to which they have narrowed our pedagogical understanding. Such an analysis brings concrete information to the attention of writing center scholars and offers an entry point for instituting change at the practice level.

### Participants, Data Sources, and Analyses

#### *Participants*

Eleven students and nine writing tutors participated in the study. All participants were affiliated with the University of Louisville. The University of Louisville is an urban university of approximately 22,000 students and a high population of non-traditional and first-generation college students. Writing tutors are selected from the pool of MA graduate students in English and are awarded a GTA stipend for tutoring 20 hours per

week in the writing center. Writers at all levels of undergraduate and graduate coursework visit the writing center for support on a regular basis.

Of the eleven students who participated in the study 2 were males and 9 were females; 2 African-American and 9 white. Eight students had visited the writing center before, and all students reported English as their first language. Four students reported visiting the writing center to work on a paper for English 101, while other students came to work on papers from classes including Psychology 401, Leadership Foundations 540, History 304, English 317, Communications 305 and History 522. One student has a physical disability that interfered with her ability to write during the tutorial.

Of the nine tutors who participated in the study, 5 were females and 4 were males; 2 African-American, 1 Asian, 6 Caucasian. One tutor is a non-native English speaker. Two had tutored in writing centers before coming to the University of Louisville; 4 tutors had teaching or tutoring experience outside of a writing center context; and 3 tutors had no experience teaching or tutoring before they began working in the writing center at the University of Louisville (Appendix A).

#### *Data Sources and Analysis*

Data collection for this study began in September 2006 after receiving IRB approval. Participants were randomly selected based upon the time they arrived for their tutorials. Students who arrived earliest for their scheduled tutorials were recruited first. If the first potential participant declined to participate in the study, then the next student to arrive was recruited. I recruited participants by asking permission of both tutor and student when the student arrived for the tutorial. It was not uncommon for students to decline to participate because they had a class immediately after the tutorial and did not

want to be held up afterwards for the interview; some expressed discomfort with being videotaped or audiotaped. Students and tutors who agreed to participate in the study signed Informed Consent forms and were compensated for their participation (Appendix B).

Writing center hours during the fall of 2006 were Monday and Thursday 9am-6pm; Tuesday and Wednesday 10am-6pm; and Friday and Saturday 1pm-4pm. I observed, videotaped, and audiotaped eleven writing tutorials in the University Writing Center at the University of Louisville. The University Writing Center is located on the third floor of Ekstrom Library, the main library on campus. All observations took place between October 1, 2006-December 1, 2006, during the hours of 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. Each tutorial is allowed approximately 50 minutes and begins at the top of the hour.

Following each tutorial, I conducted brief interviews with tutor and student separately in order to address my research questions that could only be answered by gaining an understanding of the tutor's and student's feelings about the tutorial. I made sure to include various types of questions as outlined by Michael Quinn Patton in his book Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods in order to produce a complete understanding of the tutorial and, more specifically, of the strategies that are the focus of my research (Appendix C). I also collected all supporting documents used during the tutorial, including drafts of student papers, notes taken by tutor and/or student, assignment sheets provided by students' course instructors, and any other text-based document that contributed to tutorial events. These materials necessarily supplemented tutorial transcripts because they provided context for the interaction between tutor and student.

Once the data was collected, two raters and I coded the transcribed tutorials for common writing concerns and strategies tutors used to address these concerns. Both raters were first-year doctoral students in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Louisville. One rater had a great deal of experience coding tutorial transcripts, while the other rater had no experience coding tutorial transcripts before participating in this study. Both raters participated in a three-hour training session to familiarize them with the codes used in this study and coded one transcript for practice. Raters were not required to code all conversational turns, but were encouraged to code as many turns as possible. Raters were not permitted to double-code conversational turns. Codes where two of the three raters agreed were determined to be a “match” and, therefore, were included in the calculations of percentages of concerns addressed and strategies used. Lines that did not yield a “match” were not considered in the final calculations. For example, if one rater coded a turn as Grammar, a second rater coded the same turn as Organization, and a third rater coded the turn as Spelling, that line would be excluded from the data analysis because no consensus could be reached.

Some codes represent tutorial strategies identified in previous research, including modeling (Harris “Modeling”; Shamon and Burns; Clark and Healy; Newkirk; Gillam et al.; Neff; Pugh; Ritter; Eckard and Staben; Wolcott), suggestion (Thonus), and questioning (open-ended and leading) (Harris; Capossela; Rafoth; Gillespie and Lerner; Ryan and Zimmerelli; Meyer and Smith; Blau, Hall, and Strauss; Blau and Hall; Carino (oral history); Miller; Straub; Straub and Lunsford). These strategies discussed in prior scholarship were used as guides for coding tutorial strategies, though new strategies that merit discussion surfaced.

## Topic Codes

For the purpose of this study, topics are defined as the units of discussion in a typical writing tutorial.<sup>8</sup> Raters were not required but were encouraged to code each conversational turn (e.g. each change in speaker during the tutorial) for a topic. Most of the topics were isolated after a preliminary analysis of the video and audiotapes collected in this study, though during the rating process some adjustments were made in order to refine some of the topic definitions and categories. The topics are:

- **First Five Minutes** – This is the part of the tutorial that Thomas Newkirk describes as being “critically important in giving the conference direction – they act as a kind of *lead*” (313). Specifically, in the University of Louisville writing center, the first five minutes denotes the beginning of the tutorial when the tutor takes care of administrative concerns by filling out a client information sheet (Appendix D), gathers preliminary information about the assignment, and negotiates the focus of the tutorial with the student. The portions of the observed tutorials coded as the first five minutes were discarded from the analyses in this study because of the prescribed procedures that occur during this time, which resulted in little variance between tutorials.
- **Assignment** – This topic involves specific conversation about the assignment that can include clarification of assignment guidelines or professor expectations, as well as discussions of the ways the student’s text meets or does not meet these guidelines and expectations.

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<sup>8</sup> The term “topic” is also used interchangeably with the word “concerns.”

- **Conclusion** – This topic includes discussion of the content and structure of an essay’s conclusion.
- **Documentation** – This topic includes discussions of MLA, APA, Chicago and other documentation styles, and ways students can use these styles to create appropriate citations, bibliography/works cited pages, and to format quotations within the text.
- **Grammar** – This topic includes, any grammatical concern that does not involve sentence structural issues. The most common grammar concerns coded were problems with verb tense, subject/verb agreement, unclear pronoun references, and misplaced modifiers.
- **Introduction** – This topic involves discussion of the content and structure of an essay’s introduction, including developing a clear thesis or creating a lead that interests the reader.
- **Invention** – This topic addresses idea generation for paper topics or supporting points that contribute to the development of a paper in its early stages. This topic is generally addressed when students come to the writing center for brainstorming sessions to help them get started on a course assignment but also may involve adding detail or supporting evidence to an assignment already in progress.
- **Meaning** – This topic includes discussions of the ideas the writer would like to convey in the text in order to offer the tutor a clearer understanding of the writer’s goals, main points, and/or argument. Meaning often involves the tutor restating what he or she believes the writer to say in a specific portion of the text in order to verify his or her understanding of that section.

- **Organization** – This topic addresses the overall order of the paper and may include idea, paragraph, or sentence placement. Organization might also include discussions of content addition, deletion, elaboration, and/or expansion that moves beyond word level changes.
- **Procedure** – This topic includes a negotiation between tutor and student about how to proceed in the tutorial that occurs beyond the first five minutes. Procedural interjections generally occur as transitions between topics.
- **Process** – This includes a general discussion of the student’s or the tutor’s writing process. In these discussions, participants in the tutorial might share writing tips or explain unique elements of their writing process, such as drafting, planning, or proofreading habits.
- **Punctuation** – This topic includes discussion of punctuation marks that most frequently includes commas, semi-colons, and colons.
- **Sentence structure** – This topic includes any syntactical issue, including some instances of passive voice, parallel structure, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments.
- **Spelling** – This topic includes discussion of appropriate spelling of names and other words, including typos.
- **Talk** – This topic includes discussions not directly related to the specific topics in the tutorial that tutors often use to build rapport with the writer. Talk could be described as casual conversation or “chatting” and could involve general observations about the assignment or text.

- **Word Use/Choice** – This topic includes discussion of appropriate or precise wording within a sentence or paragraph.

### Strategy Codes

For the purpose of this study, strategies are defined as specific pedagogical tools tutors use to address topics during writing tutorials. Raters were not required to code each turn for a strategy, but rather, to code strategies where they appear. Several strategies were isolated after a preliminary analysis of the video and audiotapes collected in this study. However, many of the strategies have been discussed in teacher-response and writing center scholarship. During the rating process, some adjustments were made in order to refine some of the strategy definitions and categories. The strategies are:

- **Rule**– When using this strategy, tutors offer specific directions for the writer to follow when addressing a particular topic that may be found in a grammar handbook or style manual.
- **Elaboration**– This strategy outlines the reasons a particular suggestion would appropriately address a specific topic. More specifically, elaboration is often the tutor’s explanation of “why” he or she has made a particular suggestion or noticed a particular problem with the student’s paper.
- **Illustration** – This infrequently used strategy is the tutor’s use of a reference that the writer is presumably familiar with from previous experience and that helps to demonstrate a specific concept relevant to the tutorial. For example, Olivia suggested that Mary think of her thesis statement as an analogy: “kind of like the analogies on the SAT’s where, you know, tree is to forest as hand is to body, you



know . . . you're looking to set up that kind of analogy within the thesis statement.”

- **Action modeling** – This is the kind of modeling that Muriel Harris discusses in her article “Modeling: A Process Method of Teaching.” She defines modeling as “a procedure in which a model demonstrates a particular behavior for observers to aid them in acquiring similar behaviors and attitudes” (77). I add the word “action” to Harris’s modeling in order to differentiate between this kind of modeling and resource modeling (definition of resource modeling can be found below). Therefore, action modeling occurs when the tutor actively engages in a task to show the writer how he or she might go about doing a particular task. Action modeling involves displaying tools the writer might use to address specific topics. Numerous scholars have discussed modeling as a useful but directive strategy (Harris; Shamon and Burns; Clark and Healy; Newkirk; Gillam et al.; Neff; Pugh; Ritter; Eckard and Staben; Wolcott).
- **Resource modeling** – This strategy differs from action modeling because it occurs when the tutor draws upon the resources available in the writing center in order to show the writer how these resources may assist in addressing a specific topic. Sandra J. Eckard and Jennifer E. Staben discuss this kind of modeling (though they group it under the larger category of “modeling) in their essay “Becoming a Resource: Multiple Ways of Thinking About Information and the Writing Conference.” Eckard and Staben explain that tutors should model and facilitate behavior for the student. Therefore, if the student has a question about

MLA style, the tutor can access the MLA handbook and show the student how to locate the answer to his or her question.

- **Option** – This strategy offers the writer two or more ways to address a specific topic. Options often are pairs of suggestions or multiple results of action modeling.
- **Personal experience** – This strategy is an anecdote or confession that helps to clarify the topic for the writer and that tutors often use to reinforce their peer relationship with the writer. Personal experience anecdotes may overlap with the topic “Talk.”
- **Praise** – This strategy offers positive reinforcement to the writer using encouraging words. Richard Straub discusses praise comments in his work on teacher-response. He defines praise comments as “less controlling than criticism or commands because they place the teacher in the role of an appreciative reader or satisfied critic and obviate the need for revision. Nevertheless, they underscore the teacher’s values and agendas and exert a certain degree of control over the way the student views the text before her and the way she likely looks at subsequent writing” (234).<sup>9</sup>
- **Open-ended question**– This strategy involves the tutor asking questions of the writer to elicit more detailed information about the assignment, the topic, and/or the writer’s concerns about writing. Open-ended questioning is a strategy recommended by several tutor-training manuals (Harris; Capossela; Rafoth; Gillespie and Lerner; Ryan and Zimmerelli; Meyer and Smith) and is often

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<sup>9</sup> See also Daiker.

discussed in writing center scholarship (Blau, Hall, and Strauss; Blau and Hall; Carino [oral history]; Miller; and others) and teacher-response scholarship (Straub; Straub and Lunsford).

- **Leading question**– This strategy involves the tutor asking questions that the tutor already knows the answer to. Although this strategy is often used to soften the critique of the writer’s text, several tutor-training manuals advise tutors to avoid this strategy (Gillespie and Lerner; Meyer and Smith; Harris).
- **Reader Response**– This strategy involves the tutor discussing how he or she understands portions of the writer’s text, assignment sheet, or the writer’s verbalized ideas/thoughts about the text and assignment. It often involves the tutor repeating in his or her own words what the writer has written or stated about the text. Straub categorizes reader response as reflective comments, which he explains are “The least controlling types of commentary” (234).
- **Suggestion**– Terese Thonus defines suggestions as “actions the tutor wishes the tutee to perform once the tutorial is over” (118). This strategy can involve identification of an error and a correction for that error, or a tutor might point out an error and offer no correction. However, by pointing out the error, the tutor implies that the writer should correct it.

Once the transcripts were coded for topics and strategies, I entered the data into Microsoft Excel to calculate total numbers of topics and strategies used per tutorial and to gain a clearer idea about the topic/strategy landscape of each tutorial. I also used Excel to find connections between topics and strategies. These calculations were based on the data coded by myself and the two raters.

The results of this study reveal that tutors make efforts to adhere to writing center pedagogy recommended in tutor-training manuals, although other elements of the tutorial, including student expectations, often force tutors to adjust their pedagogical plan. The results, which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and 4, shed light on the ways students are affected by the power structure that infiltrates tutorial interaction, but in turn offer writing center practitioners a starting place for change.

## CHAPTER III

### HIGHER-ORDER CONCERNS AND THE STRATEGIES THAT LOVE THEM

In this chapter, I will answer the first research question, “What strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address higher-order concerns?” in order to see if tutors follow advice from tutor-training manuals. Moreover, in order to answer the second research question, “How are these strategies perceived by participants in tutorials,” I discuss the three most common strategies, Reader Response, Open-Ended Questions, and Suggestion, using examples from tutorial transcripts and excerpts from interview data to shed light on participants’ satisfaction with tutorials in which tutors use these specific strategies to address higher-order concerns. Most tutor training manuals suggest that tutors address higher-order concerns before later-order concerns (Gillespie and Lerner; Ryan and Zimmerelli; Clark; McAndrew and Reigstad). Gillespie and Lerner define higher-order concerns as “the big issues in the paper, ones that aren’t addressed by proofreading or editing for grammar and word choice” (35). Later-order concerns have to do with mechanical correctness. The advice that tutors address higher-order concerns before later-order concerns suggests that writing center scholars value the content (clarity, message, organization) of a student’s paper above its mechanical correctness. According to Gillespie and Lerner, the rationale for these values is “if we help writers proofread first, a lot of writers—especially those who are inexperienced or hesitant—won’t want to change anything in their papers, even to make things better, because they feel that once they have their sentences and punctuation right, all will be well with their

writing” (35). This pedagogical approach teaches students that there is more to writing than just mechanical correctness and emphasizes that their ideas, the content of their paper, is valuable.

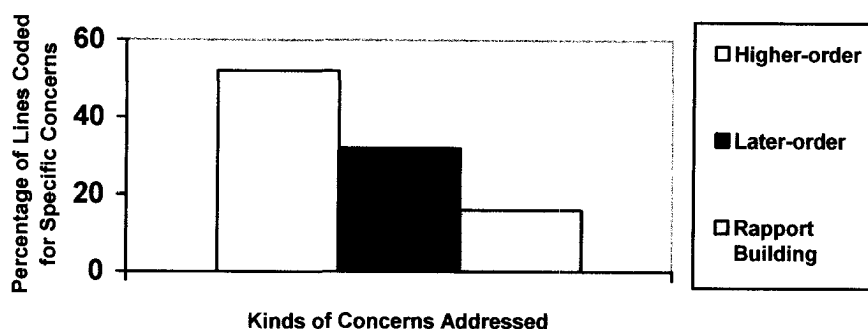
### Data Analysis/Results

Several of the topics coded for in this study represent what can be characterized as higher-order concerns, including Introduction, Conclusion, Invention, Meaning, and Organization. These topics were discussed in detail in Chapter 2. When raters coded for these topics, they looked for places where tutors addressed “big” issues, as Gillespie and Lerner explain. Sometimes when tutors addressed these higher-order concerns they digressed to brief, embedded discussions of later-order concerns like Documentation, Grammar, Punctuation, Sentence Structure, Spelling, and Word Choice, then returned to the higher-order concern.<sup>10</sup> Generally, however, there was a clear division between conversational turns addressing higher-order and later-order concerns. Figure 1 shows that the tutorials in this study addressed a higher percentage of higher-order concerns than later-order concerns or rapport building topics (Talk, Assignment, Procedure, Process).

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<sup>10</sup> Other topics including Assignment, Talk, Procedure, and Process are categorized as neither higher-order nor later-order concerns. Instead, they represent “rapport building” topics.

**Figure 1: More Higher-Order Concerns Were Addressed Than Other Concerns**



Training may have played a role in tutors' prioritizing the tutorial this way, but also Table 2 shows the students in the study most often asked for help with higher-order concerns.

