THE ECOLOGY OF PEER TUTORING: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT STAFF
IN ONE HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CENTER

By
Cynthia Dean

B.A., University of Maine at Augusta, 1998
M.A., University of Maine, 2000
M.Ed., University of Maine, 2005

A THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
(in Literacy Education)
The Graduate School
The University of Maine
May, 2010

Advisory Committee:

Julie Cheville, Associate Professor of Literacy Education, Advisor
Richard Kent, Associate Professor of Literacy Education
Jan Kristo, Professor of Literacy Education
Sarah MacKenzie, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership
A. Patricia Burnes, Associate Professor of English
On behalf of the Graduate Committee for Cynthia D. Dean, I affirm that this manuscript is the final and accepted thesis. Signatures of all committee members are on file with the Graduate School at the University of Maine, 42 Stodder Hall, Orono, Maine.

Julie Cheville, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Literacy Education, Advisor (Date)
Copyright 2010 Cynthia Dean

All Rights Reserved
LIBRARY RIGHTS STATEMENT

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Maine, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for “fair use” copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Librarian. It is understood that any copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature:

Date:
In high school writing centers that employ students as tutors, staff members can face challenges as they transition into a tutorial role. The purpose of this study was to document the challenges high school writing tutors may encounter as they transition from and between their roles as students and peer tutors.

Two conceptual frames, performance theory and social ecology, guided this study. The former framed analysis of peer tutors’ performance in the writing center while social ecology disclosed how the acquisition of identity in one context affects a peer tutor’s activity in others.

This qualitative study used a case study design and ethnographic methods. Data were collected through individual interviews, focal group interviews, document analysis, and observation. Data reduction involved the application of descriptive code frequency across the participant sample and the identification of pattern codes.

This study of how tutors in a student-staffed high school writing center perceive their tutorial identities revealed that such work did empower participants in deep and
transformative ways. This study also documented how assuming a tutorial role complicated participants’ perceptions of their roles as students, writers, and tutors. Through their tutorial training, participants came to understand alternate ways of learning and teaching. This new lens interrupted what they had previously perceived as “normal” school-based writing and writing instruction. In a role they perceived as misunderstood, tutors reported struggling to educate others about collaborative tutoring. Within the context of the tutor preparation course or the writing center, participants voiced significant reservations about clients’ and teachers’ attitudes towards writing and about what they felt was overly directive writing instruction in their school.

This study highlighted the degree to which tutorial identity empowered students and the degree to which the institutional climate constrained them. This study did not document the perspectives and/or practices of other individuals (e.g., students, teachers, administrators). Future studies could expand the participant sample to include these groups. Documenting the perspectives of all those who comprise an institution would deepen the understanding of the challenges not addressed in this study.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Jon, my husband and best friend, who was always there and always supported my work.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This journey has not been a solitary one. I could not have made it alone. While I cannot adequately thank all who have helped me, I wish to especially thank those mentioned below.

This work is dedicated to my husband, Jon. He has supported me throughout my entire academic journey. I could not have succeeded without his delicious suppers waiting for me when I returned home from a long day of teaching and attending classes, without his careful avoidance of my office when I was deep into writing, or his offer of a fresh cup of coffee to keep me going. I cannot thank him enough. He is my knight in shining armor.

I am also indebted to my children who have supported me in ways they may not even know and inspired me to be a lifelong learner. At times we were students together. As each attained an academic goal, I rejoiced and found strength in their accomplishments.

I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee for their time and effort. Each one of them has provided me with a rich and unique learning experience. Pat Burnes was my first graduate professor and taught me volumes about what it means to teach writing. It is only fitting that she is with me as I complete my educational journey.

Rich Kent encouraged me to pursue this degree and was there every step of the way as a teacher and a friend. He not only supported me in this journey, he also provided me with so many opportunities for professional growth that I’ve lost count. Suffice it to say, without Rich, I may not have made it this far.
Jan Kristo has provided me with some of the wisest advice I’ve ever been given. Her wisdom and experience have underscored my dissertation journey.

Sally MacKenzie offered me another lens into education. Her expertise in Educational Leadership has added a rich element to my graduate studies.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my committee chair, Julie Cheville. I owe her more than I can ever repay. From beginning to end, she has made herself available to me. Her honest assessment of my work has made me a better researcher and a better writer.

I also want to thank Renee Liepold, a friend and a teacher extraordinaire, who listened to me complain, cheered me on, and believed in me when I wasn’t sure I could continue.

Finally, I want to thank the writing center staff at Lakeside High School who gave me much to think about and who made me a much better teacher. Each one of you has a special place in my heart.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................... iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................. xiii

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1
   - Understanding Writing Centers .................................................................. 1
   - Problem Statement .................................................................................... 6
   - Pilot Study ................................................................................................ 11
   - Conclusion ................................................................................................ 15

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................ 17
   - Introduction .............................................................................................. 17
   - Belief and the Performance of Identity ..................................................... 21
   - From Belief to Expression: Features of Personal and Social Fronts .......... 24
   - Regions of Performance .......................................................................... 29
   - Front Stage: Writing Center as Performative Space .............................. 31
   - Back Stage: The Tutor Preparation Course as Rehearsal Space ............ 33
   - Front: Constructing a Standard ............................................................... 36
   - Underlife: Subverting Identity ................................................................. 37
   - Identity Within an Ecology: Performance In and Across Contexts ........ 38
   - Ecological Perspectives: Writing Centers and Programs ...................... 41
Conclusion……………………………………………………………………….44

3. METHODOLOGY……………………………………………………………………….45

Limitations of the Pilot Study………………………………………………...……45
Statement of Purpose………………………………………………………….…46
Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks…………………………………48
Role of the Researcher……………………………………………………...……50
Site Selection……………………………………………………………….…....54
Participants………………………………………………………………...…….58
Instruments and Data Collection…………………………………………………60

Observational Field Notes…………………………………………………..60
Focus Group Interview Protocol………………………………………………62
Individual Interview Protocol………………………………………………...64
Document Analysis………………………………………………………..64

Managing and Storing Data…………………………………………………65
Data Analysis Procedures…………………………………………………...65
Conclusion…………………………………………………………………….…68

4. RESULTS…………………………………………………………………………......69

Tutors’ Emerging Perceptions of Writing and Writing Instruction…………...…70

Perceptions of School-Based Writing: Compliance and Resentment.......70

Writing for the Teacher: “We don’t have a say.” .......................71
Writing for the Teacher: “Tell me what to do.” .........................75
Perceptions of Writing Instruction: “No room to venture out.”

Figuring it Out: “We got to where we are because we are self-taught.”

Grading as Teaching: “There’s no life behind it.”

Writing the Five-paragraph Essay: “It’s all we know.”

Perceptions of Personal Writing: “I wish I could just sit and write.”

Finding Time: “Most of the time, I have to write for assignments.”

Making Time: “Ideas just buzz around until I write them down.”

Conclusion

Tutors’ Emerging Perceptions of What it Means to Teach and Tutor

Learning to Tutor: Stepping into the Role

Course

Alternate Methods

Implementing Tutorial Training

Standards

Strategies

Defining Teaching and Tutoring

Tutoring and Teaching: “They’re totally different.”

Tutorial Role: “We can help them.”

Writing Instruction: “Teaching writing should be like tutoring.”
Appendix E. Focus Group Interviews .................................................. 169
Appendix F. Interview Questions .................................................... 170
Appendix G. Coding Dictionary ....................................................... 172
Appendix H. Coding Map ............................................................... 176
Appendix I. Frequency of Descriptive Sub Codes by Master Code ............... 177
Appendix J. Master Codes Pie Chart .................................................. 183
Appendix K. Syllabus ................................................................. 184
Appendix L. Alternative Program Training Schedule .............................. 186

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR ................................................ 187
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Participant Sample</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Focus Group Interview Topics and Participants</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.1</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Expectations</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.2</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Influence</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.3</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Identity</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.4</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Enactment</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.5</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code History</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.6</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Beliefs</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.7</td>
<td>Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Current Experiences</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure A.1. Research Questions..........................................................162
Figure D.1. Sources of Evidence..........................................................168
Figure J.1. Master Codes Pie Chart......................................................183
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Understanding Writing Centers

“Writing Centers? What’s that?”

That was the reaction of three high school students who were with me at a state conference to present their multi-genre research. This was the second time we had offered a workshop for teachers on the subject, but this time I had another purpose for asking students to accompany me. I had been reading and thinking about opening a writing center at the school in which I work, but I did not want it to be just another teacher-led enterprise that was imposed on students as something “good for them.” High school students get more than a regular dose of that kind of teacher-led reform. Since I believe in student agency in education, I wanted this to be a student-led initiative that I could assist and coach.

My friend and mentor, Rich Kent, was presenting a workshop on creating student-staffed writing centers at the same conference. I asked students to attend Dr. Kent’s workshop and as the quotation above suggests, none of them had heard of writing centers. After my brief explanation, Sally, Ashley, and Janna agreed that it sounded like something they were interested in and agreed to attend.

Approximately twenty-five teachers attended the workshop on creating student-staffed writing centers; my students were the only young people there. They were, however, active participants asking questions in the small group conversations and offering their student viewpoints. Sally, one of the veteran students on my presentation team, said, “This is a great idea, but we’ll have more trouble convincing the teachers than the students.” This statement gave me a moment’s pause; she was right. When given the
chance, students are almost always willing to embrace new concepts, but in my observations teachers often get stuck in routines that may or may not be as beneficial to student writing as they think. Sally's early observation was my first inkling that perhaps there might be challenges for student tutors in a secondary school writing center. Since these students were enthusiastic and since I felt that writing centers could foster student writing and activism, I set about to better understand writing centers and their place in high schools.

Over the next semester I worked closely with Rich Kent, the author of *Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers*, to learn about writing center policy and philosophy. I had several reasons for wanting students to staff a writing center at my school. Our professional development for that year had helped all teachers learn a common language for writing and to increase the amount of writing students were doing in content areas classes. In my capacity as a literacy coach, I had provided teachers with rationales for writing across the curriculum and with resources to help them increase the volume and quality of writing. I knew, however, that teachers might balk at having to increase the amount of time “correcting” papers and, in turn, revert to assignments that were not writing intensive. There had to be some kind of support system in place to prevent this from happening. A writing center seemed a perfect solution; student writing tutors could provide an audience for student writing, offer assistance in organizing and brainstorming, and help students through revise. A student-staffed writing center would cut down on the number of drafts teachers had to read and would provide a wider audience for student writing. My observations of writing classrooms had led me to conclude that student writing in my high school was mostly completed in isolation. Students rarely had the
opportunity for an audience beyond the teacher. In addition, the sheer volume of writing that students could produce in a writing intensive classroom often prevented teachers from providing the kind of feedback on student writing that could help students move beyond the write-it-get-a-grade-toss it paradigm. I knew from my work with Dr. Kent that student writing tutors could provide feedback to students on drafts, allowing teachers to concentrate on responding to final drafts. Instead of an audience of one – the teacher - students could have a wider forum for their work and a more collaborative network of support.

With administrative approval, a small grant, and twenty-seven peer tutors, including Sally and Ashley, the writing center opened at the end of January 2007 after all students had completed four one-hour, afterschool sessions to learn about collaborative peer tutoring. It was an exciting beginning for the student tutors who, many for the first time, were valued as experts by their peers and by some of their teachers. As Sally had predicted, students teaching students was not a situation without problems. While some teachers embraced tutors’ authority, others balked at students assuming teacher roles, and some rejected it out of hand as unnecessary and not useful. Tutors struggled with teachers who did not understand their role. In addition, some tutors did not fully comprehend the responsibility associated with their work. Some did not show up for their assigned work times while others simply edited papers for students. The first semester was a valuable learning experience that led me to believe that simply offering students a short after-school course in tutoring was not enough to support their work, to encourage collaborative tutoring, and to foster tutorial responsibility and authority. In the few
months the writing center had been open, it became clear to me that I needed to offer a formal course in tutoring in which student tutors could share experiences and in which their own writing could be nurtured. From this understanding, Writing Center English – Mentoring and Composition was conceived.

When the new school year began, nine students were enrolled in Writing Center English. While we had some returning volunteer tutors, these nine students were to become authorities on writing center policy and philosophy. As the writing center director and course instructor I provided these students with materials that oriented them to collaborative learning, provided a forum for tutor practice and role-play, supported their writing, and allowed them to share tutoring stories and to learn from those stories. The class exceeded my expectations. The students spoke about their successes and challenges; they shared writing; and they taught one another how to be collaborative tutors. As I watched these young people grow as writers and tutors, I realized that they were more than just students who worked in a writing center; they were growing in ways that I had not anticipated and in ways that had not happened the previous semester.

Looking back, I believe peer tutors were empowered and transformed by their work in the writing center and by their study of collaborative learning. Sean, a peer tutor from the inception of the center, explained this transformative growth for me:

As tutors of the writing center, we need to be firmly aware that we are not experts. We have as much to learn from the student as the student does from us. The moment we begin to patronize the students is the moment they tune us out; we’re just another teacher and a waste of their time. So I caution myself and my peers to understand the center and its purpose. Not only to understand but to advocate for
this purpose – this center for writing. It is our duty and call to aid writers, not to sit idle. And in order to ‘do our job’ we need to be prepared.

Sean’s thoughtful testimonial could have come from a teacher, but it came from a seventeen-year old. In class discussions, the other tutors echoed Sean’s sentiments. Amazed at the level of expertise, knowledge, and reflection these students exhibited, I also realized that what they had gained might cause problems in their everyday school lives. As I watched these tutors assist writers, and as I heard my colleagues express reservations about the writing center, I began to anticipate that for some teachers, tutors’ advocacy of their work might be interpreted as unduly authoritative. The tutors were enacting roles they valued and voices they honored. These roles, however, were not always appropriate in other classes where students generally were expected to view the teacher as the sole authority and where participation and work were tightly controlled.

Sean’s struggle to understand his identity and authority as a tutor was a common struggle among the writing tutors, who were not only grappling with their status as writing authorities but also questioning the definition of authority. Despite their questioning, the tutors continued to recognize the authority of teachers’ assignments and requirements even though this caused a great deal of anxiety for them. For instance, when clients brought papers with explicit teacher directives for “fixing” their work, tutors did not engage in this kind of “correcting.” Instead, tutors worked with clients to rethink papers, a stance that difference from the fix-it approach of teachers.

Writing center work had oriented tutors to the social nature of teaching and learning. They were coming to understand that knowledge was not simply acquired but was something constructed in collaboration with others. I set out to create a writing
center in which students were empowered and energized by their work and in which they could have a voice in the school community. The tension between collaborative and directive teaching, however, compelled me to help tutors reconcile their tutorial identities and the instructional demands of teachers. That seemed like a tall order but one that I was eager to embrace.

**Problem Statement**

One semester into my role as the director found me grappling with the dynamics of tutor identity in a high school setting. My observations told me that peer writing tutors were negotiating a collaborative role for which they had little experience. I wanted to understand what was creating tensions for tutors, and I wanted to provide resources that would assist them to conceptualize their identities as tutors and to respond to tensions associated with their tutoring.

When identity tensions arose, I returned to Kent's (2006a) text to understand this dynamic. Reporting tutor experience in his high school writing center, Kent (2006a) explains the empowering nature of tutor experience, “Those kids who staffed The Writing Center gained confidence, perspective, and understanding as writers and as people” (p. 5). He also noted the benefits of student-staffed writing centers to the writing classroom and the writing teacher (Kent, 2006a, pp. 6-7). While this was valuable information, it did not answer my questions about how to help tutors enact collaborative tutorial identities inconsistent with the directive models that clients and teachers were used to.

As I continued my search for literature about secondary school writing centers, I found that much of the work addressed beginning, staffing, and sustaining a center with
testimonials that could “sell” the center to administrations, teachers, and students
(Ackley, 1989; Ashley and Shafer, 2006; Barnett, 2006; Childers, Fels, and Jordan, 2004;
Elwood, Murphy, and Cardenas, 2006; Farrell, 1989; Jordan, 2006; Kent 2006a, 2006b;
Marcus and Farrell, 1989; Nicolini 2006; Silva, 2004). While this literature was valuable
for understanding functionality, it didn't illuminate the tensions and challenges tutors
might experience.

I turned to literature about college and university writing centers that addressed
the tensions in peer writing tutors’ experience with their institutions, clients, and teachers.
Because collaboration is at the heart of writing center work, and what I thought might be
the root challenge for peer tutors, I sought literature about the collaborative nature of
writing centers. I turned first to Bruffee (1984), a pioneer of collaborative learning, who
writes in this conceptual piece about the nature of knowledge and its acquisition.
Bruffee’s (1984) central argument is that students produce better writing when working
in groups rather than alone. He argues that the writing center taps into the “powerful
educative force of peer influence that has been- and largely still is – ignored” (1984, p.
4). Furthermore, he asserts, the writing center provides a social context in which peer
tutors and tutees engage in the discourse of writing. These assertions were exactly what
my writing tutors were attempting to enact in our writing center; they were discovering a
social discourse of writing. According to Bruffee, “[O]ur task must involve engaging
students in conversation at as many points in the writing process as possible…” (1984, p.
7).

Bruffee (1984) helped me to think about how a social dynamic can cause
problems for peer tutors: writing center tutoring and learning are the result of social
interaction, a give and take that is often not the encountered in classrooms. I had known that the social constructivist nature of writing center work was not the norm in high schools, but Bruffee (1984) helped me understand the challenge my students faced as they conceptualized their tutorial identities. I realized that as students in their respective classrooms, my writing tutors often had to adhere to whatever role teachers expected of learners. But as writing tutors, they had to understand and accommodate social-constructivist, collaborative tutoring in the writing center and teacher-centered teaching in their conventional classrooms. In other words, Bruffee's (1984) discussion helped me understand the tensions that tutors might be experiencing as they found themselves at the juncture where writing center philosophy and conventional teaching were suddenly bumping up against each other. I was beginning to understand that simply teaching tutors collaborative methods was not giving them the resources they needed to fully enact and sustain their tutorial identities in multiple contexts.

Wanting to know what others have written about the difficulties in enacting collaborative tutoring, I continued to look for scholars who have engaged in writing center work and who have written specifically about collaboration in writing centers. Bishop (1993) investigates collaborative and transformative talk and like Bruffee (1984), she posits that writing centers provide the space necessary for collaborative learning. Bishop (1993) underscores the value of “talking with [my emphasis] writers about writing” (1993, p. 42) collaboratively rather than directing advice about writing at them. Furthermore, she asserts that reciprocal learning between peer tutor and client understood through the concept of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development underlies collaborative work in the writing center. This concept involves the understanding that social interaction
with others precipitates the development of higher mental functions (Bishop, 1993, p. 42). While I knew the tutors in our writing center were certainly striving for the kind of social interaction and collaborative talk that could result in reciprocal learning, I also knew that enacting social learning in an institutional setting predominantly characterized by a conventional teacher-centered model could be difficult for even the most motivated tutors or teachers.

Bishop (1993) helped me understand how collaborative spaces could pose a challenge for peer writing tutors as they transition from more hierarchal classrooms. If the practice with which they are most familiar is one of directive teaching, moving to a non-directive stance is bound to cause tensions. Gillam (1994) further helped me understand this dynamic through her investigation of how theories of collaboration intersect with the practices of peer tutoring. Gillam (1994) suggests that understanding collaboration as a theoretic construct cannot only illuminate practice but also can challenge it as well. First, she argues, it is important to recognize that there are multiple models of collaboration (Bruffee, 1984; Harris, 1992; Kail & Trimbur, 1987) each with its own particular practices. Second, Gillam (1994) suggests that to better understand these numerous writing center practices, directors and tutors must understand the theoretical constructs that shape the enactment of collaboration in writing centers in order to “challenge and enlarge our understanding of practice” (1994, p. 51). She suggests that in reconciling theory and practice, the writing center can be a “fertile site for engaging in reflective practice and for generating paradoxical, contingent knowledge” (Gillam, 1994, p. 51).
James’s (1981) dated but useful conceptual piece helped me better understand the historical teacher-student relationship in terms of how it influences tutors’ definitions of teaching. It was becoming clearer to me that my tutors did not associate their work with teaching because they saw teachers as the expert giver of knowledge. Because much of the teaching they had experienced was neither social nor collaborative, they viewed tutoring as a role limited to the writing center. The risks of conceptualizing their work in this way were two fold. First, such a view did not assist tutors to fully appreciate what collaborative work could achieve in instructional contexts beyond the writing center. Second, the view rendered tutors vulnerable to the continued authority of directive approaches. Indeed, I found that my writing tutors often accepted their teachers' refusal to acknowledge their tutorial identity and authority. While they sometimes railed against this in our discussions, I recognized that they had no real alternative but to accept the status quo. James (1981) led me to want to first better understand tutors' learning histories, particularly for how those influenced their tutorial identities. Second, I realized that tutor authority and its intersection with teacher authority was a tension I needed to understand more deeply.

These early readings created more questions for me. While the authors helped me to clarify what some of the tensions and challenges might be for writing tutors and illuminated for me theoretical concepts that might be useful in beginning to understand those tensions and challenges, the major sticking point for me was that the research I had read was oriented to the college or university writing center tutor.
Pilot Study

A year and a half after attending the writing center workshop with students and a year after implementing a writing center, I conducted a pilot study. In my role as a relatively new writing center director and instructor of a writing center preparation class, I sensed that my students' roles as tutors were creating challenges and tensions for them as they transitioned from student writer to student tutor. My early reading confirmed for me the need to inquire into tutor identity through an empirical study of writing tutors in my writing center. In my year-long study of tutorial identity, I wanted to understand how students acquired, enacted, and sustained their tutorial identities as they transitioned from being one of 750 students to being a member of a small group of student writing tutors. Through observation, focus groups, and interviews, I sought to document tutors' perceptions of their transition from student writer to student tutor and to discover what, if any, challenges they were encountering. My main interest was to document tutors’ perceptions of their transition from student writer to student tutor. The questions central to my pilot study was how, in their role as writing tutors, were my students' perceptions of writing and writing instruction altered? How, if at all, did my students distinguish between teaching and tutoring? Finally, I wanted to know what influence, if any, their tutorial identities had on the identities they enacted in conventional classrooms. I believed these questions would probe tutors’ beliefs about the following challenges: conflicting conceptions of writing and writing instruction, competing definitions of teaching and tutoring, and challenges in transitioning from being an authority in the writing center to being a student in the classroom.
In my pilot study, I observed nine high school writing center tutors at the school in which I teach. Because I was interested in understanding “the social unit” of peer tutors (Merriam, 2002. p. 8), I chose to follow a case study methodology (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). To document this case, I began by collecting observational field notes and material artifacts that illuminated the practices and perspectives of the peer tutors. During the initial phase of data collection, I observed peer tutors during tutorial sessions and class discussions. I recorded field notes from these observations in order to shape my research questions. I also examined tutors’ journals and portfolios as a means to generate my interview protocol. Structured to address the transition from writer to peer writing tutor, the semi-structured interview protocol contained questions about the transition’s effect on tutors’ perceptions of their writing, teaching, and identity. After the initial phase of data collection, I selected five participants for the case study. The five were writing center tutors, as well as students enrolled in the elective course. In addition to one round of semi-structured interviews, I also conducted two focus group interviews that included the five focal students and other peer tutors in the elective course.

I audiotaped both the individual and focus group interviews. The data were transcribed and de-identified. To analyze data, I used an inductive approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) that began with an initial coding run to generate potential master and sub-codes. In a second data run, to establish internal reliability, these master and sub-codes were applied and revised as required. Once a stable set of master and sub-codes were in place, I developed a coding dictionary and coding map to insure reliability across subsequent intra-reader coding sessions. To test the external reliability of my master and sub-code definitions, I conducted two inter-reader reliability sessions involving four
research colleagues who were completely unfamiliar with my data. I used a reliability index recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and determined that initial agreement on a six-page, de-identified interview transcript measured 50%. The coding dictionary and sub-codes were subsequently revised for clarity and focus, and in a second coding run inter-reader agreement measured 71% for analysis of comparable data. I proceeded with the application of master and sub-codes across the data set.

I embarked on this study to better understand and to document the challenges high school writing tutors encountered as they transitioned between being student writers and being peer tutors. Participants shared their stories of what it means to assume, shape and enact tutorial identity and authority. Participants reflected on their writing histories and shared their changing perceptions of writing and writing instruction. In doing so, they helped me to understand how the collaborative nature of their writing center work interrupted what they had perceived as “normal” school-based writing and writing instruction. Their reports also illuminated the ways in which their authority disrupted a traditional teacher-centered stance.

My research indicated that participants enacted student-centered learning as tutors and were able to reflect about their roles as tutors. In describing their work as tutors, participants eschewed the label of teacher because in their experience, teaching was associated with directives and control. Generally, they were troubled by the ways in which their teachers exerted their authority in the classroom and struggled to understand why collaborative work was not the paradigm for all classrooms. While transitioning
back and forth between these two models of teaching and learning complicated participants’ school lives, they saw their tutorial work as valuable and a model for what writing instruction in schools could be.

My pilot study suggested to me the need to provide peer tutors with a context for examining their identities as tutors and the performative challenges they face as they transition between their work as student writers and student tutors. In other words, they needed a space in which to share their experiences, discuss their evolving roles, and reconcile the tensions with which they were confronted. Having a forum to dialogue about their experiences seemed to be of primary importance to the participants. They felt that they had had little opportunity for collegial talk in their regular classrooms.

There were clear limitations to this study. The participants were all enrolled in a tutor support class. Because I did not gather data from other tutors who were not enrolled in the course, I worried about the validity of such a study. While the study informed my practice and helped me to better understand challenges of this specific sample of tutors and suggested to me ways in which I could support their transitions, a more diverse sample, those who enroll in the class and those who do not, would provide a more valid data set from which to draw conclusions.

Another limitation of the pilot study involved my interview protocol. In the pilot study, through individual interviews, I learned how writing histories might influence tutorial identity and how notions of teaching and tutoring affect the ways in which tutors enact a tutorial stance. While providing me with much data, it was not specific enough to clearly answer my research questions. A revised and refined interview protocol will
likely yield more specific data. Put simply, the pilot study gave me only a partial story of tutorial identity.

This study expands my pilot study to involve both volunteer and course-enrolled writing tutors. To accomplish this I have revisited and reconstructed the research questions from my pilot study in order to examine the histories, present experiences, and tutor reflections on what it means to be a writing tutor and how writing tutors can reconcile tutorial identity with their student identities in conventional classrooms.

My main question in this study considers how writing tutors conceptualize their identities as tutors and writers as they transition from student-writer to student-tutor. Secondary questions that assist me in answering the main question include:

*How, if at all, is tutors' perception of writing and writing instruction altered by their transition into tutorial identities?*

*How does the transition from student/writer to writing tutor affect students understanding of what it means to teach and tutor?*

*What tensions, challenges, and or controversies might writing tutors experience as a result of their tutorial identities and how do they deal with those struggles?*

**Conclusion**

There is little research available that specifically investigates the ways in which secondary school writing tutors acquire, enact, and sustain their tutorial identities. This study will begin to bridge the gap between the rich scholarship on tutors’ experience and identities in university and college writing centers and the emerging literature that directly explores secondary school writing centers.
The key concept underlying my study is writing tutors’ struggle for identity. In secondary schools, it is uncommon for students to assume the level of responsibility and authority necessary to being a writing tutor in a student-staffed writing center. High school students are accustomed to tightly regulated, teacher-led activities within a regimented day. Understanding how high school tutors perceive their identities and the challenges, tensions, and or controversies they report will help me, as well as other writing center directors, support tutors in secondary school settings.

In addition, while the direct audience for any research into secondary school writing experience will most likely be other writing center directors, there is the potential for this research to inform school policy and influence school climate. Tutorial activity does not fit well into the culture of teacher-centered, tightly structured high schools. Research that illuminates tutorial struggle may help school officials to teaching and learning.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In seeking information about ways to assist tutors, I had looked first to literature that specifically addressed writing centers in secondary schools. What I found offered me valuable information about ways in which to begin, staff, and sustain writing centers. These resources provided a variety of frameworks and possibilities for writing center use, as well as ways to promote the center with students, teachers, and the community. Within this literature, I found a number of anecdotal excerpts that testified to the effectiveness and benefits of writing centers to tutors, clients, and schools. However, I did not find information that would assist me with understanding the struggle tutors in my high school writing center were having with the acquisition and enactment of identity.

I turned to literature that explored college and university writing tutor experience when I could not find specific literature that examined high school tutors' experience. My investigation into that body of literature focused exclusively on collaboration, as my sense was that enacting a collaborative stance was an underlying cause of tutors' struggle. The authors I read helped me to understand just how difficult it is to enact collaborative learning in general, but there was no discussion of collaborative learning in a writing center in high school. While my observations of high school tutors indicated that they were encountering some of the similar issues with which post-secondary tutors struggled, I found applying the authors' suggestions to secondary school settings plagued with problems.

Another gap in the literature was a lack of concern for the complexities of acquiring and presenting a tutorial identity. When I sought research that addressed
identity acquisition, and more importantly, the struggle tutors have as they adopted the identity of a writing tutor, I didn’t have a conceptual framework for identity. In a few articles, however, I found references to Goffman’s (1973) dramaturgical framework, which uses the concept of drama to analyze how people present themselves in daily experience. Goffman provided me the framework I needed to investigate and understand identity acquisition.

