

43:1-2 | SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

W|C|S

A JOURNAL OF WRITING CENTER SCHOLARSHIP

CARDINAL | HAHN & STAHR | WEAVER | SEVERINO

Table of Contents

- 1 **Guest Editors' Note**
Bonnie Devet and Dana Lynn Driscoll
- 2 **Transfer Two Ways: Options and Obstacles in Staff Education for Transfer**
Jody Cardinal
- 10 **Some of These Things ARE Like the Others: Lessons Learned from Tutor-Inspired Research about Transfer in the Writing Center**
Susan Hahn and Margaret Stahr
- 18 **Is Knowledge Repurposed from Tutoring to Teaching? A Qualitative Study of Transfer from the Writing Center**
Brent Weaver
- 25 **Tutors' Column: "Some of What I Learned in College Writing I Learned in the First Grade (and Vice Versa)"**
Carol Severino
- 30 **Announcements**
- 32 **Conference Calendar**

Guest Editors' Note

Bonnie Devet and Dana Lynn Driscoll

As guest editors, we are pleased to introduce this special issue on writing centers and transfer of learning. *Transfer* is generally defined as students' ability to adapt, apply, or remix prior knowledge and skills in new contexts, including educational, civic, personal, and professional (Driscoll, "Connected, Disconnected" *Across the Disciplines* vol. 8, no. 2, 2011). Scholars recognize transfer to be critically important to writing centers' work in helping students transfer writing knowledge and in preparing tutors for their future professions. We are delighted to explore how transfer is vital to centers.

Two articles in this issue focus on tutor education with the goal of cultivating transfer for students. Jody Cardinal examines how experienced tutors use "transfer talk," helping students connect current writing tasks to prior and future writing. Margaret Stahr and Susan Hahn discuss tutor education for transfer: what reading to assign, when tutors should focus on transfer during tutorials, how to help students identify similarities among assignments, and how students' dispositions affect transfer.

The final two articles consider how writing center work can offer professional benefits beyond the center. Brent Weaver examines how tutors' work shapes their classroom teaching and reports that while not all writing center expertise easily transfers to classrooms, participants felt theirs helped them as teachers. Finally, Carol Severino reflects on what transfers from working with college students in a writing center to helping first-graders with their compositions. As you read, we invite you to consider how transfer of learning informs writing center practices and how your own tutor education and outreach may foster transferable skills. We would like to thank Rebecca Nowacek and Jennifer Wells, who were anonymous reviewers for this issue. We also note that *WLN's* website hopes to host a peer-reviewed, open-access, digital edited collection "Transfer in the Writing Center," that will extend the work of this special issue.



Transfer Two Ways: Options and Obstacles in Staff Education for Transfer

Jody Cardinal

State University of New York at Old Westbury

Scholars in composition (e.g., Beaufort; Nowacek) and writing center studies (e.g., Devet; Hill) posit that writing centers are on the front lines of transfer with unique opportunities to help students adapt writing knowledge and skills from prior to current and current to future writing tasks.¹ Since transfer is more readily achieved when learners are prompted to transport knowledge across contexts (Ambrose et al. 111), tutors are well positioned to facilitate transfer by helping writers access prior and current writing knowledge and identify new uses for it.

To consider how tutors might effectively be prepared to fulfill this important role, my colleague Christopher Petty and I sought to explore what pedagogical methods tutors find most helpful in understanding and applying the concept of transfer.² At our writing center, new and returning tutors attend a two-day initial training followed by four professional development meetings each semester. Accordingly, we investigated what strategies might be effective at facilitating tutors' understanding of transfer without the benefit of a semester-long training course. Since our initial training does not cover transfer, I introduced transfer theory in two subsequent professional development meetings after which tutors responded to a survey about the meeting activities and potential changes to their tutoring. Results show that tutors perceived changes in their tutoring and valued a variety of active learning approaches. At the same time, introducing transfer theory after initial training posed challenges ironically related to the complex process of transfer for the tutors themselves.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

In spring 2017, I devoted two ninety-minute professional development meetings to tutoring for transfer. Building on Heather Hill's recent work on transfer-focused tutor training, I similarly grounded our staff education in the concept of "transfer talk" developed by Rebecca Nowacek (qtd. in Hill 79, 85). For

Nowacek, transfer talk occurs when tutors discuss the relationship between writers' prior knowledge and a current task, or between their current learning and future writing, thus helping writers adapt learning about writing to new contexts (Hill 85).

While Hill used lecture and discussion for staff training (80), I aimed both to concretize the abstract concept of transfer talk by breaking it into component parts and to provide activities through which tutors could actively engage in learning and applying the concept. As described below, I used five activities across the two transfer meetings: presentation of transfer theory via a PowerPoint and handout, small group analysis of a hypothetical dialogue using transfer talk, small group dialogue writing, watching of role plays using transfer talk, and an improv activity.

PowerPoint and Handout: In a handout (first meeting) and a PowerPoint (second meeting), I introduced Bonnie Devet's definition of transfer as "The ability to take something learned in one context and apply it in another" (119) and clarified key terms. I noted that positive transfer occurs when "learning from one situation assist[s with learning] in another situation" while negative transfer occurs when "learning from one situation interferes with learning from another situation" (Melzer 80, 79). Tutors shared examples of positive and negative transfer from their own learning and tutoring experiences. We discussed, for instance, how generating ideas for a history paper using brainstorming strategies learned in first-year composition is an instance of positive transfer: such strategies facilitate learning in the new context. On the other hand, avoiding personal pronouns in an application essay because "I" was forbidden in research papers is an instance of negative transfer: prior knowledge impedes success in the new context.

I also divided transfer talk into three parts labeled **Prior, Future, and Transparent (PFT)**:

- Ask about similarities and differences between **PRIOR** writing tasks and the current one.
- Ask about **FUTURE** uses of concepts, skills, or strategies discussed in the session.
- Be **TRANSPARENT**: discuss abstract concepts that transcend the specific situation.

Explaining the abstract concept that is the focus of a session (discussing, for instance, the rationale and nature of thesis statements in general rather than simply working to improve the specific thesis statement at hand) is vital in helping writers

identify larger writing concepts and processes that can transfer among prior, current, and future writing tasks (Hill 81).

Analyzing dialogue: At the first meeting, staff members worked in small groups to identify examples of effective transfer talk in a hypothetical tutorial dialogue. Small groups shared their findings.

Writing dialogue: Working in small groups, at the first meeting, staff revised an excerpt of a poor hypothetical tutorial dialogue to add transfer talk. At the second meeting, they created an original dialogue including transfer talk on an assigned aspect of writing (thesis, paragraphing, or analysis).

Watching role plays: At the second meeting, the assistant director and I performed weak and strong tutorial role plays illustrating transfer talk about citation. While the weak version focused merely on APA citation format, the strong version explained the larger concept and purpose of citation.

Improv: At the second meeting, staff role-played helping a writer make connections to prior knowledge around assigned genres like a literature review, aspects of the writing process like brainstorming, or higher order concerns (HOCs) like using evidence.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHOD

Nine undergraduate and three professional tutors, ten of whom attended the first transfer meeting and eleven of whom attended the second, responded to an IRB-approved survey administered eight weeks after the second meeting. The fifteen-question survey contained both Likert-scale and open-ended questions asking tutors to define transfer talk, identify the activity most conducive to their learning, rate their comfort level engaging in transfer talk, and assess changes in their tutoring.