**Table 2**

Students' goals for their tutorials

Tutor/Student name	What the student hoped to work on during the tutorial <sup>11</sup>	Higher-order or later-order concern(s)?	Repeat visitor to the writing center?
Patti/Alan	"making my piece good. Probably not rambling on."	Higher-order	Yes
Kent/Cassie	"figuring out what the thesis was to begin with; what is it about."	Higher-order	No
Patti/Amanda	"the first paragraph of my paper I knew was rough. . . And the ending as well. I didn't think that it fit anything."	Higher-order	No
Beth/Emily	"grammar and editing, things of that nature."	Later-order	No
Dani/Leigh	"I wanted to make it flow better because. . . my mom said it was choppy."	Higher-order	Yes
Phil/Erika	"just to see if I was going in the right direction, if my ideas....made sense."	Higher-order	Yes
Nichole/Erin	"my thesis and conclusion. I wanted to get those pretty much finalized."	Higher-order	Yes
Sam/Ava <sup>12</sup>	thesis, organization, and flow	Higher-order	Yes

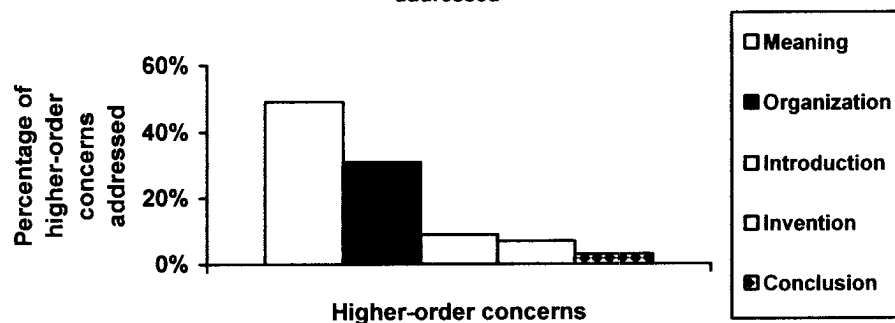
<sup>11</sup> This data comes from student responses to the question "What did you hope to work on during this consultation today?" during the post-tutorial interview. I also compared these responses to the data from the information sheet tutors completed at the beginning of each tutorial to make sure student responses were consistent.

Patti/Tammy	"I just wanted another opinion about my paper before I get my grade on it."	Higher-order	Yes
Justin/Derek	"writing more formally."	Higher-order	Yes
Liz/Kristin	"figuring out topics for my papers next week."	Higher-order	Yes

The data also suggest that tutors in these tutorials address students' concerns and follow advice from tutor-training manuals about dealing with higher-order concerns before later-order concerns.

Figure 2 shows that of all higher-order concerns, Meaning was the concern most frequently addressed during the tutorials studied, followed by Organization and Introduction. As I described in Chapter 2, Meaning includes discussions of the ideas the writer would like to convey in the text in order to offer the tutor a clearer understanding of the writer's goals, main points, and/or argument. Meaning often involves the tutor's restating what he or she believes the writer to say in a specific portion of the text in order to verify his or her understanding of that section.

Figure 2: Meaning was the most common higher-order concern addressed



Addressing Meaning helps a tutor to get a clearer idea of what the student's paper is about, particularly when a tutor has little prior knowledge of the topic. All but one of the tutorials in this study addressed Meaning at least once.

<sup>12</sup> Ava had a class immediately following her tutorial. Therefore, I was unable to interview her.



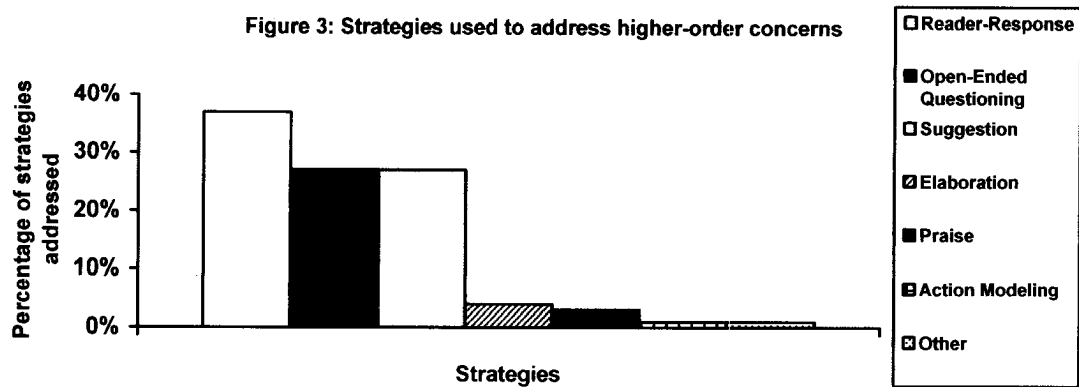
The data also were analyzed for the most common topic/strategy pairs occurring during the observed tutorials. Considering that raters were not required to code each conversational turn with a strategy, there were 1,237 total conversational turns raters agreed represented topic/strategy pairs. The raters identified a total of 72 different topic/strategy pairs. Table 3 shows that the top five pairs all involve higher-order concerns, which is not surprising since tutors addressed more higher-order concerns than later-order or rapport building topics.:

**Table 3**

Five most common topic/strategy pairs

<b>Topic/Strategy Pair</b>	<b>Percentage of occurrences out of 1,237 turns coded with topic/strategy pairs</b>
Meaning/Reader Response	14%
Meaning/Open-Ended Questions	10%
Organization/Suggestion	9%
Organization/Reader Response	6%
Meaning/Suggestion	5%

It is not surprising to see Meaning and Organization represented as part of the top five topic/strategy pairs since these were also the most common topics addressed during the tutorials. Additionally, as Figure 3 represents, Reader Response, Open-Ended Questions, and Suggestion are by far the most common strategies used to address higher-order concerns.



### Reader Response

Reader Response was the most common strategy used by all tutors to address higher-order concerns. Tutors use Reader Response to check their understanding of what the student is communicating to them during the tutorial or of material in the student's text. For example, in this conversation, Kent checks his understanding (Meaning) of Cassie's paper using Reader Response:

373 K: This is more about children, or is this

375 C: about everyone

377 K: the attachment styles

379 C: well, because everyone has an attachment style from childhood. They're formed in childhood.

381 K: So, we're still looking from younger to older maybe. . .

393 K: So, the attachment styles are also working more towards not people who are just your family, so that could be anybody

395 C: yeah

397 K: at any stage.

And, Patti similarly uses Reader Response in order to clarify her understanding (Meaning) of Amanda's paper:

128 P: It's a big concept. So, the larger world changes subcultures

130 A: um hmm

132 P: even as it's beginning to understand them.

As these examples suggest, Reader Response often involves tutors restating the ideas they have understood from reading the student's paper in order to check that their understanding is the message the student hoped to convey. Addressing Meaning using Reader Response seems particularly helpful during tutorials in which the student's paper addresses a topic that the tutor has little knowledge about. It is necessary, for example, for Kent to ask Cassie about the details of "attachment styles," a psychology term that he is largely unfamiliar with, in order for Kent to understand much of what Cassie hopes to achieve with her paper. Similarly, Patti needs to understand Amanda's argument about changing subcultures in order to offer Amanda helpful advice about clarifying her argument.

Reader Response, however, is also an effective way for tutors to couch their criticisms of student writing in a friendly, conversational way. For example, Phil responds to Erika's satirical paper about the reasons why joining a gang is a *good* choice for youth of today using Reader Response to soften his critique:

118 P: You can just say, you know, despite all the bad things, there's maybe *some* good things. I don't know what you want to say, but something, just taper it down a bit.

120 E: Okay

122 P: Yeah, maybe the opposite is true to some degree

124 E: Okay

126 P: It sounds so absolute the way you have it

Phil's critique is clear. He believes that Erika should at least nod to the fact that gang membership is not entirely positive although she needs to be forceful in her points because she's making a non-traditional argument. His Reader Response that her argument "sounds so absolute" conveys his reaction and emphasizes the point he made earlier suggesting that Erika "taper it down a bit." Phil uses words that make his critique sound friendlier, words like "maybe" and "to some degree." Reader Response generally involves this kind of language, which tutors use to facilitate a polite, warm relationship between tutor and student.

A tutor, Sam, who uses Reader Response more than any other tutor in the study, explains that in his tutorial with Ava, he believed that Reader Response was the best way to address her concerns about the flow of her writing. He elaborates, "I was trying to give her my opinion as a reader. I was posing as a dumb kind of reader, a reader who wants a lot of clarity and a lot of organization . . . I said my opinions as a reader and what I would like to see more in her paper." For Sam, Reader Response is a way for him to let Ava know what she does well in her paper, but also to show places where she can improve her writing. He believes that Reader Response is one of the strategies he uses most often in tutorials, but the strategies he uses are dictated by student needs and the tutorial context: "If a client has come with a paper in which she seeks help with her syntax and grammar, modeling is what I do. If a client comes with a brainstorming session, I don't bother about giving my opinions." Ava comes to the tutorial with concerns about her thesis and

overall flow of the paper, concerns that lend themselves to an approach that incorporates Reader Response.

For example, in one section of the tutorial, Ava is concerned that in her paper about the film Spirited Away, her attempts to “examine the most important representations of changes each character goes through as a form of social commentary on the whole of Japan as a society today” fail because she relies too heavily on summary of the movie plot instead of engaging in a discussion of the movie’s social commentary. After Ava reads aloud a section under the subheading “Greed,” Sam uses Reader Response to justify her concerns about having too much summary, but he also uses Reader Response to show her where she has successfully commented upon Japanese society:

570 S: Your word “commentary” appears here, and

572 A: I mean, am I keeping with that theme, because I’m trying to be consistent?

574 S: Yes, and the second one is, to me, the second one sounds better than the first one. The first one sounded more like a summary than a commentary

576 A: um hmm

578 S: than an analysis. The second one is much better.

Sam uses his authority as an experienced reader to show Ava that her concerns are justified, but also to show her specifically where she succeeds in making the commentary she wants to make. Sam is hopeful that his use of Reader Response will help Ava to improve her paper once she leaves the writing center, although he is concerned that an outside factor, her anxiety about her professor’s difficult grading criteria, might thwart the learning process: “So my satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the way she wrote, I

think made an impact on her. If she could understand that reaction from the reader and transfer that learning to other writing assignments in the future, I think she learned...But, if she didn't, if she was only obsessed with the present paper, and then worried too much about the professor's being hard, I don't know how much it would transfer." Sam believes that Reader Response, in this case, can facilitate learning, but recognizes that once Ava leaves the writing center, other forces may have a greater influence on her writing than his influence during the tutorial.

The tutor's role as "expert," or at least a more knowledgeable reader, is evident in each of the previous examples of Reader Response applied to address higher-order concerns. In this study, students tended to interpret Reader Response as a way for tutors to validate or invalidate students' concerns about their writing, though tutors may not intend to have their comments read this way. For example, Erika explains, "I told [Phil] that I needed to see if I was going the right way and that I needed help with my works cited, so he read over the paper and just kind of said 'okay, I like where you're going.'" The earlier example from the transcript of Phil and Erika's tutorial shows that Phil said more than just "I like where you're going," but this is one of the main messages Erika takes away from the tutorial.

### Open-Ended Questions

Like Reader Response, Open Ended Questions are often used to clarify the tutor's understanding of the student's text and/or the student's goals for the assignment but can be more difficult to use in a productive way. Open Ended Questions were used in all of the observed tutorials to address higher-order concerns. This strategy leaves room for the

student to provide a detailed answer, but only when the tutor is patient enough to wait for the answer, as in this tutorial between Nichole (tutor) and Erin (student):

208 N: self-actualization, what does that have to do with romantic relationships?

What, how is it key?

210 E: because, a lot of times, in love, you hear that in order to be loved, you have to love yourself

212 N: okay

214 E: so, I guess being, once you're self-actualized that person helps you to love yourself, and then it forms a better relationship maybe?

216 N: right

218 E: helps you to transform I guess

Using Open-Ended Questions helps Nichole to understand what Erin wants to say about self-actualization (Meaning), thus helping Nichole to give more informed advice to Erin about how to achieve her goals for this paper. In her interview following her tutorial with Erin, Nichole reports that Open-Ended Questioning is a strategy she often uses when she works with Erin. Nichole had worked with Erin approximately three times before the observed tutorial, and she knew that Erin prefers to write the introduction and conclusion of her paper first, then shape the supporting paragraphs. During this visit to the writing center, Erin was at this early stage where she wanted to work on the introduction and conclusion in order to work through her ideas to create an interesting and thoughtful argument. Nichole, because she knows Erin's writing style, recognized her needs and explained in her interview following the tutorial,

I think the primary strategy [I used] is mostly question and answer and then just dialoging, because I think that works and is really effective for Erin, being able to

say ‘okay, what do you mean here?’ and then getting her to talk in more depth about her ideas in relation to each specific area that she’s working on. So, I know that is one strategy, and we do that a lot in our sessions.

Nichole’s assessment of the tutorial is accurate. She used Open-Ended Questioning more often than any other strategy during the tutorial to address higher-order concerns. In fact, Open-Ended Questioning represented 30.8% of all strategies used during the tutorial (other strategies were: Reader Response (28.2%), Suggestion (26.9%), Leading Questions (7.3%), and Other strategies (6.8%).)

Like Reader Response, Open-Ended Questioning can be a useful strategy for tutors to gather necessary information from students about their ideas, organizational scheme, and other elements that may play a role in the tutorial, but also can be used to inadvertently (or purposefully) guide students in a direction shaped by the tutor’s vision for the paper rather than by the student’s vision. In the following example, Patti and Amanda discuss Amanda’s paper about pageant subculture titled, “Personality: The Sacrifice for Beauty.” Patti uses several Open-Ended questions to help Amanda clarify Meaning and Organization of her argument and to encourage her to more fully explain her views about the ways sacrifice plays a role in the pageant subculture. However, Patti does not offer Amanda enough time to work through her answers. Patti ends up providing a solution to help Amanda expand her argument, which Amanda may have been able to generate herself with a little more time:

856 P: Oh, I see. Are you talking about the spectators?

858 A: um hmm



860 P: Let's see, shame falls over this subculture when thinking about these things, just so this girl can have this [she's restating Amanda's words from the paper]

862 A: um hmm

864 P: So, what's the other side of that?

866 A: In reality, I don't know

868 P: So, you're saying that this is true of any industry?

870 A: yeah

872 P: Okay

874 A: I mean, well, I was saying this for pageantry

876 P: um hmm

878 A: This right here, I wanted to tie it in to like other cultures, like subcultures, but I'm kind of stuck

880 P: So, maybe in the reality of other cultures, other subcultures, or maybe in just other subcultures, money sacrifices and time are equally....

882 A: yeah

884 P: Is that where you're going?

886 A: So like in other subcultures, no wait

888 P: um hmm

890 A: (writes and says aloud) "in other subcultures without time, money, and sacrifices, you have nothing as well" or?

892 P: or maybe word it like "to have anything in other subcultures you have to sacrifice these things too"

Amanda has difficulty following the idea that connects time, money, and sacrifice Patti suggests; therefore, Patti ends up supplying words for Amanda in order to represent that idea. Patti uses many Open-Ended Questions to help her understand Amanda's Meaning in this section of her paper, but when Amanda seems unable to give enough information about how she wants to expand her argument, Patti offers her direction. Patti's decision is not a bad one, because Amanda is clearly struggling with developing her argument and a little push from the tutor could prove to be helpful for her. However, this exchange reveals the limitations of Open-Ended Questioning, because if a student, like Amanda, is struggling with complex ideas and higher-order concerns that result from a challenging assignment, she may not be able to answer a question that complicates her argument or asks for elaboration on the spot. Open-Ended Questioning is designed to elicit detailed responses from the student, and when tutors use this strategy to address higher-order concerns, the responses from the student will likely require more lengthy answers that require more time and thought to produce than when Open-Ended Questions are used to address later-order concerns.

Liz, a tutor in this study who used Open-Ended Questions more often than any other strategy, did so to help Kristin come up with five separate paper topics for her history class. Despite the Questioning, Kristin has trouble coming up with viable paper topics. Four of the papers she has to write are short journal entries of approximately 1-2 pages, and one is a fifteen page term paper.

500 L: What are some other things leading up to your large paper like you were talking about? So, the Weimar Republic starts because of a number of different factors which you mentioned

502 K: I could do the Treaty of Versailles by itself

504 L: That's big, so probably as long as you have a focus on the Treaty of Versailles, how that starts, how that's one of the beginning factors

506 K: right, right

508 L: how it starts the Weimar Republic

510 K: Culture, what is the culture like

512 L: Okay, I think

514 K: in Weimar

516 L: Okay

518 K: in the beginning, middle and end of the Weimar Republic

Kristin's response to Liz's Open-Ended question helps her to generate some broad paper topics, topics that are too broad for a short journal entry. When Liz's questioning does not help Kristin to produce useful paper topics, Liz and Kristin resort to combing through the index of Kristin's textbook to look for paper topics. This example shows the limitations of Open-Ended Questioning, because if the student does not have the information to answer the question, tutor and student are left at an impasse. What makes this situation between Liz and Kristin particularly difficult is that Kristin, as a participant in her history class, is supposed to be at least somewhat familiar with the class's content. Open-Ended Questioning is a logical strategic choice for dealing with the higher-order concern of Invention because it usually provides an effective way for tutors to see what students might be interested in writing about based on their experience in the course in which the assignment was given. Liz, who is not familiar with the content of Kristin's History course, has to rely on Kristin's knowledge to help her generate paper topics. But,

when Kristin cannot offer specific answers to Liz's questions, both tutor and student are frustrated.