A third gap in the literature was a lack of appreciation for how tutoring in writing centers is situated by particular spatial and temporal conditions. Two constraints had complicated the implementation of collaborative practices in my writing center. First, high school writing tutors face spatial and temporal complexities different from college and university writing tutors. High schools are highly structured and regulated institutions in which students' movements are meticulously tracked throughout the day with bell schedules indicating when students may pass from class to class and with teacher-issued passes as the only way students can be released from a classroom. In addition, the school day begins and ends at the same time for all students. Second, high school students' activities are generally known among the teaching staff. If a student is a writing tutor, that tutor's teachers are fully aware of that activity. I sensed that this visibility was putting a great deal of pressure on my high school tutors because they frequently had to explain, justify, or defend their tutorial identity to a teacher who did not believe in or understand the peer writing tutor role. In post-secondary situations, those kinds of tensions are lessened by a certain amount of autonomy enjoyed by college and university tutors. Generally, post-secondary instructors are not aware of a student's tutorial identity unless the student-tutor elects to make that role known.
Tutorial identity in high schools, therefore, is not enacted in isolation or separate from institutional constraints. It takes place within the climate of control and lack of autonomy generally present in secondary schools. These aspects of the high school system can create unique challenges and tensions for the writing tutors. The very nature of collaborative work demands some independence and choice on the part of the tutor that is not often granted in school policy. Even student handbooks highlight the need for adherence to institutional regulations and direct students as to how compliance can be best accomplished. In short, high schools, unlike colleges and universities, are still deeply invested in behaviorist methods of control; constructivist spaces like writing centers are bound to cause disruptions. The temporal and spatial features that situate teaching and learning in high schools make it difficult to apply the suggestions meant for college and university situations.

Because these contextual particulars influence tutorial performances in high school, an understanding of tutorial identity must acknowledge the social system in them. In order to more fully understand tutorial identity, first, it will be important to consider the organizational contexts that are connected to tutorial performance and to document how tutors report they navigate across these contexts in a school day. Second, it also will be valuable to investigate the ways in which tutors perceive how those in and outside the writing center influence their tutorial performances. With intersecting contexts of performance in mind, I sought literature that addressed writing centers (Johnstone, 1989; Stabin, 2005) and programs (DiPardo, 1993) as ecosystems. To assist me in analyzing the contextual factors impacting the acquisition and enactment of tutorial identity, I used the
metaphor of an ecosystem to understand the context of tutorial work within the high school environment.

My interest, then, was in understanding how secondary school writing tutors conceptualized their roles as tutors as they transition from being student writers in their classrooms to being tutors in the writing center. From this primary interest, three secondary questions framed my proposed study: (1) how do participants’ writing and writing histories influence their perceptions of writing and writing instruction as tutors? (2) how does the transition from student writer to writing tutor affect participants’ understanding of what it means to teach and tutor?, and (3) what tensions, challenges and or controversies do tutors report as a result of enacting a tutorial identity? Through investigation of these questions, I analyzed participants’ self-reported experiences in order to gain an understanding of what they know and believe about their transitions from writer to tutor.

In this chapter I draw on four areas in the literature to establish my conceptual framework for the study of tutorial identity. First, I summarize two concepts in Goffman's (1973) dramaturgical theory. Following a discussion of “front” and “region”, I present the sociological concept of “underlife” as a way to understand how certain performances of identity disrupt audience expectations. As I will show, Goffman's key concepts recognize the performative challenges secondary writing tutors face as they acquire a tutorial identity in the distinct context of activity in a single high school.

Second, I offer a review of writing center literature that has drawn upon Goffman's (1973) dramaturgical metaphor to (a) address the writing center as performative space, (b) to document tutor preparation courses as backstage rehearsal
sites, to (c) investigate the construction of a front, and to (d) examine underlife
performance in which one disrupts institutional expectations for how one should act.

Third, I summarize principles of ecological systems theory, suggesting how the
perspective has been used to analyze writing programs and centers. Drawn from biology,
ecological systems theory assisted me to understand the various contexts in a single high
school that participants report as influential in their acquisition of a tutorial identity.
While many composition scholars have explored the ways in which writing and writing
centers are situated contextually, there are only a few who use ecological systems theory
to situate their analyses.

Belief and the Performance of Identity

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1973) uses the metaphor
of performance and the language of the theater to explain the social behavior of
individuals and groups. Goffman considers one’s activity in any social setting as a
presentation enacted for an audience that, in turn, judges that performance to be
believable or not. To order to engage in a particular performance, “an individual chooses
a part from a range of possible scripts” (Goffman, 1973, p. 15). Goffman’s basic premise
is that in any context one is always engaged in performance. As Goffman (1973)
explains:

A performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given
occasion, which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.

Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference,
we may refer to those who contribute the other performances as the audience,
observers, or ex-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is
unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a ‘part or ‘routine’ (pp. 15-16).

Goffman’s (1973) conceptual framework offers a distinct lens into the complex human interactions that comprise the performance of identity. The concept of performance and its associated theatrical dimensions discloses the ways in which tutors acquire scripts for the performance of identity. In order to establish the relevance of this framework to my research questions, a more thorough summary of terms is necessary.

Central to Goffman's (1973) concept of performance is “impression management” which involves the ways in which an individual manages a role according to how he or she is perceived by others. In any context an individual must decide how best to manage and express a performance of identity that will satisfy the expectations of the audience. The performer must understand the kinds of supports or distractions he will encounter in the performance space and decide how to assimilate or resist those features in his or her presentation of self. Ultimately the goal of self-presentation is to offer the audience an impression that is consistent with their expectations for performance in the space.

Goffman (1973) explains:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (p. 17).

For Goffman (1973) the aspects of “impression management” inform the ways in which an individual enacts or expresses the identity expected of a particular role. As I thought
about the shifting demands on impression management writing center tutors encounter in contexts of performance in and beyond the writing center, I realized that concern for “impression management” would orient me to two key tensions. First, the concept would assist me to document tutors’ perceived challenges in acquiring and enacting a collaborative tutorial identity in the writing center. Second, the concept would orient me to the tensions associated with sustaining a collaborative identity in other contexts of the high school.

Another aspect of performance that is relevant to my investigation into tutorial identity is the belief system that an individual brings to the performance. Goffman (1973) makes a distinction between a “sincere performance,” in which the actor is thoroughly convinced the performance he or she presents is free from pretense (not disingenuous, altered, or false in any way), and a “cynical performance” in which the actor feigns an identity to achieve his or her motives (p. 17). In a “cynical performance” an individual manages her impression with an appreciation for what may be gained by presenting him or herself in a particular way. It may be that the actor feels that he or she must present a performance that he or she thinks the audience expects. Or, the actor may simply be looking to advance a personal agenda (Goffman, 1973). Goffman (1973) indicates, however, that the ways in which an actor performs an identity shifts according to the particular situation. A performer may move from a cynical to sincere association in a single performance or across performances in a single space. Goffman (1973) offers the example of an army recruit who follows orders (not because he wishes to but because he seeks to avoid punishment), but then, over time, adopts the organizational rules (because he has come to believe them) (p. 19). Conversely, one's association may shift from
sincere to cynical in the same fashion. Put simply, the performance of identity is not static but shifts according to the actor’s motives and feelings about his or her role. According to Goffman (1973), “sincere and cynical performances take their place at opposite ends of a continuum of behaviors along which performers move. It is rare that a performer adopts a fixed position” (p. 17).

The distinction between sincere and cynical performances assisted me to understand how tutors enact their identities as tutors. In my student-staffed writing center, tutors are asked to adopt a collaborative stance to be peers not teachers. This performative role contrasts to the assumptions about instruction that they have internalized from their performances as learners. In my pilot study, tutors in my writing center reported that writing in classrooms was often a solitary endeavor with teachers’ assistance often limited to grades, remarks, or corrections on a paper. In varying degrees, participants in the pilot study reported a discomfort with directive teaching and a corresponding practice of performing cynically. They also indicated an initial understanding of tutoring as a remedial activity for those who “can’t write” (according to a teacher’s instructions) and thus an activity that requires supplemental teaching. Consensus among participants that collaborative tutorial practices were an effective way to support peers’ writing suggested the degree to which they viewed their performances in the writing center as sincere.

**From Belief to Expression: Features of Personal and Social Fronts**

Performance encompasses a range of behaviors and actions that occur before a particular audience (Goffman, 1973). However, before one can present a self to an audience, she or he must envision an identity that is compatible with the role sanctioned
in that space. Goffman (1973) uses “front” to understand how one presents the self. The concept of front brings a performer’s role, interactions and audience expectations together as a unified performance and is demonstrated through three components: setting, appearance, and manner. Goffman (1973) makes a distinction between personal front and social front. A social front acts as a “collective concept” that includes the features of setting, appearance, and manner (Goffman, 1973). Coherence among the three features of a front creates the social front, a standard from which the audience can judge a performance. The personal front refers to the ways in which a performer expresses or manages the three features in a given performance. For example, according to Goffman (1973), aspects of personal front might include “gestures, facial expressions, age, posture, speech patterns, clothing, etc.” (p. 24).

One cannot appreciate the concept of “front” apart from setting, the physical space in which performances are situated. As in any theatrical performance, the presentation of self in everyday life involves props such as furniture, lighting, wall treatments, music, or any other physical items that support certain performances more than others. The physical features of a setting, particularly in institutions like schools, are generally fixed. As a result, students are expected to present a front that is respectful of what the setting does and does not allow. Goffman (1973) explains:

A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it (p. 22).
Settings are important to presenting a front because they frame what is and is not possible in a performance space. In educational institutions, teachers may move in and out of particular classrooms and the student population may shift, but the elements of the space (walls, seating, lighting, etc.) remain fixed. In addition, students are often expected to employ elements of the settings to present a front that is passive. The original site of the writing center documented in this study was the library. The first generation of peer tutors was expected to present a front consistent with the expectations in that space. Because the library space afforded to the tutors was soon needed for teachers and students, the tutors were evicted from the library setting.

The second authorized location was a sub-section of the math lab. This geographic location was outside the main building in a portable classroom. Here, tutors were asked to enact collaborative tutorial identities in a setting inconsistent with that performance. Often times the teacher-directed instruction for math students and the collaborative conversations in writing tutorials conflicted. The math teacher indicated that it was difficult to instruct with tutorial conversations going on. Tutors tried to keep the volume of their conversations low but found it difficult to do so. Because of these conflicting performances the headmaster felt that it would be best for the space to be dedicated exclusively to math assistance and relocated the writing center. The third setting documented in this study was a former storage room in another outbuilding. With each geographic move the writing center was further dislocated from more privileged settings that frame content area instruction and further from an audience of potential clients. In addition, the continual relocation of the writing center interrupted the
establishment of a normalized front for writing tutors and for students who required their assistance.

Static qualities of a geographic performance site, however, represent but one component of an individual’s front. The signs associated with a particular performer in a particular setting are a second component. Goffman’s (1973) use of sign is in line with semiotic theory and considers the sign any object, word, image, or sound that holds meaning for an audience. A sign may include what one says, how one moves, and/or how one’s body displays itself (size, appearance, race-ethnicity, facial expression). The semiotic aspects of an individual’s front are controlled by the actor but are influenced by what is possible in the setting.

Goffman (1973) divides the semiotic, or signifying, aspects of front into two features: appearance and manner (p. 24). “Appearance” encompasses the signs that indicate a performer's social status and or activity status and will elicit audience responses consistent with the identity role associated with that particular appearance (Goffman, 1973). For example, clothing is often an indicator of social status and as a feature of appearance can result in an audience’s particular reaction. “Manner” consists of non-linguistic expressive features (Goffman, 1973). Facial expressions that denote shyness or aggression represent a manner that would signal a particular kind of front. In any setting an audience generally expects a unified front in which aspects of setting, appearance, and manner are consistent.

Conflict can occur when the linguistic and expressive signs a performer uses to present a front differ from the signs that usually characterize the setting. Assisting tutors to present a collaborative front can be problematic in geographical settings where the
history of sign use (i.e., ways of talking, writing, moving) is didactic. The setting of the
math lab was problematic for tutors because the semiotic elements of coaching,
conversation, and collaboration were incompatible with the signs associated with the
directive math instruction.

When setting, appearance, and manner are enacted in similar and consistent ways,
however, an individual’s front fulfills expectations and satisfies an audience's general
perception of the particular role. Goffman (1973) refers to this collective understanding
of the front required in a particular setting as the social front:

… a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract
stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning
and stability apart from the specific tasks that happen at the time to be
performed in its name. The front becomes a ‘collective representation’ of
expectations that takes on a meaning apart from the specific tasks, which happen
to be performed in its name (p. 27).

An established social front limits individuals in a single setting to a standardized
performance that allows little variation in how one talks, gestures, moves, or interacts.
The social front dictates that participants present themselves according to a pre-conceived
script. Whether a social front involves a student’s presentation of a self in the classroom
or a tutor’s performance in a writing center, expectations sanction a particular kind of
social front. In the latter setting, one’s appearance and manner were expected by tutorial
peers and by me to support collaborative engagement with clients.

Front establishes social identity and must meet audience expectations if an
individual is to experience reward. In the school setting noted above, the social front that
tutors cultivated in the writing center was inconsistent with the social front expected of students in the library and math lab. While writing tutors understood and valued collaborative tutoring, this social front was not always acceptable to others. (Goffman, 1973) suggests how audience resistance to the social front of a performer often determines its success. If the audience doesn’t understand or accept a personal or social front, the performance usually fails.

Understanding how the multiple components of a front work in concert to effect a believable performance helped me realize the difficulty of acquiring and enacting a tutorial identity in an institution generally unfamiliar with peer writing tutor identity. Audience expectations may differ from the social front projected by the tutors. Based on their histories in directive classrooms, tutors may struggle to acquire the social front that demands collaborative activity. Any number of problems in the presentation of self can occur. Identity acquisition and its associated challenges, therefore, can be understood through the concept of front and the difficult task of establishing and uniting the three features – setting, manner and appearance.

**Regions of Performance**

As noted, personal and social fronts are performed in particular geographical settings. Within a single setting Goffman (1973) notes there are two regions of performance that include the front and back regions. The front stage is the region in which an individual presents his or her personal or social front. On the front stage, an individual is most visible to his or her audience and any deviation from the front may have negative consequences.
In the back region, the performance can be quite different from an individual’s official presentation of self on the front stage. Since back stage behavior takes place “out of sight and/or earshot” of an audience, performers may enact a presentation of self that deviates from the one expected on the front stage. They can typically do so with less risk of rejection. Goffman (1973) describes the back stage region as a place where:

…less than competent performers are offered advice or dropped from the performance, and performers generally ‘relax, drop his [or her] front, forego speaking lines, and step out of character’ (p. 112).

In the back region a performer can rehearse, modify, or reject aspects of the performance she or he enacts in the front region. In a single setting, performers may move between front and back stage regions. In the setting of my student-staffed writing center, tutors do not continually occupy a front stage region. Front stage performance occurs when a client arrives for assistance. At that time the tutors present the expected social front of a tutor and follow the script associated with collaborative assistance. However, when that client exits the center, tutors move from front to back stage. In this region of performance, tutors retreat from other tutors occupying the front stage in order to share experiences and engage in other tasks, some of which may not be associated with their tutorial identity. For example, tutors may complete homework, talk casually with other tutors, or engage in personal tasks. When, however, an official audience is present, those back region activities are suppressed or hidden in order to present the official front of peer writing tutor.

An ancillary concept central to this study is Goffman's (1961) concept of “underlife.” Underlife takes into consideration the often subversive behaviors of
performers. While the concept of back stage performance acknowledges activity that may violate audience expectation, it does not account for those performers who assume a role on the front stage that purposefully challenges or resist what is expected of them on that stage. The sociological concept of “underlife” takes into consideration those players who covertly seek to undercut the expected fronts in a performance that occurs before an audience (Goffman, 1961).

The concept of underlife positioned me to understand how one’s sincere identification with collaborative tutoring might lead them to covertly resist elements of the passive performance expected of them in the classroom. How, in other words, might a tutor’s identification with a collaborative role in the writing center create new challenges for them as a student?

In summary, Goffman's (1973) dramaturgical approach and his concept of underlife offered me a conceptual framework for documenting self-presentation in varied settings within a single setting. It provided me a frame for describing how tutors enact their performative roles in and beyond the writing center, how they present a social front to their clients, and how their tutorial identities affect their relationship with others within the institution. This framework also assisted me to consider both the normalizing and subversive activities that may characterize the enactment of a tutorial identity in multiple settings.

**Front Stage: Writing Center as Performative Space**

Others have appropriated Goffman's conceptual framework in order to analyze and theorize writing center work. Most notably, Boquet's (2000) conceptual piece examines the “tug-of-war” that often takes place when students accept the role of tutor.
Using the concept of idealization, she argues, “as tutors, our performers are stepping into a role for which an ideal already exists” (Boquet, 2000, p. 18). Boquet argues that writing center scholarship has engaged in extensive discussions of what the role of writing tutor entails and in doing so has created a performative role and established a front for tutors, instead of with tutors. In other words, tutorial performance has been scripted by scholarship, and, with few exceptions, tutors have had little opportunity to contribute to that script. Boquet (2000) questions whether this idealized role can actually be enacted. She offers a dramaturgical reading of several writing center performances and concludes that while a team of writing center tutors must be united to form a social front, the ways in which individual tutors enact their roles is often quite different. Boquet (2000) suggests that Goffman's (1973) framework grew out of a modernist perspective of fixed and static roles. She argues that in this post-modern period boundaries between front stage and back stage have become blurred. Boquet (2000) suggests that tensions arise as tutors try to reconcile their tutorial identities with their other performative roles they manage.

Boquet’s (2000) postmodern reading of Goffman helped me think about the ways in which secondary school writing tutors can resist the scripted roles they acquire. As she suggests, tutors do have to band together as a team to achieve shared goals, however, they must also act in distinctly individual ways as tutors and students. Bouquet’s (2000) assertion complicates the neat division of roles and regions of performance that Goffman (1973) presents. If, as Bouquet (2000) suggests, the boundaries between regions of performance are blurring, then writing tutors may find it difficult to separate their identities as tutors from those as students, a challenge with unique tensions.
The impact of audience on the performative role of a peer tutor cannot be underestimated. Peer tutors have to perform in ways that do not turn their audiences (clients, teachers, administration) away. Thonus (2001) conducted an empirical study of writing centers in which she investigated the interactions among “participants” (teacher, tutor, and tutee) in order to document the expectations [that] are enacted in tutorial conversations and in self-reported role perceptions” (p. 61). To ground her study, she conceptualizes a tutor’s role this way: “The role of tutor is heavily contextualized…and any self-definition cannot be divorced from institutional identity” (Thonus, 2001, p. 59). With that conception in mind, Thonus used ethnographic methods to document the work of seven undergraduate tutees, their tutors, and their course instructors. She concluded:

Little unanimity exists in perceptions of the tutor role by members of the tutorial ‘triangle’… and the results of the study corroborate anecdotal observations by writing center personnel and researcher that the tutor’s role must be redefined and renegotiated in each interaction (p. 77).

As Thonus (2001) suggests, “tutor” is a complicated and contextualized role that is impacted by and defined through many kinds of interactions. Even though writing center tutors may envision an ideal performance, the particular audience to which they play will shape that performance.

**Backstage: The Tutor Preparation Course as a Rehearsal Space**

Generally in tutoring courses, instructors and coaches encourage tutors to be active participants in shaping tutorial identity and offer ways in which to do so. In an empirical study, Dinitz and Kiedaisch (2003) sought to discover “how tutors interact with theory, how it shapes their tutoring, and how their voices might contribute to that theory”
(p. 64). The authors examined three tutors’ writing journals that were compiled during a year-long tutoring course associated with a writing center. Analyzing the journals, the researchers conclude that participants’ interactions with theory shaped their tutorial identities. Furthermore, they suggest that when tutors are treated as professionals and members of a discourse community that engages theoretically, they draw from that theory, contribute to existing theory, and create new theory together (Dinitz and Kiedaisch, 2003). As teachers of the year-long course, Dinitz and Kiedaisch (2003) report that they:

…encourage[d] tutors to engage with writing center theory as a way to invite them to become part of the scholarly conversation about writing centers,…ask[ing] them to respond in weekly journals to theory, eventually writing a proposal for a conference presentation or a piece for a wider audience (p. 64).

Through back stage activities associated with a tutoring course, participants in this study rehearsed the front of a writing center professional. Dinitz and Kiedaisch (2003) assisted me to understand that the more actively writing tutors are involved in the professional conversation about their roles, the more effective their performances may be.

In a conceptual article Vandenburg (1999) articulates a view consistent with Dinitz and Kiedaisch’s (2003) findings, namely that tutors should engage challenge and create writing center theory. Vandenburg (1999), however, argues that “a professionalizing approach [often] constructs tutors as listeners to writing center theory” (p. 64) without the opportunity to be participants in the professional conversation. He suggests that by creating “listeners to writing center theory” peer training programs
embroil tutors in the pedagogical debates that swirl through writing center literature without giving them a voice in their own work. Vandenburg (1999) argues for a training program that adopts a more egalitarian sharing of practice and theory between writing center professionals and peer tutors. Dinitz and Kiedaisch (2003) and Vandenburg (1999) argue for a revision of the tutor script and suggest that rehearsal can be accomplished in the backstage that is the tutor preparation course.

Hemmeter (1994) agrees that back stage performances are central to acquiring tutorial roles. He documents the backstage activity of storytelling he employs to help tutors in his writing center course to negotiate issues of tutorial authority in order to overcome performance anxiety. Course meetings are “a rehearsal stage allowing them to recreate themselves as narrator and/or narratee of past conferences” (Hemmeter, 1994, p. 37). Hemmeter (1994) argues that new tutors often believe they are taking on the role of an expert and struggle with how to perform that role. By providing space to role-play, novice tutors' belief that they must somehow be the authority is diffused. Hemmeter (1994) suggests that by sharing narratives of their tutorial experiences, tutors come to realize that there are multiple ways for them to interact with their audience and multiple ways to enact their identities.

Storytelling as a way to shape performative roles is also the focus of Welch's (2002) empirical study. The researcher observed course meetings involving writing center tutors, examined tutors' journals and logs, and interviewed tutors enrolled in two training courses. Welch’s focus was the narratives tutors captured and exchanged in the acquisition of their identities. Welch (2002) concludes that the course she offered to tutors provided a transitional space where tutors were encouraged to tell the “unofficial
stories” of tutoring; to explore how those stories intersect or bump up against the master narratives of the institution or writing centers in general; and to question, interpret, and complicate the stories in order to make sense of the difficult work of creating a tutorial identity (p. 245).

**Front: Constructing a Standard**

Another important impact on the acquisition of a tutorial identity is the label assigned to the role: peer tutor. The label of peer tutor is part of a social front that seems pretty straightforward to those in the writing center business: a peer tutor is a student who supports another student in the writing process and through collaborative conversation the student-writer and the peer tutor gain knowledge and expertise. The idealization of peer tutoring, however, does not always reflect the realities of a tutor’s performance. In my own direction of a writing center, I have found that the social front of writing center tutors can become institutionalized according to audience beliefs and may not be true to the actual tasks that occur in a tutorial (Goffman, 1973). For example, clients often believe a tutorial front involves directive feedback when the actual performance is collaborative and assistive. Many of the stereotyped expectations for tutorial identity involve preconceived definitions of “peer tutor.” In an empirical article, Trimbur (1987) wonders if “peer tutor” is actually a “contradiction of terms” (p. 24). He argues that peers elevated to tutor/teacher status are no longer peers and often resort to exercising the traditional role and authority associated with a teacher performance. This performative shift, however, creates identity tensions for tutors: are they student (peer) or tutor (teacher)? Trimbur (1987) suggests that training courses have the “unique responsibility to help tutors negotiate this crisis [of conflict] and put the terms peer and tutor together in
practical and meaningful ways” (author's emphasis, p. 24). Trimbur (1987) suggests that while tutors must learn the role of collaborative peer, they also must learn the role of writing instructor. However, he also warns that treating tutors like “little professors” blurs the lines of community and suggests that “we need to treat tutors as students, not as paraprofessionals or pre-professionals and to recognize that their community is not necessarily ours” (p. 27). Trimbur's (1987) warning suggests some kind of “in-between” role for tutors in which they build dual and shifting fronts for performances in which they adhere to a student front when faced with an audience of writing instructors and a more teacherly front when faced with an audience of clients.

Runciman's (1990) conceptual piece also explores peer tutors’ identity tensions. He explores the history of tutoring in British and American institutions and concurs with Trimbur's (1987) suggestion that tutors feel they must assume the role of teacher as part of their tutorial identities, but he also reminds us that this may occur because “the premises of tutoring as remedial is deeply ingrained in the American educational system” (Runciman, 1990, p. 28). The author suggests the combination of remedial and hierarchal labels works against the desired performative stance (front) of collaborative writing center work. In order to counter audience perceptions of writing center work as remedial and hierarchal, he advocates for a renaming of the role for tutors to “assistant, consultant, or fellow” (p. 30).

**Underlife: Subverting Identity**

As noted, the concept of underlife accounts for those performers who purposefully seek to disrupt a particular role in a particular situation and or reshape audience perception. Often underlife activities occur in the back stage region as
performers rehearse and adjust performances. Beech (2007) illustrates how the concept of “underlife” can be applied to practices meant to disrupt institutional definitions of the writing center and its tutors. In a conceptual article, she applies the concept of underlife to illustrate the actions she took as director of a writing center to effect a change in the perception of the writing center and tutorial identity through a critical reading and revising of writing center documents. According to Beech (2007),

…if identity is always an interactive process, as Goffman convincingly argues, then it seems wise for us to engage in strategic interaction: to work more purposefully at perception management through a complex range of mutually supportive actions, words, and documents (p. 198).

Beech’s perception management involved the revision of writing center documents that promote and explain the writing center to its audience (i.e., brochures, promotional materials, signs). The documents were revised to better reflect the social front she and the tutors wished to present. Her goal in revising her writing center documents was to move colleagues' perceptions from restricted notions of tutors as editors, proofreaders, and fixers to more complex/ideal roles of tutors as consultants, peers, and intellectuals (Beech, 2007). In effect, promotional materials made public a collaborative tutoring identity that had formerly existed as underlife activity in her institution.

**Identity within an Ecology: Performance In and Across Contexts**

Performance theory has assisted me to understand the ways in which tutors acquire and enact their tutorial identities. However, exploring identity means more than presenting a front in a single context. It means considering the performance of identity from an ecological context. Ecology in its original definition is the study of the
relationships between organisms and their environment (van Lier, 1997). Grounded in the biological sciences, the concept of ecology is most often associated with the study of the natural environment and how various biological organisms function given environmental conditions that influence their activity. The survival of biological organisms largely depends on their capacity to adapt to environmental challenges. From a biological perspective, ecosystems depend on the synergistic relation of biological organisms and environmental conditions. A report on the ecosystem of fisheries outlines the characteristics of a biological ecosystem:

[1] An ecosystem is a very complex entity with many interactive components.... [2] Ecosystems are defined at a wide range of scales of observation....[3] Ecosystems are dynamic, composite entities within which large quantities of matter, energy, and information flow, within and between components....[4] The functioning of an ecosystem results from the organization of its species communities [with each] population having their own dynamics... (Garcia, Zerbi, Aliaume, Do Chi, & Lasserre, 2003, pp. 7-8).

The four characteristics of a biological ecosystem presented in this definition - interactive entities, bounded systems, relationships of and between components, and community dynamics – are also applicable to social ecosystems. A key concept from ecology used in the study of social ecosystems is the role of human activity. The ways in which members of an ecosystem interact define and shape the environment of the ecosystem as well as the ways in which member roles are understood. In other words, the performance of identity is shaped by the ways in which a participant engages with others in and across contexts in the ecosystem. The “nested” contexts of a secondary school ecosystem consist
of distinct yet related spheres of social activity. One cannot fully understand activity in a single sphere without considering how its situated performances are compatible with or disrupt performances in other spheres. In this proposed study, the performance of identity, in this case within the context of the writing center, therefore, cannot be understood without attending to the contexts in which it is “nested” (DiPardo, 1993).

Garcia, Zerbi, Aliaume, Do Chi, & Lasserre (2003) explain the quality of “nested” this way: “Ecosystems defined at a given geographical and functional scale are therefore nested within larger ones and contain smaller ones with which they exchange matter and information” (p. 7). For the purposes of understanding the contextual aspects of the performance of tutorial identity, I limited this study to one high school within which reside various spheres of performance that include, for example, the classroom, the lunch room, the library, and the writing center. Each sphere necessitates a particular front that may or may not be compatible with other spheres. From an ecological perspective, I was interested not just in how participants perceived the challenges of acquiring and enacting a tutorial identity in the writing center but also how they perceived that identity in relation to performance demands in other contexts. Put simply, to what extent did they perceive these contexts as facilitating or disrupting their capacity to sustain a tutorial identity across the school day?

An ecological perspective is thus grounded in studying how activity occurs in and across contexts that form a system. The performative space of the writing center is connected to other contexts that combine to form the high school. From an ecological perspective, Dobrin (2002) discusses the identity of writers this way:
When we question the construction of identity, we must include a stronger sense of physical place when we contend that identity comes from other places, that we know ourselves through the surrounding world (p. 12).