Focused on a small group of tutors in one setting, this study is limited in size and scope. Additionally, while nine tutors attended both meetings, three undergraduates attended only one, thus missing some activities, which undoubtedly affected their responses, particularly their selection of the most helpful learning activity. Nonetheless, all tutors received some degree of transfer education. Their responses thus provide insight into tutors' perceptions of staff education on transfer and suggest the potential value of future research.

PREFERRED TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Survey results indicate that providing multiple entry points to the concept of transfer was valuable since each activity was selected

as most helpful to learning by at least one tutor: *PowerPoint* (2); *Analyzing Dialogue* (5); *Writing Dialogue* (1); *Watching a Role Play* (2); *Improv* (2). Analyzing a sample written dialogue was the most highly preferred activity, chosen by five of twelve tutors, including both professionals (2) and students (3). Moreover, when asked for suggestions to improve transfer training, two of nine respondents specifically valued analyzing written dialogue. One professional tutor commented, “[M]aybe reading through more examples of dialogue that demonstrates transfer talk would be helpful,” and a student tutor noted, “By the end of the analysis of dialogue, I was able to get a better understanding of transfer talk and how to use it.” These results suggest that modeling transfer talk through written dialogue may be an especially useful tool in teaching tutors how to facilitate transfer.

The tutors also favored active learning: only two preferred the PowerPoint explaining transfer theory, and when asked how training might be improved, four of nine noted the value of hands-on activities. One student tutor stated, “[It] helped greatly that I was engaged in a hands-on manner which has always helped me learn way better than a PowerPoint ever could.” Two professional tutors recommended more role plays. One explained, “Mock sessions might be the best thing, and maybe a transfer talk checklist that we can use to reflect upon our tutoring in those sessions... .” This comment highlights the potential value of combining active learning approaches with reflection.

IMPACT OF TRAINING ON SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF TUTORING

The tutors’ survey responses complement empirical data gathered by Hill on the value of introducing tutors to the concept of transfer (88). The majority (11 of 12) reported feeling *moderately* (4) or *significantly* (7) better prepared to engage in transfer talk, and all felt at least *somewhat* better prepared. Similarly, two thirds (8 of 12) felt their tutoring practices changed either *moderately* (6) or *significantly* (2).

Tutors’ qualitative responses similarly indicate at least some implementation of transfer talk. When asked to explain “what you adjusted or changed about your sessions and why,” eight articulated specific positive changes to their tutoring. Seven reported activating prior writing knowledge and/or discussing future applications of current learning. Perhaps because our staff was already familiar with the concept of transparency (discussing larger abstract concepts) from initial training, only one tutor described an increase in transparency.

Tutors also thoughtfully analyzed the benefits of transfer talk. Among the four who reported inquiring more about prior knowledge, one professional noted its value for easing writing challenges: “I definitely became more aware of the importance of using writers’ past experiences I find myself trying to come up with questions . . . that can help them approach their assignments from an angle they might be more familiar with.” Similarly, a student tutor noted increased productivity:

By noting the writer’s previous experiences, . . . I can more quickly find the negative transfer that is inhibiting the development of their writing, or engage the positive transfer to move the session along without as much explaining. This also helps to engage the writer greatly

Of the five tutors who incorporated more future talk, one noted, “I started to explain to writers how they can use what we had learned within the session on their own, outside of the writing center and outside of this particular assignment.” Another similarly commented, “I was able to remember that the writer has to learn or take away something from the session so I made sure to emphasize certain aspects of our session.” These comments suggest that an awareness of transfer theory may encourage tutors to foster long-term learning in sessions.

OBSTACLES

While the survey results indicate that training on transfer enriched staff education and tutoring practice, such training also posed challenges related to the tutors’ own transfer of prior knowledge. Comments at the first transfer meeting and on the surveys suggest that some staff members had trouble incorporating transfer theory into their existing knowledge about tutoring. All staff had completed initial training prior to the transfer meetings, so all brought prior tutoring knowledge to those meetings. Additionally, eleven of twelve had tutored for at least one full semester before encountering transfer theory. Ironically, in some cases, this prior knowledge and experience seemed to impede rather than facilitate learning about transfer.

At the first transfer meeting, some tutors had trouble conceptualizing transfer talk as distinct from a generalized notion of good tutoring. As they evaluated the hypothetical written dialogue, for instance, they noted good tutoring practices, including the tutor’s patience and use of open-ended questions, but struggled to identify specific instances of transfer talk. Similarly, when three groups rewrote a poor tutorial dialogue, two produced more comments about good tutoring practices than

instances of transfer talk. One group wrote, for instance, “analyze assignment sheet,” “compliment first,” “open-ended questions,” and “avoid mixed messages.” Another group noted, “Progress toward a goal in the session” and “Explain the differences between genres of writing (genre awareness).” These responses demonstrate a successful application of prior knowledge of good tutoring practices but one that seemingly displaced the production of concrete forms of transfer talk. Limited time and the brevity of the sample dialogues may be primarily at fault. Even so, as some staff members collapsed transfer talk into good tutoring, they had trouble seeing specific features of transfer talk, like an emphasis on prior knowledge and connections to future writing. Transfer talk risked becoming just another name for a catch-all bag of tutoring strategies, like open-ended questions and using praise.

In contrast, other staff saw too much of a distinction between transfer talk and principles covered in initial training. When asked, “How much of a difference do you see between tutoring for transfer and general good tutoring?” the majority (8 of 12) found either a moderate (5) or significant (3) difference. One professional suggested transfer talk and good tutoring might be mutually exclusive, noting, “It would be difficult to answer this question, as a tutor would have to have the same session with a writer in each condition . . . to fully compare the two.” Two student tutors constructed substantial differences between transfer talk and good tutoring by overlooking the emphasis in initial training on long-term learning as the goal of a tutoring session. One student tutor noted, for instance, “[T]utoring for transfer ensures that the writer is really gaining knowledge that will remain with them throughout the future whereas with general good tutoring the immediate problem is solved.” While transfer theory may have enhanced tutors’ understanding of the importance of fostering long-term learning, this understanding led some tutors to position tutoring for transfer as an opposite rather than an enrichment of principles learned in training.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF EDUCATION

In retrospect, it seems likely that these paradoxical responses resulted at least in part from inadequate attention to the tutors’ own prior knowledge and specifically to how their prior knowledge on tutoring was organized. As Ambrose et al. note, “When students are provided with an organizational structure in which to fit new knowledge, they learn more effectively and efficiently than when they are left to deduce this conceptual

structure for themselves” (53). I had not done enough in the meetings on transfer to activate the tutors’ prior knowledge of good tutoring practice and to assist them in integrating the new knowledge on transfer within their pre-existing mental schemas. There was a better way.

In fact, our staff already has a workable organizational structure for knowledge about tutoring, one introduced at initial training. I use the structure of the tutoring session with its opening, middle, and closing to help staff organize information about tutoring. The opening is devoted to establishing rapport, gathering information, and learning about the assignment; the middle to reading aloud and addressing one or two main priorities; and the closing to reviewing what has been learned and planning next steps. Since research suggests that “knowledge organizations are most effective when they are well matched to the way that knowledge needs to be accessed and used” (Ambrose et al. 49), the opening-middle-closing structure is likely to effectively support tutors in their work as it relates directly to the sequence of tasks they perform in a session.