Liz pinpoints Questioning as the main strategy she used during this tutorial, which is an accurate perception based on the coded transcript, but she believes that it did not work well this time. When asked to describe her consulting strategies she replied, "I don't think they were useful. I think they usually work pretty well. . .I don't think this was a representative session for me because I think usually when something is failing I try something else." Kristin explains in her interview following the tutorial that she does not believe her writing will change as a result of the tutorial, and that the most helpful part of the tutorial was when Liz wrote down page numbers from the index of her textbook that might help her to developing paper topics. Open-Ended Questioning can be used to successfully address higher-order concerns, but as the examples in this section suggest, the student's knowledge level or familiarity with the topic addressed can have a significant affect on the success of this strategy, as can the tutor's patience (or lack of) in waiting for a response.

### Suggestion

Tutors use Suggestions to recommend a revision or to address a concern in students' writing. Suggestions can help to move the tutorial along because they often defer a concern until later when the student has more time to revise and to fully address the concern. This is particularly helpful during discussions of higher-order concerns because often the revision required to address these "big" concerns takes a significant amount of time. For example, Sam effectively uses Suggestion to address an Organizational concern in Ava's paper. He uses a Suggestion that refers to a discussion

about Organization that had occurred earlier in the tutorial and that was excerpted in the previous pages of this chapter. Sam's Suggestion offers Ava a reference point to begin her revisions in order to address her Organizational concern, though the actual act of revision will occur outside of the tutorial context:

1034 S: I guess you want to give the summary and add the theme in, you know what I mean?

1036 A: okay

1038 S: thematize more

1040 A: um hmm

1042 S: and reduce the summary

1044 A: like I did in the second section?

1046 S: yeah, like you did in the second section in the paragraphs.

Ava is able to use Sam's Suggestion to recall what she had done in the second section of the paper to reduce summary material and knows that she should do the same thing (the thing that worked before) in the first section. Sam does not expect Ava to completely revise her paper during the tutorial. Instead, Ava jots on her paper, "Add more theme to first section" and knows that she can refer to the second section as an example. Presumably, Ava will revise the first section later.

Less frequently, tutors use Suggestion to address a higher-order concern and then leave time during the tutorial for the student to make revisions. This happens less frequently than deferring revisions until later because it can be very time consuming; however, offering students time to make revisions during the tutorial can allow tutors to gauge whether the student has the tools to make appropriate revision outside the tutorial

context. In this example, Patti uses Suggestion to help Amanda reorganize a portion of her text that Amanda identifies as being too long. She leaves time for Amanda to make part of her revision on the spot:

390 A: So, that's really kind of long

392 P: Kind of long, yeah. So, maybe even if we, I think if you broke it up

394 A: Can I just take this out?

396 P: Yeah, you can take that out, and I think, even if you broke these, these little examples out into a sentence, their own sentence, it might be a little bit more (unintelligible). She does this, and then she does this, and then she does this.

398 A: oh, okay, yeah

400 P: it might have more dramatic impact

402 A: "cursing at her mother because her hair is not perfect," then, period, and then "deliberately destroying another contestant's dress so she raises her chances of winning."

Patti offers Amanda a Suggestion that includes a rough outline for the organization of her paragraph and waits for Amanda to use that structure to reword her "long" sentence.

Amanda follows Patti's cue and reorganizes the paragraph.

Tutors who use Suggestion frequently during tutorials to address higher-order concerns, often report feeling as if they are being too "directive," a term they use to criticize their tutoring style. For example, Dani, who used Suggestion to address higher-order concerns more than any other strategy in her tutorial with Leigh, explains first how she used Suggestion:

I was really clear about organization and how to go about organizing a paper, and that's something you can apply any and all the time you write something. So

hopefully, she will draw on that and realize that it wasn't just for this one paper . . . I think she'll think about saying everything at one time about a particular subject before she moves on to talk about something else.

Then she describes her strategies: "They were pretty effective, and a little directive, but it seemed like she needed that a lot." Dani realizes that her strategies may not fit in with the pedagogy recommended in writing center scholarship because she was "a little directive," but she stands by her choice to use Suggestion to help Leigh with the Organization of her paper.

Patti similarly criticizes her use of Suggestion in her tutorial with Alan. She explains that Alan needed help with Organization and the "overall structure of ideas" in his paper. Although she employs two other strategies to address Organization (Open-Ended Questioning and Reader Response), she feels most guilty about using Suggestion. She explains: "I try not to be too directive. It slips up sometimes when I say 'why don't you put this here' and he just writes it down." The Suggestions Patti uses, however, to address Organization in Alan's paper still require that Alan engage in revision outside of the tutorial context. For example, Alan's paper compares three writing textbooks, Lessons in English (1916), The Writing Handbook (1953), and Seeing and Writing (2000). His analysis of each textbook is fragmented throughout the paper, and Patti suggests that Alan include more analysis in sections specific to each text rather than discussing small bits of each text in various sections throughout the paper. When she makes this Suggestion, Alan writes in the margin of his paper "comment on the full book" and draws a star next to the place where he needs to add more about the full book, which in this case is Lessons in English. Patti's criticism of her pedagogical approach in

this case seems harsh since Alan is still left with the task of making a substantial organizational revision.

Students involved in tutorials in which the tutor uses Suggestion to address higher-order concerns report that they learned from the tutorials and have clear direction on what they need to do to revise their paper. Leigh believes Dani's approach to addressing her Organizational concerns was helpful. She explains she learned that, "I need to re-read [the paper] more than I do, and then make sure that I put transitions in ... [to] make it flow better." Similarly, Alan explains that he believes his writing will change after this tutorial with Patti because he will be able to "get my point across faster and more precisely, because I guess the reader can't always understand what I'm thinking, so giving them every detail [but a] cut down version." These students' reactions to the tutors' use of Suggestion shows that Suggestion can be a tool for teaching useful strategies for revision, as Leigh mentions (re-reading her paper), as well as teaching broader principles of writing, as in what Alan learns about readers.

Some tutor-training manuals warn that offering too many Suggestions about "big" issues can discourage students if tutors do not allow sufficient room for students to work through their own solutions to the writing concern. Ryan and Zimmerelli emphasize this point and warn tutors not to "overwhelm the writer with too many suggestions for improvement at one time" (47). However, data from this study suggests that students are less often overwhelmed by too many Suggestions for improvement than by strategies that fail to propel the tutorial forward. More specifically, as the following case study illustrates, students are most often overwhelmed by the repetitive use of the same Open-



Ended Questions, Reader Responses, or Suggestions than they are by numbers of different Open-Ended Questions, Reader Responses, or Suggestions.

### Case Study: Kent and Cassie

The data from the tutorial between Kent and Cassie best represents the trends present across all the tutorials. For example, Kent addresses higher-order concerns (Organization 43%, Meaning 28%, Introduction 10%) throughout the tutorial using the most common strategies observed in this study: Open-Ended Questioning (27%), Reader Response (42%), and Suggestion (26%). These strategies, as previously discussed, are effective for addressing a variety of higher-order concerns but are sometimes tricky to use. This case, however, illustrates what can happen when a tutor fails to listen to the student's concerns and uses strategies to emphasize the same point over and over again. A tutor's failure to listen to student concerns and to pick-up on verbal and non-verbal cues can negate many of the benefits of these useful pedagogical strategies for helping the student address higher-order concerns.

### Kent

Kent is a first year, master's level graduate student in literature. He began his work as a writing tutor at the University of Louisville in August 2006; prior to that he had never tutored writing but had one year of experience tutoring Spanish in the language lab at his undergraduate school. He enrolled in the recommended writing center practicum course taught by the director of the writing center in the fall semester 2006.

Kent explains that in most tutorials he usually reads "through the paper as a whole and kind of as we go through we'll get things like grammar." Kent begins by reading Cassie's paper and stops each time he locates a topic he believes needs to be addressed.

Kent is known in the writing center for his friendly demeanor and his strong desire to help students with their writing.

### Cassie

Cassie, a senior psychology major, had never been to the writing center prior to her tutorial with Kent. The paper she brings to the tutorial is titled “The Importance of Interpersonal Complementarity Between Client-Therapist Relationships and Marital/Intimate Relationships,” and it is for an upper-level psychology independent study. Cassie explains that she came to the writing center to see if “a core topic” is coming out of her paper. She wants to make sure “that I’m actually arguing something rather than just throwing out facts.”

### Results and Analysis

Figure 4 shows that Kent and Cassie discussed more higher-order concerns than later-order concerns or rapport building topics during the tutorial. In fact, Kent and Cassie discussed no later-order concerns.

**Figure 4: More Higher-Order Concerns Were Addressed than Later-Order or Rapport Building Topics in the Tutorial Between Kent and Cassie**

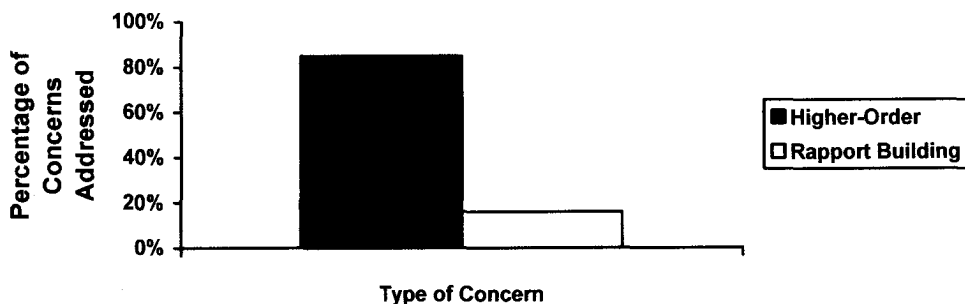
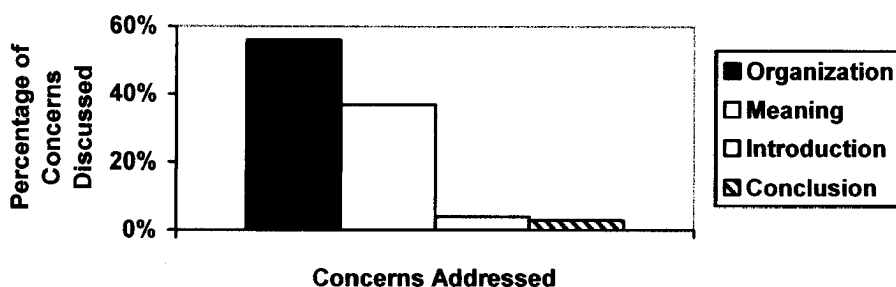


Figure 5 reveals that Organization and Meaning were the two higher-order concerns addressed, more often than any other topic during this tutorial.

Figure 5: Organization was the Most Common Higher-Order Concern Discussed



Cassie’s main concern about her writing is that her argument is not clear. Kent and Cassie realize that this is a valid concern, primarily due to the lack of an Organizational structure of her paper. Thus, the tutorial focuses mainly on Organizational concerns.

Table 4 presents Organization and Reader Response as the most common topic/strategy pair in this tutorial:

**Table 4**

Top Five Topic/Strategy Pairs in the Tutorial Between Kent and Cassie

Topic/Strategy Pair	Percentage of occurrences out of 108 turns coded with topic/strategy pairs
Organization/Reader Response	31%
Organization/Suggestion	18%
Meaning/Reader Response	17%
Organization/Open-Ended Questions	16%
Meaning/Open-Ended Questions	9%

Kent uses the strategy Reader Response most often to address Organization, and also uses this strategy most often to address Meaning; he continually checks his understanding of the subject matter with Cassie and verifies his understanding of the Organization of her paper before making Suggestions for re-organization. In the following excerpt, for

example, Kent asks Cassie if he understands part of her argument correctly before making a Suggestion regarding the Organization of that section:

413 K: So, this section, how would you say this fits in with the rest of what you're saying?

415 C: Well, I want to say that whether you verbally express something or you physically show it, people are going to be able to see or interpret how you're behaving.

417 K: Okay

419 C: and that affects your communication with others

421 K: Okay, so, I'm just trying, I'm trying to figure out how that fits in with working from younger to older and then working from, like knowing less people to knowing more people. That may be kind of an artificial way of making the paper organized.

423 C: uh huh

425 K: Does that make sense? I think it needs to fit in somehow. How does that fit in with your argument about different, about similarities and differences in relationships?

427 C: I'm not sure

429 K: Okay

431 C: (laughs)

In this segment, Kent tries to make sure he understands the main points Cassie has presented in her paper so far and asks how these points fit together to make a coherent argument. Kent identifies the lack of connections between points in each paragraph and

her thesis as a major problem in Cassie's paper. He continues to ask Cassie about these connections throughout the tutorial:

469 K: How does that tie in with the thesis again?

And

539 K: I've just been trying to go through and kind of get an idea of how everything fits together, and there's a lot of information here

And

549 K: I guess one thing that I would try to do is maybe think about how each section connects to each other.

And

665 K: Show how all this relates back to what you are saying over and over again.

And

797 K: So this is what I'm talking about when I say kind of up here, to kind of show why, how it connects back.

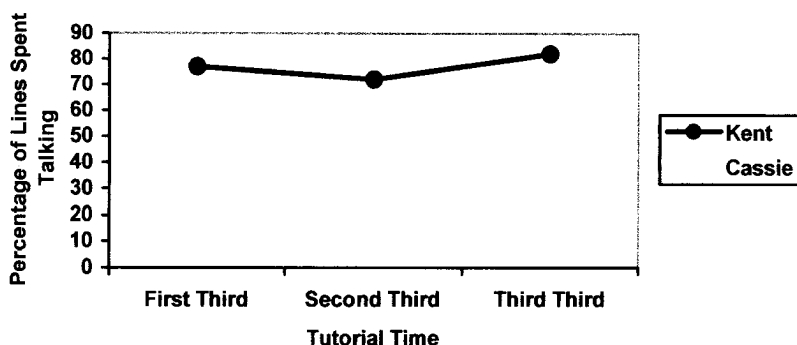
Kent's use of Reader Response and Open-Ended Questions to address Organization and Meaning, however, cease to be useful as the tutorial progresses because his responses and questions never move forward from his original response/question about how the information in each paragraph connects with the other information in the paper. Kent makes Cassie aware in the first fifteen minutes of the tutorial that she needs to strengthen the connections between her paragraphs and her thesis because Kent has already noted this several times. He points out these weaknesses but does not provide her with strategies to correct some of these organizational problems in her paper. He continues merely to point out over and over where Cassie needs to make stronger connections

between the main points in her paper. Interestingly, Kent is aware that repetition of the same strategies and the same comments is a weakness in this tutorial. He reflects, “I wasn’t sure that I was connecting with her at all. I think there was a point where I tried to kind of restate things and tried to kind of come at it differently, and I think I ended up doing the exact same things all over again. So my attempt to change things didn’t work at all.” Kent is concerned that his strategies did not work well because they were too repetitive, but, while he was immersed in the tutorial, he did not know how to change his approach to be more effective.

In order for strategies like Open-Ended Questioning, Reader Response, and Suggestion to be effective, the tutor should leave enough time for the student to think through and respond to the question, response, or suggestion. Kent often does not leave enough time for Cassie to respond, which may be another factor contributing to her eventual disengagement from the tutorial interaction. As Clark points out in Writing in the Center, “Students and tutors should work together. The tutor should not monopolize the conference while the student just sits there nodding” (43).

Figure 6 shows that Cassie begins the tutorial minimally involved and increases her involvement throughout the middle of the tutorial, an increase indicated by the increase of her verbal contributions to the tutorial. However, during the last third of the tutorial, Cassie becomes almost completely uninvolved:

Figure 6: Cassie becomes disengaged in the tutorial



Cassie's disengagement after the middle of the tutorial may also be partly due to the fact that the tutorial does not move forward at all after this point. As the previous excerpts from transcripts show, Kent asks the same questions over and over again and makes the same responses to the higher-order concerns in Cassie's paper over and over again. Moreover, Kent does not praise Cassie for what she does well in her paper during his Reader Response. Most tutors in this study balanced their Reader Response with both criticism and praise, as shown earlier in the excerpt from Phil and Erika's and Sam and Ava's tutorial. This balance can boost students' morale and potentially make them more open to constructive criticism in other areas of their writing. Tutors focusing only on the places in students' papers that need work can make students feel unconfident about their writing and potentially less willing to participate in the tutorial experience. For example, the way Kent situates his response to Cassie's elaboration on her paper topic is discouraging. Kent, who does not have a background in psychology, may not understand Cassie's initial explanation of her topic, but instead of telling her that he does not know much about the topic, he tells her that she's being unclear in her explanation of the topic:

052 K: Can you just kind of explain what the assignment is about?

054 C: Okay, I need to narrow down my research on interpersonal complementarity and what that means. Most of the research that's been done has been done on client and therapist relationships and matching between personalities. I'm trying to compare it to matching marital relationships or intimate relationships.