Although Dobrin (2002) conceptualizes the identity of a writer as opposed to a tutor, his suggestion is relevant to this study. Tutorial identity cannot be effectively studied without considering how tutorial performances shape and are shaped by other contexts within the ecosystem.

**Ecological Perspectives: Writing Centers and Programs**

While the concept of ecology has been extended from biological systems to social systems, few authors have appropriated ecology as a lens for studying writing centers or writing programs. In this section, I present scholarship that applied the concepts of ecology in three distinct ways. DiPardo (1993) conducted an empirical study of a writing program, documenting its impact on diverse university students. She suggests there are complexities and tensions associated with promoting educational equity in a distinct academic program. Despite the complexities, as DiPardo’s (1993) title suggests, writing ability is a “kind of passport” for students. As a result, such special programs are the vehicles for fostering the writing skills central to academic success. While DiPardo (1993) does not use the term ecology, her use of Cazden's (1988) term “nested contexts,” a concept that has also been used in reference to biological ecologies (Garcia, Zerbi, Aliaume, Do Chi, & Lasserre, 2003), suggests an ecological framework. DiPardo’s (1993) participants include members from the “nested contexts” of campus administration, writing program administrators and staff, course instructors, group leaders, and focal students. The underlying principle in DiPardo's (1993) investigation is
that in order to understand one context of a system, in this case the challenges of instituting an adjunct-staffed writing program as a way to meet the challenges of diverse student writing, it is necessary to investigate how the entire system influences and is influenced by that particular context. In studying the ecology in which the writing program was situated rather than studying the writing program alone, DiPardo (1993) documented systemic tensions that would have otherwise been invisible. Similarly, in the study reported here, I considered how peer tutors perceived their performance in and across school contexts that influenced their work as tutor, student, and writer.

Stabin (2005) uses an ecological lens to describe the experiences of novice peer writing tutors at a community college. In this empirical study the author seeks to document the roles for peer writing tutors and how those tutors understand their roles. To investigate tutorial roles, she explores tutors’ “negotiations with issues of identity, literacy, and difference” (Stabin, 2005, p. iv). Her participants include seventeen tutors and two faculty members affiliated with the writing center. Through observation, individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis she concludes, “there is a complex and evolving set of relationships involving a tutor’s ideas about writing, about what constitutes difference and about tutoring and the writing center” (Stabin, 2005, p. v). Stabin (2005) suggests these relationships can best be understood through the metaphor of a writing center as an ecosystem. Her study focuses exclusively on the workings within the writing center and how the multiple forces within the center shape what happens there. She acknowledges that events outside the center do shape how the center and its workers are defined, but limits her investigation to writing center activity.
Johnstone (1989) applies an ecology metaphor to the “nested context” of a writing tutorial. In this case study, she examines the writings produced by one tutor as part of a tutor preparation course. Johnstone’s (1989) purpose was to “show how an ecological model of social interaction can guide the study of writing produced in connection with tutoring” (p. 52). As part of the tutor preparation course, tutors took part in a writing workshop in which they tutored one another to produce models of writing that would be used in assisting other tutors in their work with clients. Johnstone chose one “tutor-client” assignment to examine. Citing Cooper’s (1986) work in applying the concept of ecology to writing, Johnstone (1989) suggests that the concept of ecology can also be applied to a writing tutorial. She explains, “Writing tutorials are a good place for the study of social ecologies because they are small, visible groups and because the people who make them up learn from one another” (Johnstone, 1989, p. 55). She applies the ecology metaphor at a micro level to describe the social interactions that influence the participants in the ecosystem of the writing tutorial and concludes that the contexts in which these papers were written were constructed “by individual acts of writing” (Johnstone, 1989, p. 55). In other words the acts of writing and rewriting through acceptance of and resistance to tutorial influence shaped and influenced the written product as well as the writer and tutor. Johnstone’s (1989) study supports that idea that in order to fully understand one aspect of a system, one must also explore the contexts that impact that system. Johnstone’s (1993) study demonstrates the effect of “overlapping social systems of writing workshop and tutorial, the forms and purposes of texts, and the roles and expectations of writers and readers developed in a dialectic pattern of response” (p. 51).
In summary, there are few examples of research that use an ecological metaphor to specifically examine writing center dynamics. Those reported here, however, helped me to think about the various ways an ecosystem can be defined and studied. Though Stabin (2005) and Johnstone (1989) limit their studies to specific ecologies, they acknowledge that an ecosystem is the confluence of multiple influences and thus support DiPardo's (1993) argument that in order to understand specific aspects of an ecosystem, one must understand “the contexts that shape and define them” (p. 10). Applying an ecology metaphor to my study, therefore, takes into account the many elements, events, activities, and processes that influence tutorial performance across the contexts of a high school.

**Conclusion**

The literature reviewed here demonstrates that tutorial identity is not static and cannot be dictated by a syllabus, handbook, or lecture. Rather identity is constructed through back and front stage, performance, backstage activities, underlife practices, and audience interactions. Writing center directors and those interested in writing center work have attempted to rewrite the performance script for tutors since the inception of formal writing centers and will most likely continue to do so. Viewing tutors’ performances through Goffman's (1973) dramaturgical lens has helped me clarify the difficulties and tensions inherent in constructing, enacting, and sustaining a tutorial role in my high school, where tutoring has long been associated with remediation not collaboration.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

My journey to this dissertation project began over two years ago when I instituted a student-staffed writing center at the school in which I teach. Simultaneously, I was enrolled in a year-long class in qualitative research and finishing my final year of course work for my dissertation studies. This constellation of events created the perfect setting for undertaking a pilot study for my eventual dissertation. Conducting a qualitative study of the newly established writing center seemed an excellent opportunity to better understand its dynamics. As my initial groundwork progressed, I realized that the heartbeat of the writing center was the students who worked there. Each student-tutor possessed a rich history of ideas about writing, writing instruction, teaching, and tutoring. By establishing a writing center and providing students with information about collaborative tutoring, I had given them an opportunity to expand from student to student-tutor, a role new to this particular high school. As I listened to and observed these new student-tutors, I sensed that their new role as tutors created certain challenges and tensions. What I had envisioned as a teacher-inquiry project into writing centers in high school led to this investigation of identity issues that tutors associated with their work in a high school writing center.

Limitations of the Pilot Study

I began the pilot study with a participant sample of nine tutors, all of whom were enrolled in a tutor-preparation course. From the nine secondary informants, five were selected as primary informants. My main interest was to document tutors’ perceptions of their transition from student writer to student tutor. The questions central to my pilot study was how, in their role as writing tutors, were my students' perceptions of writing
and writing instruction altered? How, if at all, did my students distinguish between teaching and tutoring? Finally, I wanted to know what influence, if any, their tutorial identities had on the identities they enacted in conventional classrooms. While the pilot study yielded interesting results involving how students acquired and enacted their tutorial identities, it did not fully explore the dynamics associated with acquiring, enacting, and sustaining a tutorial identity in a high school setting. At the time of the study, there were seven students who worked as tutors in the writing center and were not enrolled in the credited class. For logistical reasons, the pilot study did not include any of those students.

Statement of Purpose

This study expands the participant sample of the pilot study to include both those who enrolled in the tutor preparation course and those who completed alternate orientation programs for which they did not receive credit. I refer to the latter group of students as volunteers. There are clear distinctions between these two groups of tutors. Volunteer tutors, because of scheduling constraints, were not able to enroll in the tutor preparation class. Most in this group attended after-school meetings to learn tutoring skills. Once they completed the orientation, they generally worked as apprentices with a veteran tutor in the writing center to complete their training. Volunteers, who were unable to stay after school, completed the same readings and activities of the after-school program in an independent study with me or another tutor. Those students who are enrolled in the tutor preparation course have a scheduled block of time in which they meet throughout the academic year. During this academic block they share experiences; engage in readings about writing centers, composition, and tutoring; and write
extensively. Each trimester they produce a portfolio of expressive and transactional writing (Britton, 1970). Meetings that include both groups of tutors are scheduled after school once a month. Including both groups in the sample proved important to fully disclosing the dynamics of tutorial identity.

This study also refined the interview protocol from the pilot study to include more specific sub-questions. In order to refine the research further, the research questions were honed to anticipate tensions impacting tutorial identity. My primary research question, however, remained essentially the same: How do peer writing tutors in one secondary school writing center conceptualize their identities as tutors and writers as they transition from student-writer to student-tutor? To help me answer that main question, I constructed three sub-questions. First, I wanted to understand how the transition from student-writer to student-tutor affects participants’ perceptions of writing and writing instruction. This sub-question encompassed tutors’ perceptions of the influence of their writing histories, tutor training, present writing experience and work in the writing center. Second, I wanted to investigate how the transition from student-writer to writing tutor affects participants’ understanding of what it means to teach and tutor. Explored within this sub-question were tutor definitions of teaching and tutoring, influences that inform those definitions, and influences of those definitions on tutorial identity. Third, I wanted to know what tensions, challenges, and or controversies writing tutors said they experienced as a result of their tutorial identities. This sub-question addressed issues of tutorial authority, transition from tutorial identity to student identity in classrooms, and relationships with teachers and peers [Appendix A].
As noted in the literature review, secondary schools present spatial and temporal conditions that create distinct challenges for peer tutors. High school tutors are not exempt from the tightly-regulated high school day that restrict independence and choice, two concepts inherent in collaborative tutoring that are not easily acquired or enacted in this climate of control. My research questions, therefore, were designed to identify the key events, experiences, obstacles, and factors that participants reported as influential.

**Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks**

The intent of this study was to document the perceptions of secondary peer writing tutors as they pertain to acquiring, enacting, and sustaining a tutorial identity. In particular I wanted to understand the challenges or tensions associated with the performance of their tutorial identities. Because this study focused on a single social unit and because the goal was to describe and document the specific phenomenon of identity acquisition, I employed a case study design. According to Creswell (2007), a case study “involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (p. 73). In this study the issue was tutorial identity acquisition and the bounded system was the social unit of peer tutors who worked in one high school writing center. Case study methodologies emerge from a constructivist paradigm that recognizes human experience, perspectives, and knowledge as varied and culturally situated. According to Hatch (2002), “multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage point” (p. 15). From such a paradigm, the researcher is also understood as bringing a reality and perspective to her work, resulting in scholarship that involves a co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participants. Hatch (2002) explains
this epistemological stance: “Through mutual engagement researchers and respondents construct reality under investigation” (p. 15). The ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie this study demanded a methodology that was naturalistic and participatory.

Researchers have offered multiple and often conflicting definitions of what constitutes a case study (Creswell, 2007; Dyson and Genishi, 2005; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Glesne, 2006; Hatch, 2002; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Soy, 1997; Tellis, 1997). As Merriam (2002) notes, the term case study is “often used interchangeably with other qualitative research terms” (p. 178). Because of the ambiguity of the term, it is necessary to clarify my definition of case study as it frames this particular research project.

Common to all definitions of a case study are two components: (1) the case must have specific boundaries usually in terms of time, space, and/or participants (Merriam, 2002, p. 178), and (2) the case is generally defined as the unit of analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In order to construct a case, a researcher has to think carefully about the unit of analysis – who or what is being studied. Once the unit of analysis has been identified and bounded in terms of who, where, and/or when, the unit becomes “a case of something, of some phenomenon” (Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p. 3). In other words, a researcher does not just study a social unit; he or she investigates a particular phenomenon within a particular social unit that has been bounded in distinct ways.

Case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study
looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalizable truth, nor do they typically look for cause-effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description (The Writing Studio, 2009).

My study qualifies as a case study based on the two common criteria and on this well-articulated definition. I have bounded my case temporally and spatially. Data collection began in October 2008 and ended in April 2009, roughly the high school’s two academic terms. Participants were limited to those students who worked as peer tutors in one writing center in a particular school.

While this project was not an ethnographic study, I employed ethnographic methods that included observation, individual interview, focus group interview, and artifact analysis to document the case. Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (2006) differentiate between an ethnographic methodology, which “considers the entire culture in which people live and interact” (p. 94) and ethnographic methods, which include “mapping space, listening for language, interviewing people, gathering materials, observing and documenting daily activities with in a culture or subculture” (p. 94). In using ethnographic methods, my role as researcher demanded I use an ethnographic approach to “notice, record, and interpret rituals, rule, behavior, materials, and language within specific particular settings” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 2006, p. 94).

**Role of the Researcher**

In addition to being a case study, my investigation falls into the realm of teacher research. During data collection, I was the director of the writing center and the instructor
of the tutor preparation course at the research site during data collection. As a teacher, I was deeply invested in better understanding the dynamics of the writing center. As a teacher-researcher, I could document in a systematic way the reported challenges and tensions associated with acquiring a tutorial identity. From my results, I hoped to improve the support I offer aspiring tutors.

In qualitative ethnographic studies, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. As such, the researcher must monitor biases that may impact the study (Merriam, 2002). In teacher research, that caveat is crucial. Henry (1999) notes, in the past, researchers have been cautioned about over involvement in the field and have been urged to adopt an outsider status of detached-observer rather than participant-observer. Henry (1999), in her defense of teacher-research as dissertation, summaries this tradition well:

The ethnographer, in the classic tradition, is to be a stranger in a strange land, out for the etic perspective, which can be obtained only by one who is in the process of familiarization, unfettered by taken-for granted understanding and investments (p. 198).

Ethnography assumes a researcher should engage participants with whom he or she is totally unfamiliar. The ethnographer’s challenge is to orient to the etic perspective of those she studies, relying on methods that constrain emic bias. With teacher-research, Henry (1999) suggests that disengaged observation and analysis in ethnography is impossible but that valid and reliable scholarship can result from studies in which a researcher shares a close connection with informants.
Henry’s (1999) defense of teacher research helped me in considering my role as teacher researcher in this project. When I decided to conduct teacher-research, I knew I would have to be especially sensitive to criticisms of this tradition, and I knew my methodological approach would need to acknowledge the influence of my “insiderness.” Monitoring my subjectivity, therefore, has been of utmost importance. Like Henry (1999), I did not set out to “wing it;” rather I understood that “my subjectivity [was] tamed by the same theoretical frames, ethical considerations, previous research, and readerly critiques that operate within the work of conventional researcher” (p. 203). Put simply, my methodology would need to involve the monitoring of my subjectivity.

In order to further help me in recognizing the ways in which my subjectivity could have affected my research, I turned to analytic autoethnography to better understand my position as a participant-observer. While this study does not qualify as an autoethnography, many of the methods helped me better understand and monitor my insiderness. Anderson (2006) proposes five key features of an analytic autoethnography:


My dual role as researcher and observer was further complicated by my role as director and teacher. My role as director and teacher afforded me access to things like participants’ beliefs, values, and experiences that would enhance my researcher role, but I had to recognize that it also could limit my access to other things that participants may
wish kept secret from a teacher. In addition, my multiple roles could have created tension and conflict between my teacher duties and my researcher role. I recognize that as teacher and director I have the institutional and functional authority to create a certain kind of climate and that my role could influence tutors’ subjectivities and their acquisition and enactment of their tutorial identities. While all this may at first seem a downfall to the project, I believe that my personal connection to the site and my relationship with the participants outweighed the possible complications and has produced a rich and detailed investigation.

Anderson’s (2006) second feature of analytic reflexivity is the researcher’s “awareness of connections and effects on the group” (p. 382). Reflexivity is crucial to any qualitative research study. However, it is different from reflection. Reflection is a consideration of events or observations that occurs in response to an action or event. When one reflects, he or she examines the event through a personal, or emic, lens. Reflexivity, on the other hand, involves the ability to look both inward at the self as a researcher and outward to the forces that shape the research. To be reflexive in qualitative research is to acknowledge an insider position and to be aware that the researcher’s interests and values may shape the findings. Engaging in a reflexive stance means slowing down, stepping out of role, and closely examining the ways in which results are analyzed and what conclusions are being drawn. The stance allows one to monitor her involvement and to remain aware of a possible “reciprocal influence between researcher and informants” (Anderson, 2006, p. 382). Engaging in a reflexive stance assisted me in monitoring the influence of the reflective stance.
The first two features of analytic autoethnography were the most useful in helping me understand my position as teacher-researcher. However, the other features also applied. Anderson’s (2006) third feature of analytic autoethnography – being a visible and active researcher in the text - helped me guard against incorporating too much of my subjective experience into this report. The last two features- engaging in dialogue with informants beyond the self and committing to an analytic agenda - remind the researcher that ethnographic methodology must represent participants, not simply the ethnographer. These last two features helped me understand that maintaining a focus on participants’ perspectives and practices was of foremost importance. With my acknowledgement that my research interests are deeply entwined with my personal and professional life and with my commitment to an ethical rendering of my visibility as teacher researcher, I feel that I am offering a valuable research report about tutor identity issues.

**Site Selection**

As noted, site selection was a process that came about through consideration of what I wanted my final product to be. Because I wanted my research to be personally and professionally valuable to my work with writing center tutors in my school, I selected Lakeside High School, the school in which I teach, as the site for my research and the writing tutors who work in the writing center at Lakeside School as the informants.

Lakeside High School is a rural independent day school in central Maine with a total student population of approximately 760 in grades nine-12. Lakeside School serves as the high school for several surrounding towns that offer high school choice to their communities. The community in which the school is situated has a population of approximately 4,000 people. The school was founded in 1883 and is governed by a board
of directors. The administrative team consist of a Headmaster, Associate Headmaster, Assistant Headmaster, Guidance Director, and Athletic Director. The school employs fifty-six teachers and seven educational technicians, a technology director, a director of development and a full-time registered nurse. Lakeside High School also employs several administrative assistants, custodians, kitchen staff, and bus drivers. Lakeside School’s physical plant consists of a main building where most academic classes take place; a Fine Arts building where drama and art classes are conducted; two portable buildings - each of which house two classrooms; a building that houses the school nurse’s office, the special education department, and family consumer science rooms; and a building that houses the business office/development office. The writing center is presently located in the Fine Arts Building.

Lakeside High School provides traditional career pathways including advanced placement, college preparatory, and technical/vocational preparatory. Despite the tracking tradition, the general mission of the school is to provide an education that will ensure all students are college and career ready upon graduation. Students at Lakeside School must take four courses in English, three in social studies, three in mathematics, and three in science. The remainder of the coursework is constructed of courses in computer science, health, world languages, physical fitness, and electives such as art, film, creative writing, and psychology. Students also have the option of enrolling in vocational coursework at a district vocational school.

All teachers are asked to encourage and assign writing in their disciplines. Some teachers make writing center visits mandatory as part of their assignments; some offer extra credit for writing center visits. The writing center at this school is a direct result of
the writing across the curriculum initiative undertaken at the beginning of the 2006 school year. This initiative was precipitated by the release of the Writing Next report from the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The report offered specific teaching strategies to mediate what they called a “writing proficiency crisis” (Graham & Perin, 2007). The administration at Lakeside High School felt that this document could be the catalyst for increasing and improving writing in all content areas. All professional development days for the school year 2006-2007 were dedicated to helping teachers improve their teaching of writing. One feature of the writing across the curriculum initiative was the introduction of the six traits of writing as a common language for writing (Spandel, 2005). The six traits of writing model breaks down the components of the writing process and provides language for instruction and assessment. The six traits include ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Teachers were asked to use this model in instruction, conferences, and rubrics. An outcome of the year-long professional development in writing was an increase in writing assignments in all content areas. As a member of the team who facilitated the year-long professional development, I proposed a student-staffed writing center as a possible way to alleviate some of the increased conferencing burdens of teachers by providing them with a cadre of peer writing tutors who could read and respond to student work. I also felt that a space dedicated to writing would provide students with a way to have conversations about writing specifically and generally would thus increase the awareness of writing among students.

The headmaster approved the proposal, and the writing center at Lakeside High School began as a dedicated table in the media center in January 2007. Because of space
issues, however, in September 2007, the writing center was moved to a portable classroom where it shared space with the math lab. The headmaster suggested this arrangement because it would solve supervision issues. Unlike the writing center that was staffed solely by peer tutors, a teacher staffed the math lab. The headmaster felt that the math lab teacher could be the “adult in charge” for both the math clientele and the writing center tutors and clients. While this worked for a few weeks, it became evident fairly quickly that tutoring math students and writing students in the same space distracted both clientele. The math lab teacher often conducted tutoring sessions much like a class and this detracted from the climate often needed for writing conversations. Because of these constraints, the headmaster at Lakeside School suggested the writing center occupy an unused room in the Fine Arts Building even though it would have no direct supervision. This room is adjacent to a classroom, and the headmaster felt that as long as there was an adult nearby, supervision would be sufficient. The writing center has occupied this space since November 2007.

The present writing center space has been used for many purposes over the years: an office, a small classroom, a directed study hall area, a computer lab, and just before the writing center moved in, a storage space. The beige room is approximately twelve feet by fifteen feet. There are two windows that face the morning sun, one of the last remaining chalkboards at this school, a sofa that was discarded from a classroom, two leather sling chairs donated by the guidance department, a conference table, and seven computers. Tutors have enhanced the space with a rug and green plants. Tutors have also created an artistic word wall that covers the area over the computer bank. On an adjacent wall, they have put up posters that explain the six traits of writing. The writing center
space is located next to a drama classroom and across from drama storage rooms. The art department occupies the basement level.

Permission to conduct research at this site was secured through the Headmaster’s office at Lakeside High School. Subsequently, I submitted materials to the Institutional Review Board on September 15, 2008. I received final approval from the Institutional Review Board on October 6, 2008. Upon receiving approval, I explained my study to the writing tutors and invited them to participate. In accordance with Lakeside High School’s regulations and Institutional Review Board requirements, informed consent letters were given to participants and parents [Appendix B]. All participants received an assent form outlining the parameters of the study [Appendix C]. Participants were informed that their participation was not a requirement of their work as tutors. They were assured verbally and in writing that their participation was entirely voluntary. It was also made clear that withdrawing from or refusing to participate in some or all of the activities or refusing to answer particular questions would not affect their standing as a tutor, either with the investigator, with other teachers, with the school, or with other peer tutors in any way.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Patton (2002) states: “Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). As noted, I elected to situate my study in Lakeside School because I desired an outcome that would be personally and professionally useful to me as a teacher and writing center director at this particular school. Participants, therefore, were recruited from the Lakeside High School writing center. During data collection, there were originally thirteen students who worked as tutors in this writing
center. Mid year, two more students joined the writing center staff. All fifteen tutors and their parents were approached for permission to participate in this study. Eleven of the students were first-year tutors, six of whom were enrolled in the tutor preparation class. The other five completed after school training and/or apprenticeship work under a veteran tutor. The tutor preparation course had two broad objectives. First, it was designed to orient students to collaborative tutoring through readings, role plays, and discussion. The course also offered them support throughout the academic year and was a space in which the tutors shared experiences and honed their tutoring skills. The second objective of the course was to provide an opportunity for tutors to write with each tutor producing three extensive portfolios of expressive and transactional writing.

The remaining four participants were second-year tutors, two of whom had completed the course the previous year and two who had completed afterschool training the previous year. Of the fifteen tutors staffing the writing center, Sierra was the only tutor who elected not to participate in the study. Therefore, the sample consisted of fourteen writing center tutors ranging in ages from sixteen to eighteen who were enrolled in either the junior or senior year at Lakeside High School. All were enrolled in a college preparatory pathway, taking either an Advanced Placement English course or a dual-enrollment English course with a local community college. All participants who graduated in June 2009 have gone on to post-secondary school.

Table 3.1 shows that within the sample, eight students were or had been enrolled in the tutor preparation course, five had not. Of these fourteen participants, Jasmine, who during the data collection period was the student director of the writing center, was the only tutor who was part of the pilot study.
Table 3.1 Participant Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st year course participants</th>
<th>1st year non-course participants</th>
<th>2nd year course graduate participants</th>
<th>2nd year non-course participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lance</td>
<td>Heath</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Brooke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>Hayley</td>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Janna</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Susan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instruments and Data Collection

Qualitative research relies on multiple measures of data collection. Three kinds of data collection are most common to qualitative research: interviews, observation, and document analysis (Merriam, 2002). The data set for this study included four sources of evidence: observational field notes, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and document analysis. All four sources of evidence informed each research question [Appendix D].

Observational Field Notes

I conducted classroom observations in the tutor preparation class in which tutors regularly discuss reading and their work as tutors. Readings were often teacher-assigned designed to stimulate conversation around tutoring issues. However, some readings are brought to the attention of the tutors by individual tutors. Those readings often extend previous readings or discussions. Tutors also spend considerable time sharing their tutoring experiences with one another.

I also conducted observations at scheduled after-school meetings of all tutors. These meetings gave the tutors in the course and the tutors who were not in the course opportunities to discuss their work and discuss issues that were pertinent to their work.
For example, at tutor meetings the agenda might be a discussion of recent experiences, reactions to excerpts from articles, or conversations about future activities.

Observation of regular group discussions among peer tutors was critical to this study because tutors are much more relaxed and candid in a peer discussion forum. Dyson and Genishi (2005) indicate that students “speak up in their class when they 'have a problem' with a text.... And their problems sometimes reveal the interpretative frames they bring from their own experiences” (p. 7). My goal was to document tutor conversations in order to better understand the experiences and events that influence their “interpretive frames.” Dyson and Genishi (2005) suggest that

The ways in which people make meaning is shaped by context and that context can refer to, for example, a commercialized big city block or to an elementary classroom; to an informal conversation or a formal health lesson; and to the larger economic, cultural, and historical forces that shape and are shaped by local encounters (p. 9).

Each context informs the other. In other words, by observing the tutors' conversations in both the classroom and in tutor meetings, I could better understand how the context of their work shaped their ideas and how those ideas were further developed in the context of the writing center and the school. I could also understand what kinds of contexts they brought to their work from their previous academic and personal experiences. While I was a participant-observer in the discussions, I tried to limit my voice during these conversations in order not to direct the conversation in any particular direction. I did, however, interject occasionally to ensure that all voices were being heard. All participants were included in the observations.
I took observational field notes throughout the duration of the study. This yielded a set of fifteen observational field notes. Within 48 -72 hours of each observation, I read and thickened my in-the-midst field notes noting time, topic, and context for the observation. The data were then entered into the research file on my personal computer for on-going and future analysis. Throughout data collection and analysis, I scrutinized observational fieldnotes and composed analytic memos. Constructing memos assisted me to pause and reflect on methodology and to identify emerging themes, issues and questions, and tie those concepts into other observational notes.

**Focus Group Interview Protocol**

Originally, I planned to conduct three focus group interviews on 21st century writing instruction, teaching and tutoring, and self as tutor. However, it became clear that scheduling three focus group interviews in the midst of the worst winter this area had experienced in quite some time was going to be difficult. The first focus group interview on current trends in writing instruction scheduled for February had to be cancelled when school was cancelled. I proceeded with the next focus group interview on self-perception of tutor identity even though only three participants were able to attend. When no one appeared for the third focus group on teaching and tutoring, I decided to combine the agenda for the cancelled first session with the agenda for the third session and schedule that combined focus group during the school day. Table 3.2 outlines the participants in each focal group.
Table 3.2 Focus Group Interview Topics and Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of self as tutor</th>
<th>Perceptions of writing instruction/Definitions of teaching and tutoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 26, 2009</td>
<td>April 7, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janna</td>
<td>Brooke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hayley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, I decided to wait until the chance of school cancellation due to inclement weather was less likely. The combined focus group on current trends in writing instruction and teaching and tutoring was conducted with seven participants.

The protocols for focus group interviews addressed sub-questions one and two of the research project. However, both focus group interviews also yielded information pertaining to sub-question three. While the target number for each focus group was six to eight participants, actual attendance varied from a low of three participants to a high of seven. Some participants rescheduled work and athletic schedules to participate in the after-school session. Those who participated in the focus group interview held during the school day sacrificed their study halls and some obtained permission to miss a class. I felt strongly that I should compensate focus group participants for the inconvenience and their time. In order to express my appreciation for their willingness to accommodate my work, I gave each participant a twenty-dollar gift card for their participation in the focus groups.

Focus group sessions lasted for one hour each and were audiotaped. Those audiotapes were later transcribed. Before proceeding to analysis, the transcripts were
cleansed for inconsistencies in semantics and syntax. The topics for each focus group appear in Table 3.2 along with the dates for and participants in each. A copy of the focus group interview protocol submitted to the Institutional Review Board is attached [Appendix E].

Individual Interview Protocol

Individual interviews were conducted with twelve of the fourteen participants. Janna and Susan elected not to participate in individual interviews due to scheduling constraints. The individual interviews were designed to answer all three sub-questions. Interviews lasted about one hour and were scheduled at the convenience of the participants during study hall, class period, or after school. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. Before proceeding to coding, I cleansed all transcripts in order to detect and correct semantic and syntactic errors. The individual interview protocol began with broad phenomenological questions (Seidman, 2006). Within each broad context I constructed sub questions to help focus the interview [Appendix F].