Prompting staff members to consider new information about transfer in relation to this organizational structure might better facilitate learning and reduce interference between prior knowledge and the new material on transfer. Ideally, one professional development meeting would address each of the three components of transfer talk as they apply to a particular stage of a session. Certainly, each form of transfer talk can occur at any point, and identifying the abstract concept at issue (transparency) can facilitate connections to prior and future writing tasks. Nonetheless, rearranging the letters from **PFT** to **PTF** highlights the specific relevance of each component to a particular stage: asking about **prior** writing tasks in the opening; **transparently** discussing the abstract concepts addressed in the middle, and looking ahead to **future** writing tasks in the closing.

Each staff meeting might begin by asking tutors what they know about a particular stage of a session, thus activating their prior knowledge “to aid the integration and retention of new information” (Ambrose et al. 16). Next, we might consider how the concept of transfer enriches our practices at each stage. What changes should our session openings undergo if facilitating transfer is a primary purpose of the opening? How will our discussions with writers in the middle of sessions change if being transparent about the larger abstract concepts being addressed becomes a priority? How can we use closing strategies that help

writers connect what they've learned to future writing? Paired with a variety of active learning activities like those discussed above, this approach might better enable staff to incorporate new knowledge about transfer into prior knowledge of tutoring.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, transfer-focused staff education foregrounds transfer not only for writers but also for tutors. As we prepare tutors to facilitate transfer for writers, we should consider tutors' own process of learning transfer. Particularly in continuing staff education, prompting meaningful connections to tutors' prior forms of knowledge organization may aid acquisition of new knowledge about transfer. Such connections may also help tutors understand transfer theory as an enhancement of initial training rather than as entirely different material or a repetition that blurs the particularity of new knowledge.

While further research is needed to confirm these findings, this study suggests that active learning approaches and explicit modeling of transfer talk may be particularly helpful in staff education for transfer and that such education may increase tutors' attention to long-term learning. It also suggests that timing matters. Administrators introducing transfer theory to experienced staff will want to do so thoughtfully in relation to what staff members have already internalized about good tutoring.

NOTES

1. I thank Bonnie Devet, Dana Driscoll, the *WLN* editorial team, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful feedback on this essay.

2. I'm grateful to Christopher Petty, co-principal investigator in this study and former assistant director of our writing center, for assistance in designing staff meeting activities and for enriching my thinking about our data. I also thank the staff members who generously participated in this study.



WORKS CITED

- Ambrose, Susan A., et al. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. Jossey-Bass, 2010.
- Beaufort, Anne. *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*. Utah State UP, 2007.
- Devet, Bonnie. "The Writing Center and Transfer of Learning: A Primer for Directors." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2015, pp. 119-151.
- Hill, Heather N. "Tutoring for Transfer: The Benefits of Teaching Writing Center Tutors about Transfer Theory." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2016, pp. 77-102.
- Melzer, Dan. "The Connected Curriculum: Designing a Vertical Transfer Writing Curriculum." *WAC Journal*, vol. 25, 2014, pp. 78-91, wac.colostate.edu/journal/vol25/melzer.pdf
- Nowacek, Rebecca S. *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.

Some of These Things ARE Like the Others: Lessons Learned from Tutor-Inspired Research about Transfer in the Writing Center

Susan Hahn
DePauw University

Margaret Stahr
University of Pittsburgh



SUSAN HAHN



MARGARET STAHR

Transfer-related scholarship in composition studies—which has been prominent since about 2007—suggests that many factors influence the degree to which writers engage in transfer-related behavior, or the habit of applying what has been learned in one context to another. While many writing center scholars agree that “[writing] centers already teach for transfer every day” (Devet 120), and “that writing centers are fostering both anticipated transfer . . . and actual transfer” for a number of writing center users across institutions (Bromley et al.), we argue that tutors can do more to foreground transfer with student writers. Our practice-based research at two small liberal arts colleges (SLACs) leads us to offer four suggestions for educating writing center staff to “facilitate moments of connection-making for writers” (Hughes et al.), or, put another way, to tutor *for* transfer.

Conclusion 1: We should assign readings about transfer as part of tutor-education curricula.

Prior to 2013, a review of our centers’ exit surveys revealed that writers generally did not leave a session consciously thinking about transfer. Thereafter, we assigned readings about transfer to new undergraduate peer-tutors, anticipating that conversations about these articles would foster more dialogue about transfer, more priming for transfer, and more modeling of how to transfer writing knowledge from and to other contexts during sessions.¹

Of the texts assigned, new tutors seemed most engaged with Elizabeth Wardle’s “Understanding ‘Transfer’ from FYC,” which explains transfer and reports that Wardle’s small cohort of honors students did not perceive that they needed to transfer knowledge from first-year composition to other courses (76).² In class discus-

sions, our tutors reported that her article helped them understand transfer's importance and led them to generate ideas about how they could facilitate transfer in tutorials. As directors, we were initially most interested in forward transfer, or using tutorials to generate awareness that writers could apply present learning to future contexts (Nelms and Dively 218). Our tutors, by contrast, perceived that writers rarely placed new assignments in context with older ones and encouraged us to emphasize backward transfer: the ability to draw on memories of previously learned material that are related to current tasks (Nelms and Dively 218). Our tutors' sense that writers neglected to build on prior knowledge made us consider what specific moments within a tutorial are most ripe for engaging writers in transfer-related discussions and behaviors and led us to our second conclusion.

Conclusion 2. Tutors should emphasize transfer particularly at the beginning (backward) and ending (forward) of tutorials.

To facilitate this emphasis, tutors at Institution A, one of the SLACs represented in this study, added this question to the center's intake form: "Does the assignment you want to work on today remind you of any other assignments you've ever written? Be as specific as you can be." The tutors argued that this question would prime writers to think about how current writing tasks draw on prior ones. In fact, tutors reported that writers' responses provided them with openings for transfer talk, such as "So this is your second sociology journal. What kind of feedback did you get on the first one?" or "It looks like you're not used to writing about non-fiction. How do you typically approach new writing tasks?" Transfer talk engages students in thinking about how to apply what they already know to new writing tasks, provides occasions for filling in gaps in prior knowledge that students may or may not know they have (Yancey et al. 126), and/or explores future applications in which such knowledge can be applied.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, 861 writers at Institution A completed the intake form on which the transfer question appeared. About 30% of the time (N=251), students left that question unanswered. Though several factors could contribute to the blank responses (e.g., lack of motivation, time constraints, or not having a sufficient "writing vocabulary"), it is also possible that respondents did not have prior knowledge upon which to draw for a particular assignment. In *Writing Across Contexts*, Kathleen Blake Yancey et al. note that most first-year composition students experience "an absence of prior knowledge" related to "key writing concepts" and "non-fiction texts that serve as models" (108).

So, writers may have left the transfer question blank—rather than writing “no” —because “they enter[ed] college inexperienced in the kinds of writing and reading the first year of postsecondary education demands” (Yancey et al. 108); thus, their new writing assignments do not, in fact, remind them of any prior high school or college writing tasks. We suggest tutors can begin facilitating backward transfer by simply asking writers about past writing attitudes and assignments.

Though sometimes rushed, session endings are also crucial moments for building transfer awareness and are especially fertile moments for forward transfer. “What did you learn today that you can carry forward to future papers?” a tutor might ask. Such an open-ended question can engage writers in transfer by prompting them to think about written tasks as interconnected and to take ownership of their writing process.

Conclusion 3: In addition to assigning readings about transfer and foregrounding it as a concept during tutorials, we should educate tutors to identify similarities among different types of writing assignments.