056 K: Okay

058 C: So based in personality, yeah.

060 K: Alright, so that's basically what the paper's about?

062 C: um hmm

064 K: Alright, and so, ... that's not a very good explanation of what the paper's about.

Though Cassie's explanation might not have been clear to Kent, there are any number of follow up questions he might have asked her in order to clarify his understanding of the topic. And, his criticism may have shut down Cassie's effort to help him understand her topic better. Kent moves on to ask, "Is there something that you're specifically worried about with this paper?" and leaves his understanding of the topic alone for the moment. As I observed this tutorial, Cassie appeared insecure about her writing, but upon my analysis of the tutorial transcript and revisiting more closely some of the language Kent used during this tutorial, I believe she may just have been reacting to the kinds of criticism Kent offers about this paper.

As the tutorial progresses, Cassie starts to self-deprecate more and more, picking up on Kent's confusion about her paper, which seems to be primarily due to his unfamiliarity with the topic.



555 K: Are you happy with the core idea that relationship harmony exists when two people complement one another? Are you happy with that as being the core idea?

557 C: Yes, yeah, I am

559 K: Okay

561 C: I'm happy that I have one

And eventually, approximately 30 minutes into the tutorial, Cassie expresses that she's overwhelmed:

645 K: I feel like I'm talking a lot. Are you trying to figure out how all this connects?

647 C: Ah, I'm so overwhelmed right now.

Cassie could not be more clear. She is aware that there are Organizational problems with her paper, and she needs some time to step away from the paper before she begins her revision process. She is exhausted. Kent, however, presses on with his repetitive responses though Cassie is almost completely disengaged at this point:

657 K: I think with a lot of papers it would be easy to say, well, you just rewrite it

659 C: um hmm

661 K: I think you have a lot of valid information here, and you've clearly done your own research and have the information, but I think you just need to come back, I think you just need to show how this information relates back to what you're saying.

663 C: um hmm

665 K: So, show how all this relates back to what you're saying over and over again.

Cassie continues to give obvious verbal cues to Kent, trying to let him know that she's thoroughly overwhelmed and needs a break, but his comments continue to overwhelm and discourage her:

737 K: Do you have questions about this? Or do you want to work on this more, or do you want to move on to the next section?

739 C: Goodness, I'm sorry, I can't answer any questions.

741 K: I mean, I think this is just a confusing paper. It's okay. It's difficult, you know, you're in the middle of it and you can't figure out exactly what needs to happen.

After Cassie expresses that she is overwhelmed, the tutorial continues for an additional 25 minutes. Kent cannot effectively employ Open-Ended Questioning and Reader Response to address the higher-order concerns in Cassie's paper because he does not listen to her concerns or verbal cues and does not recognize that the failure to understand this advanced paper topic may reflect his own shortcomings. No strategy can be effective if the tutor does not actively listen to the student and put the student's concerns first. In her follow up interview Cassie acknowledges that Kent's use of Open-Ended Questioning was useful at first, but eventually became overwhelming to her:

I liked the questions for each paragraph about how [the topic] affects relationships or how do I improve this, how to bring this together . . . how these things fit in . . . I got something I need to specifically answer that I couldn't see myself. I felt better knowing that it's not due until tomorrow, so I've got some time to fix it. At the same time, I wish I'd come in here last week. I could have done this all over the weekend and come back today and probably could have made a better paper for tomorrow than had it been the day before . . . I'm so overwhelmed with it.

That's why I feel like I should have definitely come back later for this paper. It would take more than one time.

Cassie understands that part of the problem was that she attended the writing center the day before her paper was due, which did not allow her much time for revision. However, based on the analysis of the tutorial, Kent could have used the strategies more effectively to instill confidence in Cassie rather than disillusioning her about her writing, a conclusion which Kent recognizes:

It was confusing. It was difficult to see if things were working or not. I feel like we really slogged through it . . . I think [the tutorial] helped, but I think she left being confused too. And, I'm still confused. I mean it wasn't perfect, but I think it's alright.

### Conclusion

The strategies tutors in this study used most often to address higher-order concerns have the potential to be effective in these situations. The data supports three key points tutors should consider when using Reader Response, Open-Ended Questioning, and Suggestion to address higher-order concerns. These three points are not unique to this dissertation but often appear as advice in tutor-training manuals. The empirical evidence in this study lends support to these previously lore-based suggestions.

- 1) Diversify the content of responses, questions, and suggestions throughout the tutorial rather than repeating the same comments. Doing this may be difficult if the tutor notices one specific higher-order concern dominating a student's paper, as Kent notices in Cassie's paper. Kent uses strategies recommended by tutor-training manuals, Open-Ended Questioning and Reader Response, but his mere use of suggested strategies is not enough to ensure that he will be able to adequately address Cassie's concerns. In these situations, it is best for

tutors to allow time for students to begin revising their papers, either during the tutorial time with tutor supervision or outside of the tutorial (which may mean ending the tutorial early). Otherwise, tutors risk overwhelming students with their suggestions or questions, a problem illustrated in the tutorial between Kent and Cassie. If tutors suggest students revise outside of the tutorial, they should make sure the students know how to revise in order to address the concerns discussed during the tutorial. Tutors should also recommend that students return to the writing center once they have had time to revise.

- 2) Listen to students' verbal and nonverbal cues. Paula Gillespie aptly notes in her oral history interview for the Writing Centers Research Project that

tutors tell us when they write back in response to the peer tutor alumni research project that listening skills are among their greatest skills...listening and respect are closely tied together...you have to listen and wait and just be patient and not jump in, because I think our tendency is to be uncomfortable with silence and to want to end silences.

A tutor's failure to listen to a student's concerns can easily be misconstrued as disrespect. For example, when Cassie explained she was overwhelmed, it was probably time to wrap-up the tutorial. Kent did not pick up on this verbal cue, which only served to exacerbate Cassie's feeling of being overwhelmed.

Similarly, if a student seems completely disengaged in the tutorial by leaning away from the table, looking at his watch, and muttering an occasional "um hmm" to the tutor's suggestions, the tutor should try to get the student more engaged in the tutorial, which is often easier said than done. Nevertheless, being acutely aware of verbal and nonverbal cues can make the tutorial

experience more satisfying for both tutor and student and can help tutors to choose the most appropriate approach to various concerns in the students' writing.

- 3) Don't feel guilty about using Suggestions. Suggestions, though to many tutors in this study seemed too "directive" and counter to pedagogical best practice, were perceived by students to be one of the most helpful strategies tutors used to address higher-order concerns. Moreover, the interview responses from Leigh and Alan presented earlier in this chapter revealed that Suggestions succeed in teaching strategies that students can take from the tutorial to improve their writing as well as teaching basic rhetorical principles. As Linda Shamoon and Deborah Burns argue, "The idea that one cannot be extremely appreciative of expertise and also learn actively from an expert is an ideological formation rather than a product of research" (136). The data in this study supports that students can, in fact, be appreciative of expertise and learn actively from an expert, because when tutors offer Suggestions, they are placed in the role of expert. It is also likely that students expect tutors to be "experts" when they come to the writing center.

Overall, the analysis of strategies used to address higher-order concerns revealed that many strategies recommended by tutor-training manuals as default methods, specifically Open-Ended Questioning and Reader Response, can be difficult to use effectively. Open-Ended Questioning, a strategy often discussed as if it is a way for tutors to ensure they are not taking control over student writing, can just as easily be used to take control of student writing as other strategies that are often recommended with more

caution and that tutors use with more guilt. Therefore, new tutors need more detailed instruction regarding how to use these strategies effectively to supplement the information presented in tutor-training manuals. Although many universities offer extensive tutor training courses, far too many still only offer the one or two day “bootcamp” to train tutors before throwing them into the tutorial setting. The upcoming chapter further supports the need for more extensive tutor training and adds depth to the discussion of strategies presented here.

## CHAPTER IV

### QUANTITY NOT QUALITY: STRATEGIES USED TO ADDRESS LATER-ORDER CONCERNS

Many tutor training manuals spend a lot of time offering tutors suggestions for addressing later-order concerns in student writing, partly because it is often a tutor's inclination, due to time constraints or other factors, to want to correct the student's paper rather than teaching the student how to correct his own paper. To counteract tutors' inclinations to correct students' papers, tutor-training manuals often recommend many of the same strategies for addressing later-order concerns that they recommend for addressing higher-order concerns. For example, McAndrew and Reigstad recommend Open-Ended Questioning as an effective strategy for addressing both higher-order and later-order concerns. They begin both sections (higher-order and later-order) with appropriate "Tutor Questions" that can spark discussion of these kinds of concerns. For higher-order concerns, McAndrew and Reigstad suggest questions like, "What's the central issue of your piece?" and "What's the one dominant impression you want your piece to make?" (43), and for later-order concerns they suggest questions like, "Can you eliminate unnecessary words?" and "Is the movement from sentence to sentence clear?" (57-8). For McAndrew and Reigstad, Open-Ended Questioning is the go-to strategy for all kinds of concerns that may arise in the tutorial context. Strategies like Open-Ended Questioning that tutor-training manuals often recommend for addressing both higher-

order and later-order concerns are assumed to prevent the tutor from taking control of the student's paper, which, as discussed in previous chapters, is a problematic assumption.

Although the emphasis in these manuals remains upon strategies assumed to minimize the power the tutor exerts over the student's paper, one of the most interesting findings in my analysis of tutor-training manuals was that they present a larger number of strategies for addressing later-order concerns than higher-order concerns. In this chapter, I will answer the second part of the first research question, "What strategies do tutors employ to address later-order concerns?" in order to see if tutors follow advice from tutor-training manuals and employ a greater number of strategies to address later-order concerns than higher-order concerns. And, to answer the second research question, "How are these strategies perceived by participants in tutorials?" I discuss the most common topic/strategy pairs, as well as some surprising absences of particular strategies that I expected to be used to address certain topics. To do this I will use examples from tutorial transcripts and excerpts from interview data to shed light on participants' satisfaction with particular strategies to address specific later-order concerns.

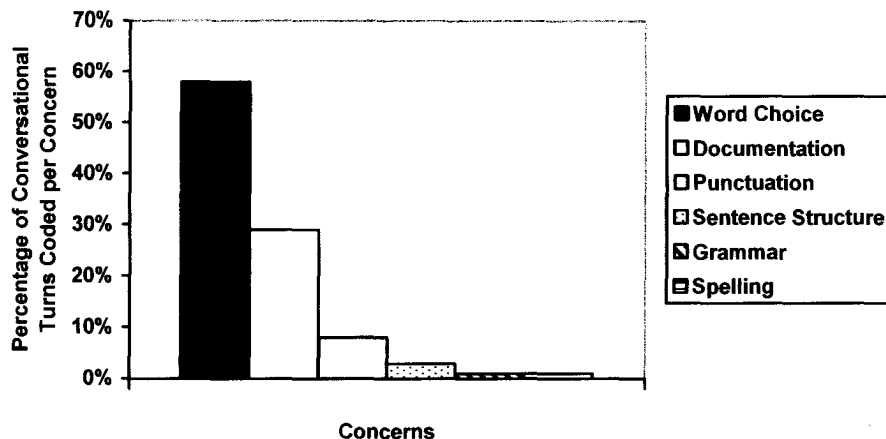
### Data Analysis/Results

Tutors in this study used several of the same strategies to address both higher-order and later-order concerns, including Open-Ended Questioning, Reader Response, and Suggestion, which matches the advice from tutor-training manuals. As discussed in Chapter 3, more conversational turns were coded as addressing higher-order concerns than later-order concerns or rapport building topics, and in only one tutorial did the student request help with later-order concerns as the main focus of the tutorial. Figure 7



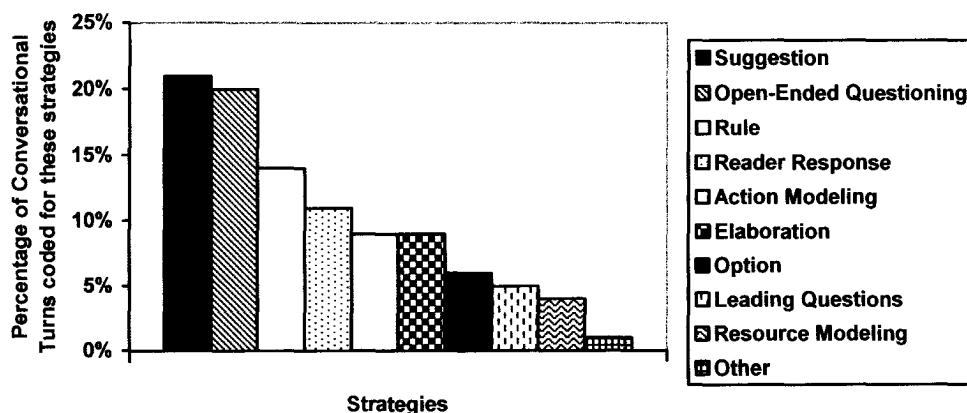
shows that of all later-order topics, Word Choice was most frequently addressed during the tutorials studied, followed by Documentation and Punctuation.

**Figure 7: Word Choice was the most common Later-Order Concern Addressed**



Additionally, as Figure 8 represents, Suggestion, Open-Ended Questions, Rule, and Reader Response are the most common strategies tutors employed to address later-order topics.

**Figure 8: Suggestion is the most common strategy used to address later-order concerns**



When compared with Figure 3, Figure 8 also reveals that tutors used a greater variety of strategies to address later-order concerns than they used to address higher-order concerns.

However, the tutors relied most heavily on the same strategies they relied upon to address higher-order concerns: Suggestion, Open-Ended Questioning, and Reader Response. As noted earlier, tutor-training manuals present more strategies for dealing with later-order concerns than higher-order concerns. Several tutor training manuals present the bulk of these strategies under the umbrella of “error-analysis” (Gillespie and Lerner; Clark; Meyer and Smith). Error analysis is a technique for identifying patterns of error in student writing and/or for discovering why a student may make particular errors. Error analysis can involve several strategies, including Questioning (Leading and Open-Ended), Elaboration, Modeling (Action and Resource), Rule, and Suggestion. We can see these strategies appear in Gillespie and Lerner’s step-by-step guide to error analysis:

1. You see an error. First, you want to know if the writer spots it and can correct it. So you ask, “Do you see an error in this sentence?” [*Leading Question*]<sup>13</sup> Chances are that the writer will find and correct it without any problem. But let’s say that the writer doesn’t see it. Then we get to the next step.
2. Talk about the general class of errors, saying, “The problem is with your verb,” or “There’s a punctuation error.” [*Elaboration*] Give the writer time to spot it, and if he still doesn’t see it, it is time for the next step.
3. Point out the error to him. “The problem is with this comma.” Ask about the writer’s logic behind making the error. See if he knows how to fix it. If not, ask him what rule he used to decide to put a comma where he did. [*Open-Ended Questions*] As we noted above, writers often misinterpret or misapply rules. If the writer still hasn’t made the correction, proceed to the next step.
4. Explain the specific rule [*Rule*] (and refer to the handbook, as we pointed out) [*Resource Modeling*], and have the writer apply it to his error. Help him make the fix if you need to [*Action Modeling*], but explain as thoroughly as you can why you’re making the choices that you made [*Elaboration*].

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<sup>13</sup> All bracketed text with italics are my insertions in this block quotation.

5. Go on to the next example of this error, but try to have the writer apply what you've taught in the previous example. And then treat each error in this fashion. For many writers, you'll soon not need even to point out the problem – they will recognize and fix the error on their own. (41-2)

The data in this study represent the diversity of strategies presented in Gillespie and Lerner's discussion of error analysis, although not to the extent one might expect. For example, if tutors were truly following Gillespie and Lerner's model, we would expect more reliance on Leading Questions, Elaboration, Action Modeling and Resource Modeling, but these strategies are only minimally present in the observed tutorials.

The data also were analyzed for the most common topic/strategy pairs occurring during the observed tutorials. Although no later-order concerns were part of the top five topic/strategy pairs, presented in Table 3, Table 5 below shows the top five pairs that involved later-order topics, revealing that Documentation/Open-Ended Questioning was, by a narrow margin, the most common topic/strategy pair involving a later-order concern.

**Table 5**

Top Five Topic/Strategy Pairs Involving Later-Order Concerns

<b>Topic/Strategy Pair</b>	<b>Percentage of occurrences out of 390 turns coded with topic/strategy pairs involving later-order concerns</b>
Documentation/Open-Ended Questioning	11%
Documentation/Rule	10%
Word Choice/Reader Response	10%
Word Choice/Suggestion	9%
Word Choice/Open-Ended Questioning	8%

It is not surprising to see Word Choice and Documentation represented as part of the top five topic/strategy pairs because these were also the most common later-order topics addressed during the tutorials.