Document Analysis

As part of their customary work in the writing center, students maintained tutoring journals in which they recorded reactions and questions to tutorial sessions, readings, and class discussions. In addition, tutors kept records of tutorials in a logbook located in the writing center. Each entry describes what was accomplished in the tutorial and offers a brief analysis of the tutorial by the tutor. Excerpts from tutoring journals and the writing center logbook that inform the research questions were photocopied and then analyzed.
Managing and Storing Data

The digital recordings of the individual and focus group interviews and the observational notes were transferred to my personal computer into a passworded file and onto a dedicated flash drive as a back up. Transcription of the digital recordings was completed by the end of August 2009; coding was completed by the end of October 2009. When transcription and coding were completed, the recordings were destroyed. Any identifying information was removed from the transcripts and documents and replaced with pseudonyms. Students’ real names will not be used in any reports, publications or conference presentations that have resulted from this study. The key linking peer tutors’ names to data was destroyed once analysis was completed. The de-identified data will be stored in my home office in a locked cabinet and will be kept for a period of ten years. At that time, the data will be shredded.

Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze data, I used an inductive approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) that began with an initial coding run to generate potential master and sub-codes. In a second data run, to establish internal reliability, these master and sub-codes were applied and revised as required. Once a stable set of master and sub-codes were in place, I developed a coding dictionary [Appendix G] and coding map [Appendix H] to insure reliability across subsequent inter-reader coding sessions. To test the external reliability of my master and sub-code definitions, I conducted two inter-reader reliability sessions involving research colleagues who were completely unfamiliar with my data. I used a reliability index recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and sought a 70% agreement on a six-page, de-identified interview transcript. The first session resulted in
50% agreement. The coding dictionary and sub-codes were revised for clarity and focus, and a second coding run was conducted with comparable data. A second session resulted in a 73% agreement. I proceeded with formal analysis with the application of master and sub-codes across the data set.

Once descriptive coding of all the data concluded, I created spreadsheets in which I tabulated the frequency of each code and sub-code [Appendix I]. From the spreadsheets I created a pie chart to give me a visual picture of the predominant master codes [Appendix J]. At the same time, I disaggregated the data into individual document files. Each file represented data coded for each sub-code and for each research question. This process of displaying the data was invaluable in understanding salience of the descriptive codes and in establishing pattern codes. Miles and Huberman (1994) define pattern codes as “a kind of meta-code that pulls together a lot of material into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (p. 69). By mapping the descriptive codes into pie charts, clear pattern codes emerged. For the predominant pattern codes, I created a chart of those influences on poster paper showing cause, effect, and or reciprocity of those influences. From the poster of predominant pattern codes, an organization structure for chapter four emerged. Before proceeding to final analysis and writing, I disaggregated the data further by creating new document files that consolidated relevant data for each pattern code.

Qualitative research generally relies on triangulation, a process of cross-checking multiple sources of data to ensure congruence and thus validity (Merriam, 2002, p. 25). For example, I checked individual interview information against document analysis to check converging data. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, observational fieldnotes, analytic memos, and documents were analyzed and compared to
ensure that the data set for each question was responsive to its respective research question. In addition to triangulation of data, I conducted periodic member checks with participants to confirm the accuracy of tentative descriptions and interpretations. Participants reviewed only de-identified excerpts for which their language and/or behaviors were described either directly or indirectly. Finally, my researcher’s journal helped me monitor my research practices. In addition to monitoring the influence of empirical bias, the journal was a place to monitor internal validity, particularly the question, “Am I studying what I say I am studying?” It was a place to monitor internal reliability, notably the question, “Am I applying my instruments in a consistent way?”

External validity pertains to the degree that results are generalizable to other situations. In qualitative research with purposeful sampling, the intent is to study one case in detail in order to understand that particular case. Therefore, generalizability is not easy to apply. Merriam (2002) explains that in qualitative research “user generalizability” is a better term for extending results beyond the intended case. In user generalizability “readers determine the extent to which findings from a study can be applied to their context” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 28-29). My intent is not to generalize my findings to other writing centers. Writing center tutors in other writing centers will have different circumstances and contexts for their work. However, I hope my research report will add to the general conversation about secondary writing center tutors. Merriam (2002) explains that a researcher must offer enough information in a final report to help readers know whether the information can be applicable to their situations:

Rich, thick description is the major strategy to ensure for external validity or generalizability in the qualitative sense. This involves providing an adequate
database, that is, enough description and information that readers will able to
determined how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred (p. 29).

My goal, therefore, is not to generalize findings in the traditional sense, but to produce a
descriptive report that others may find useful for supporting peer writing tutors and understanding their identity struggles.

Conclusion

I documented the perspectives and practices of tutors in my writing center because I wanted to understand the challenges in acquiring, enacting, and sustaining their identities. While I could have chosen to conduct this same study with a group of writing center tutors with whom I do not have a relationship, the study would likely not have yielded results that would directly benefit my tutors or my instruction. By being an insider and a participant-observer, I was uniquely positioned to document and interpret data. The findings I report in the next chapter result not from a detached clinical analysis but from a situated analysis of tutors’ perspectives and practices that was built upon pre-existing rapport.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore how peer writing tutors at Lakeside High School's student-staffed writing center perceive their identities as tutors and writers as they transition between their roles as student and tutor. Since student-staffed writing centers are relatively uncommon in high school settings, a key concern underlying this exploration was the possible struggle with tutorial identity in this distinct context. Prior to this study, as a writing center director, I had observed writing tutors not only gain knowledge and expertise in tutoring methods but also gain pedagogical insight through their work with clients. Specifically, I wondered how tutors understood their roles as tutors, as writers, and as students as a result of their tutor training and experience. And I wondered how, if at all, their tutorial identities created challenges or tensions for them.

My main question in the study considered how writing tutors conceptualize their identities. In order to distinguish factors influencing their understandings, I constructed secondary questions that asked participants to discuss their histories and their current experiences and beliefs about writing, teaching, and tutoring. Specifically, these questions included the following: How does the transition from student/writer to writing tutor affect participants’ perceptions of writing and writing instruction? How does the transition from student/writer to writing tutor affect their understanding of what it means to teach and tutor? What tensions, challenges, and/or controversies do writing tutors say they experience as they acquire and enact their tutorial identities? Given my emphasis on acquiring a collaborative tutorial identity, I remained especially attentive to tensions associated with participants’ transition from classrooms that were often teacher-directed to a writing center that asked them to assume a client-centered stance.
This chapter is divided into three sections, each representing a secondary question of my study. In each subdivision I report respective salient themes that emerged during data analysis. The first subdivision identifies findings related to participants’ emerging perceptions of writing and writing instruction. The second represents tutors’ emerging perceptions of what it means to teach and tutor. In the last sub-division, I report on the tensions, challenges and/or controversies participants indicated they encountered in their transition from their roles as student-writer to student-tutor.

**Tutors’ Emerging Perceptions of Writing and Writing Instruction**

This section examines key themes associated with participants’ past and present experiences with writing and writing instruction, as well as their experiences with personal writing. As a result of their tutorial identities, participants indicated new perspectives on writing and writing instruction had emerged, thus contributing to changing beliefs about what constitutes effective writing assignments and instruction. Their tutorial identities appeared to give them a new lens for understanding the various ways teachers at this site viewed writing and writing instruction. As a result, participants indicated they were able to look more critically at school-based writing and writing instruction that they had heretofore viewed as “normal.”

**Perceptions of School-based Writing: Compliance and Resentment**

One predominant theme associated with participants’ perceptions of writing and writing instruction was tensions associated with their school-based writing. Instruments across the data set revealed participants’ references to their writing histories and to their current writing experiences in school. Informants frequently provided accounts of their own successful and failed assignments as a way to frame their encounters with their
writing center clients. In discussing their school-based writing assignments, participants expressed concern, even resentment, toward the lack of choice and the preponderance of teacher-controlled writing topics and genres. Yet, despite the criticism that 13 of 14 participants expressed, they reported that they had complied with teachers’ expectations for writing. This pattern of compliance with and, at the same time, resentment to school-based writing cut across participants’ reports of their writing experiences in school.

*Writing for the Teacher: “We don’t have a say.”*

All fourteen informants felt that in their school-based writing, they did not have a say in what or how they wrote. In addition, all fourteen participants reported the belief that teachers did not accept or favorably mark any essay that included elements of personal voice (e.g., use of the first person or reference to personal experience). Informants reported that in their past and present writing in school, teachers usually supplied the topics and dictated genre and conventions. Thirteen of fourteen participants indicated that they wished they had had more influence in the design of their writing assignments. Among this group, as I will explain below, participants appeared to assume two distinct stances in their response to teacher control. These stances included the *defiant stance* and the *disengaged stance*.

The *defiant stance* was held by seven of 13 participants who desired more influence in the design of writing assignments. These seven reported that by conforming to teacher-mandated topic and genre their subjectivity as writers was silenced. The defiant stance is a term reserved for those participants who indicated their resistance to pedagogical methods in the classroom. One participant who evidenced the defiant stance in his description of school-based writing and writing instruction was Heath, an honors
track senior enrolled in multiple Advanced Placement courses and a first-year volunteer
tutor in the Writing Center. In a meeting with other tutors, Heath spoke frankly about his
writing experiences in school.

We don’t really have a say. If a teacher says this; you listen. If you don’t listen,
you get detention. We listen to teacher; teacher doesn’t listen to us. That’s
basically how it’s always been. Of course you get some of the more lenient
teachers that are more open to everything but it’s still – teacher has final say. I’m
not saying it [the classroom] needs to be a complete democracy where children
always block the vote of the teacher. I’m saying that the way it is set up right
now. It’s always teacher wins, and you shut up and accept it.

Heath’s reliance on either/or dichotomies to characterize his experiences suggests the
degree to which he felt he had been silenced as a writer. For Heath, exerting authority as
a writer invited the risk of official punishments like detention. While he identifies
“lenient” teachers as distinct from those teachers who strictly enforce writing
assignments, he also acknowledges that teachers are categorically the authority. In
Heath’s view, writing is rarely a collaborative experience. The categorical nature of
Heath’s account suggests the degree to which his perception of compliance has inspired
resentment.

Following the tutor meeting, in an individual interview with Heath, I asked him
to be more specific about what he meant by “It’s always teacher wins, and you shut up
and accept it.” I was curious to know if Heath was applying this win/lose analogy to
writing assignments in general, or if he was referring to specific aspects of his writing
experience. Heath explained that he had been speaking about the convention of voice.
According to Heath, his experience had involved teachers who wanted papers to be completely void of subjective references (e.g., use of the first person or personal experience).

It’s kind of like – okay, let’s say you were putting your soul into this paper. We’re [teachers] just going to rip that out of there, and we [the teachers] just want you to spew information. Nope, you can’t have your own personal opinion or feelings in here. It’s all what you can spew that’s factual, nothing else. You can never be personal. You have to be objective and everything. Well, that doesn’t really work. If you’re writing something, it’s subjective. So just embrace that. You can have a subjective piece that is structured.

In Heath’s view, the voice mandated in school writing privileged the presentation of facts. His metaphor, “ripping your soul out of the paper,” illustrates his discomfort with the expository voice expected of him. Heath seems to perceive that in school, the “I” is not part of the front (Goffman 1973) associated with a student-writer. Furthermore, his view of the writer as soulful and the teacher as destructive suggests his resistance to this social front. Despite his resentment to and defiant statements about what he perceived as a silenced subjectivity, Heath conformed to his teachers’ expectations, thus illustrating Goffman’s (1973) notion of a cynical performance. As Goffman (1973) explains, every identity role comes with a set of rules. When a performer complies with established rules associated with a specific front, the performance falls along a continuum from sincere to cynical. At one end of the continuum, the performer enacts the performance because he or she sincerely believes in the system that produced the rules. On the cynical end of the continuum, the performance is enacted only because there is something to be gained from
doing so. Put simply, in a cynical performance the performer does not believe in the rules governing her performance of identity but understands the advantage to complying and/or the risks associated with non-compliance. While Heath advocated for a shift in the performative rules associated with a student-writer, when called upon to enact a student-writer role, he adhered to established rules. That said, his resistance seemed due, in part, to his sustained identity as a tutor in the classroom.

While Heath illustrated a defiant stance characterized by cynicism, a second stance was evident among the thirteen participants who felt silenced as writers in their classrooms. Six of these evidenced what I term the disengaged stance. The disengaged stance is a term reserved for those participants whose accounts indicated their detachment from, rather than overt resistance to, school-based writing. These participants reported that teacher-prescribed genre and topic caused them to personally disengage from the writing. For participants evidencing this stance, detachment involved the lack of connection to their school-based writing and/or noted detachment from their tutorial identities while in the classroom.

One of the six participants who evidenced the disengaged stance was Jasmine. Jasmine was the student-director of the writing center, a senior who had taken two years of Advanced Placement English as well as multiple other Advanced Placement courses, and a high honors student. Jasmine admitted she didn’t care about what she wrote when it came to assigned writing.

When I write papers for class, it’s almost as if I detach myself from tutor mode because I don’t check my papers. I don’t even read them over. I run spell check, and I know that there are errors. You know what I mean? I’m not even thinking
‘This is good.’ I don’t even need to read it. I know there are mistakes, but I don’t even bother. It’s not fun at all. It’s not challenging. Maybe it’s supposed to help my writing get better because I’m supposed to be doing it over and over again, but it doesn’t feel really good. When I’m done, when I’ve typed the final word, I just want it to be so done. I don’t ever want to see it again until it gets passed back, and it has the grade on it. But when you write something you are proud of and that you’re happy with, that you wanted to write and had a lot of fun writing, that’s when you pay attention to it.

Here, Jasmine explains a stance in which she disengaged both from her identity as a tutor and from the task of writing. Unlike Heath, who appeared unable to divorce from his tutorial identity as a writer, Jasmine explains how she relinquishes her tutorial identity in order to produce writing for her teacher. Disengagement, not defiance, is the distinguishing characteristic in her approach to writing tasks in schools.

Interestingly, the two stances (i.e., defiant and disengaged) emerged in tutor meetings that provided participants with a forum for voicing and discussing their performances as writers in schools. In this context participants could drop the front of student-writer and speak frankly without fearing audience scorn or rejection, a suggestion that such a context seems important to tutors’ negotiation of competing roles (e.g., writing instruction as teacher-directed vs. writing instruction as collaborative).

**Writing for the Teacher: “Tell me what to do.”**

The one exception to thirteen participants’ resentment to teacher-controlled writing was Hannah who argued that she needed and liked the structure and form her teachers provided. Furthermore, Hannah insisted that in the classroom one could manage
to write from a personal perspective and at the same time adhere to prescriptive models and conventions. Hannah was a senior and a first-year tutor enrolled in the tutor preparation course. During her high school career, she had alternated between enrollment in college and honors preparatory classes. During data collection, she was enrolled in several Advanced Placement courses, including Advanced Placement Literature and Advanced Placement Art. Prior to high school, Hannah had been home schooled and had attended a religious private school. In the midst of a course discussion on writing assignments in the tutorial course, Hannah acknowledged those of her current English teacher, Mr. Bromanski, who according to multiple informants allowed students freedom in their choice of genre for assignments related to their reading. Hannah explained,

I am a big structure fan. Give me an outline, very detailed, and I will follow it to a T. Tell me what to do, and I’ll either do it, or I won’t do it. But I need to know what the limits are and how I am supposed to do it. That’s how I thrive. If I don’t have the structure, I get all confused and stressed out and hate it. I just sit and stare at the paper hating the teacher and wishing he [Mr. Bromanski] would have told me what to do. It’s like I have nothing to measure it up to or something. I know it’s probably wrong or warped that I think this way. Most people my age don’t think this way. They’re like, ‘Yeah freedom, let’s just write what we want.’ I’m like, ‘No, I want structure. I want to be told what to do.’

Hannah’s description of herself as a student-writer exemplifies the sincere performance. She notes her security with the institutionalized social front established by her teachers and without it, as she explains, she cannot function. Her insistence that teacher-assigned genres and conventions are essential to her performance as a writer suggests Hannah has
experienced success through her previous performances as a student-writer and any deviation from this may jeopardize her standing with her teacher audience.

My observations of Hannah during tutor discussions and meetings indicated she brought up her dislike of Mr. Bromanski’s writing assignments several times. The other informants who also had Mr. Bromanski as a teacher noted they understood why it might be so difficult for Hannah, or other students, to adjust to this particular teacher’s style. Jasmine indicated that because students have been told what to do for so long, they don’t always know how to choose genres or topics on their own. Hannah replied that in school she didn’t want to have to do it “on her own.” She wanted to be told what to do and how to do it so she could succeed on writing tasks. Therefore, when she encountered a teacher who did not specify topic or form, Hannah felt rudderless. In an individual interview, Hannah reiterated her stance.

Tell me what to do, and I will do it. There’s a point in time when people need to be told what they need to do and then they can do it their own way but still do what is being asked for. If a teacher is too vague, then some people, like me, don’t know what to do. I just like being told what to do, and then I will find my own way to do it. I know that some people want the vagueness. I can’t stand it. Just tell me what to do, and I will write the paper. But without it, I don’t know how to fulfill the requirement, and I don’t know how to get a good grade. No matter how you put it, we’re all writing for that grade to pass the class.

To ignore a teacher’s directions for format, subject, or structure could, as Hannah notes, result in an unacceptable grade. While the other thirteen informants complied by writing in the genre and with the conventions demanded by their teachers, they assumed either a
defiant or disengaged stance. Hannah, on the other hand, seemed to have accepted the front expected of her and reported that she performed it sincerely. For Hannah, teacher-directed assignments were essential to effective school-based writing, and she acknowledged and adapted her writing practices accordingly.

**Perceptions of Writing Instruction: “No room to venture out.”**

From participants’ accounts of writing, the theme of compliance was pervasive. Thirteen of 14 participants admitted feeling confined by conceptions of what a writer should be and do. Participants adopted two particular stances in response to what they perceived as confining features of school-based writing: a defiant stance or a disengaged stance. To deepen my understanding of informants’ perspectives of school-based writing, I sought more specific information on their teachers’ actual writing instruction, and how, if at all, particular instructional practices had influenced how they understood these practices to have affected their interaction with writing center clients. In individual interviews, I asked informants to describe particular features of past and present writing instruction, a topic that also arose in a tutor meeting. In these contexts, participants initially had difficulty responding to questions about instruction. What emerged was a general consensus that the assignment of writing, the correction or grading of written work, and/or the provision of a genre for writing were the contexts in which teachers provided instruction. Put simply, participants acknowledged that teachers’ instruction was generally prescriptive and addressed only guidelines for the successful completion of assignments. In this section, I report three predominant themes that emerged from participants’ accounts of writing instruction: (a) the perception of being self-taught as a
writer, (b) the perception of grading as the context for writing instruction, and (c) the perception of the five-paragraph essay as a privileged form.

**Figuring it Out: “We got to where we are because we are self-taught.”**

Twelve of 14 participants reported they had taught themselves how to write. They noted reading as the basis for their writing development. Ten of 12 participants indicated that because they read a great deal, they learned to mimic authors’ styles, grammar usage, and vocabulary. These same ten participants also noted they were personally motivated to learn how to write. In a focus group addressing writing instruction Lance, a member of the course, a senior, and a first-year tutor; Lauren, a member of the course, a senior, and a first-year tutor; Brooke, a senior and a second-year tutor; and Jasmine discussed reading and motivation as two primary factors in their learning to write effectively.

Jasmine: I think that because we want to be tutors, we generally are pretty good at writing. And when you think about it, we’ve kind of picked up the skills through reading and stuff. Now imagine if you didn’t read or want to get better at writing. If you didn’t pick it up, you don’t have it.

Lance: Like with semi-colons and colons and those little things. I didn’t learn any of that in school. I read a lot and saw where they put them in the book, and I was like, ‘Maybe this is how they’re supposed to be used.’ A lot of it is motivation for wanting to get it right.

Lauren: Yeah, I read a lot. When I was in 8th grade, my mother thought something was wrong with me because I didn’t do anything but read.
Brooke: We got to where we are in writing because we were self-taught.

Sometimes it’s about experience. The more you read and write, the better you get. A lot of it is reading. A lot of kids don’t have that.

These four informants agreed that reading had been the model for their own writing, and they acknowledged that because they were intrinsically motivated they transferred what they had learned from reading to their own writing. During data collection, when the subject of self-teaching arose, participants credited their own reading histories, implicitly discounting school-based instruction. It should be noted that because participants were generally more advanced writers than their peers, data on the impact of reading is likely more salient for participants than it would have been for the general school population.

An additional factor that participants cited as influential in their writing instruction was curricular emphasis on decontextualized grammar instruction. Nine of 14 participants reported that isolated grammar instruction had absorbed considerable time. It is important to note that these participants came to Lakeside High School from various districts, so it was not one district’s emphasis on grammar instruction that influenced participants’ reports. The research site, Lakeside High School, did not have a specific grammar curriculum. Rather, teachers made individual decisions as to the amount and/or method of teaching grammatical concepts. In an individual interview, Emily, a senior and a first-year tutor enrolled in the tutor preparation course, reported she had received a great deal of grammar instruction but no real instruction on how to use that grammar to write effectively.

In middle school we probably spent 90% of English class on grammar. They [the teachers] only placed like 10% on how to use that grammar and put it into writing
a paper to make other people understand. So, no, I don’t think I was ever taught how to write. I just learned on my own.

Emily emphasizes a disproportionate relation of content and procedural knowledge of grammatical concepts. While she notes that she had been taught how to explain grammatical constructs, Emily indicates she was not shown how to use them in the context of her writing. Throughout the course of the tutor preparation class, participants read and discussed the teaching of grammar in context. Emily’s experience with grammar instruction, coupled with the course materials on grammar instruction, may have heightened her awareness that prescriptive instruction did not support her growth as a writer.

In addition to consensus regarding the curricular emphasis on isolated grammar instruction, eight of 14 participants noted that writing instruction had involved teachers’ response to error in written products. Hayley, one of the eight who noted this practice, acknowledged what she felt was her teachers’ tendency to identify and/or correct errors in her writing rather than to support the mastery of those elements in the context of a writing process. In an individual interview Hayley, a senior, a graduate of the tutor preparation course and a second-year tutor, suggested her teachers did not give her the kind of feedback that would have facilitated improvement in her writing.

Mostly the instruction I had was about grammar. I think I learned to write on my own because teachers wouldn’t give me hints on how to improve my writing. They didn’t understand that I wanted to get better. They only corrected grammar. That’s what kids want me to do too.
Here, Hayley notes frustration with grammar correction-as-instruction frustrating and explains that despite her desire to improve her composition skills, her teachers continued to focus on grammar correction. Hayley’s perception echoed what all fourteen participants reported as a recurring challenge encountered in their work as tutors, the struggle to dispel clients’ assumptions that a tutor’s role includes correcting grammatical errors.

**Grading as Teaching:” There’s no life behind it.”**

In addition to the understanding that they had taught themselves to write and that decontextualized grammar instruction or correction represented a primary context of instruction, nine of 14 participants felt that their teachers believed that by passing back papers marked with a numerical grade, students would discern what they did well and what they did incorrectly. These nine participants also suggested that their teachers marked aspects of a paper that were incorrect without indicating how they could improve. Finally, these nine participants noted that numbers or letters assigned as grades did not give them enough information to produce more effective writing in subsequent assignments. In a class discussion, four informants, Madison and Troy, both first-year tutors, members of the tutor preparation course, and seniors as well as Lance and Lauren, discussed grading.

Madison: One thing I don’t like is when a teacher gives you back a paper and tells you all the bad stuff about it, but he never actually tells you what is okay with it. So if you want to repeat something good, you don’t know what to repeat.
Lauren: It’s usually trial and error – guess what was right.

Troy: That’s the mentality of teachers. They assign the paper and the students
do it on their own and then they give it back to you with a number or
letter on the paper, and the student sees that and then there is no possibility
for improving on that and getting a better grade because you don’t know
what is wrong.

Lance: It’s just a number. There’s no life behind it, no explanation of why you
got it or what you could do to improve.

According to these informants, a letter or numerical grade and/or marking the paper for
corrections did not assist them to revise effectively. In this class discussion and in other
contexts of data collection informants indicated that their teachers’ correcting and/or
grading had been not only ineffective but, in some cases, detrimental. Lance described a
numerical grade as having “no life” often squelching any direction or investment in
revision.

Eight of 14 participants agreed with Lance’s assessment that grading as feedback
was not helpful and only served to discourage writers. In their work as tutors, these nine
participants noted they observed the same kinds of corrective feedback on their clients’
work and indicated that they were not always entirely sure how to approach such papers.
Jasmine suggested:

I just think [the teachers] think it’s the only thing they can fix in the time they
have. And when the kids come to the writing center, they want us to fix up the
paper. And it’s true. When you fix it up, you get a better grade. Never mind that
[a client] went from talking about cats to dogs and then back to cats again. They
just want it cleaned up because that is what the teacher wants and that’s how they
get a better grade but that’s not really what we do.

Having learned in her tutor preparation to address higher order concerns (e.g., purpose,
content, and organization), Jasmine seems torn between advice she believes the client
needs and what she knows a client must receive to obtain an acceptable grade, a clear
tension in her enactment of a tutorial identity that is collaborative in nature. From an
ecological perspective, tutorial performances, like Jasmine’s, are not performed in
isolation, but rather are embedded in and intersect with performances in other contexts. In
this school, the situated performances of student-writers and teachers in classrooms
impacted the ways in which tutors constructed and performed their identities in the
writing center.

*Writing the Five-paragraph Essay: “It’s all we know.”*

Despite the general consensus of participants that they had not received specific
writing instruction, twelve of 14 indicated they had been taught the format of the five-
paragraph essay in the classroom. Instruments across the data set revealed the five-
paragraph essay as the prevailing organizational model. Nine out of 14 informants
expressed disparaging remarks about what they perceived as faults with this model.
Across participants, three variations of opinion on the restrictive nature of the five-
paragraph essay were evident.

First, nine of 14 participants believed the process of constructing a five-paragraph
essay was too confining. In a class meeting, Madison complained that the procedural
demands of a five-paragraph essay were too limiting. While she seemed to recognize the
need for a thesis in expository writing and for organization and development, she felt there had to be other ways for a writer to approach an expository essay.

I know you have to have a thesis and support but it’s so frustrating because you sit down; you think of a thesis; and you think of three supporting points.

Unfortunately, that’s how it [planning the five-paragraph essay] always starts. I honestly think that is a horrible way to go at things, to always start that way, because it leaves no room for you to venture out if you always write by the five-paragraph essay. There’s no way to be creative.

Madison’s frustration with what she viewed as a perfunctory structural approach suggests she felt bound by principles of basic composition that do not account for individual needs, motives, or styles. Madison’s “I think it is a horrible way” clearly indicates her concern about one aspect of the front expected of her as a student-writer.

Nine of 14 participants noted specifically that what restricted them most as writers was that the format of the five paragraph essay left them little room for the expansion of ideas. In the same class discussion in which Madison had noted her concerns, Emily offered an example of a teacher restricting paragraph length and number and suggested that the limited space available for development prevents substantive content.

And then, Mr. Hamilton, [an English teacher] said that along with the five paragraphs you need three to five sentences in each paragraph, and he said whether you need them or not, you have to have those three paragraphs in there. Whether you need more or less, they have to be in there. That’s ridiculous. This doesn’t make sense to me. When I write five paragraph essays, they don’t have much content.
In response to prescribed organizational structure Emily, like Madison, feels that this particular component of the front expected of a student-writer is restrictive. My observational notes for interviews note the exasperated tone of Emily’s emphatic, “That’s ridiculous” and Madison’s “There’s no way to be creative.” It is important to note that both participants’ work in the writing center and their introduction to alternate methods of writing in the tutor course may have made them hypersensitive to teachers’ insistence on strict adherence to structure.

In addition to concerns about creativity and content development, nine of 14 participants suggest the five-paragraph essay creates a tension between wanting to write outside of teacher-prescribed genre and convention and wanting to experience academic success. In a focal group interview, Jasmine noted that the five-paragraph essay is what she had always been assigned in classes and what had always been validated as correct.

If you can’t write the traditional essay with the supporting points in five paragraphs, if you can’t write in that format, then you are going to get lost in this world of school. You just are - in any school, I think. But I think all the time, while I am writing that this could be another paragraph, but I don’t break them up. I don’t change them because then I don’t know what will happen. Will the teacher mark it wrong? I think - ‘This should have been over a paragraph ago so why am I extending it?’ But I don’t want to mess anything up so I just leave it all one paragraph. It’s all I’ve ever been taught.

Jasmine’s expressed doubt about the effectiveness of an essay restricted to five paragraphs appears to conflict with her desire to push beyond prescribed boundaries. This tension is further complicated by her desire to please her teachers. Jasmine indicated that
to intuit the organization of content risks a violation of convention and thus rejection. In their response to writing instruction that required the five-paragraph essay, participants’ response indicated they were generally not willing to elicit the disfavor of teachers by disrupting the performances expected of them as writers.

Perceptions of Personal Writing: “I wish I could just sit and write.”

When I asked participants to discuss their writing, initially they took this question as an exclusive query about their academic writing and did not discuss personal writing. It wasn’t until I prompted them to discuss all aspects of their writing lives that they offered any information about what kinds of writing they did on their own. These reports were quite different from reports about their experiences with traditional school-based writing and writing instruction, which appeared, for the most part, to be unfulfilling, routine events.

When informants had applied to be writing tutors, each had professed the love to write. For this study, I wanted to understand how they could say they loved to write and still express such ambivalence towards writing. I felt that participants’ love of writing probably came from the writing they did outside school, but I also wondered if sentiments about school-based writing and personal writing ever overlapped. In addition, I wanted to understand how, if at all, these various writing experiences affected their tutorial work. Of the 14 participants, only two reported that they did not write beyond school assignments. In this section, I report on two viewpoints about personal writing that emerged from the twelve who indicated influence: finding time to write and making time to write.
Finding Time: “Most of the time, I have to write for assignments.”