While we have found such practice is common in many writing center and WAC initiatives, we also wonder whether the trend toward specialized disciplines has eroded writers’—and maybe even our own—conviction that some writing strategies transcend genre and discipline. In 314 responses (37%) to Institution A’s intake question about the similarity of the current assignment to previous ones, writers wrote “no,” implying that their assignments were providing new and different types of challenges. Occasionally students elaborated, writing explanations like “This is my first time writing a book summary,” “This essay is a new category,” and “This is the longest paper I’ve ever had to write.” Such responses indicate these (mostly first-year) writers were experiencing new genres and new expectations regarding length (and, presumably, what constitutes “adequate development”). We note particularly that in such comments, writers focus on what is different about their present assignments without mentioning what they already know. While it seems probable, for example, that all of these writers had previously been asked to write a summary, the fact that they are summarizing something lengthy, or that the assignment includes a response, reflection, or evaluation component, seems to cause them to overlook the assignment’s familiar portion. Our analysis echoes Wardle’s finding that “simply having previous experience similar to the new and engaging writing task was not enough to ensure generalization” (“Understanding ‘Transfer’” 80).

One first-year writer's responses to our intake form during her eight tutorials for three different classes in her first semester highlights Wardle's point. When the student sought help with a psychology paper, she said the assignment was familiar because it was her "second journal in psychology." For two FYC papers, she reached further backward: "I had a research paper in high school . . . about pharmacists and what they do. I struggled with it a lot" and "Yes, in high school [a comparison] between two movies we watched." In these instances, the writer focused on genre. Interestingly, in her four other tutorials, she responded "no" to the transfer question three times and the fourth time, "Not at all. It's my first summary and strong response." In this last comment, she, like many others, focused solely on the different part of the assignment. Responses like hers surprise us because while our intake form question is admittedly an imperfect snapshot of students' prior writing knowledge, its wording also hints at similarities (by virtue of the word "reminds"). It would be surprising if this particular student—who, in high school, wrote a research paper on pharmacists and a comparison of two movies—did not have summary-writing knowledge on which to draw for this new assignment.

One important component of transfer talk is emphasizing the rhetorical elements shared by different assignments; for example, all summaries identify a source's main ideas, even if those sources are longer than students are accustomed to, even when a source is non-fiction rather than fiction, and even when an assignment combines summary with additional tasks. Guiding writers in the retrieval of information they already know is an integral part of tutoring for transfer, so a tutor's role should include deliberately, explicitly helping writers access their prior knowledge. We found that encouraging tutors to highlight similar rhetorical features helped them engage in transfer talk more regularly.

Although we recognize the risk in overgeneralizing students' responses to the intake form question, their answers suggest that instructors' assignment sequencing is not always visible to our students. The small composition program at Institution A adheres to a fairly uniform, deliberate progression of FYC assignments, moving from *analysis* of a single source, to a comparative analysis of two sources, to a researched essay requiring students to *analyze* multiple sources. Nevertheless, Institution A students who used the writing center more than once for the same FYC class sometimes indicated on the intake forms that later assignments did not remind them of previous ones; their responses often fo-

cused on assignment *differences*, not *similarities*, both within the FYC curriculum and when they wrote in other disciplines. Similarly, in our conversations with tutors, we often hear them corroborate this sense that writing assignments—whether assigned within a single class or across disciplines—are as different from one another as the desert and the ocean. While we acknowledge disciplinary differences in writing, the concept of transfer presupposes that there are effective writing strategies that student writers can take with them as they move through courses and disciplines. Examples of effective writing strategies include statements that assert a main point or argument; logical progression of ideas; evidence to support assertions; citation and attribution to acknowledge sources; and transitional words and phrases to help readers follow the writer’s thinking. Therefore, we propose that tutor educators continue to emphasize features of effective writing that are similar across contexts so that tutors can use dialogue about such strategies to facilitate—rather than to unintentionally discourage—the transfer of writing knowledge.

Conclusion 4: Tutor educators should emphasize with tutors that individual writers will display varying levels of receptivity toward transfer depending on the writing task.

About 35% (N=296) of writers affirmed that, “yes,” their writing assignment reminded them of a previous writing task.³ Some writers, particularly juniors and seniors, referred to a “previous college course,” frequently “English” or “first year seminar [sic],” and sometimes courses in the disciplines that required similar papers. Writers whose assignments had autobiographical components often identified “personal experience” as a familiar genre. Other writers reported that assignments reminded them of something they wrote in high school, and the remaining “yes” responses were a hodgepodge that included previously written “essays,” “four-page papers,” and “compare/contrast essays.”

The differing responses to our transfer question may be attributed, in part, to students’ dispositions. Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells have argued that “student dispositions [are] critical to success in transfer of learning.” In other words, writers’ orientations toward learning may be more important in fostering transfer than educational contexts like classrooms and curricula. Wardle (“Creative Repurposing”) characterizes students as having either more “problem-exploring” or more “answer-getting” dispositions. She argues that students with a problem-exploring disposition—which is characterized by curiosity, recursive thinking, and the desire to solve problems—are more prone to transfer knowledge

than students with an answer-getting disposition, which is characterized by distractibility and the desire to quickly find a single, correct answer.

It is tempting to conclude that students who responded to the intake form's transfer question with some version of "Yes, I'm reminded of a previous assignment" are more inclined to transfer. However, in our analysis, few responses indicated true problem-exploring dispositions, and few responses represent true answer-getting dispositions. Even though about 30% of writers in our sample left the transfer question blank, tutors' session notes seldom suggested that these writers were averse to the problem-exploring nature of tutorials. Many tutor session summaries like this one hinted at writers exhibiting some level of problem solving: "[The writer] talked and I took notes on specific occurrences she could tie into her paper." Similarly, among the 35% of writers who affirmed and engaged in backward transfer by describing a similar, previous writing task, some demonstrated little curiosity. For example, one writer with a weekly appointment displayed an answer-getting mentality even though she always affirmed that the assignment she wanted to work on reminded her of a previous one. Her standard transfer question response was, "Yes. Dr. M," which was shorthand for a professor who notoriously required students to eliminate all instances of passive voice. Understandably, this writer wanted help eliminating passive voice. However, our tutors did not perceive that she was engaged in transferring the ability to write in active voice from one assignment to another. Rather, tutors read her simple duplication of "Dr. M" and her resistance to applying the previous weeks' strategies for recasting passive voice to new assignments as the "answer-getting" behavior Wardle describes. Yet, this student's disposition is not strictly an answer-getting disposition because she displays the "problem-solvers'" awareness that a repeated writing task ("Write in active voice!") should draw on prior knowledge.

Moreover, while it might seem that writers who responded "no" to our question about similarities between present and previous assignments demonstrate dispositions that are less transfer-prone, their responses sometimes display considerable reflection. In a tutorial for a paper assigned in her honors course, one writer reflected, "No. I've never gone into this much detail about a historical event." The writer seems to be struggling with the amount of "detail"—perhaps evidence?—required for this particular paper, and her response articulates this difficulty. In this instance, hers might be considered a hybrid disposition toward transfer—part

answer-getting, part problem-solving—and a transfer-educated tutor could help her understand how to more effectively develop her ideas by probing for more information about how much detail she’s used to providing, and how adding more details helps to meet the intellectual demands of the paper and the course.