## Documentation/Open-Ended Questioning

It may seem interesting that the most common topic/strategy pair is Documentation/Open-Ended Questioning. Since Documentation usually indicates discussion of rule-based documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago), what questions could a tutor possibly ask that would help to contribute to student learning of these systems? However, the data, in this case, is skewed due to the tutorial between Liz and Kristin where 61% of all lines coded for Documentation/Open-Ended Questioning occur. In this tutorial, Kristin asks Liz for help with Chicago style, specifically footnotes. Liz uses Resource Modeling to show Kristin what footnotes in Chicago style look like, then asks Kristin to try formatting some sources on her own. Kristin has a physical disability that makes it difficult for her to write, and because it is difficult for her to write, Kristin asks Liz to write for her. Therefore, in order to keep Kristin involved in the tutorial, Liz uses Open-Ended Questioning so Kristin will provide the information for her to write in the appropriate format for footnotes:

744 L: What's the last name of the first author?

746 K: it's K-A-E-F

748 L: that's the last name?

750 K: Yes

752 L: okay, K-A-E-F?

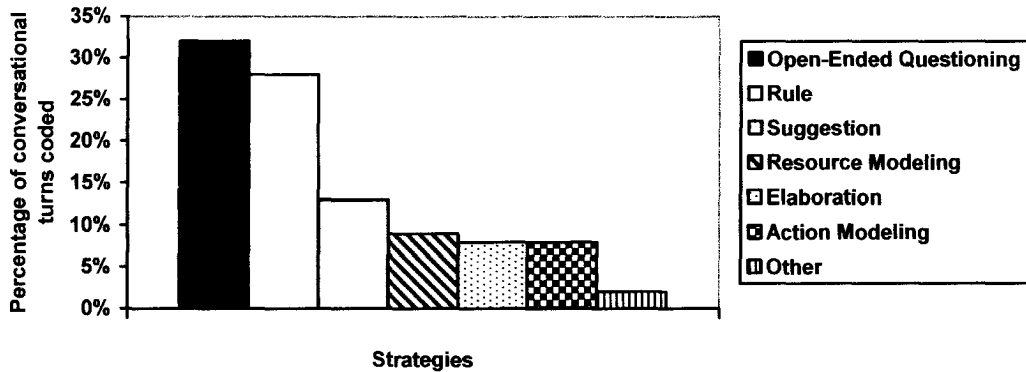
754 K: Yeah

Liz continues to ask questions like this in order to show Kristin how to fill the required information into footnotes. This is not a typical strategy tutors use to address Documentation, but in this case, it is necessary.

## Documentation/Rule

Figure 9 shows that Rule is the second most common strategy after Open-Ended Questioning used to address Documentation. Its use is much more typical for addressing Documentation across all of the tutorials.

Figure 9: Rule is the second most common strategy used to address Documentation



Rule was used in all of the tutorials in the study in which Documentation was addressed. This makes sense because Documentation (APA, MLA, Chicago) is governed by a set of relatively inflexible rules. Therefore, when tutors assist students with Documentation, it is usually necessary that tutors explain the rules for Documentation in the particular style the student's professor requires. For example, in Beth's tutorial with Emily, Beth uses a Rule to help Emily decide where she should place a parenthetical citation:

290 B: One thing real quick here, I think you need a cite at the end of this.

292 E: Well, this happens later on too. I wasn't sure, because I'm getting the whole story from one source. It's the actual source.

294 B: Yeah

296 E: I didn't know if I needed to do like every sentence.

298 B: No, at the end of each paragraph.

300 E: of each paragraph? Okay.

302 B: Yeah

304 E: because I think the other time, I just did it at the end of every sentence, and it got a little crazy.

306 B: Yeah, you don't have to do it after every sentence. Once you establish where you're getting this information from, once you've cited it the first time

308 E: um hmm

310 B: you don't have to cite it again until the end of the paragraph where you change sources.

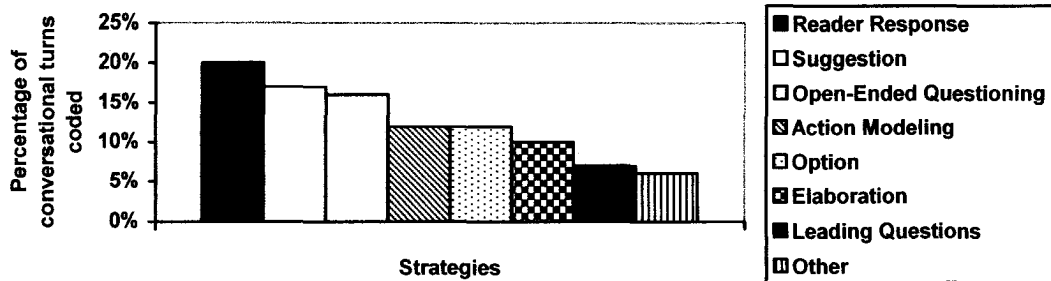
Using Rule is one of the most effective ways to address concerns about Documentation, and this strategy is sometimes used in conjunction with Resource Modeling. Tutors often have not memorized all of the rules for MLA, APA, and Chicago documentation styles, so they access handouts or style manuals available in the writing center to look up the rules. For example, in the tutorial between Liz and Kristin, Liz explains the rules from a handout she grabbed from the file cabinet. Not only does this technique model an important behavior for the students – showing them where to locate the resources to help them with Documentation concerns in the future and how to make use of it, but it also reduces the risk that tutors will provide incorrect information if they haven't memorized each Documentation style. In four of the seven observed tutorials that address Documentation, tutors use both Rule and Resource Modeling to address these concerns.

### Word Choice/Reader Response

As shown previously in Figure 7, Word Choice was the most common later-order concern addressed during the studied tutorials. Tutors used a relatively wide variety of

strategies to address Word Choice, and Figure 10 shows that Reader Response was the most common strategy for addressing Word Choice.

Figure 10: Reader Response was the most common strategy for addressing Word Choice



Tutors often use Reader Response to address students' concerns about Word Choice by explaining that certain words do or do not seem to fit well in the context of their writing. For example, Sam uses Reader Response to explain to Ava a problem he detects with Word Choice in her paper. Sam does not offer a solution to the problem but, instead, supplies an explanation of the problem that is designed to encourage Ava to reconsider the Word Choice on her own. Sam reads this sentence from Ava's paper aloud: "The hero is a heroine, and the morals aren't cheesy, but very basic and simplistic," and Sam focuses on the word "simplistic:"

890 S: Why do you say "simplistic?" (. . .)

900 A: I mean basic morally, but

902 S: maybe you want to look up the word "simplistic" in a dictionary

904 A: um hmm

906 S: I'm not sure whether "basic" works

908 A: well, I mean, I guess

910 S: It can carry negative connotations like

912 A: right, well, I meant like, I guess not so much simplistic as in more mundane, everyday things

914 S: umm

916 A: that happen because, you know, in the movie, there's not ever really morals and the morals are always like [unintelligible]

918 S: oh, but they are apparently simplistic, but they do represent, they do tell something deeper than they look like. Because that is what it means, "The hero is a heroine, and the morals aren't" apparently, sorry "the morals aren't cheesy, but very" anyway, the word, you might want to reconsider the word "simplistic"

Sam explains from his perspective as a reader that the words "simplistic" and "basic" carry certain connotations, and he is not sure if Ava intends for her reader to access these connotations. He encourages her to reconsider these words if she does not want the reader to associate her point with these sometimes negative connotations.

Sam does not provide alternative words for Ava to consider, but expects her to revise with more appropriate wording when she has time, whereas Patti, who also uses Reader Response to address Word Choice in Amanda's paper offers a Suggestion along with her Reader Response to encourage Amanda to sharpen her points:

260 P: (READS AMANDA'S PAPER ALOUD) "The hidden crisis states," Okay, for one thing, that might be a, it isn't really "stating" it

262 A: um hmm

264 P: maybe it implies or it

266 A: okay



Patti explains that, as a reader, her reaction to the sentence beginning with “The hidden crisis states” is that “states” is not an accurate Word Choice. Then, she suggests the word “implies” to replace “states,” and, with a marked pause, moves on to the next point.

Although Patti uses Reader Response to explain her Suggestion about Word Choice, her treatment of this concern may be too brief. Amanda, in response to Patti’s critique, writes “implies” as a correction and moves along with Patti to the next concern. However, the word “implies” is not an appropriate correction because it personifies “the crisis,” which is the problem with Amanda’s initial word choice “states.” Therefore, Patti offers Amanda an incorrect solution. Patti seems discontent with the way she addresses this concern about Word Choice, possibly because she knows Amanda’s word “states” is incorrect, but she is unsure why it is incorrect. Patti hesitates before moving on to the next concern, as if she wants to show Amanda something rather than just supply a replacement, but something stops her. It may have been Amanda’s ready acceptance of “implies” as an appropriate replacement for “states,” or it could have been Patti’s inability to pinpoint what was wrong with Amanda’s Word Choice that prevents her from embracing a teaching moment. However, it seems unlikely that after such a brief exchange Amanda would be able to notice similar instances of inappropriate Word Choice. Tutors often express the feeling that “this is not the right word here” and offer a Suggestion for an alternative word without explaining why the first word did not work.

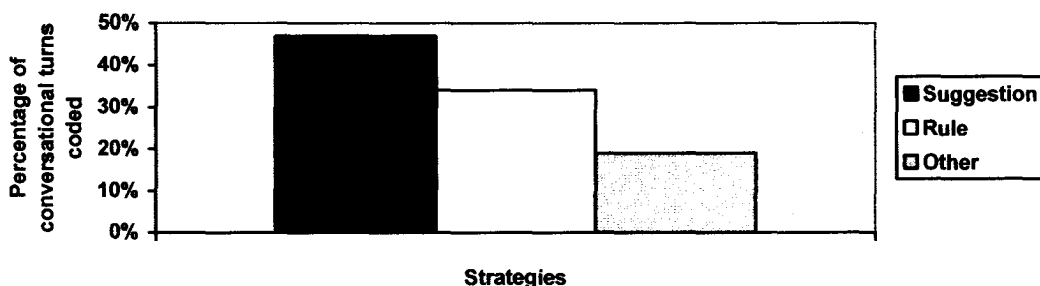
As the data suggests, Reader Response can be an insufficient strategy to justify a Suggestion regarding a later-order concern. When dealing with higher-order concerns, the feelings and reactions of the reader are crucial in helping the author understand where he or she may need to clarify main points or expand on a topic. However, when dealing with

some later-order concerns, Reader Response does little to assist the author in understanding why certain later-order concerns are concerns at all because, most often, later-order concerns are more rule governed and not determined by the opinions or feelings of the reader. Therefore, it would have been more useful for Patti to explain the reason why “states” was an incorrect choice using a Rule to support her Suggestion than for her to express, as a reader, that “states” did not seem to work in that context, to supply “implies” as a solution, and to move on.

Punctuation/Suggestion and Punctuation/Rule

Although they were not two of the top five topic/strategy pairs, Punctuation/Suggestion and Punctuation/Rule are worth discussing because, as Figure 11 shows, Suggestion was the most common strategy tutors used to address Punctuation. However, it would seem logical that Rule would be the most common strategy used to address concerns about Punctuation, since Punctuation, like Documentation, is rule governed.

Figure 11: Suggestion was the most common strategy used for addressing Punctuation



Like the excerpt between Patti and Amanda in the previous section, tutors seemed reluctant to use Rules to justify their Suggestions about later-order concerns, often offering no reason for the Suggestion at all.

Even more problematic, however, is that when tutors used Rules to justify a Suggestion regarding Punctuation, 27% of the time the Rule was incorrect or incomplete. For example, this excerpt from Phil and Erika's tutorial shows Phil providing an incomplete explanation for why Erika needs to add a comma in a particular sentence:

090 P: Usually, a lot of times before "but" you're going to want a comma

092 E: okay

094 P: since it's a transition word, . . . things like "but" and "which"

"therefore," whenever you want to take a little turn, you know.

Phil's explanation is partially correct except that "but," "which," and "therefore" are not the same parts of speech, so they are not governed by the same rules. He terms each of these words "transition words." It may be reasonable to suspect that Phil does not know the grammatical terms for these words or the appropriate comma rules that might have helped him to teach Erika more specifically when to use commas in her writing.

Tutors rarely accessed the resources in the writing center to check punctuation rules, but rather used shortcuts or instinct sometimes presented as Rules to determine correct punctuation. I suspect this is not a problem unique to tutors in this study, as many of their fuzzy explanations of punctuation "Rules" were taught to them in elementary, middle, and high school and are familiar to composition instructors. Justin, for example, relies on the fuzzy concept of placing a comma where a reader would pause in order to explain comma usage to Derek. Justin explains after adding a comma to Derek's sentence,

082 J: and that's kind of a style issue you could choose to do or not really because if you wanted to pause right there you could, but I kind of paused when I hit it, so I just sort of instinctually did it

Justin recognizes that this is not a hard-and-fast Rule he offers to Derek to determine where he should place commas in his paper. Unfortunately, as many composition instructors have discovered, many students learn comma usage by placing commas where they might pause. This often results in papers littered with commas in unusual places. Justin's advice will not help Derek to understand when, where, and why to correctly place a comma in his paper next time.

Justin's reliance on "rules of thumb" rather than actual Rules to explain comma placement become more problematic as the tutorial progresses. In this instance, Justin is trying to help Derek correct some run-on sentences:

146: J: um, let's see then, S-P over here, semi-colon, S-P, like complete sentence, complete sentence, and that functions just as saying S-P, comma like "and," "or," but," S-P, so that's a rule of thumb I find useful because I have the same tendency really

As the observer of this tutorial, I scratched my head at this point wondering what Justin was getting at. Only after transcribing and looking at this segment again did I realize that he was talking about subjects and predicates (S-P). I think it is a safe bet that Derek did not understand Justin's explanation of this particular topic. In fact, during his interview, Derek expressed his frustration with learning "rules" (though he did not accuse Justin of bombarding him with rules during the tutorial). He said,

You know, because I'm not an English major, telling me the rules and all that, I mean, that's good also, but if you're not on that level, you don't really need, you

know, “this is where I might think you need to use it, it sounds better, read it back,” and go on from there instead of getting into deep detail of why, the rules, you know.

Derek’s frustration could be expected when the explanation Justin offered became less of a teaching moment and more of a display of knowledge not designed for the student to understand. It is unlikely Justin intended to alienate Derek by using such a power play. Rather, Justin may not be confident in his explanation of ways to correct run-on sentences, so he breezes through an explanation that the student is unable to question. Or, Justin may not believe that Derek would be interested in learning rules, a feeling which Derek’s interview may support.

### Word Choice/Suggestion

As the data suggests, it is usually good practice to follow-up Suggestions with an explanation, usually a Rule, when addressing later-order concerns. However, there are some instances when Suggestions alone are sufficient. Suggestions can be useful for offering students choices for correcting problems with Word Choice if they cannot provide appropriate corrections on their own. Dani, for example, helps Leah reword a sentence she has been struggling with by giving her various options that would correct its lack of clarity:

367 L: and, should I say, “and”

369 D: you could just say, “and,” you could even say “and his Vietnam War strategy,” or you could say “his approaches to,” or “his Vietnam War plans,” or you could say anything like that “his Vietnam War tactics” . . .

371 L: how do you spell “tactics?” I like that one.

Although Dani has provided words for Leah's paper, she waited until Leah was clearly stumped and asked for her input on the Word Choice of this sentence. Moreover, Dani offered several Suggestions for correcting Word Choice and allowed Leah to choose which option best fit her goals for the essay.

Using Suggestions, however, can be difficult because, as many tutors fear when they employ Suggestion, it can be used in unproductive ways to assert the tutor's own vision for the essay onto the student's writing. For example, Justin uses Suggestion in Derek's paper to address issues of Word Choice. Derek is concerned that his writing does not sound formal enough to meet the requirements his professor has set for this assignment. Justin reads through Derek's paper and makes Suggestions to help Derek, but he does so by making on-the-fly corrections, writing the corrections on Derek's paper as he goes along. He leaves no room for Derek to respond to the Suggestions while expecting that Derek will fill in the suggested wording when he has more time to revise. In fact, transcribing the tutorial between Justin and Derek was difficult because Justin often wrote corrections on Derek's paper while mumbling, almost inaudibly.<sup>14</sup>

630 J: (READS FROM DEREK'S PAPER, MAKING CORRECTIONS AS HE GOES). "Something I would say was," um

632 D: "that"

634 J: "that was different," (pause) "something I would say that was different" and you could go on to say "is the fact," because this is the fact. It's like, well, that fact, are you talking about (pause)

---

<sup>14</sup> If Justin's mumbling was inaudible to the observer and on the tape recording, it was also inaudible to Derek because Derek, and I (as observer) were located at a similar proximity to Justin during the tutorial, and the tape recorder with a sensitive microphone was placed in the middle of the table between Justin and Derek.

636 D: um hmm

638 J: Okay, about having (READS FROM DEREK'S PAPER, MAKING CORRECTIONS AS HE GOES) "to put together a training program while doing an internship." How about, "No other class was demanding as this one."