All participants reported they desired to write outside of school but found this nearly impossible because their days were filled with school, homework, employment, the college application process, and extracurricular activities. Most writing, according to all 14 participants was completed to fulfill an assignment. Of the 12 participants who reported they engaged in personal writing, all twelve agreed that this writing had little connection to their writing in school. However, despite participants’ general insistence that personal writing did not overlap with school writing in content or form, these twelve participants admitted that they had engaged in either expressive or creative writing for at least one school-based assignment. While this finding seemed to counter what participants had said about lack of choice and restricted genre in school-based writing and instruction, participants were quick to note that any crossover between personal and school writing was minimal.

Nine of 14 participants reported they had had at least one English class that included expressive or creative writing. While participants noted course-required expressive writing did have specific parameters, these particular assignments were much less restrictive than the expository writing generally assigned. Hannah revealed that a short story she continues to write had its genesis in a freshman English class.

Circe was actually my short story from my freshman year. I always really liked it, and over the next few years I worked on it and expanded it quite a bit. Then for the [tutor preparation] course I needed a portfolio, and I couldn’t really think of what I could write about that was good. I thought I would have to start from scratch, but then I realized that I already had this beginning point that I loved so
much so I just took that and started developing the characters and the place and making it real. This was my own creation. It was like I was God for this story, and it was my own. No one can touch it. It doesn’t matter what teachers or people said; I love it. It is my story. I fell in love with the characters as I developed them and now I just love it, and I keep working on it. It is so much fun. It’s not like an assignment; it’s a privilege and it’s like I have to do it for class, so it’s an excuse to write. I just say, ‘I have to do homework now Mom, I have to work on this.’

Hannah’s explanation of the crossover between her personal and school writing suggests that in the context of school-based writing she views her performance as an expository writer and a creative writer differently. As noted previously, Hannah insisted she needed structure and teacher-direction for school based writing and adopted the social front associated with a compliant student-writer. Yet, in this account, she eschews teacher-control of her writing and claims ownership. Interestingly, Hannah still seems to need aspects of a traditional front to justify the time she devotes to her personal writing. She notes that even though she had continued to work sporadically on this story after it had been turned in for credit, she didn’t return in earnest to the piece until she had another assignment that called for creative writing.

Nine of the 14 participants reported that even though the tutor preparation course portfolio was obligatory, this kind of school-based writing provided them with choice of genre allowing them to incorporate their otherwise, personal out-of-school writing into an assignment. In the tutor preparation course, students produced a trimester portfolio of self-selected writing that was composed for the course. While I give students suggestions for number and length of papers included in the portfolio, students can negotiate both the
content and format of the portfolio to fit their interests. Even though the grade students receive for this product determines their overall grade for the course, participants did not seem to recognize the portfolio as school-based writing. In a focal group interview, Jasmine, a senior, a graduate of the course, and the student director of the writing center reported,

I don’t get to write very much now but when I was doing the portfolio? That was a really good chance to write anything I wanted. The only time I had the time to write outside of assigned work was my portfolio. Now that time is gone. I haven’t really had time to write again. I wish I could just sit down and write like I did then.

Hannah and Jasmine’s accounts of the intersection of personal writing and school writing suggests that personal writing outside of school is a luxury that most participants could not afford even though they had the desire to do so. When personal writing could be situated within the requirements of coursework, however, participants found it meaningful. Troy, a prolific writer outside of school, offered an explanation for why the portfolio assignment was palatable and unlike other school-based writing assignment:

The portfolio allowed you to put yourself into something. It’s not what you’re traditionally used to in classrooms. You actually get to put your own thoughts behind it, to do what you want to do with it. I really liked it a lot because obviously you’re going to do what you enjoy doing, and you’re going to put more effort into it. You know it’s not like when you have to do something for a class and you have to follow this strict procedure and you have to follow these rigid guidelines and you have to stay inside the lines all the time.
For Troy, writing outside the parameters of traditional school writing assignments was an aspect of the portfolio assignment he found agreeable. He suggests the portfolio allowed him to break the rules he had come to associate with the performative role of a student-writer. For example, the centerpiece of Troy’s portfolio was an adventure narrative set in a mythical time and place. He began this creative piece the first trimester completing thirty pages divided into two chapters. He continued this narrative in his second trimester portfolio, completing an additional twenty-five pages. The quantity of writing over time suggested to me his sustained engagement with creative writing in school.

**Making Time:** “Ideas just buzz around until I write them down.”

A second viewpoint about personal writing among participants suggests that despite the lack of time cited by participants, many felt compelled to make time outside the school day to write. Eight of 14 participants expressed an intrinsic motivation to find time to pursue personal writing. These participants suggested that while sometimes the performative roles of a student-writer and a writer intersect, in order to maintain a writing life, one simply had to carve out time in which to write. In a personal interview, Lance reported on how he came to view himself as a writer and how he managed his time in order to engage in a writing life beyond school.

When I was three-years-old, my grandmother dragged me to the library every single day. She always went on about how I’d be an amazing writer some day. I began to write these really, really crappy stories that had no details or anything. But it was like they got stuck in my head, and I’d be like, ‘go away,’ but the only way they would leave me and not drive me insane was for me to put [them] down on paper. Even today, ideas never go away. They just buzz around until I just
'FINE, I’ll write you down. Just leave me alone.’ Now I belong to a fan fiction website. People write back to me about my stories from places like New Zealand and Korea. One of my best friends I met using that fan fiction site. She lives in Arizona, and I have another friend who lives in Ohio. We wrote a story together. It’s [the fan fiction site] so great because you can get your work out there, and you get reviews from other people who have accounts. One of my stories had 1000 hits, and I’ve gotten four reviews on it.

Lance’s report mirrors eight other participants’ accounts on their writing lives. Each stated they made time to write beyond school, noting an early introduction to writing and an inherent need to convey their thoughts and ideas through writing. Lance’s account of creative writing is particularly poignant in its reference to sustained writing over time, to authentic audiences and feedback, and to the relevance of new media in supporting his writing process. These features were distinct from Lance’s various accounts of the social front he presented as a writer in school.

**Conclusion**

Participants’ reports about their experience with writing suggest that they had been positioned by their various experiences with and assumptions about writing. As they acquired and enacted tutorial authority, informants uniformly questioned their past ideas about writing and writing instruction, a reflective process that created tensions for all participants, including Hannah, who in group discussions had to contemplate and defend her beliefs about teacher-directed writing instruction. Despite their tutorial identities, participants in this study were still students and thus were expected by their teachers to enact the established front associated with that role. This performance, according to
participants, included adhering to teacher prescribed genre and format even if one disagreed with instructional practices.

Participants generally viewed the kind of writing they did for teachers as perfunctory. In the back region provided by the course and by tutor meetings, interviews, and focal group interviews, participants reported their frustrations with the kind of writing they were expected to do in school. However, in enacting their performative roles as writers in school, informants uniformly acknowledged their presentation of the expected front. Hannah was the only dissenting voice among these participants. While the other participants gave performances at the cynical end of the continuum, Hannah reported delivering a sincere performance stressing she need for teacher direction.

Participants generally suggested they felt silenced as a result of their student-writer fronts. In order to comply with teacher expectations, they acknowledge the belief that they had to enact performances in which they did not believe. In addition, when participants wrote within their coursework, six of 14 felt they had to disengage from their tutorial roles. The aspects of the writing process for which they advocated in the writing center were not part of their roles as writers. Additionally, seven of 14 participants adopted a defiant stance speaking out in back regions against the traditional performative rules of a student-writer, yet complying with and enacting those rules in classroom.

It is evident that tutoring had oriented participants to a different vision of how one can teach and learn differently. While they seemed unwilling, or perhaps not ready, to break the stereotypes associated with a student-writer in their own lives as student-writers, they used the backstage region of the tutor preparation course and tutor meetings to air their emerging perceptions of what writing and writing instruction should look like.
in school. A key tension that emerged in participants’ accounts of traditional writing instruction was the challenge it presented in the writing center, when clients acculturated to a corrective approach sought tutorial assistance. Despite their desire to reframe writing instruction, participants felt they had to assist their clients within the corrective framework of a client’s classroom.

Interestingly, participants did not specifically report influence of their personal writing on their tutorial roles. Rather, when asked to discuss their personal writing and any connections to their tutoring, they answered only my query about personal writing and described in detail the kinds of writing they do beyond school. None of the participants suggested the writing they do beyond school assisted them in their tutorial roles in any way. Even though participants indicated they had occasionally pursued personal writing in particular English classes that included creative writing, in the tutor preparation course and in their own time, they insisted their personal writing had little connection to school writing activities.

**Tutors’ Emerging Perceptions of What it Means to Teach and Tutor**

To document tutors’ perceptions of the performative moves they associate with teaching and tutoring, I asked informants to discuss the process of learning to tutor, the process of enacting a tutoring identity in the writing center, and the definitions that participants reported for “tutoring” and “teaching.” As a writing center director, I felt this information would help me better assist tutors as they transitioned into their tutorial roles. Primarily, I wanted to know their opinions about collaborative tutoring and how they applied their learning in tutorials. I also wanted to know the degree to which they felt their training was effective and how prepared they felt they were for various
circumstances they might encounter in the writing center. Evidence of this kind, I felt, would help me in designing future training for tutors.

Prior to this study, I had noticed that as tutors become acclimated to their collaborative roles, they began to voice some tension related to their classroom experiences with teachers who took a directive stance. Participants began to question the validity of teaching methods and wondered why a collaborative stance was not more widely acknowledged as a teaching method. I believed gaining a deeper understanding would assist me in finding ways to help participants reconcile their tutorial identities with the institutional demands of teachers. In addition to reporting findings for each of these foci, this section acknowledges my own influence as a performer in and beyond the writing center.

**Learning to Tutor: Stepping into the Role**

In order to probe the ways in which participants constructed a tutorial identity, in individual interviews and in a focal group interview, I asked them a series of questions about their experiences acquiring and implementing their tutorial role. Additionally, participants wrote entries in their tutoring journals reflecting on their identities. As noted elsewhere in this report, tutors at Lakeside Writing Center had several options for learning their tutorial role. The preferred method was for students to enroll in the year-long, one-credit tutor preparation course because it afforded time and space each week to discuss readings, as well as share experiences and strategies. The course also gave tutors an opportunity to write about their engagement with clients, pursue creative writing interests, and offer one another feedback on their writing. Students could also become tutors through alternate means that included four afterschool training sessions and/or an
apprenticeship with a veteran tutor in the writing center. In this section, I document participants’ accounts of how they learned to tutor and what aspects of that training they reported as most useful in establishing a tutorial identity.

Course

When I instituted the year-long, one-credit tutor preparation course one year prior to this study, I envisioned an “official” context for students to learn the principles of and methods for collaborative tutoring. As the writing center director, my experience in this school had led me to believe that students needed more than a short series of afterschool sessions to prepare them to work collaboratively with clients. I also felt that tutors needed continuing support for their tutorial work that was not always possible without regular and frequent meeting times. In addition, I felt that tutors needed to write about their experiences as tutors and writers and explore multiple modes of writing. I also felt that having an “official” course might legitimize the writing center for teachers and students as well as attract more potential tutors. If students could earn a credit for their work, I felt they might be more willing to make the time commitment necessary to be an effective tutor. I understood that potential tutors might not be able to enroll in the class, and I also hoped that those who did enroll could be mentors to those whose schedules would not allow it.

When I designed the course, my primary goal was to help tutors understand the principles and benefits of tutoring writing in a collaborative way. I provided students with resources that focused on peer tutoring and composition because I felt it was important for students to understand the histories, practices and theories that frame student-staffed writing centers and writing instruction in school. After the first year of the course, I
realized the considerable influence the course had had on tutors. They possessed a deeper knowledge of composition studies, a wider view of writing center pedagogy, and an appreciation for their own writing.

Mentoring and Composition, the tutor preparation course at Lakeside High School, was in its second year of existence during data collection for this study [Appendix K]. Six of the fourteen participants were enrolled in the course. Two of the fourteen participants in this study had taken the course the previous year and were continuing their tutorial work in the writing center as well as mentoring novice tutors.

The course description appearing in the curriculum guide read as follows:

In this…course students will hone their own writing processes, support that process across the school community through work in the Writing Center, learn and support the six trait language of writing, and practice multiple writing applications including expressive, transactional, and poetic forms (Britto, 1970).

As course instructor, I encouraged students to invest fully in their writing in order to assist others. By experiencing and reflecting on challenges in their own writing processes I believed they could better understand the difficulties that others faced. During this course when students acquired and enacted tutoring methods, they wrote extensively about their experiences in the writing center. These reflections were captured in journals and short reaction papers to their own and their peers’ tutorial experiences. In addition to these reflections, students constructed a trimester portfolio of personal and expository writing that they shared with one another at the end of each trimester [Appendix K].

The course provided a back region in which tutors learned and practiced their performative roles as tutors, shared writing, and discussed course materials and tutoring
experiences. I facilitated the course as a seminar, thus demonstrating collaborative learning and encouraging participants to engage in constructing knowledge with me. Initially, students did not really know how to conduct themselves in this kind of collaborative environment. As they become acclimated to a seminar model, however, they embraced the idea that they could have a say in the direction of the class. While I provided reading materials initially, as the course proceeded, students brought interesting and relevant materials to the course to share. Some materials came from a small library of books and journals I had put together in the writing center. Others came from participants’ own reading and Internet searches. In addition, students regularly used the course to share their writing and to seek feedback from one another. This flexible format facilitated the exchange of ideas and allowed me to model a collaborative stance for them. In the course, which occurred during this study, students often took responsibility for course meetings after an initial orientation period. They took turns initiating focused discussions, sharing tutoring experiences, and facilitating peer review of writing.

During data collection, I asked the six participants who were currently enrolled in the course and the two graduates of the course a series of questions designed to probe the impact of the course on their tutoring. On the subject of learning to tutor in the course, participants generally agreed that three elements of the course were influential: (a) the course readings, (b) the class discussion, and (c) the role-plays of common tutoring scenarios.

Seven of the eight participants who were or had been part of the course specifically cited the assigned readings as instrumental in giving them a foundation from which to acquire and enact a tutorial role. Participants who were enrolled in the course
read excerpts from *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring* and *The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Tutors*, as well as selected essays from such publications as *Writing Center Newsletter*, *English Journal*, and *Rethinking Schools*. The Allyn and Bacon text served primarily to orient students to the performative role of a writing tutor by providing tutors with the nuts and bolts of tutoring writing. The St. Martin’s book presented reprints of seminal articles that specifically addressed peer tutoring and writing centers. One problem with these texts was that they were designed primarily for college writing tutors. As this study has indicated, high school student-staffed writing centers involve distinct ecological features that investigations of post-secondary sites do not. This gap in the literature required participants in the writing course to assess the relevance of what they were reading and to make adaptations as necessary.

In her journal, Emily, referring to *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*, anticipated challenges and wrote, “I like the readings a lot because I know that [the scenarios and examples provided within the book] are going to be right around the corner. So I am embracing that and learning what I should do.” The scenarios described in the Allyn and Bacon text covered a wide range of possible tutorial encounters and provided potential strategies for tutors to use. Scenarios ranged from tutorials with enthusiastic, willing clients to sessions with reticent, sometimes hostile clients. For Emily, the procedural readings proved valuable for building an appropriate front for a tutorial role. Goffman (1973) explains that often fronts for any given role have already been established. A potential performer must generally adopt the expressive tools associated with that role and then adjust his or her performance to suit the audience.
Emily’s “embrace” of this text suggests the usefulness of nuts and bolts readings in a writing center course.

While course participants indicated that the pragmatic nature of the Allyn and Bacon text was worthwhile, they also enjoyed what they called “the more controversial essays.” These essays were theoretical in nature and required students to reflect upon and discuss conceptualizations of writing center activity. I had selected the course readings in order to provide participants with both practical and theoretical knowledge for constructing a tutorial role. I considered them essential steps in acclimating tutors to the collaborative front at the heart of the writing center’s mission. Madison explained the values of these texts.

The controversial essays that we read, I like those. While I could connect with those little scenarios [in the Allyn and Bacon text], I am big on hearing other peoples’ views. I don’t develop my own views very easily. It takes a while to register and see all the aspects of it. I liked hearing other peoples’ views [about writing centers]. Sometimes I base my opinions off from other people if they have good arguments.

Above, Madison’s view suggests the theoretical essays helped her to understand the varying stances scholars have taken in regards to writing centers and indicates that she needs time to digest these kinds of arguments.

In a follow-up interview with Madison, I asked her to define “controversial essays.” She spoke about “The Idea of a Writing Center” by North (1984), a seminal article that argues for a shift in the way teachers and administrators conceptualize writing centers. North (1984), writing early in the process tradition, argues that the prevailing
definition of writing centers is that of a “fix-it” service. He explains a need to shift focus from the writing to the writer and to place more emphasis on orienting the writer to a process rather than a product. As course instructor, my purpose for providing this article was to help tutors understand the historical development of writing centers, and North’s article was one in a series I provided that conceptualizes writing centers differently. Interestingly, Madison felt this essay was controversial in terms of its rhetorical value first and its content second.

The Stephen North one - that one was - well you could hear his voice and attitude in the piece. It makes it seem so controversial. Of course what he said about writing centers is so true, and it really helped me think about our center and how we want all that too. I have never read essays like this that looked so closely at writing and stuff or had such a strong voice. I had always been taught to be objective and detached when writing, and it is almost shocking to read an essay with such a forceful, personal voice. I really like it because it kind of gave me confidence to be bolder in my own writing.

Madison’s report suggests the course text selections helped her gain confidence in her performance as a tutor. At the same time, this essay deepened Madison’s understanding of what it means to be a writer and modeled for her another mode of writing, one she had not encountered in her previous classroom instruction.

Closely connected to the influence of the course readings is what participants acknowledged about the discussions they had had in the course. While some of those discussions were in response to the readings, some addressed actual tutorial experiences and how those experiences did or did not connect with what they had previously read.
Five of the eight participants who were enrolled in or graduates of the course reported that class discussions were an important influence on how they constructed their roles as tutors. Hannah explained that discussions assisted her in learning how to perform her role.

The conversations we had as a class about the articles we read and about our tutoring were really good. It was good to talk about our experiences we had tutoring because you could see how others dealt with problems. And it was really good to hear from Jasmine [a former student in the course] about things that happened last year. That worked really well.

Hannah’s mention of Jasmine refers to a discussion held early in the school year when Jasmine, the student-director of the writing center, gave a short presentation on writing center standards, on the challenges encountered during the previous school year, and on the solutions tutors found for those challenges. Hannah indicated that being able to pose questions to an experienced tutor helped orient her to a collaborative tutoring role and helped her develop her personal front. In addition, Hannah appreciated the chance to bring her own tutoring experiences to the group for discussion and feedback. These kinds of activities align with what Goffman (1973) refers to as back region events. In the back region, a performer can do such things as ask for assistance or adapt his or her role without risk of offending the audience before whom she officially performs. Constructing the course so it served as a back region provided a way for tutors to share strategies, ask one another for advise, and brainstorm possible solutions to potential problems.

An important aspect of the tutor preparation course was providing new tutors with the opportunity to practice tutoring skills through dramatic role-plays. Five of the eight
participants in the sub-group of course members or graduates cited rehearsal as beneficial to acquiring and enacting a tutorial role. During role-play participants are presented with scenarios that highlight situations typically encountered during tutorials. I used scenarios taken from the Allyn and Bacon text. In addition, a colleague who directs a high school writing center at another location provided me other scenarios. These role plays included encountering the know-it-all client, working with special needs clients, and assisting a client who arrives with no paper. In the course, students assumed either the role of tutor or client and jointly enacted the scenarios. After the role-play, the entire class debriefed on the tutor’s performance, examining what went well and what could be improved. Tutors in the course shared strategic approaches and, when necessary, brainstormed alternate possibilities. In an individual interview Lance reported that role-play was beneficial for preparation and for understanding the features of collaborative tutoring.

The role-playing activities really helped me to see how difficult it is to be a tutor. You can’t just take someone’s paper, hand it back to them, and send them on their way. You need to talk with them to get to know them and the assignment and then help the writer mold their work. But to get better at tutoring, you actually have to do it, like role-playing helps, but it is not a serious, real situation so you really need to go out there and experience it for yourself.

Here, Lance acknowledges that dramatic role-play assisted him to anticipate the challenges he might face as a tutor. His “You can’t just take someone’s paper, hand it back to them and send them on their way” suggests his understanding that tutoring necessitates social exchange for which the tutor is responsible. By rehearsing his identity through role-play, Lance was able to practice his impression management which involves
knowing what to express and what to suppress in any given performance and is part of
the evolving front that these participants were building in the course (Goffman, 1973).
While Lance acknowledges the values of dramatic role-play in the course, he is clear that
his performance as a tutor was really only tested in contexts of authentic engagement.

Alternate Method

While the official course was my preferred method of tutor preparation, I also
understood that due to full schedules not all students could take the course. By providing
an alternative means for “volunteers” to become tutors, I expanded the pool of tutors. I
was aware that staffing a writing center can be difficult and the need for this
accommodation was essential for our writing center to operate throughout the school day.

I required volunteers to attend four afterschool training sessions. I designed these
sessions to replicate the most essential elements of the official course. Volunteers were
assigned excerpts from the Allyn and Bacon text and asked to discuss those readings in
the sessions. I provided them with some of the same role-play activities that I had given
the course participants, engaged them in discussion about their role-play experiences, and
asked them to write reflectively about them. The schedule of activities is attached
[Appendix L]. As noted, a series of afterschool training sessions could only approximate
a small portion of the course. I felt strongly that volunteer tutors would be better able to
enact their training if they had a mentor with whom they could work in the center. To
accomplish this, I assigned each new volunteer tutor to a veteran tutor. Volunteer tutors
observed their mentor tutors in the writing center, asked questions, and generally talked
about the tutoring experience. Once volunteer tutors felt ready, mentor tutors observed
volunteer tutors as they conducted tutorials. The same process of discussion and feedback followed.

Two of the six volunteer tutors had received the training described above the year prior to this study. During the data collection period for this study, five students sought to become tutors through alternative means. Ultimately scheduling conflicts interfered with the four sessions I had planned. Three of the five original volunteers attended one session; two (of the same three) attended a second session, and no one was able to attend subsequent sessions. Two of the original five volunteers decided not to continue their pursuit of tutoring. With only three volunteer tutors left, two of whom had only attended two sessions and one who had not been able to attend any, I was left with the decision to either find another way to train these tutors or simply inform them they could not tutor. I wanted to do whatever I could to make sure all students who wished to become a tutor could do so. Therefore, I decided to increase the amount of observation required of volunteer tutors and to ask the veteran tutors to monitor and report volunteer tutors’ progress to me. One of these three remaining volunteer tutors was not part of this study.

In addition to the three volunteers tutors mentioned here, at mid-year two veteran tutors each brought a student to me as a potential tutor. The veteran tutor, the applicant, and I discussed how to facilitate training. We decided to have the new volunteer tutors read excerpts from the Allyn and Bacon text, shadow the veteran tutor in the writing center for two weeks, observe tutorials, take notes, and discuss with the veteran tutor questions or concerns. At the end of the two-week period, the mentor tutor reported the volunteer’s progress to me. Mentor tutors reported the three volunteer tutors were ready to engage in tutorials with continued support of mentors.
During an afterschool tutor meeting, Heath reported that observation of and subsequent discussion with a veteran tutor was an essential part of his orientation. Heath’s tutorial training came exclusively through apprenticeship and observation. His academic schedule had not afforded him the time to enroll in the class and his extracurricular schedule conflicted with the afterschool training sessions. As a result he had to rely on his observation of authentic tutorials to learn his role.

Learning to tutor was a slow process. It was kind of difficult at first, but I watched some of the other tutors and read that stuff you gave us and then I kind of just jumped in from there. It’s really helpful at first when you’re not in the class, just watching somebody and sort of picking up as you go, especially when you ask questions like – ‘Why did you do it that way? Is there a different way?’ That really helped me out.

For Heath, the primary back region available for the negotiation of his tutorial identity was occasions when clients had departed or were not present in the writing center. After they observed tutorials, Heath and other volunteers had the opportunity to “interview” tutors as a means to understand particular moments in their interactions with a client. Heath’s questions “Why did you do it that way?” and “Is there a different way?” suggest his capacity for asking higher order questions. Given the spontaneous nature of these moments for master and novice tutors to talk, it is reasonable to assume that novice tutors who are less adept at questioning or who hesitate to question lose one of their few opportunities to deepen their understanding of tutorial practice. Heath felt able to construct a tutorial identity in alternate ways through interaction with course members.
The other five volunteer participants reported similar experiences. Faith, a senior and second-year volunteer tutor, reported her experience with acquiring a tutorial identity the previous year. Even though Faith had the advantage of the full four training sessions the year prior to this study, like Heath, she cites observation as the primary means by which she learned her tutorial role. According to Faith:

Junior year I was in the writing center with Nadine and Amanda [two former writing tutors who were members of the 2008-09 course]. I just watched them the first couple of times, put in my two cents worth and then asked them questions when they were finished with their sessions. I apprenticed with them, but I’ve added my own style. I learned a lot from them. This year, I have Hannah in the center with me and she’s in the [tutoring] class so we talk about what’s going on. So I’m kind of learning what they are learning. The course is great but I think this [alternative program] is an effective way to train tutors. I think they should be out here one on one, hands on, kind of what I am doing with Susan [her mentee] right now, under my wing so to speak.

Here, Faith suggests that tutors do not have to be part of an official class in order to benefit. She indicates that her mentors, both last year and this year, have shared information with her and engaged in discussion about course content. Her statement “So I’m kind of learning what they are learning” implies her belief that course participants have assumed authority on their own for serving as liaisons between the course and the volunteer tutors.

This study indicated, however, that acquiring a tutorial identity through alternative methods may have its downside. Even though volunteers have learned to tutor
effectively through observation of and discussion with course participants and even though they acquired some knowledge of course readings and events, they did not have access to the sustained back region the course provided. Faith’s suggestion that she acquired the same knowledge as the course participants may be overstated.

In this instance, the strength of this study, a focus on what participants reported they perceived, was at the same time its weakness. It may be that what Faith perceived was not, in fact, true. If, in fact, a qualitative difference did exist in the tutorial practices of course participants and volunteers, Faith’s confidence about her abilities represents a reflective liability. Put simply, the alternate program would not have assisted her to recognize what is and is not effective collaborative practice. In such an instance, an alternate program would pose certain risks to consistent tutorial practice in the writing center. The need exists for future research to document the extent to which beliefs actually frame practice in high school writing centers.

**Implementing Tutorial Training**

Both course and non-course participants reported that learning the front associated with a tutorial role was not necessarily a lineal process but required almost constant reflection on and revision of their ideas. When participants in this study moved from the back region to authentic performance in the writing center, I expected them, as writing center director, to implement the standards and enact the strategies they had acquired in their training. To further document participants’ emerging perceptions of what it means to tutor, I asked them a series of questions designed to probe their experiences as they put into practice what they had learned in their initial preparation. In this section, I report on
the standards and strategies that participants articulated as the most valuable to their tutorial performances.

**Standards**

I expected writing center tutors to adopt a certain set of performance standards associated with collaborative tutoring. The mission statement of Lakeside Writing Center states, “The writing center is committed to helping all writers understand and refine their personal writing processes.” Since the mission of the writing center is to provide student-centered support of the writing process, orientation to tutoring in the course and through apprenticeship focused on developing standards of performance that encourage respectful discussions between tutor and client, attention to related content and organization, and client ownership of the paper. I felt enacting these three standards facilitates collaborative tutoring and prevents overly directive instruction.

As part of this study, I wanted to document which standards participants felt were the most crucial to their tutorial performances. In individual interviews I asked participants to describe a typical tutorial. In a focal group interview, I asked them to explain what they believed effective tutoring looked like. In addition, one after school tutor meeting I observed was devoted to sharing tutoring experiences. While participants referenced several principles of collaborative tutoring in these forums, three distinct standards were most often cited as essential to an effective tutorial performance: make the client feel comfortable, don’t correct or judge the client, and offer encouragement to the client.

In my own experience as writing center director, I have noticed that many clients who visit the writing center do so with trepidation because they do not know what to
expect. As a result, I was not surprised when participants mentioned repeatedly that their clients often did not seem to understand the role of a collaborative writing tutor and often expected a tutor-directed encounter. One of the most important aspects of a tutorial session, according to eight of the 14 participants, was to make clients feel comfortable in the writing center.

One way in which participants reported creating comfort for a client was in first explaining the role of a collaborative tutor. Faith remarked that one of the first things she does in her initial appointment with a client is to make the client feel comfortable and assure that person that as a tutor, Faith is a student just like the client and not a teacher. For Faith, emphasizing her status as a student was a key performative move, one essential to a client’s comfort in the writing center.

I get to know the client as a person, especially if he’s resistant. I’m like, ‘Hey, I’ve been in your position before. I’ve been stubborn and not wanted to open up about my writing but when it comes to your grades and English, this is stuff you need to know. I’m not trying to say I’m better than you are because I’m not. I’m a student too, so remember that.’ It’s just that I know it’s hard. So I just try to get them more comfortable with who I am as a person and then go back to tutoring.