Research into dispositions that Driscoll and Wells as well as Wardle have conducted would suggest that in writing center contexts, writers, not tutors, are most responsible for transfer. However, by focusing on what individual writers say about the relationship between past and present assignments, tutors can help writers who display “answer-getting” tendencies, or who appear less prone to engage in transfer-related behavior, to adopt more “problem-solving” strategies. In fact, tutors at Institution B saw transfer talk as a way of moving from “directive” sessions (“fixing” the paper) to more nondirective, generative sessions, and the kind of conversation that Andrea Lunsford defines as a “collaborative environment” (74).

Because so many different writers, assignments, and disciplines intersect in them, writing centers are ideally situated to act as hubs for transfer. In our view, an effective writing center session should help a writer think intentionally about how to apply and adapt writing knowledge to new contexts. As a result of conversations about transfer in our tutor education courses, tutors have generated provocative ideas for helping writers negotiate backward and forward transfer, and in so doing, they have helped some writers adopt problem-solving dispositions that facilitate transfer. Moreover, our findings suggest that when instructors and tutors intentionally include transfer talk in their conversations with writers, they help writers make connections among their writing tasks and generate a climate that facilitates transfer.⁴ Intentional focus on students’ prior knowledge and future applications can create powerful learning connections for the immediate assignment and for the process of facing the next assignment: some of these things ARE like the others.

NOTES

1. Heather N. Hill recently reported that “learning about transfer theory does cause tutors to explicitly engage their students in transfer talk more often” (92).

2. We also drew texts from the Fall 2012 *Composition Forum*, which was devoted to transfer-related research.

3. Interestingly, 81% of international students in our sample appear primed to transfer and answer “always or usually” to the question: “Have you ever thought about ‘transferring’ knowledge from your session to another paper?”

4. Space constraints prevented us from discussing a four-year longitudinal study that followed 15 writers at Institution B; Hahn presented that research at the

2013 CCCC. This study also contributed to our understanding of how students engage in transfer.



WORKS CITED

- Bromley, Pam, et al. "Transfer and Dispositions in Writing Centers: A Cross-Institutional, Mixed-Methods Study." *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2016, wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/bromleyetal2016.cfm. Accessed 25 Apr. 2018.
- Devet, Bonnie. "The Writing Center and Transfer of Learning: A Primer for Directors." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2015, pp. 119-151.
- Driscoll, Dana Lynn, and Jennifer Wells. "Beyond Knowledge and Skills: Writing Transfer and the Role of Student Dispositions." *Writing and Transfer*, special issue of *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, compositionforum.com/issue/26/beyond-knowledge-skills.php. Accessed 25 Apr. 2018.
- Hill, Heather N. "Tutoring for Transfer: The Benefits of Teaching Writing Center Tutors about Transfer Theory." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2016, pp. 77-102.
- Hughes, Bradley, et al. "Examining Writing Center Tutorials for Evidence of Transfer." *International Writing Centers Association*. Denver. 15 Oct. 2016. Conference presentation.
- Lunsford, Andrea. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*, edited by Christina Murphy et al., 4th ed., Bedford, 2011, pp. 70-77.
- Nelms, Gerald, and Rhonda Leathers Dively. "Perceived Roadblocks to Transferring Knowledge from First-Year Composition to Writing-Intensive Major Courses: A Pilot Study." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 214-240.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. "Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning: Considering 'Problem-Exploring' and 'Answer-Getting' Dispositions in Individuals and Fields." *Writing and Transfer*, special issue of *Composition Forum*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, compositionforum.com/issue/26/creative-repurposing.php.
- . "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 65-85.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake, et al. *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Utah State UP, 2014.

Is Knowledge Repurposed from Tutoring to Teaching? A Qualitative Study of Transfer from the Writing Center

Brent Weaver
Kansas State University



As I transitioned from writing tutor to writing instructor, I wanted to equip myself to become the best teacher possible. Thus, I actively considered how my pedagogies influenced each other. At that time, I hadn't yet investigated the scholarship on transfer. Discussed by scholars of rhetoric and composition since the 1980s, transfer means the repurposing of knowledge from one context to another (e.g., Herrington; Moore; Taczak; Wardle, "Creative" and "Understanding"). In reviewing the literature on transfer, I found, as others have (e.g., Devet; Wardle, "Creative" and "Understanding"), that transfer is less studied in the writing center than in other areas. Scholars contend, however, that the writing center is a prime site for transfer research (e.g., Devet; Driscoll; Driscoll and Harcourt; Hagemann; Kenzie).

By conducting my own research, I hoped to get a better sense of how other people who both tutor and teach feel about transferring knowledge from the writing center to the classroom. My research question was simple: Do teachers transfer knowledge from their work in writing centers to the teaching of writing in their classrooms? Ultimately, I found that participants self-reported that transfer occurs. This essay adds to the existing research on transfer by examining how teachers' experiences as writing center tutors shape their time in the writing classroom—in both their classroom teaching and office hour visits with students.

METHODOLOGY

Using a mixed methods approach that combines grounded theory and general qualitative analysis methods, I investigated if tutor-instructors self-reported transfer. Grounded theory is a rigorous qualitative research strategy in which the researcher builds theory from the data itself, rather than using a framework for analyzing the data. Thus, the study is 'grounded' in the data (Charmaz 2). Both Kathy Charmaz and Johnny Saldaña explain that grounded theory coding consists of two stages: initial coding and

focused coding. For initial coding, the first step in building grounded theory, researchers generate as many codes as possible using gerunds to capture action (Charmaz 109-113; Saldaña 100). Then, researchers employ focused coding by locating the most important and/or frequent terms from the list of all the initial codes. Researchers lastly re-code the data set using these most salient codes. The most frequent codes reveal participants' experiences.

I designed a 10-question survey asking participants to state their tutoring and teaching backgrounds and training, describe their tutoring and teaching philosophies, and respond to transfer-specific questions. For the transfer-specific questions, I asked participants if they found that writing center pedagogy transfers to their teaching and if they consciously implement writing center methodology in their teaching. With these two questions, I applied grounded theory methods to build analytical categories for analyzing and understanding the self-reported data.

Participant Demographics. Because I desired to find participants who had taught or tutored writing at Kansas State University between 2011 and 2016, I sent emails to past and current staff members, using our email directory when necessary. Some participants had tutored first and then began teaching; this allowed them to reflect on how tutoring transferred to their teaching. Other participants were graduate teaching assistants who taught for a semester and then joined our writing center. Their reflections allowed them to notice changes to their teaching practices after tutoring for a semester. As a note, my study does not draw conclusions based on which role came first. My sample size was 13 participants, and, therefore, the findings are not generalizable to the entire population of tutor-instructors. I did not ask participants for demographic information, such as age, gender, or ethnicity. Instead, I designed the demographic questions to get a sense of experience levels and participants' training. Participants provided the number of years they tutored and taught. In addition, participants selected tutoring and teaching training opportunities from a set list (or they could supply their own answers).