Justin offers Suggestions to address Word Choice, but he is merely filling in the Suggestions on his copy of Derek's paper. His approach to the tutorial almost prohibits Derek from participating. Derek, however, is a regular visitor to the writing center and wants to become a more self-sufficient writer. Therefore, Derek makes his own notes during the tutorial as Justin talks in an effort to learn how to write more formally on his own. Derek will leave the tutorial with a copy of his paper covered in Justin's notes, with which he can revise, as well as a copy of his paper with his own notes.

During the follow-up interview, Derek resists criticizing Justin's tutoring methods but is visibly displeased with his tutorial experience. Derek praises the writing center as a whole but is a bit dismissive of his experience working with Justin. When asked how he felt about his writing after his tutorial with Justin, Derek replied, "Well, just coming to the writing center period, I feel that I've grown confident in my writing as far as writing formally." And, when asked if he believed his writing will change as a result of his tutorial with Justin, Derek responded, "Definitely, not just from Justin, but the previous visits I've had here at the writing center have definitely helped me." Considering the generally enthusiastic, positive responses students offer about their experiences in the writing center, Derek's lukewarm feelings about Justin are somewhat anomalous. Part of his discontent with this tutorial may have been due to Justin's heavy-handed use of

Suggestion that did not allow Derek to learn more about formal writing, which he had hoped to do during the tutorial.

As discussed in Chapter 3, tutors tended to feel guilty using Suggestion to address higher-order concerns because they believed they were being too “directive” and telling students what to do with their writing. However, tutors who used Suggestion most often to address later-order concerns did not exhibit the same feelings of guilt as the tutors who used Suggestion most often to address higher-order concerns. Nichole, for example, recognizes that offering Suggestions to address Word Choice may seem to exert control over the student’s writing, but she believes in the case of her tutorial with Erin, Erin used her Suggestions as a catalyst for generating more precise words. Nichole explains,

A few times, when she couldn’t think of a word, and then I’d say, ‘well, I’m thinking of this word,’ which, you know, that’s pretty directive because you’re giving the word. A lot of times that is just fine because she seemed like she couldn’t think of a word, so I would give her a word that I was thinking, and most of the time she didn’t use that word. She used another word because that brought up another word in her.

Nichole uses Suggestion in a productive way to jump-start Erin’s vocabulary. As examples from their follow-up interviews discussed in Chapter 3 reveal, other tutors like Patti and Dani, who often rely on Suggestion to address both higher-order and later-order concerns, use examples of when they apply Suggestion to higher-order concerns to express guilt for being too “directive,” but do not mention their extensive use of Suggestion to address later-order concerns in these reflections.

### Word Choice/Open-Ended Questioning

Open-Ended Questioning, although, as discussed in Chapter 3, is a difficult strategy for tutors to employ effectively, it is one of the most common strategies tutor-training manuals recommend for addressing later-order concerns. Gillespie and Lerner,



for example, explain that when engaging in error analysis, “Your most powerful question for the writer is, ‘Why did you make that choice?’” (41). Along the same lines, Ryan and Zimmerelli suggest, when addressing sentence-level revisions and problems with voice of the paper, tutors should ask the student, “Do you talk like this?” (48), which is a question facilitating discussion about language in the paper. Or, a tutor could point to an error and ask, “Do you see a problem here?” (Ryan and Zimmerelli 50). The use of Open-Ended Questioning to address later-order concerns poses unique problems because these questions often are not truly “open.” Instead, they infer a particular answer or direction for response. For example, the question “Do you talk like this?” infers that the answer should be “No.” Similarly, the question “Why did you make that choice?” suggests the choice must have been a wrong choice, or at least an unusual choice, for it to draw the tutor’s attention. Open-Ended Questions addressing higher-order concerns seem more likely to be truly “open,” inviting genuine responses from the student (e.g. What are your goals for this paper? How did you become interested in this topic?) rather than Open-Ended Questions addressing later-order concerns.

In some instances, however, Open-Ended Questions worked well to spark discussion about later-order concerns. In her tutorial with Amanda, Patti uses an Open-Ended Question to find out more about Amanda’s choice of the word “Furthermore:”

276 P: Do you think, is this part of the sentence?

278 A: part of this sentence?

280 P: I don’t know. Maybe, “Furthermore,” to me, maybe I’m wrong, but it seems like “Furthermore” is taking away from

282 A: from the first

284 P: yeah

286 A: yeah

288 P: because you do want to talk about natural beauty

290 A: um hmm

292 P: maybe, okay

294 A: Could I say maybe “leaving competitive beauty to strip a person’s values, strip away a person’s valuable and moral personality and replacing that personality with a false, artificial one?”

Patti’s question about whether “Furthermore” fits with the sentence she and Amanda are looking at sparks a discussion between them that leads Amanda to articulate her meaning more clearly. But, Open-Ended Questions, as discussed at the beginning of this section, can often be less “open” than intended, particularly when dealing with later-order concerns. Later in her tutorial with Amanda, Patti asks a question designed to be Open-Ended but implies that Amanda has made a bad writing choice:

536 P: Do you think you need that?

538 A: No

540 P: Did you say this instead of just “easy” for a reason?

542 A: No, I just

544 P: It seems a little bit

546 A: out there

548 P: yeah

Patti’s questions in this exchange are not truly open. Her second question on line 540 could be read by the student to say, *You should just say “easy” here*. Patti would not

likely have asked Amanda this question if there was not a problem with the current wording of the sentence. In fact, one rater coding for strategies coded this exchange as Leading rather than Open-Ended Questioning. This reveals the often fine line between types of questions used to address later-order concerns.

Overall, each of the strategies discussed in this chapter can be used to address later-order concerns but are sometimes difficult to use effectively. The following case study between Beth and Emily show, in more depth, some of the difficulties tutors face when dealing with later-order concerns.

#### *Case Study: Beth and Emily*

##### Beth

Beth is a first year, master's level graduate student. She began working as a writing tutor at the University of Louisville in August 2006; prior to that, she had no experience tutoring writing. She enrolled in the recommended writing center practicum course taught by the director of the writing center in the fall semester 2006.

Beth is known for being soft-spoken, friendly, and eager to help students with their writing. She explains in her interview that one of the most important things for her to do during a tutorial is to “talk [to] and interact with the client.” Beth typically begins each tutorial by asking the student about his or her goals for the tutorial, then asks the student to read his or her paper aloud. Therefore, in her tutorial with Emily, she followed this procedure and stopped Emily from reading at various places to point out concerns in her writing.

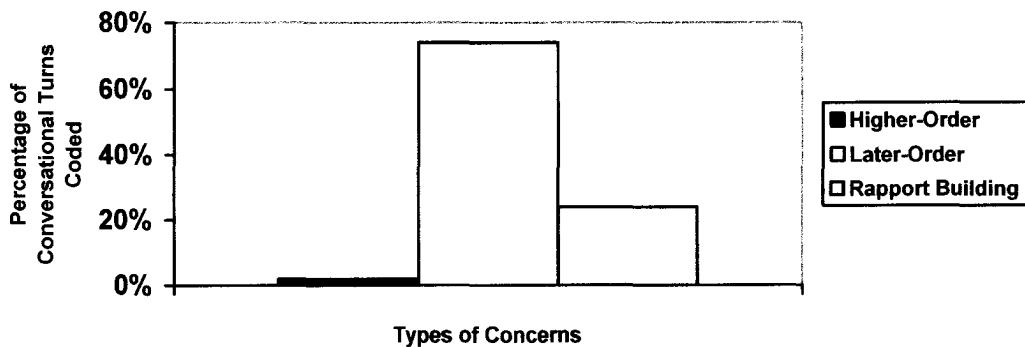
##### Emily

Emily is a junior, very outgoing political science major who had never visited the writing center before her tutorial with Beth. The paper she brings to the tutorial is titled “Patriotic Pirating,” and it is for an upper-level history class. Emily explains that she came to the writing center to work on “grammar and editing, things of that nature” because her professor has been “very critical” of her work in the past. She continues to explain, “even my word choice and my writing style he doesn’t seem to care for.” Emily is the only student in this study who asks for help on later-order concerns only.

### Tutorial Analysis

Figure 12 shows that more later-order topics were addressed than higher-order or rapport building topics in the tutorial between Beth and Emily.

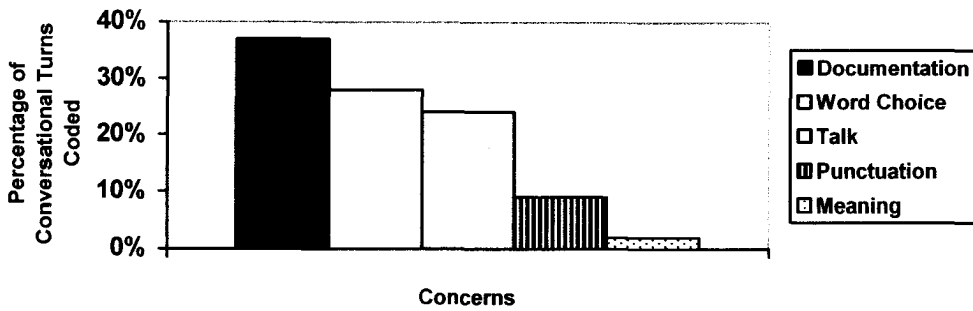
**Figure 12: More Later-Order Concerns were addressed than Higher-Order or Rapport Building Topics in the Tutorial Between Beth and Emily**



Emily came to the tutorial with a complete draft of her paper that she had proofread herself before the tutorial. She specifically asked for assistance with later-order concerns, which seemed to suit the stage of the writing process she was in at the time, and this certainly affected Beth’s approach to the tutorial.

Figure 13 reveals that Documentation was the most common topic addressed during the tutorial between Beth and Emily, followed by Word Choice and Talk.

Figure 13: Documentation was the most common concern addressed in the tutorial between Beth and Emily



Emily’s paper relies heavily on outside sources to inform her work, and she has many questions about citations, which the high percentage of conversational turns coded for Documentation reflects.

Table 6 presents the top five topic/strategy pairs used in the tutorial between Beth and Emily. Documentation/Rule is the most common topic/strategy pair Beth uses in this tutorial.

**Table 6**

Documentation/Rule is the most common topic/strategy pair Beth uses in her tutorial with Emily

Topic/Strategy Pair	Percentage of occurrences out of 44 turns coded with topic/strategy pairs involving later-order concerns
Documentation/Rule	32%
Documentation/Suggestion	16%
Word Choice/Resource Modeling	14%
Punctuation/Suggestion	11%
Documentation/Resource Modeling	7%

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Rule is a likely strategy to employ when addressing Documentation, as is Resource Modeling, since concerns about Documentation often can

be solved by familiarizing the students with the specific rules of the style they are using, usually APA, MLA, or Chicago.

Beth also uses Suggestion to address Documentation, which works very well in this tutorial because she selectively uses Suggestion to address certain writing issues related to Documentation but that are not necessarily governed by rules in the style manuals. For example, Beth addresses Emily's questions about using an extended quotation:

252 E: Should I change this because this is still a quote from that letter? I just needed to add the part in-between to explain it

254 B: Well, you could still have the quote from the letter

256 E: Okay

258 B: But, just make sure it's clear that this is all still from the letter.

Beth answers Emily's question about including the extended quotation, and her Suggestion is effective because she gives Emily an idea of what she needs to do to revise but does not supply the revision for her. Beth makes another similarly effective Suggestion paired with Resource Modeling a bit later on to help Emily with another concern about Documentation:

364 E: It seems to ramble. I don't know. It just seems to me it's not focused.

366 B: Well, it seems okay to me. The only thing, I saw a couple of things that we talked about with your citations and the way you drop those quotes

368 E: Oh, that was what I wanted to show you or ask you about.

370 B: The Bedford [Handbook] has a list of signal phrases that does a good job, I think. I like The Bedford for explaining how to do that.

372 E: yeah

374 B: and we have it, a copy of it here on this shelf that you can look at

376 E: yeah

378 B: but, since you started the paragraph with a direct quote, and you didn't have any kind of set up at all, you just

380 E: yeah

382 B: dropped the quote in

384 E: okay

386 B: you need to try and set up your quotes somehow

Beth's Suggestion that Emily "set up" her quotes is useful because she offers Emily the tools, The Bedford Handbook, to be able to set up her quotes and contextualizes her Suggestion with a specific example of the problem from Emily's paper. Emily seems to have recognized this was a problem before Beth pointed it out but didn't know what to do to correct it. Emily explains in the interview following the tutorial that she gained awareness of more effective ways to incorporate quotations into her paper: "I'd always just, even like starting off papers, I just started with quotes, and obviously that's not a good thing. I don't know, just looking closer and how I incorporate quotes into my paper, just take a little closer look at it. It's something I'll think about in the future." Similarly, Beth responds to the question "What do you believe the student learned as a result of this tutorial?": "She might have learned a little bit about citations that you don't have to cite every single sentence, and how to set up quotes and stuff like that. She might have learned a little bit of that." Beth has a good idea of what worked and what Emily learned

during the tutorial because her response matches Emily's response about what she will take away from the tutorial.

Although Beth's use of Suggestion works well when addressing Documentation, she is not pleased with the results of using Suggestion to address concerns about Punctuation in Emily's paper. To address concerns about Punctuation, Beth repeatedly points out places where Emily needs to insert a comma and provides little explanation:

114 B: um, I would put a comma set "written in 1845 by Lieutenant Murray," I would set that off with commas

She does not follow up this Suggestion with additional explanation or Resource Modeling the way she did when addressing Documentation. Beth continues to make similar Suggestions to address Punctuation repeatedly during the tutorial:

185 B: I'd put a comma here  
and again,

201 B: right there you need a,

203 E: yeah, okay  
and again,

222 B: I'd put a comma

Beth merely points out these problems rather than embracing this tutoring opportunity by explaining the comma rules in the hopes that Emily will eventually be able to correct these errors herself. Each time Beth makes such a Suggestion, Emily writes the comma in the appropriate place on the hard copy of her paper. Therefore, it is as if Beth is editing the paper for Emily.



When Beth reflected on the tutorial during the interview, she showed an acute awareness of what had occurred. In response to the prompt, “Tell me about any activities or strategies that you used during the tutorial that addressed the issues Emily wanted to work on,” she replied, “I guess I was pretty directive. I was just like ‘you need a comma here’ you know. I don’t know that I had a particular strategy.” And, in response to the next question, “How do you believe that pointing out the commas may have been helpful to her?” Beth replied, “Well, that’s a good question. I mean, I guess that, it was helpful for this paper, but I don’t know that I really taught her anything about using a comma correctly the next time.”

Upon her reflection about the tutorial, Beth recognized the missed opportunity to teach Emily about comma rules that might have helped her with future writing assignments, but realized that Emily’s paper was probably better upon leaving the writing center after her tutorial. Moreover, Emily noted in her interview that Beth addressed exactly what she had hoped to work on during the tutorial by addressing comma issues and, most specifically, “point[ing] out where she thought things needed to be.” Although the student left the writing center satisfied with her tutorial, this tutorial did not meet the tutor’s expectations because she knew she did not “teach” Emily much about comma usage, a significant concern in her paper.

Other contextual issues might have affected the interaction between Beth and Emily. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Beth is relatively soft-spoken, whereas Emily is very loud and outgoing. Emily exhibited much confidence regarding her writing, and she entered this tutorial with a clearly defined goal. Emily mentions in the interview following her tutorial that she knew from the beginning that “there was nothing glaringly,

completely wrong with the paper itself.” During the tutorial, she recognized many errors herself and sometimes interrupted Beth to seemingly anticipate what she was going to say. Because of Emily’s high level of confidence in her ability as a writer, she might not have given Beth enough space to comment fully regarding some of the smaller, later-order issues in the paper, like comma usage. Beth sometimes seemed drowned out by Emily’s interruptions. In her interview, Beth hints that she felt controlled by Emily during the tutorial. She explained when asked what she would change about her tutorial with Emily, “I feel like the student had more control over this session than I; I let her have more control of the session than I did. I might try to be more a part of it and less passive.” Emily posed questions about Documentation, which was the catalyst of their discussions on this subject, whereas Beth pointed out problems with comma usage without Emily instigating those discussions. Beth’s interjections about comma usage may not have necessarily been on Emily’s agenda, as were concerns with Documentation, and therefore she shut-down the discussion that may have ensued if Beth had been offered the opportunity.

Nevertheless, this case study focusing specifically on the use of Suggestion to address a variety of later-order concerns shows that using Suggestion can be tricky. Suggestion can be an effective teaching tool, but it can also be used as an editing tool if not followed by an explanation of why the Suggestion is appropriate and adequate space for the student to apply the Suggestion when the concern appears again in the paper. For example, if Beth had explained, the first time she pointed out a problem with comma usage in Emily’s paper, the rule for appropriate usage in that case, then, upon noticing a second instance of the same problem, she could have pointed out the problem to Emily

and given her the opportunity to correct it on her own based upon her previous advice. Such a pedagogical move allows Emily to practice using commas correctly and would have given her something to take away from the tutorial to improve her comma usage.