Faith reveals tensions concerning how tutors and clients view the performative roles of tutor, student, and teacher. She appears to understand the standards of collaborative tutoring but also knows from experience that clients often do not. From my observations of Faith’s tutoring, I noted that her “I know how you feel” tone was not delivered in a confrontational manner. Faith’s account indicates her understanding that in order to have a successful tutorial, her client must be comfortable with her as tutor and understand
tutorial protocol. By positioning her tutorial role and student role as symbiotic and separating her tutorial role from a teacher role, Faith believes she assists her clients in understanding the kind of performance that will ensue.

A second standard that eight of 14 participants reported was an avoidance of correction or judgment. Both in the course and in the alternate program, I placed emphasis on the importance of tutors orienting primarily to the development and organization of ideas. In course sessions and tutor meetings, we discussed why simply declaring a paper clean of error does not ensure a well-crafted paper. I did not offer many directives as director, but I did insist that tutors be respectful of others’ writing. To insure respect, as part of their initial orientation to tutoring, mentors and I instructed participants not to pass judgment on a client’s paper by saying it was not good, correcting errors, or implying through words or facial expression that the writer was deficit. One of the ways that participants acknowledged the avoidance of correction or judgment was in their approach to error.

Evidence that tutors understood the standard of avoiding correction or judgment occurred at various points in the study, including a conference for English teachers where three participants conducted a workshop on student-staffed writing centers. When the opportunity to participate in the conference presented itself, I consulted Jasmine, the student-director, and asked her to participate and to choose two other tutors to be part of the workshop. She chose Faith, a second-year tutor, and Janna, a first-year tutor. Jasmine felt that having a veteran and novice tutor would provide a better picture of the process of becoming a peer tutor; I concurred. My participation in this workshop was limited to introducing the participants and advancing slides on a Powerpoint presentation during the
first portion of the workshop. The three participants presented an 80-minute workshop entitled “Student-Staffed Writing Centers” to an audience of approximately 25 teachers. During the first part of the workshop, each participant provided commentary related to the following questions and topics associated with student-staffed high school writing centers.

Faith - Understanding writing centers
* What are they?
* Why are they important?

Janna - Collaborative Learning
* What do peer tutors do?

Jasmine - Our story and journey
* Beginning, continuing, growing
* Outreach
* Tutor enrichment activities

The second half of the workshop was devoted to small group conversations related to each of the three key themes. Faith facilitated a conversation on planning and organizing a student-staffed writing center; Janna moderated a group that discussed staffing and training; and, Jasmine worked with teachers to discuss how to sustain a writing center. During the small group discussion, I circulated through the groups and answered any administrative questions that the participants may not have been able to answer.

Both Faith and Janna mentioned the standard of avoiding judgment and correction in their individual presentations.

Faith: My job is not to correct a paper; that is your [the teacher’s] job. I
never write on my client’s paper, and I make sure the client always has the paper in front of him.

Janna: What I don’t do is write on the client’s paper, edit grammar mistakes or tell the client what to do.

Faith’s candid statement that teachers are the ones who “correct papers” suggests her understanding that what she does is distinct from what teachers do. During the panel discussion, several teachers asked Janna and Faith if they had ever edited a client’s paper. Faith added, “I try not to judge. I know there have been some papers where I wanted to just fix things, but I can’t. That wouldn’t be fair.” For Faith, fairness entails stepping back from her instinct to correct surface errors and to focus on revision. As previously noted, in their own experience as writers, participants had generally experienced feedback as corrective rather than assistive. As part of their tutorial training, they learn that focusing on the writing process and the writer is the primary function of their performance.

Eight of 14 participants in the study agreed that error correction did not have a predominant place in their tutoring practice. Among these informants, marking up papers was noted as judgmental, unhelpful, or inattentive to broader concerns like content and organization. In their interview accounts, these participants indicated they could articulate the standard of don’t judge/don’t correct.

A third standard addressed by six of 14 participants was the importance of encouraging clients. According to these participants, “encourage” meant raising or maintaining the confidence of clients throughout the process of drafting and/or revision as well as motivating clients to draft and revise. Hannah shared her methodology for
encouraging the reluctant client who does not want feedback but believes his paper to be polished and publishable. In an individual interview, she commented on what she feels she must do to encourage the client to engage in the writing and revisionary process.

There will be times when students will refuse to accept that their paper needs work. We must patiently explain to them that we can help them with their paper if they are willing. We also have to explain that the writing center is not a place to boost false egos of students, however good they may be. We have to help them realize that everyone has faults in their writing and gently give them ideas of how to help without making them feel stupid or slow. We have to help them feel confident in their writing and in their willingness to re-work. I try to be really encouraging, and I try to help them recognize aspects of their paper that need work.

Hannah suggests that even when clients believe that their paper is non-revisable, a tutorial performance demands strategies that will encourage, promote and stimulate deeper thinking in the client and motivate him or her to want to continue revision. Hannah’s assertion that “the writing center is not a place to boost false egos” indicates her determination to urge clients to see beyond what may appear as acceptable work and strive for an even better product.

**Strategies**

While standards serve as measures of normative behavior, strategies are the actual practices that embody those standards. Throughout the initial tutor preparation period, I introduced to course participants various strategies for assisting clients in a collaborative way. Some strategies included asking the client to read his or her paper aloud, taking
notes during that reading, and adopting a questioning stance. I presented these strategies through readings that offered exemplars and scenarios concerning tutorial practice. Participants also took part in role-plays that simulated the ways in which clients might react to clients’ behavior. This activity helped participants form individual strategies for assisting clients. Participants who were not in the course read the same procedural readings as course participants and observed veteran tutors enact strategies they had learned or developed in the course. The strategies I presented to participants were not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, in addition to the strategies I presented, I encouraged participants to develop their own strategies. As long as tutors adhered to the principles of collaborative tutoring, they were free to develop a set of strategies that were comfortable for them and their clients.

In individual interviews and in subsequent focus group interviews, I asked each participant to describe a typical tutorial in order to document what strategies participants reported using. I anticipated that each participant, regardless of whether they had participated in the course or the alternative program, would discuss strategies involving questioning and reading the paper aloud as these were what the tutors and I had all agreed upon as important to collaborative tutoring. Interestingly, only 10 of the 14 participants actually commented on these basic strategies in interviews. In this section, I discuss the three most widely reported strategies: providing examples, questioning, and reading the paper aloud.

Seven (two course and five non-course participants) of 14 participants cited the need in a tutorial encounter to provide specific examples of how to complete a writing task. This was not a strategy I had presented to students as part of their tutorial training.
Rather, participants enacted this strategy because they felt it had benefited them as writers and as a consequence believed it would benefit their clients. Reported strategies addressing task completion included crafting model sentences to assist clients in moving from simple sentences to more complex sentences, writing model theses, and/or suggesting organizational patterns.

In a focal group interview in which I asked participants to discuss their tutorial performances, Janna, a senior who had joined the writing center staff mid-year, immediately said, “Examples,” and I asked her to explain.

Because I was helping someone with his paper the other day, and I knew he needed a transition. He said, ‘I don’t know how to write a transition between this paragraph and this paragraph.’ I told him, ‘Well you could it write it like this.’ And I gave him an example of where he did a transition well. Then he understood that this is what it should look like or what kinds of things he should be writing. He got the idea, and I didn’t just tell him.

Janna reported that she assisted her client to understand where he had been especially effective in his rhetorical choices. By pointing out the exemplar for a transition in his paper, Janna believed she had encouraged him to reproduce that rhetorical move in other sentences. By using her client’s own paper as a model for effective transitions, she believed she had honored the successful aspects of his paper and avoided “telling” him what do.

Since the writing center’s mission emphasized tutor and client as collaborative partners, learning how to question clients was an important strategy for tutors. At the outset of tutor preparation, I realized that few students had experience with questioning
strategies. I provided participants with a list of sentence-starters divided into two categories: clarifying and mediating. While I did not expect participants to use these sentence-starters slavishly, I did expect them to use the list to develop their own questioning strategies. Both course and non-course participants initially found this difficult to enact. However, after practice through role-play and authentic tutorials, participants improved. Five (two course and three non-course participants) of the 14 participants specifically discussed asking questions as a strategy. Jasmine in a focus group interview, discussed her use of questioning as a strategy and the reactions she often gets from her clients.

In the tutorial, when I just ask them questions and try to lead them in the right direction, they are totally taken back. They don’t know how to act because you are leaving it to them, that it is their paper, and it’s their ideas that count, and it’s not the teacher saying, ‘This would have been better if it were moved to the top.’ Instead, we say, ‘What do you think? Do you like it there?’ And it’s so different to have no one telling them what to do. It’s their freedom to write. Questions always work. I think one of the best ways you can help someone learn is to get them to come to the realization on their own. That way you’re leading instead of telling. They can kind of pick it up.

Jasmine suggests that employing a questioning model assisted her in re-educating and orienting the client toward a collaborative model of writing and revision, an approach that she infers is different from what clients encounter in their classrooms. For Jasmine, questioning strategies assisted her to increase a client’s self-realization and to “lead” or facilitate “instead of telling.”
As writing center director at Lakeside High School, one of the first things I suggest to tutors is that the strategy of asking the client to read a paper aloud can be one of the most effective ways of helping the client take ownership and responsibility for his or her paper. In my observation of participants’ tutorials, each of the fourteen tutors asked a client to read a paper. If the client refused or was reluctant to do so, the tutor read the paper aloud. In at least one read-aloud session I observed of each participant, the client made visible or audible note of at least one correction or change after they read aloud. When I asked participants to discuss strategies they used in tutorials, I was surprised when only five (two course and three non-course participants) of 14 participants actually mentioned reading the paper aloud. In an individual interview, Heath recalled a particular read aloud experience.

I was asking her to read her paper paragraph by paragraph. After she went through one paragraph, I asked her if she heard anything that didn’t really sound right and she said, ‘Well right here, I kind of needed a breath.’ I told her that the way I [had] learned commas is that you usually put them in where you need a pause, where you need to catch your breath. So she puts the comma in. So she starts going through and begins spacing out everything. According to Heath, the strategy of having the client read chunks of text and then questioning her resulted in his client becoming more familiar with comma usage. Heath did not prescribe a rule out of context; rather he acknowledged that reading aloud provided a context for teaching the logic of mechanics in an authentic way. For Heath, reading aloud provided an occasion to “hear” the need for punctuation.
Defining Teaching and Tutoring

As writing center director, I do not directly oversee the daily work of tutors. Most tutorials take place out of my or any teacher’s view. While I do schedule observations to better understand the kinds of tutorials students are encountering, I am not present in the center on a daily basis. Once tutors have been oriented to collaborative tutoring through the course and alternate program, I trust them to facilitate tutorials as professionals. Even though they take on responsibilities typically associated with teachers, participants insisted that their tutorial roles differed from a teacher role. At this high school, the writing center tutors are the only group of students allowed to operate without a teacher in the room, and they know that I am ultimately responsible for their conduct. Participants, therefore, do not take their responsibilities lightly. They monitor client conduct, remind one another of writing center protocol, and report any difficulties to me. In addition, the student director, though she is not directly responsible for monitoring tutor behavior, takes note of any inconsistencies, problems, or concerns that arise. She and I meet informally bi-monthly to discuss what has been happening in the writing center and to address any possible difficulties. For the most part, however, tutors are on the honor system to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. I often remind participants that their duties are similar to teachers’ duties but they insist that while some of the aspects of their responsibilities may mirror a teacher role, their collaborative stance differentiates them from teachers.

Tutoring and Teaching: “They’re totally different.”

In this section, I report on the defining qualities participants associated with the roles of tutor and teacher. All participants recognized a distinction between tutoring and
teaching. Evidence for this theme occurred at various points in the study including during a course discussion. During my observation of a course discussion, the course enrollees, Madison, Lauren, Lance, Hannah, Troy, and Emily, discussed how they viewed tutoring and teaching.

Madison: Tutoring is more like helping students find their way. Teaching is an authority position with a one right way to do things.

Lauren: Teaching is telling it to you. That’s how people teach; they tell. They expect you to already know it.

Madison: Why don’t teachers do what tutors do?

Lance: We assist.

Madison: We collaborate.

Hannah: Teachers assign something to you and you have to do it or you’ll [be] punished. Tutors don’t make you do anything. When you’re tutoring, it’s more like you give them [the clients] ideas of what they can work on so they can improve instead of giving them an assignment to do.

Madison: Yeah, teachers give you the information whereas the tutor and writer will sit down and actually come up with information together, instead of just getting it from a teacher. You collaborate together.

Troy: Tutoring and teaching are different things. As a tutor, you are learning at the same time with the students. A teacher is more of an instructor telling you what to do.

Emily: Tutoring is about the student’s point of view and how the student learn
to write. The student defines the way whereas a teacher says, ‘This is how you write it and this is the right way.’

Consistent with data presented earlier, participants in this discussion associated teaching with “telling.” In addition, teaching is identified as punitive and prescriptive. In contrast, members of this discussion reiterate a consistent finding, namely the belief that tutoring is a facilitative role, one in which client and tutor “come up with information together” and do so from “a student’s point of view.” The remaining eight participants showed evidence of sharing this understanding of the collaborative tutor.

*Tutorial Role: “We can help them.”*

Having asked participants to define what it meant to teach and tutor, I wanted them to expand on specific activities they associated with their tutorial role to better understand the degree to which they perceived tutorial roles differed from teacher roles. Participants reported three distinct features of a tutorial role: additional instruction, collaboration, and individualization.

Eight of 14 participants reported the belief that a tutor offers supplemental instruction for clients. Given consensus that a teacher’s role is to provide information, it is not surprising that participants agreed that tutors serve to provide collaborative feedback consistent with teacher instruction. Participants uniformly acknowledged the feature of supplement, not substitution. In a focus group interview, Janna reported:

The teachers give students the basic information and tutors help them fill in the details and gray areas, like you know a comma exists but when you work with a tutor you can figure out exactly what to do with it. Or we can help students with
what they want to do and work on something beyond what the system wants them to learn or write.

According to Janna, while the activities and scripts a tutor uses during a tutorial performance may be different from those a teacher may employ, a tutorial performance often is an extension of a teacher performance by providing additional instruction to supplement what the client received in the classroom. Participants may insist that a tutorial role and a teacher role are distinct, however, one does not exist without the other in the context of this community. Clients visit the writing center because of teacher assignments or teacher insistence.

Interestingly, Janna also believes the supplemental instruction provided in the writing center may encourage the client to write outside of a teacher’s instruction. Janna’s suggestion that a tutorial also can be a space where tutors encourage clients to write beyond systematic expectations relates closely to Goffman’s (1961) concept of underlife, which represents performances that undercut sanctioned roles. Any institutional context involves specific identity expectations that demand certain performances from its members. In the classroom, for example, student-writers are often expected to internalize the concepts a teacher presents and then demonstrate that knowledge in some kind of product, often a written document, which is subsequently submitted to the sole audience of a teacher. In the writing center, however, Janna and others described a space for encouraging clients to write beyond the demands of a classroom assignment. This view may well have deviated from the tutorial role teachers expected of a writing tutor at this institution. In my observations and in participant reports, it is clear that teachers and
administrators in this site often expect tutors to offer assistance that aligns with teacher-provided parameters.

The second feature participants felt was distinct to a tutorial performance was collaboration. Six of 14 participants reported collaboration as a feature that distinguished a tutorial role from a teacher role. In an individual interview, Kayla, a junior, a volunteer first year tutor, explains:

The whole collaborative thing really makes the student feel like this isn’t just another teacher correcting their paper. What the student takes away is much more beneficial when they feel that the other person is into it, too, when you’re having a discussion about it and not just telling them what is wrong. Teachers probably don’t like it though because we aren’t doing what they think we should do.

Here, Kayla explains the collaborative function of the tutor by returning to a finding noted earlier, namely the importance of delaying error correction until late in the writing process. Kayla positions collaborative practice as non-corrective and non-directive, qualities she does not associate with a teacher role. Kayla’s “Teachers probably don’t like it” report suggests her belief that teachers view a collaborative tutorial identity as inconsistent with goals for instruction.

The third differentiating feature participants most closely associated with a tutorial role was the importance of individualized assistance. Seven of 14 participants emphasized that tutors are better situated than teachers to differentiate their assistance according to client needs. In a focus group interview, Jasmine explained this feature.

What makes the writing center so important is that we realize that not everybody learns the same way. I know that teachers say they don’t have enough time, but
that’s what they [students] need. When they show up at the center, we take the
time to work with them one on one so they can find different ways to finally
understand. It’s [tutor response] contoured to them in the ways that they can learn
and can help them be able to catch up if they’ve fallen behind.

What makes the writing center a niche context in Jasmine’s view is the capacity of tutors
to provide differentiated one-on-one instruction. Her emphasis on tutoring that is
“contoured” indicates her view that tutoring is an “interpretive” practice, which involves
identifying what a student needs and providing that feedback in terms of what the student
can understand.

*Writing Instruction: “Teaching writing should be like tutoring.”*

Participants authoritatively voiced their opinions on what they believe
differentiates a tutorial performance from a teacher performance in this institutional
context. Participants also had strong opinions as to the change they felt should be made to
teaching practices. Generally, participants felt that teachers could benefit from
incorporating aspects of the collaborative tutorial performance into their pedagogies. In
individual and focus group interviews I asked participants what they believed writing
instruction in classrooms should include. Not surprisingly, the suggestions they reported
mirror the features they believed are presently only particular to tutorial performances. In
this section, I report on two elements participants felt should be part of a teacher
performance: student choice and differentiation of instruction

First, eight of 14 participants believed allowing students greater choice in genre
and conventions would result in better writing and writers. Madison reported her belief
that strict adherence to a particular set of teacher-assigned rhetorical rules stifles a writer’s ability to express meaning and find voice.

Students should be able to expand in their writing and not be restricted to the ways of the teachers. Students have to be able to express themselves in their writing. The best way to learn how to write is to write, plus when high school students are being taught a specific process to follow with no room to move, it inhibits the writer’s ability to form a strategy that works for them. I honestly think a writer needs to be free from strict structure in order to truly express their opinions. With a strict structure the writer can’t be the writer. The voice is not going to be there and neither is the meaning. I realize there has to be purpose and supporting evidence, but the way teachers have it structured now, it’s a little box of requirements where the teacher is controlling the thoughts of the student.

Here, Madison notes she has problems with strict structural rules. While she acknowledges the need for thesis and support, she argues that demanding all writers write in the same format does not encourage expression of meaning or voice. Her advocacy for reform, therefore, suggests teachers expand their performative roles to include multiple patterns of organization so a writer would have more individual choice as to how they might develop their essays.

The second feature participants believed should be part of a teacher’s performance was differentiation of instruction. Seven of 14 tutors believed that teachers should know how to individualize instruction and provide students with alternate ways of learning a concept. Jasmine explained that teachers must diversify their teaching methodology to accommodate varied learning styles.
Teachers can’t know just one way to teach. A teacher can’t just say, ‘Here’s way A and if you don’t get way A, sorry.’ If way A doesn’t work for you, the teacher has to show you way B. But I don’t think that happens a lot in classes. With the writing center at least students can come out and say, ‘Listen, I am really not getting this way.’ We can help them and give them way B. That’s what teachers should be doing too. Just giving them a bad grade over and over again is not helping them.

As Jasmine reported throughout the data collection period her perception of and experience with writing instruction has been a one-way-fits-all pedagogy. In this account, Jasmine expresses her frustration with what she believes has become a standardized approach to writing. Based on her first-hand observation of client achievement and success. Jasmine believes that teachers should adjust their performative stances to include multiple methods of assisting students with their writing.

Conclusion

In this section, I documented participants’ perceptions of the performative moves they believe are associated with tutoring and teaching. To document their perceptions of what it means to tutor, I asked informants to discuss the process of acquiring their tutorial role and what features of their learning they believed were most valuable or useful. The two groups of tutors, course and non-course participants, shared different stories of acquiring their identities. According to both groups of participants, however, acquiring a collaborative tutorial role was a process of learning standards associated with a collaborative stance and acquiring strategies that best expressed those standards. To document participants’ perceptions of what it means to teach, I asked informants to
discuss their perceptions of a teacher role. Prior to this study, I had noticed that once tutors began enacting a collaborative performance, they also began to question the validity of some teaching methods. I felt that a better understanding of this tension would help me assist participants as they transitioned between their roles as tutor and student.

Informants’ assessment of the efficacy of the course and its influence on structuring their roles as tutors indicates that through readings, discussion, role-plays or any combination of the three, they found the course beneficial to acquiring a tutorial identity. The six course participants and the two course graduates agreed that exposure to ideas through the readings and discussions provided varying viewpoints about writing, tutoring, and teaching. Having acquired some sense of tutoring methods, the informants felt that role plays enhanced their understanding of strategies and assisted them in anticipating possible situations in which they might find themselves as tutors. However, they also noted that actual tutoring was the cornerstone of learning the role of tutor. Additionally, course participants reported having the space of the course provided with a regular opportunity to share experiences, explore personal writing, and discuss topics related to their writing and tutoring.

Not all participants were able to enroll in the course and acquired their identities through alternative methods. Faith was one of six non-course participants, or volunteers, who felt the alternate program had prepared her to tutor. However, there is no evidence that Faith’s confidence translated into a tutorial performance that was theoretically and pedagogically consistent with those who participated in the course.

Addressing the actual implementation of collaborative tutorial practices, participants exhibited consensus on particular standards framing their performance and
particular strategies characterizing actual practice. Standards participants cited as most important to their tutorial roles were making the client feel comfortable, avoiding correction or judgment and encouraging clients. Each of these strategies, according to participants, was enacted in ways to make sure the client retained ownership of the actual writing and revision. In order to enact the standards associated with a tutorial role, participants learned and developed a toolbox of strategies. Participants cited the most effective strategies were using of examples, adopting of a questioning stance, and requesting clients to the practice of reading papers aloud.

When asked to describe the roles of tutor and teacher, participants reported their belief that a tutorial performance and a teacher performance are two entirely different acts. They cited two distinct features of a tutorial role that they believe are generally absent from teacher roles: choice and individualization. In addition, they noted their belief that teachers were likely to not agree with nor understand the tutorial behaviors or activities that promote these features. Participants believed teachers disagreement or misunderstanding was in part because teachers may feel that tutorial behaviors could disrupt the established protocol of a writing classroom. Nonetheless, they insisted that the client’s needs should shape the performance. According to participants, however, teachers generally do not perform according to the needs of their diverse students. Participants believed by expanding the institutional front associated with a teacher performance to include more collaborative activities and behaviors, the teaching of writing could be more effective, relevant, and satisfying to students. Because of what they had experienced as writers and as tutors who have worked with diverse groups of
writers, participants generally agreed restricted writing topics, genres, conventions, and instruction are problematic.

**Tensions, Challenges, and Controversies: “Being a tutor is hard.”**

As noted, transitioning from a role as student-writer to a role as student-tutor in a high school setting is not seamless. Students who become tutors possess a certain amount of authority and expertise. The responsibilities and attributes associated with a collaborative tutorial role are not always valued or recognized by other members of the institutional ecosystem. Because tutors do not leave their student identities behind when they acquire tutorial identities, they often have to navigate between these roles. In the context of the writing center, as this section will address, tutors reported having to express or suppress certain behaviors in order to convince their clients that their tutorial roles were legitimate. In the broader context of the high school, participants indicated the need to reconcile their tutorial identity with the other roles expected of them in other contexts. In this section, I document tensions, challenges, and/or controversies that participants reported experiencing with clients in the writing center. I also document acknowledged difficulties associated with informants’ tutorial identities in the greater school community.

**Tutorial Difficulties**

In individual interviews and again in a focus group interview, I asked participants to discuss what factors might hinder their ability to be an effective tutor. Across the data set, I identified two salient themes: complications involving client and tutor difficulties. In terms of client difficulties, participants reported client’s resistance and/or hostility to their performances as a challenge. This theme resulted largely from participants’
acknowledgment that acquiring and enacting the role of a collaborative tutor in the writing center was inconsistent with clients’ expectations for instructional assistance. In the section on complications involving tutor difficulties, I examine participants’ reported worries about not knowing how to deal with certain tasks during tutorials. This latter theme relates to situations that may not have been covered in tutorial preparation or tensions participants felt when they felt ill-prepared for certain tutorial encounters.

**Client Resistance**

Twelve of the 14 participants reported client resistance as a challenge to their tutorial performances. In an individual interview, Faith reported three kinds of client resistance. These three were representative of concerns expressed by the other twelve participants. First, she noted that in her experience many clients were unfamiliar with a collaborative tutorial performance and expected to drop off papers for editing. Second, she disclosed that once the client was made aware of the participatory protocol, he or she often resisted the performance and was unwilling to learn about the procedural norms. Third, Faith noted that some clients resisted because they did not want to be in the writing center at all and were only there because they had been required to visit by a teacher.

Some students will come in and say, ‘Can you do this paper and I’ll come back in like ten minutes?’ I tell them, ‘No, you actually have to come in and participate with us.’ And they stay, and I ask them questions, and it’s like talking to a wall. I feel horrible. And then there are other students who come in and don’t want to be there, and I have to try ten times as hard with those kinds of students just to get them to open up.
For Faith, tutorials can be challenging when a client is unfamiliar with collaborative tutoring. For a resistant or uninformed audience, Faith acknowledges her strategy of getting her clients “to open up,” a performative move designed to orient her audience to a collaborative tutoring experience. She notes, however, that sometimes clients are resistant to her urging and simply do not engage in the tutorial. Faith’s “I feel horrible” suggests her discomfort with trying to engage a resistant client. Given the relative newness of collaborative tutoring at this institution, Faith may not be overstating the extent to which she encounters hostile or resistant audiences since clients may have had no previous experience with a collaborative tutorial performance in this institutional setting.

**Tutor Frustrations**

In addition to client resistance, tutors acknowledged some frustration in enacting and/or sustaining a collaborative identity in the writing center. Participants reported they often felt at a loss as to how to respond to clients and still maintain a non-directive and collaborative role. Seven of 14 participants reported difficulties in accessing the most effective strategies for particular tutorials. I had hoped as director that readings, discussion, and role-plays in the course and apprenticeship and observation in the alternate program would have provided participants with enough procedural knowledge for dealing with most tutorial encounters. Participants, however, reported occasions when they felt at a loss for how to deal with certain situations.

In their initial tutor preparation, whether through the course or the alternative program, I discouraged participants from simply telling a client what needed to be corrected. Instead, mentor tutors and I helped participants to actively interact with their clients in order to assist them in understanding what kinds of revisions might need to take
place. I helped participants to understand that directive feedback, e.g., editing, is appropriate for tutorials where clients have already proceeded through several drafts. At times, however, tutors found themselves in situations where they were unsure of how to proceed.

When asked what factors undermined her effectiveness as a tutor, Jasmine in a focus group interview, reported that one particular difficulty was having doubts about how and when to point out that something in a client’s essay was problematic without offending the client. In the following report, Jasmine references a health assignment in which students were instructed to write an essay about the qualities they felt were important to a good relationship. In this particular essay, the client had created a list of qualities he would look for in a partner. Jasmine felt that the list of qualities went beyond humorous to inappropriate but was unsure how to approach this problem.

Something that definitely gets in my way is the reservations I have about how to say stuff to kids and when to say it. Sometimes I see things that I don’t know exactly how to bring up. For instance when I’m reading a paper, I realize that the client is taking it past being a cute little list of things to the point where it’s, ‘Oh man!’ But how do you say that? It’s hard. Sometimes it’s hard to figure out what to say and how to say it because while you are the tutor, you’re supposed to be helping them with the writing, at the same time you’re just another student.

Here, Jasmine expresses a tension that involves balancing her feedback. She seems to feel that too much directive commentary may jeopardize a collaborative tutorial yet, she also worries that by not pointing out potential problem areas she does a disservice to her clientele by not pointing out potential problem areas. For Jasmine, maintaining a
collaborative stance is sometimes difficult. In the same focus group interview, Janna replied to Jasmine’s concerns by saying, “Yeah, you can’t really say anything too much because they may see it as mean, and then they [the client] won’t come again.” Janna was not only concerned about offending the client, she also expressed some apprehension about alienating the client. Jasmine replied, “That’s the hardest part about being a tutor - I could just come out and say it, but I don’t want to be just another person telling them here are your rules, now follow them.” Both Janna and Jasmine appear to be wrestling with expression of their roles as collaborative tutors. Goffman (1973) explains expression control as the act of expressing only those mannerisms and behaviors that will promote an ideal performance. Mis-performing in oral or body language, for instance, might disrupt the whole performance. Participants must balance the collaborative and directive response they provide to clients. According to Jasmine and Janna, if tutors momentarily shift from a collaborative to a directive role, their performance risks being discounted by the client.

**Community Expectations**

Acquiring and implementing a tutorial role, as these participants have suggested, is a recursive process of learning, implementing, revising, and reflecting. Participants also indicated that enacting a tutorial identity is often impacted by factors often beyond their control. Simply learning and enacting the skills of collaborative tutoring form only part of participants’ overall experiences as peer writing tutors. In order to more fully investigate challenges, I documented how participants perceived their roles in the greater ecology of the institution.
As noted in the methodology chapter participants enacted their tutorial roles within the social setting of Lakeside High School, where the performative role of a peer writing tutor is generally unfamiliar to the broader population of students and teachers. Because of this unfamiliarity, participants often had to convey the procedural and behavioral protocols associated with the role of a peer writing tutor to others in the school setting. In the following section, I document what participants reported about clients’ and teachers’ expectations and perceptions in these other contexts.