Short-Answer Coding. For my two short-answer questions, I first employed initial coding and garnered 155 codes in total. For my subsequent focused coding, I utilized four analytical categories:

CODE:

Valuing a center methodology: [value held]

Employing center methodology: [method]

Attempting to employ center methodology: [method]

Benefitting from center methodology: [method]

The focused coding was conducted twice. In my first round, I had not separated “attempting to employ center methodology” from “employing center methodology.” Because I noted a specific pattern that emerged, I engaged in an additional round of focused coding. As I coded, I noticed my participants often used hedging language, a form of linguistic politeness that uses hedging modifiers—such as *might* or *could*—to preserve the autonomy of the person spoken to (Brown and Levinson 62). Because hedging is linked to the writing center practice of nondirectiveness and student agency, the appearance of hedging terms affirmed the need to apply the additional round of focused coding.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

In my analysis, I coded short-answer questions about how participants’ tutoring knowledge is repurposed for teaching. To clarify, participants described both the classroom and one-to-one conferences. In line with the existing research of writing center transfer scholars (Hagemann; Driscoll and Harcourt; Kenzie), my findings show that tutors learn invaluable skills that can transfer from the writing center to their teaching. Each of the following findings are relevant for writing center transfer research:

- Participants noted benefits of tutoring in a writing center; these benefits represent self-reported transfer.
- Participants employed specific writing center methodologies and attempted to employ others; this finding calls into question what kind of knowledge is easy to repurpose.
- While all participants believed writing center methodology transferred to their teaching, not all participants believed this transfer to be conscious.

Participants noted self-reported benefits of tutoring in a writing center. Eight (61.5%) participants mentioned benefiting from writing center tutoring. They indicated their writing center tutoring helped them empathize with student writers (4 participants), ask better questions (3 participants), employ nondirective methods (2 participants), provide feedback (2 participants), and communicate (2 participants). Participants were asked to explain if they saw the effect of writing center training on their teaching, and if so, to provide an example. One participant stated: “In the writing center, I learned a lot about asking students questions and letting them come to conclusions themselves.” This response is representative of how participants self-identified what skills transferred from tutoring to teaching.

Participants employed specific writing center methodologies and attempted to employ others. After analyzing how participants used hedging in their responses, I realized participants differed in

actions they *employed* versus actions they *attempted to employ* by using hedging language. The terms “near transfer” and “far transfer” (e.g., Reiff and Bawarshi; Rounsaville) can help explain the emergence of this hedging language. *Near transfer* describes a form of knowledge that is more easily moved from one context to another. An example of near transfer is learning to apply a scientific formula during a class lecture and then using that process on an exam question. In this example, transfer can happen more easily because the contexts are virtually the same. By contrast, *far transfer* describes knowledge that is less easily moved from one context to another. An example of this type of transfer is writing a thesis statement for an English essay and then for a Music History essay. While there are some generalizable principles of thesis writing, applying the knowledge from one genre to another can be more difficult than repeating a process almost exactly. As Susan Hahn and Margaret Stahr contend in this special issue of *WLN*, one way to make this process less difficult is by emphasizing what’s similar about the two types of knowledge. This helps students more easily transfer knowledge.

In total, ten participants (76.9%) noted they had employed a writing center methodology. Of these ten participants, five did not use hedging language to describe employing their pedagogy and five did use hedging language. I found that tutors repeatedly described conferencing (4 participants) and empathy (2 participants) without using hedging language. For instance, one participant stated that they “meet with students one-to-one to talk through parts of their papers...” For these participants, conferencing and empathy emerged as examples of *near transfer*, or skills that more easily transferred between the two contexts. As conferencing with students can simply replicate a writing center tutorial, I am not surprised that participants report this skill transferring. Similarly, writing center tutors take pride in empathizing with student writers from all backgrounds (e.g., Denny; DiPardo; Rafoth). Empathizing with a student, then, could be a skill for tutors to transfer easily to teaching.

By contrast, participants used hedging language when describing the use of talk (3 participants) and questioning (2 participants). For example, another participant used hedging language (‘generally’ and ‘try’) when talking about the use of questions in class discussion: “During class discussions I generally try to ask a lot of questions...” Moreover, the use of talk and questions were both examples of *far transfer* for participants. While talk and asking questions are common writing center practices, these practices

might be less engrained than the actual structure of a tutorial or empathizing with student writers. For instance, the use of questions lands us in the middle of the debate over directive versus nondirective methodologies (e.g., Brooks; Carino; Kavadlo). While this scholarly debate has lasted several decades, tutors may find themselves grappling with the directivity continuum in their teaching practices—and this struggle may have been reflected in the lessened ability of participants to comment on the transfer of talk and questioning from the writing center to the classroom. Another reason may be that, in some cases, the skills are simply more difficult to apply in practice. Many tutors would say that it's easy to empathize with the student they're working with, but it might be more difficult to employ open-ended questions.

Not all participants believed transfer to be conscious. When asked if writing center pedagogy affects their teaching, thirteen participants (100%) responded “yes.” However, when asked if they consciously implement writing center pedagogy into their teaching, the results were mixed: nine participants responded “yes,” one participant responded “no,” and three participants responded “unsure.” One participant expressed that transfer may happen through a natural process: “One supposes that the constant exposure to student writing and papers will naturally filter into improved student feedback as a teacher.” Similarly, another participant directly stated that transfer is not a conscious act: “...as far as how I do my day-to-day lesson planning, I don't enter into that work thinking, ‘For sure, let me implement some minimalist tutoring methods.’” This participant added, “[T]he practice of being a writing center tutor is there in all of my teaching.” I point out this area of analysis because there's a difference between a tutor *knowingly* transferring skills versus a tutor *reflexively* transferring skill. If a tutor knowingly transfers skills, they can actively draw from their tutoring arsenal to maximize their teaching work. However, if a tutor reflexively transfers skills, they may be unaware of the potential to equip themselves with strategies they've learned.

CONCLUSION

Participants in this study did self-report the transfer of tutoring insights to teaching. This finding helps the study contribute to the literature on transfer in the writing center by:

- agreeing with scholars who posit the center as a prime site for transfer research
- isolating specific variables—in this case, types of knowledge repurposing—researchers can investigate further
- understanding that not all knowledge gained in writing center work may easily transfer

- explaining that transfer might not always be conscious.

For directors, this study also has outcomes that affect practice. It is not uncommon for writing center staff to simultaneously serve in tutoring and teaching capacities; encouraging such staff to consider their pedagogical transfer of knowledge may encourage best practices in both the tutorial and classroom. For example, best practices for tutoring may differ from best practices for teaching (teaching includes an evaluative role while tutoring is thought to be non-evaluative). If we provide tutors with opportunities to examine their own practices, strengths, and areas for growth, they can consciously transfer this knowledge to their classroom teaching.

Perhaps most importantly, given that some practices are not consciously transferred, I argue directors can help their staff become more aware that transfer from the writing center to the classroom does occur. Directors can ask their staff to reflect on skills gained as tutors, and how they can apply these skills to new contexts, whether in the classroom or in other forms of employment. Then, their tutors will be able to more consciously transfer knowledge from the writing center to other locations. My anxieties as a first-year teacher made me hyperaware that I was relying on writing center pedagogy. But for others, the link between tutoring and teaching may be less obvious. Directors can make this connection clear and help tutors understand the implications of transfer from the writing center to the writing classroom.