### Conclusion

As the examples and discussion in this chapter suggest, many of the conclusions made regarding higher-order concerns also apply to later-order concerns. However, the data offered a few more specific points for tutors to think about when addressing later-order concerns:

- 1) Open-Ended Questions are often not truly “open” when addressing later-order concerns. Tutors who notice a grammar problem, for example, in a students’ sentence, often resist making a direct comment about the problem, such as “there is a problem with subject/verb agreement in this sentence.” Instead, they often rely on Open-Ended Questions that, as previously discussed, are recommended in several tutor-training manual. Questions such as, “Do you see an error in this sentence?” or “Does this sentence sound right to you?” offer an immediate cue to the student that something is wrong with the sentence. Therefore, it may be more efficient and more helpful for tutors to avoid using Open-Ended Questions in these situations. Using Open-Ended Questions may put the student on the spot if she does not immediately recognize the error or can appear as if the tutor is withholding information from the student by not pointing out the problem with the sentence despite clearly having the knowledge to do so. Additionally, Jo Mackiewicz, in a 2005 study, hypothesized that using indirect suggestions or hints, a category

which open-ended questions addressing later-order concerns fit into, is a mark of unsure tutors (366). Hints, because they are open to interpretation, offer tutors a “way out,” placing the burden on the student to figure out the hint. The data analyzed here supports Mackiewicz’s hypothesis.

- 2) Rule and Resource Modeling work well to complement Suggestions involving later-order concerns. If a tutor makes a Suggestion regarding a later-order concern, specifically Punctuation or Documentation, interview data revealed that students were more likely to express that they had “learned” the concept when the Suggestion was supported by a Rule or by accessing resources in the writing center that explained the Rule/Suggestion in more depth. Students were less likely to report they had “learned” the concept when tutors made Suggestions not supported by Rule or Resource Modeling. Suggestions not supported by Rule or Resource Modeling that address later-order concerns sometimes appear to be little more than tutor editing. Embracing teaching moments is important when making Suggestions regarding later-order concerns, although it may be easier and less time consuming to make a correction for the student and move on.
- 3) A tutor’s clear expression and understanding of a Rule used to support a Suggestion is essential in order for the Suggestion to contribute to student learning. For example, Justin’s unclear explanation of comma placement using the abbreviations S-P for subject and predicate did little to contribute to Derek’s understanding of comma usage. Similarly, Patti’s reliance on instinct rather than her knowledge of grammar to determine that the word “states” did

not fit in Amanda's sentence resulted in an equally inappropriate correction with the word "implies." Although tutors should not be expected to know every grammar rule, tutors should be more aware of the times when they are relying upon their knowledge of rules and when they are relying upon instinct. As Gillespie and Lerner emphasize, "Don't be afraid to take a handbook off the shelf and say, 'Let's look this up'" (94). Tutors should not hesitate to access resources, including handbooks and OWLs, to check their understanding so as not to mislead or provide bad information to a student.

These three points, based upon the data analyzed in this study, offer concrete evidence supporting what many writing center professionals already suspect and indicate the need for more extensive tutor-training to supplement the information presented in tutor-training manuals. Being an effective tutor means being able to react to a variety of situations that cannot possibly be predicted beforehand. Therefore, tutor-training based on the study and observation of real tutorials with the addition of role-playing and other hands-on activities may help to prepare new tutors to effectively address tutoring situations better than tutor-training with a primary focus on writing center scholarship and theory. The following chapter will apply the findings discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 to the development activities for a tutor-training course that may help new tutors to develop their tutoring practices in a way that enables them to become effective as well as confident.

## CHAPTER V

### WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

One goal of this study was to offer an example of a sound methodological framework other scholars could use to analyze writing tutorials. I believe this study accomplished that goal with its use of a variety of data collection instruments, both qualitative (interviews and observations) and quantitative (coded transcripts), and triangulated data. Despite these strengths and even though this study yielded more information about strategies tutors use to address concerns in student writing than previous research has provided, there are shortcomings that can be addressed in future research:

- 1) Sample size – With more time, I would have observed and analyzed more tutorials. Having more data would have offered an even clearer picture of the most common strategies used and would have allowed me to exclude anomalous tutorials (for example, Liz and Kristin's tutorial that uses Open-Ended Questioning to address Documentation). Moreover, having a larger sample size would have allowed me to observe tutors more than once, which I was only able to do with Patti in this study. There would have been more diversity of students and tutors, more accurately reflecting the clientele in the writing center.
- 2) Inter-rater reliability – In this study, the coding scheme was loose because I did not want to force raters to code for something they did not

see in the transcript. Upon reflection, however, I should have asked raters to code each line for both a strategy and a topic, as this would have provided more inter-rater “matches” and would have encouraged consistency between the raters. I also would have conducted a series of training sessions to familiarize the raters with the codes. The short training session I conducted did not allow the raters enough time to get a complete and shared understanding of the codes and did not allow enough time for norming. Because of these shortcomings, I did not calculate inter-rater reliability that would stand up statistically, and I would have liked to have done so.

- 3) Interviews and data collection – The interviews conducted after the tutorials provided some of the most valuable data sources in this study. However, due to the time limitations on each interview, the data was not as complete as I had hoped. Had there been more time to ask follow-up questions of both tutor and student, many of the claims made in this study would have been supported more thoroughly. Moreover, efforts to collect the syllabus from the tutor-training course in which each of the tutors was enrolled during the time of my observations were unsuccessful. Having access to this syllabus might have enriched my data analysis and allowed me to make meaningful connections between syllabus material, tutoring behavior, and interview responses.

Most of these shortcomings were directly affected by the short amount of time allowed to collect data and write a dissertation in a four year graduate program while

juggling teaching responsibilities. These challenges, no doubt, are similar to the challenges many writing center administrators face when attempting to carve out time to conduct research. However, as I hope this dissertation has illustrated, despite its shortcomings, it is possible to conduct a small-scale, rigorous, methodologically sound study under these conditions.

### Summary of Findings

This study addressed two research questions: 1) What strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address higher-order concerns? And, what strategies do tutors employ during tutorials to address later-order concerns? 2) How are these strategies perceived by participants in tutorials? The data revealed that tutors tend to use three of the same strategies to address both higher-order and later-order concerns: Open-Ended Questioning, Reader Response, and Suggestion. Although tutors employed more strategies to address later-order concerns, which is congruent with advice from tutor-training manuals, they used these three strategies as default strategies throughout the observed tutorials. These strategies can be used effectively to address higher-order and later-order concerns; however, when used broadly, unique problems and potential pitfalls surfaced. For example, Open-Ended Questions that work well for getting students to think more about higher-order concerns, like developing their topics, seem less “open” and more leading when used to address later-order concerns. Similarly, Reader Response, when used as support for a Suggestion regarding a higher-order concern, is often more convincing and provides adequate rationale for the Suggestion than when Reader Response is used to support a Suggestion regarding a lower-order concern. Data suggests that Reader Response is not usually an effective justification for a later-order Suggestion



because many later-order concerns are rule bound. Therefore, a rule may be a better follow-up to a later-order Suggestion than a Reader Response.

The data also revealed that strategies generally assumed by writing center scholars to lessen control over the student and his or her writing can be used just as easily as other strategies to dominate the tutorial. Other factors apart from the strategies themselves affect whether the tutor dominates the tutorial, including amount of time the tutor pauses to allow the student to answer questions or respond to suggestions, students' overall level of participation/interest in the tutorial, students' expectations for the tutorial, and tutors' listening to students' concerns (really "hearing" those concerns). Moreover, the use of praise and time spent on rapport building may have an effect on whether the tutor dominates the tutorial, but further data analysis needs to be done in this area in order to fully support this claim.

One of the most interesting findings was tutors' unfamiliarity with grammar and mechanical rules. Tutors tended to rely upon rules-of-thumb that were often inaccurate, rather than actual rules and rarely accessed the resources available in the writing center, even when they expressed that they were unsure about a specific rule. In one tutorial (Justin and Derek) this had a direct effect on the student's perception of the strategies the tutor used during the tutorial, as he expressed that the "rules" were not helpful to him. Although no other students expressed discontent with tutors' use of rules, data suggest that the failure of tutors to voice specific rules may contribute to the students' inability to improve writing in those specific areas following the tutorial.

The second research question proved more difficult to answer than the first because students tended to view the tutorials as helpful or not helpful, and they

sometimes lacked the vocabulary and experience to critically analyze the strategies the tutor used during the tutorial. However, students often were able to isolate the most common strategy the tutor used during the tutorial. Tutors were better able to explain the strategies they used during the tutorial. They, like the students, were able to isolate the most common strategy they used during the tutorial and were able to express, with specific examples, why that strategy worked or did not work. Tutors' perceptions about whether a strategy did or did not work generally matched students' perceptions about the tutorial experience as a whole. For example, Liz explained that her use of Open-Ended Questions did not work in her tutorial with Kristin, and that she should have adjusted her approach during the tutorial rather than sticking with it. Similarly, Kristin expressed that the tutorial was only minimally helpful to her.

Overall, students tended to express more confidence and said that they had learned something specific from the tutorial when the tutor addressed concerns using Suggestions justified by a Rule. This was true even if the Rule was a "fuzzy rule" or "rule-of-thumb." For example, Erika reports that she learned "the comma before the 'therefore'" even though Phil's explanation, excerpted in Chapter 4, was that when using "transition words" Erika should use a comma. Similarly, Emily explains that she learned from her tutorial with Beth how to "incorporate quotes into [her] paper." During their tutorial, Beth used numerous rules to explain to Emily how to correctly use quotations and gave her an outside resource, The Bedford Handbook, to provide help if she needed to refresh her memory. Other students involved in tutorials where the tutor did not use Suggestions justified by Rules tended to offer answers that suggested a shortcoming in their writing. For example, Leigh explains after her tutorial with Dani that she learned "I

need to re-read more than I do, and then make sure I put transitions in before I actually get here.” And, Erin explains, “I think my writing is more focused now. I tend to lose focus of my papers. Sometimes I just get an idea and start branching off with them.” Though further data analysis is necessary to make a more convincing conclusion, it seems that Suggestions, when paired with Rules that justify the Suggestion may promote students confidence in their writing because when tutors use this approach they offer students tools for correcting problems in their writing. But, when tutors use Reader Response to justify Suggestions, the emphasis appears to be on the problem with the students’ writing rather than the solution.

### Implications

Some of the practical implications of this study were discussed in the numbered lists at the ends of chapters 3 and 4. However, the implications of the study as a whole should affect the direction of tutor-training. First, the data supports the argument that tutor-training should be balanced between practice and theory. This means that rather than relying primarily on writing center scholarship to guide new tutors, tutors should be asked to observe real-time tutorials and videotaped tutorials, and to analyze what they see. Tutor-training manuals should be used to supplement new tutors’ understandings of what they are observing, but should not be used as primary source material. As the data revealed, some of the tutors experienced guilt when using certain strategies, specifically Suggestion, because tutor-training manuals had encouraged other supposedly “non-directive” strategies. They felt as though they were taking control of the students’ papers when using Suggestions, even though students in many of these instances found the tutors’ use of Suggestions to be very helpful. Although tutor-training manuals’ warnings

about being too “directive” are not unwarranted, these manuals seem to villainize the strategy rather than the way it is used (or misused). If new tutors studied these strategies in action, in real tutorials, they might see that the strategy itself does not determine how much control the tutor wields during the tutorial. An activity that might be appropriate for a tutor-training course to teach this concept follows:

#### Assignment #1

- Observe an experienced tutor for one hour in the writing center. During the observation, jot down the strategies the tutor uses to address the student’s concerns. Note the topic of the conversation and what strategy the tutor is using. Try to develop an overall impression of the tutorial by asking yourself these questions: Do both tutor and student appear engaged in the tutorial? Do you think the student is learning some strategies he/she can take away from the tutorial in order to become a better writer in the future? After the tutorial, do both tutor and student appear pleased with the tutorial? Provide evidence supporting the answers to these questions.
- Write a brief 2-3 page analysis of the tutorial you observed. Include basic information about the tutorial, like what were the main topics addressed in the tutorial (e.g. invention, grammar, organization) and the strategies the tutor used to address these topics. Then analyze the tutor’s use of these strategies. Did the strategies appear to work well? Were there times when the student became more/less engaged in the tutorial? Do the tutorial participants seem happy/frustrated/satisfied/motivated/etc. after the tutorial and why do you think so? Did anything surprise you during the

tutorial? What did the tutor do well? What could the tutor have improved upon?

- Now read Gillespie and Lerner,<sup>15</sup> Chapter 3 “The Tutoring Process.” Be prepared for class discussion about how the tutoring process you observed reflected elements of the tutoring process Gillespie and Lerner discuss.

This assignment should be one of the first assignments new tutors complete in a tutor training course because it encourages them to develop an idea of what tutoring is, based upon real tutorial interactions in their specific context. Comparing their observations and analysis to the tutoring process presented in Gillespie and Lerner’s tutor-training manual as a final step in the assignment is designed to help them to view the manual as a broadly applicable guidebook that may have limitations when applied to specific contexts. Using the manual in the final step of the assignment also enables new tutors to develop their own opinions about what they see in the tutorial context rather than be influenced by the opinions and vocabulary (specifically “directive” and “nondirective”) of the tutor-training manual.

Second, the data in this study suggest that new tutors need to frequently engage in discussions about grammar during their tutor-training. Of much concern in this study was tutors’ unfamiliarity with grammar rules, which often resulted in sharing incorrect information with students. Tutors may have relied on rules-of-thumb, as Justin does in his tutorial with Derek when he suggests that Derek insert a comma. Justin makes this suggestion because, as he read, he paused. These rules-of-thumb and writerly instincts do

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<sup>15</sup> I chose Gillespie and Lerner’s book, in part, because it has a section on observing tutorials. Therefore, it leaves room for the kinds of comparisons between scholarship “lore” and real tutoring practice that I believe are crucial in a tutor-training course. Many “readers” used for tutor-training are insufficient for this reason.

not hold up in all grammatical situations; therefore, they can cause students more problems in the future. Although tutors do not need to be grammar experts, they need to be familiar with basic grammar and punctuation rules, and they need to know where to locate answers to grammar questions they cannot answer. The following activity can be incorporated each week, or even each class meeting, to help new tutors become more comfortable with grammar rules:

### Assignment #2

- One person each class meeting will select a topic dealing with grammar/mechanics/punctuation. Such topics might include subject/verb agreement, semi-colon usage, passive voice, or comma usage. That person will research her topic: what the common mistakes are, how these mistakes can be corrected, and the rules governing the correction. She will present to the class a 10-15 minute presentation of the research conducted and offer tips for addressing such concerns in student writing. The presenter will also be asked to share the resources used to gather the information about the topic so tutors can start generating a quick reference list for grammar concerns to use when they begin tutoring.

Instilling greater confidence with grammar rules in new tutors will help them to heed suggestions #2 and #3 at the end of Chapter 4, which, in turn, will encourage student learning.

### Further Research

This study opens up a multitude of research directions that, if pursued, have the potential to enlighten and improve tutor-training. With the current data, I would like to explore the use of rapport building practices that, I suspect, play a significant role in determining student and tutor satisfaction with the tutorial. Further analysis could be done on the conversational turns coded as Talk, which represents a majority of the rapport building that occurred during the observed tutorials. That data analysis, paired with the analysis of higher-order and later-order concerns, would provide a more complete picture of the interaction that occurred in the observed tutorials and may shed light on some of the attitudes both tutor and student expressed regarding their overall satisfaction with the tutorial.

Also with the current data, I would like to further analyze three tutorials labeled the “bad” tutorials (Kent and Cassie, Justin and Derek, Liz and Kristin). These three tutorials were the only tutorials after which both tutor and student expressed discontent with the tutorial experience. Though comments from both tutor and student were not wholly negative, the overall feeling from both parties was not positive. I analyzed these tutorials for strategies, an analysis which did not markedly separate them from other tutorials except in Liz’s use of Open-Ended Questioning to address Documentation. However, I did not look into other elements, including tutor and student expectations and personal misunderstandings between tutor and student that occur during the tutorials. Such an analysis might give some insight into why these tutorials, and not others, left the participants dissatisfied.

I hope my research will encourage other writing center scholars to conduct similar research in their writing centers. Each writing center context has unique information to

offer to the discussion of strategies tutors use to address concerns in student writing.

Therefore, the more research of this kind we conduct, the more we can learn about tutoring in various contexts, and thus, tutoring in general. I also hope my research will inspire writing center scholars who may have been wary of conducting empirical research to attempt it. Overall, this project was rewarding for me, as I had envisioned following this topic for many years, and I hope other scholars will find similar enjoyment in researching, writing, and applying their findings into practice within their own tutoring or tutor-training course.