**Client Expectations: “Tutors are like teachers.”**

Six of 14 participants expressed frustration with clients who expected a tutor to be like a teacher, someone who tells the client exactly what they should do to revise. In a focus group interview, Janna, Lauren, and Jasmine noted that clients can expect tutors to perform a teacher’s role.

Janna: I was just thinking of how when kids come out to the writing center, they expect it to be like the teacher-driven classroom. They come out and say, ‘Well, do I need a comma or do I need whatever?’ which is what the teacher talks about, and clients expect you to correct because that is what they expect in the classroom. And that is not what it is here. I wish they would get it.

Lauren: It’s hard for them because they are used to a teacher telling them what to do and what to write. I think some have just seen me as someone who can tell them what to change like a teacher does. I don’t like that. I tell them I am here to help. Those who see me as a teacher expect I am going to do all those things.
Jasmine: Clients are presenting their writing to you individually as someone who has been given this authority. I almost feel like when I am in the writing center, when they come to me, they are thinking about that authority as like a teacher. They have those ideas about me, and it almost makes everything feel that way. Even though I know that’s [having a teacher’s authority] not true, I almost feel a little bit uncomfortable.

Janna, Lauren, and Jasmine’s assessment of their clients’ unfamiliarity with their performative roles illustrates a primary challenge they face as members of a relatively new context situated within an institution. Any time new contexts are introduced into an institutional ecosystem, members of the community must come to understand the relationship of the new context to the whole. Since the role of a writing tutor was relatively new at this institution, clients might understandably mistake a tutorial role for a teacher role. While Jasmine’s “I tell them I am here to help” is sincere, it suggests the complexities associated with what “help” means. In the writing center, where tutors have acculturated to a collaborative identity, “help” is construed in ways distinct from what “help” means in other contexts of the ecosystem. Perceived contradictions in expectations for performance represent a key finding in this study, the implications of which will be discussed in chapter five.

Client Misperceptions: “The writing center is for dummies.”

Another misperception noted by some participants was clients’ belief that the writing center only provides remedial services to those who struggle with writing. Six of 14 participants reported this perception was often held by clients whose teachers required them to visit. In my anecdotal observations, I have sensed that these visits often
occur when students have been advised to seek help with grammar and mechanics. Of the practice requiring students to attend for such assistance, Madison, in her journal, noted the following:

Teachers use the writing center as punishment so the writing center gets the reputation of being a place for bad or poor writers. So many people think it is for the bad writers, the special needs kids or as Stephen North put it, ‘the others.’ This concept is most frustrating because it shrinks the population of students who use the writing center. This then seems to embarrass those who do go to the writing center because people look at them as bad writers. It’s hard to change peoples’ minds.

Here Madison understands clients’ misperception that the writing center is “for bad writers” in all its complexity. According to Madison, teachers’ use of the writing center as a punitive measure rather than an assistive one invites all in the community to misperceive the writing center’s function. Faced with this misperception, tutors, according to Madison, experience the difficult task of “chang[ing] people’s minds.” This challenge is not particular to this site; since their inception, writing center staff have had to fight the stigma of remediation (Pemberton, 1992). Tutorial identity can be shaped by attitudes, perceptions, reactions, and experiences with tutorial performances. As Madison notes, changing the attitude of an institutional system is not an easy task, nor one that can be accomplished quickly.

Teacher Perception of Tutorial Role: “I don’t think they really understand.”

Teachers, according to some participants, also had misperceptions about the role of peer writing tutors. Over half the participants felt that some teachers either did not
understand or did not endorse tutorial performances as enacted at this institution. Among these eight participants, data suggested the perceived existence of two stances maintained by teachers. First, participants reported that some teachers had expressed disapproval of collaborative peer tutoring. Second, some participants reported that they had observed that some teachers were threatened by tutorial work.

The first stance, teacher disapproval, was reported by eight of 14 participants. Interestingly, five of these eight participants cited the disapproval of the same teacher. In an individual interview, Brooke spoke about this teacher and offered some explanation for the teacher’s perceived disdain for the writing center.

You know Mr. Hamilton doesn’t approve. He just doesn’t understand the writing center. He thinks it is a joke. He doesn’t understand how students can do this because he likes everything perfect, and we don’t do that. He can’t understand how students can do it because we’re working on writing too. But then again he doesn’t understand that while helping them, we are helping ourselves also.

Brooke outlines three separate reasons for Mr. Hamilton’s disapproval. First, Mr. Hamilton, according to Brooke, places value on perfection, which differs from the emphasis tutors are taught to place on the writer’s process and agency. Second, Brooke suggests Mr. Hamilton believes only a teacher who is expert in writing is qualified to assist students with writing. Third, Brooke underscores Mr. Hamilton’s lack of awareness of the reciprocity involved in peer tutoring. While Brooke does not specify the implications of Mr. Hamilton’s disapproval for his students that visit the writing center, it’s clear his stance is apparent and influential.
The second stance reported by 10 of 14 participants suggested that participants believed some teachers felt threatened by tutorial roles. In an individual interview Faith addressed her perception of the threatened stance.

…I think that some teachers think that tutors think, ‘Ha. Ha. We’re getting your students because they don’t like you, or something like that.’ I don’t think teachers need to feel that way. It’s not that students don’t like them, it’s just they know teachers are busy and not there to help all the time. Here we try to sit down one-on-one with the students and work on individual strengths. I think if some teachers did that a little more, I don’t think it would take away from the writing center, but I think it would help students in both ways because they’d have the teacher’s and another student’s feedback.

Here Faith suggests that teachers may harbor some insecurity about their students going to a writing tutor for assistance before asking for teachers’ help. While students in high school typically have little power within the institutional system, student-tutors are asked to assume a certain level of authority that may, as Faith suggests, create some tensions around what constitutes teacher and tutorial authority. Another key feature of Faith’s report is her suggestion that a teacher role and a tutorial role can and should be symbiotic, not competitive.

**Conclusion**

On the subject of tensions, challenges, and controversies, five findings emerged from participants’ accounts of tutoring. The first finding was the challenge posed by resistant clients. Participants noted that clients often expected a directive performance when they came to writing center. Faced with a collaborative model, clients often did not
know how to proceed in the tutorial or refused to participate. Participants indicated that they felt part of their tutorial role was to help orient clients to a collaborative tutorial performance.

The second challenge reported by participants was self-doubt. Because clients’ needs and attitudes varied widely, participants reported that they often struggled to find the appropriate strategies for certain tutorial performances. They felt that using the wrong strategies might alienate the client or suggest a directive role. Put simply, participants struggled to find the perfect balance of assistive and corrective feedback in the expression of their roles.

The third challenge participants reported was that clients often expected them to perform like teachers. The writing center at this site was relatively new and not all members of the institution understood the nature and function of collaborative tutoring. Therefore, as participants noted, clients often viewed a tutor as a kind of authoritative figure who would “tell them what to do.” Participants reported they struggled with ways to orient clients to a collaborative relationship.

The fourth challenge participants reported was that some members of the institution regarded a tutorial performance as a remedial service designed only for poor or struggling writers. They suggested this belief was most often associated with some teachers’ practice of referring only writers whose work needed extensive revisions. Participants noted that changing attitudes within an institution is not an easy task, and they struggle to sustain their collaborative stance.

Fifth, participants reported two teacher stances that created tensions for them. First, they reported some teachers disapproved of peer tutoring as it is enacted at this
institution. Participants believed these teachers did not have a context for collaborative learning and dismissed their work as ineffective and unnecessary. Second, participants reported some teachers felt threatened by the introduction of students as tutors and may be somewhat insecure about a tutorial performance because they believed it could usurp their classroom authority.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

I undertook this study to document and understand the challenges high school writing tutors may encounter as they transition between their roles as students and peer tutors. I investigated participants’ perceptions of writing and writing instruction, of what it means to teach and tutor, and of definitions they held for teaching and tutoring. This study of how tutors in a student-staffed high school writing center perceive their tutorial identities revealed that such work could empower participants in deep and transformative ways. This study also documented how assuming a tutorial role complicated participants’ perceptions of their roles as students, writers, and tutors. Through their tutorial training, participants came to understand alternate ways of learning and teaching. This new lens interrupted what they had previously perceived as “normal” school-based writing and writing instruction. In describing their work as tutors, participants eschewed the label of teacher because in their experience, teaching was directive instruction distinct from the collaborative identity that mentor tutors and I encouraged them to acquire and enact in the classroom. Thirteen of 14 participants were troubled by the ways in which their teachers exerted their authority in the classroom, and these participants struggled to understand why collaborative work was not the paradigm for all classrooms.

Participants experienced definite challenges in their work as writing tutors. In a role they perceived as misunderstood, tutors participating in this study reported struggling to educate others about their roles. Within back regions of the tutor preparation course or the writing center, participants voiced significant reservations about clients’ and teachers’ attitudes towards writing and about what they felt was overly directive writing instruction practices in the school. All fourteen participants felt that beyond the contexts of the
course and the writing center, their opinions, no matter how informed through research and experience, were discounted in the greater ecology of the high school.

Student-staffed writing centers in high schools are rare. As a result, the research base documenting the perceptions and/or experiences of tutors in this context is thin. The purpose of this study was to understand how tutors themselves perceive the challenges associated with their transition from student to tutor and to do so from an ecological perspective. While the perspectives participants reported did not necessarily reflect actual practices in any context of the high school setting, my rapport with these tutors and the security of our back region conversations largely insured that they were forthright about their perceptions. Ultimately, if writing center directors and mentor tutors are to support novices’ enactment of a collaborative tutorial identity, understanding these perspectives is essential. In this chapter, I discuss implications resulting from the findings reported in chapter four.

**Acquiring a Tutorial Identity: Implications for Preparation**

Across the data set, participants offered considerable insight into the function and impact of the tutor preparation course. Prior to this study, as the writing center director, I had believed the tutor preparation course was an appropriate vehicle to educate students about collaborative tutorial practice, and I wanted the course to be a space where tutors felt free to discuss their work and to confront issues of concern. During this study, I documented how participants viewed the course and what, if any, changes they felt should be made to foster the student-centered seminar I had been seeking. The findings provide evidence that participants perceived the tutor preparation course as formative in their acquisition and enactment of a tutorial identity. Participants noted that the seminar
provided a space for discussion of tutorial experiences and concerns, for reflection on their performative role, and for learning about writing and/or writing center research. Classes often began with a tutor expressing his or her satisfaction with or dismay at a particular tutorial. Tutors discussed at length strategies that worked well and those that had failed. They gave one another feedback and advice, thus strengthening their toolbox of tutorial strategies and solidifying standards of practice for a tutorial performance. Or, the entire class might be taken up by a critical analysis of a piece of scholarship or a particular teacher practice a tutor encountered in the writing center. The course, according to participants, gave them the space and time to digest, analyze, and investigate aspects of their tutorial identities.

This study also indicated that course materials assisted participants to learn about collaborative learning and teaching and about how to provide respectful feedback to writers. The course was the primary vehicle for distribution and subsequent discussion of writing and writing center scholarship. It gave tutors the opportunity to learn about aspects of tutoring, teaching, and learning that they might not otherwise have. Participants reported the course materials were not only beneficial in assisting them gain a tutorial role, they also reported the readings were often enlightening.

Volunteer tutors, those who performed their tutorial roles without the support of a class, did not enjoy all the benefits reported by course members. While tutor meetings approximated the collegial atmosphere of the course, the meetings fell short in depth and complexity. Moreover, the meetings were not conducted with the every other day frequency of the course meetings. Volunteer tutors did not have the same sustained space and time to share experiences, discuss challenges, or investigate scholarship regarding
writing and writing centers. Volunteers, therefore, did not have the same foundational base that course members built from the extensive readings and discussions that were particular to the course.

What, then, are the implications associated with findings reported for the impact of the tutor preparation venues? One implication is that the more venues a director creates for the preparation of tutors, the greater the possibility that novice tutors will not have received the same quality and/or quantity of training as they enter into engagement with clients. A second implication of this study is that any course, or seminar, designed to train tutors should address tensions associated with the transition that tutors make as they shift from student-writers to student-tutors. Because this study relied on an ecological frame to document this transition, it became clear that tutors required more assistance than the course provided in reconciling competing identities. In teacher-directed classrooms, participants appeared to respond in one of two ways. Some participants, like Heath, maintained a defiant stance, refusing to relinquish his alliance with core standards and strategies acquired and enacted in the writing center. The defiant stance was characterized by obvious resentment that risks being a liability to those enact it in classrooms. Other participants, like Jasmine, maintained a disengaged stance, which involved detachment from their identities as tutors. Either stance is problematic for writing center directors.

It became clear to me that I had not provided sufficient support to help tutors in reconciling their tutorial identities with their student-writer identities. In order to foster a healthier third stance, as writing center director, I have to help tutors understand the cultural and historical context of the institution from multiple perspectives and provide
them with avenues to succeed in their classrooms without sacrificing their tutorial identities.

**Enacting a Tutorial Identity: Implications for Writing Center Practice**

Prior to this study, I sensed tutors were experiencing challenges in enacting a collaborative stance. During this study, it became clear to me that tutors’ enactment of collaborative practice in the writing center was complicated by factors from other contexts. As noted in chapter four, the lack of context for collaborative learning and teaching among students and teachers was a primary challenge for participants and created performative anxieties for them. During this study, participants revealed three distinct challenges they associated with enacting collaborative tutoring in the writing center.

First, participants struggled with how to orient clients’ attention away from error correction to broader concerns about purpose, content, and organization. In chapter four, I documented tutors’ anxieties about the misperceptions clients had for tutorial work. Participants reported that often when clients came to the writing center for help, they expected corrective feedback. Helping clients to focus on higher order concerns was problematic, first, because clients had come to define “help” as correction of error.

Second, I documented participants’ anxieties about how teachers perceived their work and its value. I documented tutors’ perception of two teacher attitudes. Brooke and four others felt that some teachers simply did not approve of peer tutoring. They reported that these teachers did not find value in students assisting students. Rather, participants noted that these particular teachers maintained that expert teachers should be the audience for student work. Another teacher attitude reported by ten participants was the belief that
some teachers felt threatened by student tutors. According to Faith, these teachers felt the writing center was taking away from their authority and disrupting the traditional teacher-student relationship.

Third, I documented participants’ tensions as they struggled to balance directive and formative instruction in the writing center. Seven informants, including Jasmine, expressed frustration with maintaining a collaborative stance in certain situations. Jasmine doubted whether her collaborative stance was effectively assisting her client and wondered how directive she could be and still maintain her collaborative performance.

What then are the implications of these anxieties? First, one implication is that the more opportunities tutors have to envision collaborative tutoring beyond their own writing center, the greater the possibility they will be better equipped to deal with challenges. In chapter four I documented three tutors’ involvement in a student-led workshop at a state teacher conference. As a writing center director, I believe it is important to build a professional network for high school writing center tutors. Tutors from my writing center have presented workshops on student-staffed high school writing centers at the national, state and local level. At each of these workshops, tutors have advocated for student-staffed writing centers by sharing the history of their writing center, discussing the writing center’s mission, and answering questions from teachers. Put simply, at these venues, student-tutors teach teachers how to begin, staff, and sustain high school writing centers. In turn, they have had the opportunity to learn from other directors and tutors that the challenges they face are not unique to their school. One implication of this study, then, is that the ecology of peer tutoring extends beyond the spatial and temporal parameters of any single school. Directors who tap into, or create,
broader professional networks for tutors create a context for rethinking challenges and practices. In engagement with those from other writing centers, tutors may understand challenges not as distinctly connected to particular clients or teachers but as systemic obstacles that all tutors face. In addition, tutors would expand their opportunities to deepen pedagogical knowledge.

For the past three years, I have been part of building a state coalition of writing center directors and tutors. Each year, we meet to share practices and experiences. This annual conference provides directors with sustained time to talk but more importantly, it brings tutors from various high school writing centers together to have sustained conversations about writing center practice. During the midst of this study, I was asked by the conference founder to develop this program beyond an annual conference. I was asked to develop a director training program, to create more opportunities for student tutors, and to plan and execute the yearly conference. Helping tutors to build bridges with other tutors in other school recognizes the importance of a broader ecology for tutors in high school writing centers.

A second implication suggested by these findings is that a professional network dedicated to tutors may well serve another purpose. To the extent that such a network is visible to secondary administrators, it might also raise awareness of the vital function of student-staffed writing centers. In the time that I have been director of Lakeside High School’s writing center and part of building a state coalition to promote and support student-staffed writing centers, overall awareness of the benefits of student-staffed writing centers has increased. When I instituted the writing center at this site, there were four student-staffed writing centers in the state. Today, three-and-a-half years later there
are at least ten, many of which were represented at the latest state conference for student-staffed writing centers.

A third implication for findings related to tutorial practice is the need among students, teachers, and administrators for greater appreciation of what writing center tutors do. A key finding of this study was how influential other contexts of instructional practice were on the tutors’ attempts to be collaborative in the writing center. Participants did not perceive students, teacher, and administrators to be fully aware or to appreciate collaborative tutoring.

One recommendation for building students’ appreciation of tutorial work is for the writing center tutors to become a more forceful advocacy group. Instead of re-educating the student body one client at a time in the writing center, writing tutors could be more proactive by advocating in other contexts. This advocacy might involve sponsoring writing events, contests, and workshops specifically targeted at students. A possible opportunity for enacting or promoting these events in this site of the study, for instance, might be during the 40 minutes advisor/advisee period all students at Lakeside High School have each week. Instead of explaining a tutorial role to them, tutors could engage students in writing activities and revision protocols. By building currency with the student body and by helping them better understand the role of a writing center tutor, two objectives might be met. First, tutors’ anxieties about enacting and sustaining their role might be alleviated, and, second, potential clients would have a clearer understanding of what to expect before they arrive at the writing center.

Another recommendation involves building teachers’ appreciation for what writing centers do. As evidenced in this study, tutors possessed valuable insights about
their clients’ writing needs, which they shared with other tutors in the writing center. However, their conversations about student learning seldom extended beyond the back regions associated with that site. Constrained by a hierarchal organizational structure that grants teachers responsibility for curricular choices and a cultural framework in which student participation in educational conversations is an anomaly, tutors did not feel they could initiate conversations with teachers about their clients. This study revealed that participants observed a distinct separation between the role of teacher and tutor. To begin to bridge that perceived gulf and to help both teachers and tutors to gain a deeper appreciation for what each contributes to writing in this school, it makes sense to invite teachers to the writing center where they would have an opportunity to observe tutorials, to ask tutors questions, to discuss student writing, and/or to share experiences. Teacher and tutors engaging in collegial conversations within the setting of the writing center would contribute to increased understanding of tutorial identity. Centering the tutor-teacher conversations in the writing center, a space not associated with teacher control would perhaps encourage a shared responsibility for improving writing. Simply put, the writing center could be the setting for a new professional dialogue between teachers and tutors.

This study invites recommendations for assisting administrators to understand and appreciate tutors’ work. The administrative team at Lakeside High School supported the writing center by providing space and sanctioning the course, what I considered two basic requirements for instituting a student-staffed writing center. In order to gain approval for a writing center, I provided the administrative team with a multi-page, research-based rationale for how peer tutoring in such a site could support student writing. When I
decided a course was needed to train and support tutors, I returned to the administrative team with another rationale and subsequently received permission. I believe the informed communication with administrators was the key to securing approval for the writing center and for the tutor preparation course. In order to maintain that approval, I sent periodic reports with quantitative data, my assessment of writing center efficacy, and student and tutor testimonials. In addition, I constructed a writing center newsletter that highlighted tutors’ work in and beyond the writing center. Tutors contributed articles about the writing center, wrote about their outreach work, and submitted their personal writing. I made this newsletter available online to the entire school community and printed hard copies for each teacher and administrator. I believe these efforts helped to remind administrators of the existence and efficacy of the writing center.

However, more needs to be done to build administrative appreciation for tutorial work. I noted in the methodology chapter that Lakeside High School Writing Center has relocated four times since its inception. Those decisions about where to (re) locate the center were always based on what facilitated the learning in other contexts, not what supported tutorial work. The first two spaces, the library and the math lab, were noisy, open spaces where tutorials were often interrupted. In each case, the teacher in charge requested the writing center be moved. The media specialist felt the writing center was taking up too much space in the library; the math lab teacher felt the presence of the writing center detracted from both math lab and writing center clientele. The third space, a room in the Fine Arts Building, while less public and noisy, was located away from the heartbeat of the school. In fact, participants were so used to being located on the outskirts of the school that they referred to clients arriving for a tutorial as “coming out to the
writing center.” The implication for this became obvious to me in the midst of data analysis: if the writing center was to make a significant contribution to writing in this school and to foster collaborative tutoring, it had to be more accessible and visible to the overall institutional community.

The writing center may have remained on the outskirts of the school had I not advocated for another change. Because of a shift in my responsibilities, I was able to make available a more accessible space for the writing center. The fourth and present space is central to student traffic and highly visible to teachers, students, and administrators. However, during the three-and-a-half years that Lakeside High School’s writing center has been in existence no administrator has visited the center. Participants reported they had had little interaction with administrators in their tutorial roles beyond a hallway greeting or an occasional query as to their satisfaction with tutoring. Previously, I suggested the need for more and better communication between teachers and tutors. In the same vein, I suggest that same increased communication should occur between administrators and tutors. This is a recommendation that I feel is best undertaken by me as writing center director. Though I have provided reports to administrators in the past, I can do more. For example, I could schedule and facilitate times for tutors to share their work with administrators. In addition, I could ask administrators to visit the writing center periodically to converse with tutors. Simply put, I can provide more opportunities for tutor and administrator interactions.
Sustaining Tutorial Identities: Implications for the Classroom

One reason tutors found it difficult to establish their presence in this school was because, according to their perceptions, there had historically been little value attached to collaborative learning. When the writing center was formed, the school community defined the writing center in the terms most familiar to them: remedial and directive. As participants gained knowledge of and experience in collaborative learning, they wondered why a collaborative stance was not part of their classroom instruction and why a directive approach to writing and writing instruction prevailed. Thirteen of 14 participants expressed frustration with the writing instruction they had received in classrooms. Twelve of 14 participants believed they were self-taught and discounted any teacher instruction in their success as writers. Lance, for example, believed he wrote well because he read a great deal and recognized rhetoric choices from his reading. Emily, like nine other participants, cited a decontextualized emphasis on grammar instruction as a focus of her writing instruction. Emily noted she learned grammatical concepts but not how to use those concepts in her writing. Another tension that nine of 14 participants cited was receiving papers with only errors marked and/or a grade. Lance suggested this kind of feedback provided no direction for revision. Finally, twelve of 14 participants cited the provision of the five-paragraph essay as a universal organizational pattern for academic writing. Participants provided three opinions about the five-paragraph essay. Madison, like nine of 14 participants, felt this genre was too confining and left little space for creativity. Nine of 14 participants also felt the five paragraph essay left little room for expansion of ideas. Emily, for example, suggested the limited space also limited content. Nine of 14 participants experienced tensions around wanting to write beyond teacher-
prescribed form and convention and wanting to experience academic success. Jasmine noted her anxiety with trying to make her essays fit the five paragraph format.

The challenges participants reported in their classrooms were generally in response to directive and controlled writing in classrooms and what participants perceived as a model of assigning, correcting, and grading rather than one that assisted them in improving their writing. Participants believed in and practiced collaborative tutoring in the writing center, but their expertise was generally not acknowledged in their classrooms. This created tensions for tutors who, to experience academic success, had to abandon their tutorial identities in their classrooms. One recommendation for assisting tutors to sustain their identities in contexts beyond the writing center is to involve tutors in the preparation for mini-workshops that they could offer throughout the school year at department meetings. In addition to supporting the advocacy of tutors, these mini-workshops would be a context not just for introducing the writing center, but for initiating a conversation about collaboration between tutors and teachers. Such engagement would be particularly helpful for students whose defiant stance risks their alienation from teachers. Forthright conversation about how teachers and tutors might work together to support improved writing would have implications for teacher and tutor reflection on their roles. Sharing their vast knowledge and experience with tutors, teachers could help tutors better understand why and how certain writing instruction practices exist.

A second recommendation for assisting tutors to sustain their identities in contexts beyond the writing center is to involve writing tutors in the classrooms. During this study, participants perceived notable teacher control at Lakeside High School. They
felt empowered when they enacted their identity in the writing center but felt their ideas and expertise were often discounted in other contexts. Student tutors have a great deal to contribute to the school, but to sustain collaborative support across the school day they need trust and support from the teaching staff. In the present world of economic woes, schools are experiencing deep cuts in programs and staff. Teachers are taking on larger course loads and class sizes. The writing center currently provides a valuable service to student writers at Lakeside High School, but it is underused, a reality that invites peer tutors increased participation in classrooms. One option that might support the sustained collaborative work of tutors might be to establish a tutor assistance program. This program might begin in the classrooms of those teachers who clearly understand the collaborative identity central to tutorial work. On particular days, when these teachers are devoting class time to the teaching of writing, tutor assistants free of class obligations might attend and assist teachers. A tutor assistance program of this kind would require a formalized operation in order that teacher and tutor plan in advance the nature and function of the latter’s assistance. Such communication between teachers and tutors would constitute another context for communication, but it would be vitally important that the pedagogical and theoretic principles of both parties be consistent.

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

As noted, there has been little research on the subject of high school writing centers. Even fewer empirical studies document the perspectives of high school tutors, a chief rationale for my focus on the views of the peer writing tutors who worked in Lakeside High School’s writing center. While this study used an ecological framework to document the writing center as one of a series of interrelated instructional contexts, it did
not document the perspectives and/or practices of other individuals (e.g., students, teachers, administrators) in the school site. Future studies could expand the participant sample to include these constituencies. Documenting the perspectives of all those who comprise an institution would deepen our understanding of the systemic challenges not addressed in this study.

The findings and implications noted in this study are probably not pertinent to teacher-staffed high school writing centers which future research might document. Other possibilities for future research are comparative investigations documenting tutorial perspective and/or practices in these varying venues. States in which high school writing center networks exist represent an existing context for such a study.

As a writing center director, I gained invaluable insights into tutorial identity, extended my vision for the possibilities for a student-staffed writing center, and acquired a student perspective on writing in this particular school. I learned a great deal from participants, and my view that we, as educators, ought to consider students as learning partners was validated many times over by participants’ reports. Finally, as a researcher, I learned the degree to which tutorial identity empowered students and the degree to which the institutional climate constrained them. Participants were open, honest and eager to share their experiences and beliefs. They treated me as a colleague, and I hope, in documenting their perspectives, I have returned that consideration.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Figure A.1 Research Questions.
Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child is invited to take part in a research project being conducted by Cynthia Dean, a graduate student in the Department of Education at the University of Maine and the director of the writing center at Erskine Academy. This research will be carried out in order to inform the investigator’s doctoral dissertation in Literacy Education. The research will be conducted under the guidance of Dr. Julie Cheville, chair of the dissertation committee. Dr. Julie Cheville is an Associate Professor of Literacy Education in the College of Education and Human Development.

The purpose of this research is to explore the transitions and challenges student writers face as they become writing center peer tutors. More specifically, I will explore how the transition from student writer to peer tutor affects peer tutors’ perspectives of writing and teaching and how their status as a peer tutor might influence and or shape their relationship with members of the school community.

What will your child will be asked to do?

As part of their customary work in the writing center, peer tutors engage in group discussions about their work as tutors, as writers, and as students in school and keep tutoring journals about specific tutorials. The information from these group discussions and from the tutor journals that specifically inform my research will be used in my study. I will also interview each tutor individually about his or her work in the writing center and ask tutors to participate in focused group discussions that I will audiotape and transcribe. See below for details of each activity. Your child may choose to participate in some or all of these activities.

- Classroom discussions in which peer tutors engage about their work as tutors, writers and students that I will observe and on which I will take notes. These observations will not be audiotaped.

- Excerpts from tutor journals that inform the research questions will be photocopied and then analyzed and coded to identify patterns and themes.

- In-person interviews with the researcher that will be audiotaped and transcribed. The interview will require up to an hour of each tutor’s time and will be scheduled at the tutor’s convenience during study hall, class period, or after
school. I will ask each tutor to talk about his or her history as a writer and tutor, his or her experience as a writer and a tutor, and his or her reflection on that history and experience. Sample questions include:

- How did you come to participate in the peer tutoring program at the writing center?
- What is it like for you to tutor?
- How has your tutorial identity shaped you?

Focus group interviews with the researcher that will be audiotaped and transcribed. Focus group interviews involve several or all of the peer tutors participating in this study. Peer tutors will be asked a broad question relating to the study and asked to offer their opinions and discuss the topic. The focus group interview will require up to an hour of each tutor’s time. Three focus group interviews will be scheduled during three separate class periods. If your child does not wish to participate, he or she will be excused from class and given a pass for the library.

- Focus group #1
  Perception of writing instruction: What does writing instruction for the 21st century look like?

- Focus group #2
  Perception of self as tutor: On your way to becoming the “ideal” writing tutor what gets in your way?