WORKS CITED

- Brooks, Jeff. "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work." *Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 15, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1-4.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. *Politeness*. Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Carino, Peter. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Tutoring: Power and Authoring in Peer Tutoring." *The Center Will Hold: Critical Perspectives on Writing Center Scholarship*, edited by Michael A. Pember-ton and Joyce Kinkead, Utah State UP, 2003.
- Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed., SAGE, 2014.
- Composition Forum* (special issue), vol. 26, 2012, compositionforum.com/issue/26/map-questions-transfer-research.php.
- Denny, Harry C. *Facing the Center*. Utah State UP, 2010.
- Devet, Bonnie. "The Writing Center and Transfer of Learning: A Primer for Directors." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2015, pp. 119-51.
- DiPardo, Anne. "'Whispers of Coming and Going': Lessons from Fannie." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1992, pp. 125-44.
- Driscoll, Dana Lynn. "Building Connections and Transferring Knowledge:

- The Benefits of a Peer Tutoring Course Beyond the Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2015, pp. 153-81.
- Driscoll, Dana Lynn, and Sarah Harcourt. "Training vs. Learning: Transfer of Learning in a Peer Tutoring Course and Beyond." *Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 36, no. 7-8, 2012, pp. 1-7.
- Hagemann, Julie. "Writing Centers as Sites for Writing Transfer Research." *Writing Center Perspectives*, edited by Christina Murphy and Eric Hobson, NWCA P, 1995, pp. 120-31.
- Herrington, Anne J. "Writing in Academic Settings: A Study of the Contexts for Writing in Two College Chemical Engineering Courses." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1985, pp. 331-61.
- Kavadlo, Jesse. "Tutoring Taboo: A Reconsideration of Style in the Writing Center." *Refiguring Prose Style: Possibilities for Writing Pedagogy*. Utah State UP, 2005, pp. 215-226.
- Kenzie, Daniel P. "Transfer and the Writing Center: A Qualitative Study of Tutoring Transitions." MA thesis, Purdue U, 2014.
- Moore, Jessie. "Mapping the Questions: The State of Writing-Related Transfer Research." *Composition Forum*.
- Rafoth, Ben. *Multilingual Writers and Writing Centers*. Utah State UP, 2015.
- Reiff, Mary Jo, and Anis Bawarshi. "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition." *Written Communication*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2011, pp. 312-37, journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0741088311410183.
- Rounsaville, Angela. "Selecting Genres for Transfer: The Role of Uptake in Students' Antecedent Genre Knowledge." *Composition Forum*.
- Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 2nd ed., SAGE, 2013.
- Taczak, Kara. "Framework for 'The Question of Transfer.'" *Composition Forum*.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. "Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning: Considering 'Problem-Exploring' and 'Answer-Getting' Dispositions in Individuals and Fields." *Composition Forum*.
- . "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of Longitudinal Study." *WPA*, vol. 31, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 65-85.

Some of What I Learned about College Writing I Learned in the First Grade (and Vice Versa)

Carol Severino
University of Iowa



I walked into Ms. W.'s first-grade classroom, waved to my granddaughter Millie, and carefully lowered myself into a tiny kid-chair. Because Millie had recently transferred to a new school and could benefit, I figured, from my familiar face to help her make the transition, I was volunteering in her class once a week.

Ms. W. was wrapping up a discussion of a biography the class was reading about author Tomás Rivera's childhood—how his migrant-worker grandfather introduced him to the library and to stories. Wow, I thought, multicultural literature is sure an improvement over Dick, Jane, and Spot.

"Today, Carol, I'd like you to help Eddie write his problem-solution story," Ms. W. said, assigning me my morning mission. "He didn't get a chance to do his when the class did. He wants to write about Mario and Luigi. Eddie, why don't you take Carol to the library where it's quieter?" Then, hiding her mouth with a cupped hand, she whispered to me, "Eddie can be a real challenge. He is a reluctant writer."

"No problem," I whispered back. "In my writing center, we work with reluctant writers all the time." But having never played video games or paid them much attention when my sons were kids, I knew nothing about Mario and Luigi. I would indeed be an "ignorant" tutor. Plus, I had forgotten where the school library was, my sons having graduated from that same school over 25 years before. At least I was familiar, albeit at the college level, with Eddie's assignment—a problem-solution narrative. And because I had already played a sight-word Chutes and Ladders-type board game with Eddie, I knew he had a mind of his own (e.g., he "cheated" by moving his piece extra squares to land on a ladder) and a body that was extra squirmy and fidgety, probably the reason he couldn't focus on his story during class time. I

remembered him sprawling his torso across the game table, wiggling his lower legs and feet against his chair.

Eddie took me via the scenic route to the library. Eventually we arrived at a room that wasn't a library (i.e., no books) but coincidentally looked more like a writing center. Two other children were working with grown-ups, both pairs hunched over materials. Although I vetoed Eddie's choice of seats, an office chair that swiveled and moved up and down, he ignored me, proceeding to use the lever and wheels to diversify his squirming while I tried to direct his attention to his problem-solution story. I was eager to adjust my best questioning strategies to a seven-year old.

"So what is Mario's problem, Eddie?"

"He has to um, uh...rescue the princess."

"Why? Is the princess in trouble? Has she been captured by the bad guys?" I asked, pretending to know what I was talking about.

"Ah, I don't remember. Mmmm... I don't wanna to write about Mario. I wanna write about Luigi." Eddie erased "MARIO," ripping the top of his paper in the process and scratched "LUIGI" in its place.

"Oh, OK, so what is Luigi's problem?"

"He captured some ghosts."

"So how is that a problem? Are the ghosts bothering him? Does he want to let them go?" I asked, aware that I was suggesting both a problem and a solution. I didn't want to be too directive, but I did not want to return to Ms. W's classroom without a story either. We needed to get some words down on paper ASAP.

"I don't know. I forget. I have to ask Joe. He plays Mario Brothers, too." Joe was Eddie's classmate, another charming but squirmy kid who played video games at home and had "cheated" at that board game.

"But Joe isn't here right now. Hey, I've got an idea. How about we come up with a problem that YOU had and that YOU solved? For eeexaaam...ple," I drew it out before I actually had an example on hand; I was realizing that first-grade brainstorming might have to be less open-ended and more specific than it is in my writing center. "Have you ever lost anything?"

“No, never,” Eddie said firmly. He grabbed the lever and moved himself up and down as he swiveled left and right.

“Never? Are you sure? How about clothing that you left at school? Gloves? A hat? And please keep your hands off that chair handle.”

“I lost my raincoat.”

“Great! I mean not great that you lost your raincoat, but great that we have something to write about,” I exclaimed, conscious of using supportive “we” language recommended in college tutoring manuals. “Write that down.”

“Write what down?”

“That you lost your raincoat. Where did you lose it?”

“On the playground, on the cement.”

Painstakingly, letter by letter, as I reminded him to leave spaces between the words, Eddie managed to carve out: “I Last MY RancOt on the Plagrnd on the SaMent.” Writing is a slow process for adults, but with first graders, it proceeds at a glacial pace. Fortunately, Ms. W. accepts invented spelling, or her students would never put pencil to paper.

But as Eddie was eking out those words, the bell rang. The two other children got up and dashed out of the center, and Eddie sprung out of his chair after them. It was 10:00—time for the younger grades to go to recess. He did not want to be left behind.

“But Eddie, you can’t go yet. We need to write the solution. We only have the problem. Come back here!” I knew I sounded bossy, but darn it, we were going to finish that story. Eddie returned and reluctantly sat back down. “So what’s the solution? How did you find your raincoat?”

“I didn’t. It’s still lost.”

“You’re kidding! You never found it?” I was really panicking now. How would we solve this problem of no solution? Why hadn’t I asked him in the first place whether he had found his raincoat? What a tutoring gaffe—and after over 25 years directing and tutoring in a college writing center! Why did I not know by now how to ask the right kinds of questions at the right time? “So how did you solve the problem of getting wet in the rain? Did you use an umbrella?” I persisted.