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Appendix A

**Student Demographic Data**

<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Been to the Writing Center before?</b>	<b>Tutor Pseudonym</b>
Cassie	Female	Psychology 401	No	Kent
Tammy	Female	Creative Writing	Yes	Patti
Erika	Female	English 101	Yes	Phil
Derek	Male	Leadership Foundations 540	Yes	Justin
Amanda	Female	English 101	No	Patti
Erin	Female	English 101	Yes	Nichole
Alan	Male	English 101	Yes	Patti
Ava	Female	English 317	Yes	Sam
Emily	Female	History 522	No	Beth
Kristin	Female	History 304	Yes	Liz
Leigh	Female	Communication 305	Yes	Dani

### Tutor Demographic Data

<b>Tutor Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>English First Language?</b>	<b>Student(s) Pseudonym</b>
Kent	Male	Some non-writing center tutoring	Yes	Cassie
Patti	Female	Writing center tutoring	Yes	Alan, Tammy, Amanda
Justin	Male	None	Yes	Derek
Dani	Female	Some non-writing center tutoring	Yes	Leigh
Nichole	Female	Some non-writing center tutoring	Yes	Erin
Liz	Female	Writing center tutoring	Yes	Kristin
Beth	Female	None	Yes	Emily
Phil	Male	None	Yes	Erika
Sam	Male	Some non-writing center tutoring	No	Ava



Appendix B

For IRB Approval Stamp

**Subject Informed Consent Document**

**“The Rhetoric of the Writing Center: Continued Investigation into Writing  
Center Theory and Practice”**

**Investigator(s) name & address:** Meredith Kate Brown  
Department of English  
University of Louisville  
2211 S. Brook Street  
Louisville, KY 40292

**Site(s) where study is to be conducted:** University Writing Center at the University of  
Louisville

**Phone number for subjects to call for questions:** (502) 555-5555<sup>16</sup>

**Introduction and Background Information**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Carol Mattingly, Ph.D. and Meredith Kate Brown, M.A. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of English. The study will take place in the University Writing Center at the University of Louisville. Approximately 30 subjects will be invited to participate.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to compare and analyze the ways writing center consultants and students interact during writing center consultations and to analyze the strategies consultants use to address specific topics in writing center consultations.

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<sup>16</sup> Phone numbers have been changed for privacy reasons.

## **Procedures**

In this study, you will be asked to allow the researcher to videotape and audiotape your consultation. You will also be asked to allow the researcher to copy and retain any materials discussed during the consultation including drafts of papers, copies of instructor feedback, and notes made during the consultation. Following the consultation, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher. The purpose of the interview is to give you an opportunity to provide an account of the consultation and to describe your overall satisfaction. The interview should take no longer than 15 minutes. The length of the videotaped observation should not exceed the standard 50 minute consultation time and should not disrupt the normal consultation environment. Some participants will be contacted for follow-up interviews. These interviews might take place over the telephone, by email, or in person. Each follow-up interview will last no longer than 30 minutes. During these follow up interviews, you will be asked to allow the researcher to copy and retain any subsequent drafts of

the paper(s) discussed during the initial observed writing center consultation. During your participation, you may decline to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

## **Potential Risks**

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions, **though there may be unforeseeable risks.**

## **Benefits**

The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

## **Compensation**

For your participation you will be entered into a drawing for a \$50.00 gift certificate to Target, or you may choose to take a \$5.00 gift certificate to Subway.

## **Confidentiality**

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and the Human Subjects Protection Program Office, Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights

All participants in the study will be given pseudonyms, and all data collected will be kept in a secured area.

## **Voluntary Participation**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study.

## **Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints**

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the investigator at 502-555-5555.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

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This paper tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature means that this study has been discussed with you, that your questions have been answered, and that you will take part in the study. This informed consent document is not a contract. You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a signed copy of this paper to keep for your records.

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Signature of Subject

Date Signed

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Printed name of Subject

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Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form  
(if other than the Investigator)

Date Signed

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Signature of Investigator

Date Signed

LIST OF INVESTIGATORS

PHONE NUMBERS

Carol Mattingly, Ph.D.

502-555-5555

Meredith Kate Brown, M.A.

502-555-5555

## Appendix C

The question schedule is organized as a script for each interview in order to control for possible differences in wording that may influence participants' answers. I incorporated the six question types Patton recommends in Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. These question types are: Experience and Behavior Questions, Opinions and Values Questions; Feeling Questions; Knowledge Questions; Sensory Questions; and Background/Demographic Questions. He explains that "Distinguishing types of questions forces the interviewer to be clear about what is being asked and helps the interviewee respond appropriately" (348).

### **STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

The purpose of this interview is so I can gain a clearer understanding of the interaction between you and \_\_\_\_\_ during your tutorial. I am also interested in your perceived outcomes of the tutorial.

Okay, do you have any questions for me before we begin?

### **HISTORY/BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

- 1) When you came to the Writing Center for your tutorial with \_\_\_\_\_, had you been to the Writing Center before?

PROBE IF HE/SHE ANSWERS "YES": Approximately how many times had you visited the Writing Center before your tutorial with \_\_\_\_\_?

### **STUDENT/CONSULTANT INTERACTION QUESTIONS**

- 2) Tell me how the tutorial began with \_\_\_\_\_.

- 3) What did you hope to work on during the tutorial?
- 4) Tell me about any moments during the tutorial where the consultant addressed what you wanted to work on in the session.

PROBE: What moment you just described do you believe was the most useful to you?

PROBE FOLLOW-UP: Why do you believe this was the most useful moment?

Thank you for your responses thus far. Do you believe the questions I just asked were clear and were broad enough to give me an understanding of the interaction between you and \_\_\_\_\_ during this tutorial? Is there anything you'd like to add regarding this interaction before we move on?

Okay, next, I'd like to ask you some questions about the outcomes of the session. Is it okay if we move on to those questions?

### **OUTCOMES QUESTIONS**

- 5) How do you feel about your writing now that you have had a writing center tutorial \_\_\_\_\_?
- 6) Do you believe that your writing will change as a result of your session with \_\_\_\_\_?

PROBE IF HE/SHE ANSWERS "YES": Explain some ways you believe your writing will change.

FOLLOW-UP: Were there any specific strategies that you believe the consultant used that will help you to improve your writing in the future?

PROBE IF HE/SHE ANSWERS “NO”: Describe some activities or strategies that you believe the consultant might have employed that would help you to improve your writing.

- 7) Describe what you learned from your tutorial with \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to add about this experience in the Writing Center?

Okay, thank you for your responses. If you think of anything you would like to add to what you have said already, please feel free to contact me. Have a great day!

### **CONSULTANT QUESTIONNAIRE**

The purpose of this interview is so I can gain a clearer understanding of the interaction between you and \_\_\_\_\_ during your tutorial. I am also interested in your perceived outcomes of the tutorial.

Okay, do you have any questions for me before we begin?

### **HISTORY/BACKGROUND QUESTIONS**

- 1) Did you have any tutoring experience before you began tutoring at U of L?

PROBE IF HE/SHE ANSWERS “YES”: How many years of experience did you have?

### **STUDENT/CONSULTANT INTERACTION QUESTIONS**

- 2) What did the student tell you that he/she wanted to work on?
- 3) What did you end up actually working on during the tutorial?
- 4) Tell me about any activities or strategies that you used during the tutorial that addressed the issues the student wanted to work on in the session.

PROBE: What activity or strategy you just described do you believe was the most useful to the student?

PROBE FOLLOW UP: Why do you believe this was the most useful activity or strategy?

- 5) Tell me about any activities or strategies that you used during the tutorial that addressed issues in the student's writing that the student may not have identified at the beginning of the session.
- 6) How would you describe the consulting strategies you used in this tutorial today?
- 7) How would you describe your normal tutoring style?

Thank you for your responses thus far. Do you believe the questions I just asked were clear and were broad enough to give me an understanding of the interaction between you and \_\_\_\_\_ during this tutorial? Is there anything you'd like to add regarding this interaction before we move on?

Okay, next, I'd like to ask you some questions about the outcomes of the session. Is it okay if we move on to those questions?

### **OUTCOMES QUESTIONS**

- 8) How do you feel about this session overall?
- 9) Do you believe that you were able to help the student to improve (his/her) writing?
- 10) What do you believe the student learned as a result of this tutorial?
- 11) What would you change about the ways you conducted this tutorial today?
- 12) Is there anything else you would like to add about this experience in the Writing Center?



Okay, thank you for your responses. If you think of anything you would like to add to what you have said already, please feel free to contact me. Have a great day!

Appendix D

Client Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time \_\_\_\_\_

Appointment/Walk-In (circle one)

<p><b>First visit to WC only:</b> Major: _____ Native language: _____ How did you hear about the Writing Center? _____ Classification: ___ Freshman, ___ Sophomore, ___ Junior, ___ Senior, ___ Graduate Student, ___ Other (explain)</p>
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Purpose for the writing project: \_\_\_ Class (course number \_\_\_\_\_), \_\_\_ Co-op Report,  
\_\_\_ Thesis, \_\_\_ Dissertation, \_\_\_ Application (circle one type: graduate, medical, business, other)

When is the writing due? \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly explain what the writing assignment or project involves. (If you have a written assignment sheet, be sure and share it with the writing consultant.)

Why have you come to the Writing Center?

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***[To be filled out by Tutor]***

**Tutor Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Length of consultation:** \_\_\_\_\_

*What kind of help did the consultation offer? (see the help requested by student and note differences)*

*What tutoring methods were used and why? (i.e. Reading aloud at student's request, modeling for syntax, directive/nondirective for greater effectiveness, etc.)*

*Suggestions to client at end of the session:*

*How effective do you think this session was for the client? Why? (consider describing attitude, apparent effectiveness of the methods, communication positive/negatives)*

*Suggestions for other tutors of this client: If this student returns, what would you do next? Alternatively, what would you want to learn to do to make the session better?*

*Form by AH/MR 8/2006*

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**NAME:** Meredith Kate Brown

### **EDUCATION:**

Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric, Expected August 2008

University of Louisville

Dissertation: "Breaking into the Tutor's Toolbox: An Investigation into Strategies Used in Writing Center Tutorials"

Committee: J. Carol Mattingly (Director), Joanna Wolfe, Bruce Horner, Karen Kopelson, and Neal Lerner

M.A., English (Literature), 2004

Florida State University

Thesis: "Spinning Pagans or Americans: Dance and Identity Issues in Stowe, Twain, and James"

Advisor: W.T. Lhamon, Jr.

Certificate, American and Florida Studies, 2004

Florida State University

M.A., English (Composition and Rhetoric), 2003

Florida State University

Portfolio: "A Cross-Section of Research and Reflection in Composition and Rhetoric"

Advisor: Wendy Bishop

B.A., English/Psychology, 2000

College of William and Mary

### **PUBLICATIONS:**

"Wendy Bishop's Legacy: A Tradition of Mentoring, a Call to Collaboration." With Anna Leahy, Stephanie Vanderslice, Kelli Custer, Jennifer Wells, Carol Ellis, Dorinda Fox, and Amy Hodges Hamilton. Stories of Mentoring: Theory and Praxis. Ed. Michelle Eble and Lynee Gaillet. Forthcoming from Parlor Press, 2008.

"Five Years of Writing Center Journal Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography." Writing Center Journal 26.1 (2006): 83-7.

“‘We’re Not in Kansas Anymore’: Negotiating a Teaching Philosophy.” Finding Our Way – A Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook. Ed. Wendy Bishop and Deborah Coxwell-Teague. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Publishers, 2004.12-17.

“Manwaring, Edward.” The Dictionary of British Classicists. Ed. Robert B. Todd. Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004.

#### **DATABASES:**

Writing Centers Research Project Archive Searchable Database. With Patrick Corbett. <<http://coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/a-s/wcrp/archive/search1.cfm>>.

Searchable Annotated Bibliography of *Writing Center Journal* Articles. <<http://coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/as/wcrp/wcjournal/search.cfm>>.

#### **ESSAYS ACCEPTED FOR EDITED COLLECTIONS IN PROGRESS:**

“Assessing the Composition Program on Our Own Terms.” With Sonya Borton and Alanna Frost. Handbook of Research on Assessment Technologies, Methods, and Applications in Higher Education. Ed. Christopher Schreiner. Under review by IGI Global.

“‘Can You Hear Me Now?’: Performing Voice in Academic Writing.” With Cynthia Britt. Talking about Style: Essays on Speaking Articulately about the Workings of Texts. Ed. Elizabeth Hodges and Dona Hickey. Under review by Utah State UP.

#### **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS:**

“Changing ReOWLities: Writing Center Web Presence and the Evolving Mission of Writing Centers.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. New Orleans, LA. 2008.

“Usability Studies: How Research Leads to Technological Change.” The 20<sup>th</sup> Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition. State College, PA. 2007.

“‘Tell me more’ or ‘Too much Information’: A Discussion of Personal Narratives in the Academy.” Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition. Louisville, KY. 2006.

“‘Can you hear me now?’: Synchronous Audio and File Sharing in the Virtual Writing Center.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. Chicago, IL. 2006.

“A Directive Discussion of the Directive/Non-Directive Binary in Writing Center Theory and Practice.” Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference. Chapel Hill, NC. 2006.

“Knocking on Death’s Door: Women’s Experience with Spirits and Spiritualism in the

Nineteenth Century.” Fifth Biennial International Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) Conference. Houghton, MI. 2005.

“Bishop’s Ethnographic Research: Outsider Access into the Composition Classroom.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. San Francisco, CA. 2005.

“Wendy Bishop: Composition Insider, Champion of Outsider Research.” Modern Language Association. Philadelphia, PA. 2004.

“Evaluating Hypertext: How Many Literacies Can First-Year Writing Handle?” Computers and Writing. Honolulu, HI. 2004.

“Teaching Students Common ‘Sense’: An Investigation of Multiple-Literacies Pedagogy.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. San Antonio, TX. 2004.

“Accessing the Student Voice: The Potential of Talk-Write Theory in the Composition Classroom.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. New York, NY. 2003.

“Speech Recognition: A Practical Way to Investigate Talk-Write.” Computers and Writing. Normal, IL. 2002.

#### **WORKSHOPS AND ROUNDTABLES:**

“Turn Left at the Coffee Pot: Navigating the Intersections of Ethical, Methodological, and Institutional Space in Writing Center Research.” With Beth Godbee (University of Wisconsin) and Tanya Cochran (Union College). IWCA. Houston, TX. 2007.

“Assessing and Responding to Student Writing.” With Sonya Borton (University of Louisville) and Alanna Frost (University of Louisville). College Colloquia. NCTE. Nashville, TN. 2006.

Scientific writing workshop for a graduate level Mechanical Engineering class (ME 645). Speed School of Engineering, University of Louisville, 2005.

“The Mirrored Self: Lighting the Way to Reflective Practice for Teachers and Students of Literature and Composition.” With Cynthia Britt (University of Louisville), KCTE. Bowling Green, KY. 2005.

#### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE:**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Louisville, 2007-2008 and 2005-2006  
Courses taught:

ENGL 101 Introduction to College Writing  
ENGL 102 Intermediate College Writing

ENGL 306 Business Writing (computer supported)

Adjunct Instructor, Virginia Military Institute, Summer 2006

Courses taught:

EN 101 Composition I

Writing Consultant (Volunteer), University of Louisville, 2004-2006

Part-Time Instructor, ECPI College of Technology, Newport News, VA, 2003-2004

Courses taught:

ENG 099 Introduction to Writing (computer supported)

ENG 106 College Composition II (computer supported)

ENG 255 Technical Writing (computer supported)

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Florida State University, 2001-2003

Courses taught:

ENC 1101 Freshman Composition and Rhetoric (computer supported)

ENC 1102 Freshman Writing about Literature (online course)

ENC 1145 Writing about Travel (computer supported)

ENC 1905 Preparatory Course for ENC 1101

Writing Center Tutorials (including online tutorials)

Online Writing Consultant, Tallahassee Community College, 2003

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS:**

Assistant Director, Writing Centers Research Project, 2007-2008.

Research Assistant to Bruce Horner, Endowed Chair in Rhetoric and Composition,  
University of Louisville, 2007 -2008.

University Graduate Fellow, University of Louisville, 2004-2005, 2006-2007

Research Assistant to Susan M. Griffin, Justus Bier Professor of Humanities,  
University of Louisville, 2005-2006.

Assistant Director, University Writing Center, University of Louisville, 2005-2006.

Assistant to the Executive Coordinator of the Society of Early Americanists, Dennis  
Moore, Florida State University, 2002-2003.

#### **GRANTS, HONORS, AND AWARDS:**

IWCA Research Grant Recipient, 2007.

Bonnie Research Grant Recipient, University of Louisville, 2007.

“Faculty Favorite” nominee, University of Louisville, 2006.

Marian C. Bashinski Award for Teaching Excellence in First-Year Writing, Florida State University, 2003.

**SERVICE:**

AP Language Exam Reader, Daytona Beach, FL, 2006-2008.

General Education Assessment Project Portfolio Reader and Rater, University of Louisville, 2005-2006.

Graduate Student Representative to the English Department Graduate Committee, University of Louisville, 2004-2006.

English Graduate Organization (EGO) Executive Board Member, University of Louisville, 2005-2006.

Graduate Student Representative, Friends of the Florida State University Libraries Board, 2003-2004.

First-Year Writing Committee Member, Florida State University, 2002-2003.

**REFERENCES:**

Available upon request