- Focus group #3
  Perception of definitions of teaching and tutoring: What does it mean to teach and what does it mean to tutor?

Risks:

Other than time and inconvenience, risks to your child are minimal beyond those of a regular school day. There is a possibility that students may be uncomfortable answering some interview questions, but students will be reminded that they may skip any questions at any time. There is also a possibility that responses during focus group sessions will be shared with others; however, students will be reminded of that during the sessions. Your child has the right to skip any question he or she does not wish to answer and to end the interview or focus group participation at any time.

Benefits:

While this study will have no direct benefit to you or your child, this research may help us improve teaching practice and school culture.

Confidentiality:
Your child’s name will not appear on any of the documents. Peer tutors’ names will be replaced with pseudonyms when the interview tapes are transcribed. The audiotapes will be stored on the investigator’s computer in a passworded file that only she can access. A coding system will be developed to label transcripts and documents. The data will be transcribed and coded within one year of collection; at that time the audiotapes will be destroyed. The key linking your child’s name to the data will be destroyed after data analysis is complete. Your child’s real name will not be used in any reports, publications, or conference presentations that result from this study. The transcripts and papers will be stored in my home office in a locked file cabinet for a period of ten years. At that time, the transcripts and papers will be shredded.

**Voluntary**

Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary. He or she may refuse to participate or may withdraw from any of the activities listed above. Withdrawing or refusing to participate in some or all of the activities or refusing to answer interview questions will not affect his or her standing with his or her teachers, the school or other peer tutors in any way.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Cynthia Dean at 542-9481 or at cindy@umit.maine.edu, address: 240 Rankin Street, Rockland, Maine 04841. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Julie Cheville at 581. 2411 or at julie.cheville@umit.maine.edu If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Anderson, Assistant to the University of Maine’s Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 581.1498 or at gayle.anderson@umit.maine.edu

If your child is under eighteen years of age, your signature is required. Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the above information. You will receive a copy of this form.

__________________________________  _________________________________
Signature                                                                          Date
APPENDIX C
ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Assent Form for Students
Research study of writing center peer tutors
Principal Investigator: Cynthia Dean
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Julie Cheville

Dear Student,

You are invited to join me in a research study about student-staffed writing centers in secondary schools. I want to study how you make the transition from writer to tutor, how your work in the writing center affects your understanding of tutoring and writing, and how your status as a peer tutor might influence and or shape your relationship with members of the school community. I am doing this study as a graduate student in the Department of Education at the University of Maine; the research will inform my dissertation in Literacy Education. The research will be conducted under the guidance of Dr. Julie Cheville, chair of the dissertation committee. Dr. Julie Cheville is an Associate Professor of Literacy Education in the College of Education and Human Development.

What you will be asked to do:

If you agree to join this study, it means that I will ask you to answer some questions in an individual interview and in focus groups of peer tutors, and allow me to observe you during class discussion. During the individual and focal group interviews, I will use a digital voice recorder to record our conversations. See below for details of each activity. You may choose to participate in some or all of these activities.

• Classroom discussions in which peer tutors engage about their work as tutors, writers and students that I will observe and on which I will take notes. These observations will not be audiotaped.

• Excerpts from tutor journals that inform the research questions will be photocopied and then analyzed and coded to identify patterns and themes.

• In-person interviews with the researcher that will be audiotaped and transcribed. The interview will require up to an hour of your time and will be scheduled at your convenience during study hall, class period, or after school. I will ask you to talk about your history as a writer and tutor, your experience as a writer and a tutor, and your reflection on that history and experience. Sample questions include:
  o How did you come to participate in the peer tutoring program at the writing center?
  o What is it like for you to tutor?
  o How has your tutorial identity shaped you?

• Focus group interviews with the researcher that will be audiotaped and transcribed. Focus group interviews involve several or all of the peer tutors
participating in this study. You and other peer tutors will be asked a broad question relating to the study and asked to offer your opinions and discuss the topic. The focus group interviews will require up to an hour of your time and will be scheduled after school and during class meetings.

- Focus group #1
  Perception of writing instruction: What does writing instruction for the 21st century look like?

- Focus group #2
  Perception of self as tutor: On your way to becoming the “ideal” writing tutor what gets in your way?

- Focus group #3
  Perception of definitions of teaching and tutoring: What does it mean to teach and what does it mean to tutor?

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to join this study if you do not want to, and you are free to stop at any time without consequences. Withdrawing or refusing to participate in some or all of the activities or refusing to answer interview questions will not affect your standing with your teachers, the school or other peer tutors in any way.

**Benefits and Risks:**

Other than time and inconvenience, risks to you are minimal beyond those of a regular school day. There is a possibility that you may be uncomfortable answering some interview questions, but you will be reminded that you may skip any questions at any time. There is also a possibility that responses during focus group sessions will be shared with others; however, you will be reminded of that during the sessions. You have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer and to end the interview or focus group participation at any time. I hope that what I learn from you will help teachers. I also hope that you learn more about yourself as a tutor and a writer.

**Confidentiality:**

Your name will not be on any of the documents. I will replace your name with a pseudonym when I transcribe the interview tapes. I will store the audiotapes on my computer in a passworded file that only I can access. I will develop a coding system to label transcripts and documents. The data will be transcribed and coded within one year of collection; at that time I will destroy the audiotapes. The key linking your name to the data will be destroyed after data analysis is complete. Your real name will not be used in any reports, publications, or conference presentations that result from this study. The transcripts and papers will be stored in my home office in a locked file cabinet for a period of ten years. At that time, the transcripts and papers will be shredded. You may keep a copy of this form.
APPENDIX D
SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

CASE STUDY
WRITING CENTER PEER TUTORS IN ONE HIGH SCHOOL IN MAINE

Figure D.1. Sources of Evidence
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Focus Group Interviews
Research study of peer writing tutors
Principal investigator: Cynthia Dean
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Julie Cheville

The focus group interviews are designed to answer sub questions 1 and 2 of the research project and will last up to an hour. They will be conducted during the school day when peer tutors meet as a group as well as after school to accommodate both tutors who are enrolled in the tutor preparation class and those who are volunteers.

Research sub-question 1: How does the transition from student/writer to writing tutor affect students' perceptions of writing and writing instruction?
Research sub-question 2: How does the transition from student/writer to writing tutor affect students' understanding of what it means to teach and tutor?

Focus group #1
Perception of writing instruction: Drawing on your experience as a writer, student of writing, and tutor of writing, what do you believe writing instruction for the 21st century should look like? Based on your experience, how is this different from or the same as writing instruction in the past?

Focus group #2
Perception of self as tutor: What does an “ideal” tutor look like? How do you enact this ideal identity? On your way to becoming the “ideal” writing tutor what gets in your way? what assists you?

Focus group #3
Perception of definitions of teaching and tutoring: What does it mean to teach and what does it mean to tutor? How are they the same and how are they different? How, if at all, has your definition of these terms changed since becoming a tutor?
APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions
Research study of peer writing tutors
Principal Investigator: Cynthia Dean
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Julie Cheville

• Tell me the story of how you came to be a peer tutor. How did you come to participate in the peer tutoring program in the writing center?
  • Why did you want to become a writing tutor?
  • What do you hope to get out of your work?

• Tell me as much as possible about your writing history.
  • What kinds of writings do you enjoy? not enjoy? Why?
  • What kinds of writings have you typically done in school up to the present?
  • What kinds of writings do you presently do personally and academically?
  • What kind of writing instruction have you had in the past? In elementary school, middle school?
  • What kinds of writing instruction have you encountered since entering high school?
  • What is your opinion of the effectiveness of the writing instruction you have experienced?

• Tell me as much as possible about your training for becoming a tutor.
  1. What is your perception of the effectiveness of your training? What worked well for you? What did not work well for you? What would you change, add, delete?
  2. If you are enrolled in the credited course, talk about the class readings, discussions, and writing requirements? What works for you? What does not work for you? What would you change, add, delete?
  3. If you are a volunteer, talk about the monthly meetings of tutors? What works for you? What does not work for you? What would you change, add, delete?

• Tell me as much as possible about the details of your tutoring experience in the writing center.
  • What is your work?
  • What is it like for you to do what you do?
  • Take me through a typical tutorial.
  • How do you define teaching and tutoring?

• Now that you have talked about how you came to your work, what does it mean for you?
  1. What sense does it make to you?
2. What are the conditions that encourage a person to become a tutor in the writing center?
3. Where do you see yourself going in the future?

- How has assuming a “teacher role” influenced your academic performance in school?
  1. How has your identity as a tutor shaped how teachers perceive you?
  2. How has your tutorial identity shaped how students perceive you?
  3. How has your tutorial identity shaped how other peer tutors perceive you?
  4. How has your tutorial identity shaped how administration perceives you?
  5. What, if any challenges, tensions, or controversies have you faced in your transition from student and writer to tutor or in your transition from tutor to writer and student?
  6. How have you responded to these challenges, tensions, or controversies?

- How, if all, has your experience as a peer writing tutor affected your writing?

- How, if at all, has your experience as a peer tutor affected your definition of good writing?
  - How, if at all, has your identity as a tutor shaped the way you perceive writing instruction?
  - What, if any, challenges do your definition of writing and writing instruction present to you in your work as a tutor?
  - What, if any, challenges do your definition of writing and writing instruction present to you in your role as a student and writer?
Master Code: INFLUENCE (INFLU) This master code reflects reported influences on a participant’s learning as he/she prepares to tutor. This master code is restricted to curricular influences associated with the training of tutors.

INFLU-crse (course) – This sub-code addresses the reported influence of the tutor preparation course on a participant’s tutorial practice.

INFLU-ttrs (tutors) – This sub-code addresses the reported influence of tutors who have been influential as teachers. This sub-code involves participants’ specific reference to tutors or to tutors generally as in some way assisting them to acquire particular tutorial practices. This influence may occur in or outside the tutor preparation course.

INFLU-obsrv (observation) – This sub-code addresses the reported influence of a participant’s observation of writing center tutorials.

INFLU-rhrl (rehearsal) - This sub-code addresses the reported influence of a participant’s rehearsal of tutorial practice with other tutors. Rehearsals are defined as role-plays conducted as part of tutoring training within the tutor preparation class and/or within the writing center. Rehearsals could also be spontaneous moments not related to the course or within the writing center.

Master Code: ENACTMENT (ENACT) This master code addresses the participant's actual enactment of tutorial practices. In his or her description of enacting a tutorial role, the participant may address particular events, tasks, or techniques that accompany his/her tutoring. Enacting a tutorial role may take place in a variety of contexts (the writing center, classrooms to which participants have been invited, spontaneous moments during the school day, and/or any other event when a participant enacts a tutorial role.

ENACT-strtg (strategies) – This sub-code encompasses the strategies a participant indicate he/she uses to assist clients during tutorials. This sub-code includes successful and failed strategies.

ENACT-stnrd (standards) - This sub-code addresses reported standards for enacting tutorial practices. A participant's reference to standards include any principle of conduct that she or he considers central to the enactment of tutorial practice.

ENACT-dfclt (difficulties) - This sub-code encompasses any reported difficulty associated with the enactment of tutorial practice. This sub-code does not encompass tutorial practices or strategies that are in effect but focuses on external explanations for tutorial challenges (client, task, tutors, etc.).
ENACT-csquncts (consequences)- This sub-code addresses any reported consequences associated with the enactment of tutorial practice. Potential consequences reported by participants may include increased responsibility, heightened expectations from teachers, etc.

Master Code: IDENTIFY (IDNTY): This master code refers to a participant’s explicit acknowledgment of characteristics, affordances, and/or constraints associated with his/her identity as a tutor. “Identity” does not refer to the act of enacting tutorial practices or to influences that have shaped a participant’s preparation to tutor. Rather, “identity” refers to a participant’s reflection on a general persona (e.g. writing tutor) and characteristics, affordances, and/or constraints associated with that persona.

IDNTY-chars (characteristics): This sub-code captures what a participant says are the characteristics of a writing tutor. This sub-code includes personality and performance qualities.

IDNTY-affd (affordances): This sub-code captures what a participant says about privileges, benefits, opportunities, or advantages he or she believes are associated with a tutorial identity.

IDNTY-cnst (constraints): This sub-code captures what a participant says about difficulties, limitations or restrictions he or she believes are associated with a tutorial identity.

IDNTY-actvt (activities) - This sub-code captures what a participant say about the effects of tutor-related activities on his or her identity. For example, this sub-code may include a participant's explanation for how participation in speeches, workshops, or other kinds of tutorial presentations affect his/her identity.

Master Code: EXPECTATIONS (EXP): This master code reflects the expectations a participant perceives others have for him/her as a writing tutor. The code refers to the expectations of teachers, clients, administrators, and/or peers and includes expectations for tutorial practice in any context.

EXP-tchr (teachers) – This sub-code represents a participant’s reference to teacher(s)’s expectations for a tutor’s general classroom work and participation, for his/her writing, and about his/her role as a writing center representative.

EXP-clnt (clients) – This sub-code represents a participant’s reference to the general expectations a client has for the tutor and the writing tutorial prior to, during, and following a tutoring session. This sub-code also includes a participant’s perception of the expectations a client may have for his/her tutoring beyond the setting of a formal tutorial.
**EXP-admn (administrators)** – This sub-code represents a participant’s reference to administrator’s expectations for tutorial performance.

**EXP-prs (peers)** – This sub-code represents a participant’s perception of peers’ expectations regarding his/her tutorial identity and/or performance in the writing center. "Peers” includes tutors with whom the participant works or students in the general school population.

**Master Code: HISTORY (HSTY)** This master code encompasses a participant’s recollection of their past experiences as students, writers, and/or tutors. This master code also includes a participant’s reference to how a past experience shapes his/her current identity as a tutor. This master code does NOT address any references to identity that are divorced from past experience.

**HSTY-wrschl (writing, school)** – This sub-code refers to a participant’s reference to his/her past experiences with school-based writing. This sub-code also includes the participant’s perception of the effect of his/her school writing experiences on his/her tutoring.

**HSTY-wrprsl (writing, personal)** – This sub-code refers to a participant’s reference to his/her past experiences with personal writing. This sub-code also includes the participant’s perception of the effect of his/her personal writing experience on his/her tutoring.

**HSTY-wrinst (writing instruction)** – This sub-code refers to a participant’s reference to his/her past experiences with writing instruction. This sub-code also includes the participant’s perception of the effect of his/her writing instruction on his/her tutoring.

**HSTY-stdt (student)** – This sub-code refers to a participant’s reference to his/her past experiences as a student in general, including the influence of these experiences on his/her tutoring.

**HSTY-ttr (tutor)** – This sub-code refers to a participant’s past experiences as a tutor, including the influence of these experiences on his/her present tutoring.

**Master code: CURRENT EXPERIENCES (CXPR)** This master code refers to what a participant reports as current experiences as a writer and a student particularly in writing instruction and writing assignments. However, this code can also refer to current writing experience not associated with school. This code does NOT include experiences prior to becoming a tutor. Rather, it includes only experiences reported as occurring concurrently with being a tutor.
CXPR- wersch (writing, school) - This sub-code refers to a participant's reference to his/her current experiences with school-based writing. This sub-code also includes the participant’s perception of the effect of his/her school writing experiences on his/her tutoring.

CXPR- wrinst (writing instruction) –This sub-code refers to a participant’s reference to his/her current experiences with writing instruction received from a teacher. This sub-code also includes the participant’s perception of the effect of his/her writing instruction on his/her tutoring.

CXPR- wrprsl (writing, personal) - This sub-code refers to a participant’s reference to his/her current experiences with personal writing. This sub-code also includes the participant’s perception of the effect of his/her personal writing experience on his/her tutoring.

Master code: BELIEFS (BEL) This master code refers to a participant's beliefs about past or present tutor preparation practices, writing instruction, teaching practices, tutoring practices and/or organization and management of the school. This master code also includes a participant's beliefs (recommendations) about what should be changed, adjusted, or maintained in these areas.

BEL-ttprp (tutor preparation) – This sub-code captures references to a participant's beliefs and recommendations about past or present tutor preparation practices.

BEL-wrinstn (writing instruction) –This sub-code captures references to a participant's beliefs and recommendations about writing instruction.

BEL-tch (teaching) - This sub-code captures references to a participant's beliefs and recommendations about teaching practices.

BEL-ttr (tutoring) - This sub-code captures references to a participant's beliefs and recommendations about tutoring practices.

BEL-schl (school) – This sub-code captures references to a participant's beliefs and recommendations about school policy.
APPENDIX H
CODING MAP

INFLUENCES (INFL)
- INFL-crse: influence of course
- INFL-ttrs: influence of tutors
- INFL-obsrv: influence of observation of tutorials
- INFL-rhrl: influence of rehearsal with other tutors

ENACTMENT (ENACT)
- ENACT-strtg: strategies used to assist clients; successful and failed.
- ENACT-dfclt: difficulties encountered during tutorials
- ENACT-csquncs: consequences associated with tutorial practice

IDENTITY (IDNTY)
- IDNTY-chars: personality and performance characteristics of a tutor
- IDNTY-affd: privileges, opportunities or advantages assoc with tutorial id
- IDNTY-cnst: limitations or restrictions assoc with tutorial id
- IDNTY-actvt: effects of tutor-related activities

EXPECTATIONS (EXP)
- EXP-tchr: teacher expectations for tutors in class, for writing, and as a tutor
- EXP-clnt: client expectations for tutorials as well as in other settings
- EXP-admn: administration’s expectations for tutorial performance
- EXP-prs: peers’ expectations for tutorial identity and or tutorial performance

HISTORY (HSTY)
- HSTY-wrsch: past experiences with school-based writing and effect on tutoring
- HSTY-wrprsl: past experiences with personal writing and effect on tutoring.
- HSTY-wrinstn: past experiences with writing instruction and effect on tutoring
- HSTY-stdt: past experiences as a student and effect on tutoring
- HSTY-ttr: past experiences as a tutor and effect on present tutoring

CURRENT EXPERIENCES (CXPR)
- CXPR-wrsch: current experiences with school-based writing and effect on tutoring
- CXPR-wrinst: current experiences with writing instruction and effect on tutoring
- CXPR-wrprsl: current experiences with personal writing and effect on tutoring

BELIEFS (BEL)
- BEL-ttprp: beliefs and recommandaitons about tutor prep
- BEL-wrinstn: beliefs and recommendations about writing instruction
- BEL-tch: beliefs and recommendations about teaching
- BEL-ttr: beliefs and recommendations about tutoring
- BEL-sch: beliefs and recommendations about school policies
APPENDIX I
FREQUENCY OF DESCRIPTIVE SUB-CODES BY MASTER CODE

Master Code: EXPECTATIONS (EXP)

This master code reflects the expectations a participant perceives others have for him/her as a writing tutor. The code refers to the expectations of teachers, clients, administrators, and/or peers and includes expectation for tutorial practice in any context.

Sub-codes:
- Expectations - teachers (Exp-tchr)
- Expectations - clients (Exp-clnt)
- Expectations - administrators (Exp-admn)
- Expectations - peers (Exp-prs)

Table I.1. Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPECTATIONS - DATA</th>
<th>Exp-tchr</th>
<th>Exp-clnt</th>
<th>Exp-admn</th>
<th>Exp-prs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Master Code: INFLUENCE (INFL)

This master code reflects reported influences on a participant's learning as he/she prepares to tutor. This master code is restricted to curricular influences associated with the training of tutors.

Sub-codes:
- Influence - course (Infl-crse)
- Influence - tutors (Infl-trrs)
- Influence - observation (Infl-obsrv)
- Influence - rehearsal (Infl-rhrl)

Table I.2. Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFLUENCES - DATA</th>
<th>Infl-crse</th>
<th>Infl-trrs</th>
<th>Infl-obsrv</th>
<th>Infl-rhrl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications per Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Master Code: IDENTITY (IDNTY)

This master code refers to a participant’s explicit acknowledgment of characteristics, affordances, and/or constraints associated with his/her identity as a tutor. “Identity” does not refer to the act of enacting tutorial practices or to influences that have shaped a participant’s preparation to tutor. Rather, “identity” refers to a participant’s reflection on a general persona (e.g. writing tutor) and characteristics, affordances, and/or constraints associated with that persona.

Sub-Codes:
Identity- characteristic (Idnty-chars)
Identity - affordances (Idnty-affd)
Identity - constraints (Idnty-cnst)
Identity - activities (Idnty-actvt)

Table I.3. Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTITY- DATA</th>
<th>Idnty-chars</th>
<th>Idnty-affd</th>
<th>Idnty-cnst</th>
<th>Idnty-actvt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications per Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Master Code: ENACTMENT (ENACT)

This master code addresses the participant's actual enactment of tutorial practices. In his or her description of enacting a tutorial role, the participant may address particular events, tasks, or techniques that accompany his/her tutoring. Enacting a tutorial role may take place in a variety of contexts (the writing center, classrooms to which participants have been invited, spontaneous moments during the school day, and/or any other event when a participant enacts a tutorial role.

Sub-Codes:
- Enactment- strategies (Enact-strtg)
- Enactment-standards (Enact-stnrd)
- Enactment-difficulties (Enact-dfclt)
- Enactment-consequences (Enact-csquncs)

Table 1.4.
Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Enactment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENACTMENT - DATA</th>
<th>Enact-strtg</th>
<th>Enact-stnrd</th>
<th>Enact-dfclt</th>
<th>Enact-csquncs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications per Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Master Code: HISTORY (HSTY)

This master code encompasses a participant’s recollection of his or her past experiences as student, writer, and/or tutor. This master code also includes a participant’s reference to how a past experience shapes his/her current identity as a tutor. This master code does NOT address any references to identity that are divorced from past experience.

Sub-Codes:
- History- writing, school (Hsty-wrschl)
- History - writing, personal (Hsty-wrprsl)
- History- writing instruction (Hsty-wrinst)
- History- student (Hsty-stdt)
- History-tutor (Hsty-ttr)

Table I.5
Sub-code Distribution for Master Code History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HISTORY-DATA</th>
<th>Hsty-wrschl</th>
<th>Hsty-prsl</th>
<th>Hsty-wrinst</th>
<th>Hsty-stdt</th>
<th>Hsty-ttr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications per Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Master code: BELIEFS (BEL)

This master code refers to a participant's beliefs about past or present tutor preparation practices, writing instruction, teaching practices, tutoring practices and/or organization and management of the school. This master code also includes a participant's beliefs (recommendations) about what should be changed, adjusted, or maintained in these areas.

Sub-codes:
Beliefs-tutor preparation (Bel-ttprp)
Beliefs-writing instruction (Bel-wrinstn)
Beliefs-teaching (Bel-tch)
Beliefs-tutoring (Bel-tr)
Beliefs-school (Bel-schl)

Table I.6.
Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BELIEFS-DATA</th>
<th>Bel-ttprp</th>
<th>Bel-wrinst</th>
<th>Bel-tch</th>
<th>Bel-tr</th>
<th>Bel-sch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications per Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Master code: CURRENT EXPERIENCES (CXPR)

This master code refers to what a participant reports as current experiences as a writer and a student particularly in writing instruction and writing assignments. However, this code can also refer to current writing experience not associated with school. This code does NOT include experiences prior to becoming a tutor. Rather, it includes only experiences reported as occurring concurrently with being a tutor.

**Sub-codes:**
- Current experiences - writing, school (Cxpr-wrsch)
- Current experiences - writing instruction (Cxpr-wrinst)
- Current experiences - writing, personal (Cxpr-prsl)
- Current experiences - school (Cxpr-sch)

Table I.7.
Sub-code Distribution for Master Code Current Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT EXPERIENCE-DATA</th>
<th>Cxpr-wrsch</th>
<th>Cxpr-wrinst</th>
<th>Cxer-prsl</th>
<th>Cxpr-sch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications per Sub-Code: Observational Data</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Focus Group Data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Document Data</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications: Interview Data</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure J.1. Master Codes Pie Chart
APPENDIX K
SYLLABUS

Writing Center Syllabus
Mentoring and Composition 2008-2009
“Rhetoric is the art, practice, and study of human communication.”
Andrea Lunsford

Beginning to Write by Jacques Barzun

To know how to begin to write is a great art. Convince yourself that you are working in clay, not marble; on paper, not eternal bronze; let the first sentence be as stupid as it wishes. No one will rush out and print it as it stands. Just put it down; and then another. Your whole first paragraph or first page may have to be guillotined after your piece is finished; but there can be no second paragraph until you have a first.

Course texts:
The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring
The St. Martin’s Sourcebook for Writing Tutors
Handouts

Description:
In this course students will hone their writing processes, support that process across the school community through work in the Writing Center, learn and support the six trait language of writing, practice multiple writing applications including expressive, transactional, and poetic forms, investigate and write in various disciplines.

Course description:
• Open to juniors and seniors by application. Sophomores with teacher recommendation will be considered. Students interested in this class will complete an application and submit a writing sample.
• Student-centered, inquiry-based learning through service to the school and community.
• Class size – 20.
• Students must have strong interpersonal skills and a good command of the writing process.
• Students must be able to work independently.
• Students will staff the Writing Center during during study halls.

Peer tutor requirements:
• Complete the initial training sessions for peer tutors.
• Continue to enhance your communicative skills through reading and research into mentoring and coaching strategies.
• Staff the writing center.
• Promote the writing center with fellow students and with teachers.
• Continue to grow your writing abilities by completing all coursework.
Course reading and writing requirements:
• Complete a portfolio of writing for each trimester.
• Keep a reflective journal of your work in the Writing Center.
• Read extensively about rhetoric and composition theories and practices.
• Seek out and read essays, articles, and or books about writing centers and writing in general (e.g. books -Stephen King’s On Writing, Ralph Fletcher’s Breathing In, Ann Lamott’s Bird by Bird; English Journal or Writing Center Journal for articles and essays)

Trimester Portfolio Requirements:
• Read articles provided by writing center director about writing, composition theory, and tutoring.
• Participate in discussion groups in class
• Seek out and read at least three articles, chapters, or stories about writing and share with class.
• Create an annotated bibliography of the articles you read each trimester.
• Choose one particularly interesting article or book chapter; write about that article in a 500-800 word response.
• Participate in a writing group; members will serve as critical friends and peer tutors for one another.
• Three pieces of writing, (suggested length: 600-1000 words each) highly-polished (at least three drafts) with editors’ comments
• Two free-choice pieces of writing with at least two drafts. (e.g., poetry collection, drama, essay, letter, fan fiction, short- short, comic book, hyper-text story, web log, website)
• Journal (reflections on readings, responses to prompts, free writes, self-assessments, story of your work in the writing center)
• Portfolio will be carefully collated into a three-ring binder with a table of contents, reflective letter to the reader, and a self-assessment. Alternately, you may submit your portfolio as a web-based document. Portfolios are due the week before the end of each trimester. Your portfolio will have multiple student readers as well as the writing center director.
• OPTIONAL: Seek out a wider audience for your work. Submit your work to the school anthology, on-line forums for student work, post to a web log for a wider audience, submit to Teen Ink, submit to a local newspaper, and so forth.
• NOTE: The three highly polished piece and the two free choice pieces can be combined into alternate formats e.g., a chapter of a novel, a multigenre project, etc. Please see me to get this approved.
Session 1: 2-3:30pm. Students will bring a writing sample to the first session. These papers will be read and responded to by the writing center director.
   1. Introductions
   2. Mission statement and philosophy of the writing center
   3. Importance of student-tutors in HS and in college
   4. Higher vs. lower order concerns. Give example of student writing to trainees.
      Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts on the paper (What do you think about it? What would you comment on?).
   5. Discussion of what you wrote. What did you look for? Why? Why are higher level concerns more important than lower order concerns?
   6. Learning the six trait language (student checklist and instructional scoring guide)
   7. First three chapters of Allyn and Bacon. Read chapter one.

Session 2: 2-3pm.
   1. Return student papers with comments
   2. Conversation on the comments. What do you notice? How are the comments worked? Directive or suggestive? Model for peer response?
   3. Role-plays.
   4. Unpack the experience. Write a short reaction.
   5. Discuss Chapter 1. Read Chapter 2 for next time.

Session 3: 2-3pm
   1. Discuss of Chapter 2 - The Writing Process. Write a short reflection on personal writing process. How will you encourage clients to reflect on their processes? Read Chapter 3 for next time.
   2. Return reactions from previous session.
   3. Role-plays.
   4. Unpack the experience. Write a short reaction

Session 4: 2-3pm
   1. Discuss Chapter 3 - The Tutoring Process. How does the tutoring process described in the text compare with what we’ve learned so far? What aspects of the process described do you think you can use?
   2. Return reactions from previous session.
   3. Assign mentors; sign up for time in writing center.
   4. Final words, questions, concerns.
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Cynthia Dean was born in Rockland, Maine on July 15, 1953. She grew up in and around Rockland, Maine and graduated from Rockland District High School in 1971. Cynthia attended the University of Maine at Augusta, and graduated from there in 1998 with a B.A. in English. She went on to do post-graduate work at the University of Maine and earned an M. A. in English in 2000. Cynthia worked as an English teacher at Lee Academy in Lee, ME for one year before moving to a high school in central Maine. She taught English there for six years and is currently the school’s literacy specialist and writing center director. Cynthia earned a Master’s degree in Literacy Education from the University of Maine in 2005. She is a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in Literacy Education from the University of Maine in May, 2010.