“No, no umbrella.”

“A big hat to protect you from the rain?”

“No, no big hat.”

“Couldn’t we just pretend that you used an umbrella or big rain hat?”

“No, no, because it didn’t happen that way.”

I guess this kid is into telling the absolute truth in his non-fiction, I thought, ashamed of what was going to be my next desperate suggestion—to pretend that he found his raincoat in the lost and found.

I had no choice but to be totally directive. Time was running out. “How about you just end the story saying you decided it was OK to get wet? Then you can join your class for recess.”

“I Disayd It waZ OK to be WET,” Eddie slowly notched onto his page that was by now a wrinkled, ripped, barely readable mess.

“Good, Eddie! You got your problem and your solution. Let’s go put your story on Ms. W’s desk, and I’ll take you to the playground.” Mission accomplished.

Over the rest of the spring semester, as the first-graders slowly developed their motor skills, I improved as a tutor and avoided over-suggesting and putting words and ideas in the children’s mouths. I tutored two other writers, one who was responding to the prompt “What are you most proud of?” (running fast and riding a bicycle without training wheels) and another to “What makes you a good friend?” (helping other friends get up when they fall down on the playground and comforting them when they are sad).

Tutoring first-graders made me appreciate how far college writers have come in their writing (and how little they squirm). Working with Eddie and his classmates taught me about the miracle and hard work of writing development—on the part of the writers themselves and their teachers. In fact, Ms. W. is my hero for working five hours a day, five days a week teaching 22 first graders to read, write, and problem-solve. College writers also struggle to interpret assignments, adjust their writing to different disciplines and instructors, and like Eddie, choose and develop topics. Yet most college writing is relatively fluent, considering that all college writers began like Eddie, slowly eking out words to their stories in the first grade, their less developed motor skills making it laborious to record all the thoughts and words their quick and

able minds are generating.

Tutoring emergent writers just starting to express their thoughts on paper moved me in ways that working with college writers does not. Part of my reaction was connected to how the first-graders expressed their gratitude; when I received 22 different painstakingly handwritten thank-you notes from six- and seven-year olds, including Eddie, telling me why they enjoyed working with me, I was really eager to tutor writing again in the second grade.

Announcements

We are delighted to welcome our new Co-Editors: Karen Gabrielle Johnson and Ted Roggenbuck. They have already been hard at work as Associate Editors, having also guest edited a *WLN* special issue on tutor education (vol. 42, nos. 1-2), and in addition, are finishing up a Digital Edited Collection on tutor education that will be available soon as an open-access publication on the *WLN* website. (Yes, they somehow manage to also be full-time faculty who direct their writing centers.)

We offer huge thanks to Kim Ballard, who has cycled off for a much-deserved rest after her years of editorial work on *WLN*. Lee Ann Glowzenski, who will continue her work as Co-Editor, is currently recovering on a “sabbatical” from *WLN* editorial work. (Shhhhhh....Lee Ann thinks she’s only doing half as much work as usual, but we know otherwise and continue to rely heavily on her editorial skills on an almost daily basis.)

Elizabeth Foster (who also has a real world job) is our absolutely vital Assistant Editor who valiantly works at keeping us organized and whose innate wisdom about all things *WLN* we rely on constantly.

Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julie Prebel are our Associate Editors who develop webinars on writing for publication in *WLN*. Their first webinar, held this last year, is now available online in the Resources section of our website, and they plan another webinar in the fall.

Chris LeCluyse, Clint Gardiner, and Karen Jackson are our Associate Editors who established a one-to-one mentor program for authors to have a mentor as they write for publication in *WLN*. All the mentors now have writers to work with, but more applicants will be paired with mentors when more mentors become available.

Our reviewers are also a dedicated, vitally important group whom

we thank profusely and have listed on the *WLN* website, in the Submit section of the website.

Muriel Harris
Editor-in-Chief

SEEKING MORE *WLN* MENTORS

The *WLN* mentor match program seeks more mentors experienced in writing center work and scholarship to assist writers developing articles for *WLN*. Mentors give feedback to writers submitting to *WLN* so that they may develop more fully formed articles for publication. Mentors actively engage in goal-setting with mentees. Mentors also work with writers who may be interested in writing, but aren't sure what to write about or where to begin. In other words, a *WLN* mentor does much the same work as tutors in a writing center. If you would like to serve as a mentor, please contact Chris LeCluyse (clecluyse@westminstercollege.edu), Clint Gardner (Clint.Gardner@slcc.edu), or Karen Keaton Jackson (kkjackson@nccu.edu).

WLN WEBINARS

If you missed the first *WLN* webinar, "Introduction to Publishing in *WLN*," it is now online and available to watch: wlnjournal.org/wln.php. To support authors interested in publishing in *WLN*, Elizabeth Kleinfeld, Sohui Lee, and Julie Prebel will be offering another webinar this year.

GET INVOLVED WITH *WLN*

Interested in serving as a reviewer? Contact Karen Gabrielle Johnson (KGJohnson@ship.edu), Ted Roggenbuck (troggenb@bloomu.edu), and Lee Ann Glowzenski <laglowzenski@gmail.com>.

Interested in contributing news, announcements, or accounts of work in your writing center to the Blog (photos welcomed)? Contact Brian Hotson <brian.hotson@smu.ca>.

Interested in guest editing a special issue on a topic of your choice? Contact Muriel Harris <harrism@purdue.edu>.

Interested in writing an article or Tutors' Column to submit to *WLN*? Check the guidelines on the website: <wlnjournal.org/submit.php>.

Conference Calendar

October 10-13, 2018: INTERNATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION
Atlanta, GA

Contact: Nikki Caswell: caswelln@ecu.edu; **conference website:** writingcenters.org/annual-conference-2.

November 1-4, 2018: NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEER TUTORING IN WRITING

South Padre Island, TX

Contact: Randall Monty: randall.monty@utrgv.edu / rgvwc17@gmail.com;
conference website: www.ncptw.info/index.php?msg=2.

November 8-9, 2018: MIDDLE EAST-NORTH AFRICA WRITING CENTER ALLIANCE

Al Ain, UAE

Contact: Elizabeth Whitehouse: Ewhitehouse@uaeu.ac.ae; **conference website:** bit.ly/menawca2018

November 9-10, 2018: SECONDARY SCHOOL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Arlington, VA

Contact: sswca.board@gmail.com; **conference website:** sswca.org.

October 23-25, 2019: LATIN AMERICAN NETWORK OF WRITING CENTERS

Guadalajara, Mexico

Contact: Minerva Ochoa: euridice@iteso.mx; **conference website:** sites.google.com/site/redlacpe/home.



WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship

WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship, published bi-monthly, from September to June, is a peer-reviewed publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC. Material can not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. Proper acknowledgment of title, author, and publication date should be included.

Editor: **Muriel Harris** (harrism@purdue.edu)
Blog Editor: **Brian Hotson** (brian.hotson@smu.ca)

Managed and Produced by

TWENTY SIX DESIGN LLC under agreement with
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC
52 Riley Road #380, Celebration, FL 34747
(866) 556-1743
www.wlnjournal.org
support@wlnjournal.org

Subscriptions, Archives, and Manuscript Submissions:

Visit www.wlnjournal.org for subscription information, free archive access, and manuscript submission guidelines.



A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER LLC.
52 Riley Road #380
Celebration, FL 34747

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
ORLANDO, FL
PERMIT 3172

