# "I Know It's Going to Affect My Teaching": What Emerging Teachers Learn through Tutoring Writing

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Abstract

*This focus-group study followed twelve writing center tutors over the course of one academic year to examine what they learned about teaching. We captured changes in tutors' beliefs and practices over time, especially their increased empathy for students, improved interpersonal skills, and knowledge of WAC, assignment design, and ways of responding to student writing. The tutors believed their writing center experiences would shape their future teaching in positive ways. These findings suggest that WPAs and writing center directors alike may devise teacher training activities designed to help tutors transfer their pedagogical knowledge from the context of the center to that of the classroom.*

## Introduction

The idea that tutoring experience benefits composition teachers has wide acceptance in the discipline. For example, the CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing recommends writing center work as professional development for graduate TAs and instructors. Many writing programs follow this recommendation. More than half of the programs represented in Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick's study required writing center work for TA preparation (112). Even in programs that don't require writing center experience, tutoring was considered a helpful supplementary form of teacher preparation (112).

Because of their role in preparing writing teachers, both writing center directors and program administrators can benefit from a deeper understanding of what tutors learn from tutoring and how it might influence their classroom practice. Empirical investigations of tutor learning, however, are rare. Instead, arguments for the value of writing center work, while compelling, have rested primarily on anecdotal reflections by writing center directors and tutors. Few studies have examined the impact of tutoring in a systematic and data-driven way. Data-driven inquiries are needed, therefore, to test the claims of earlier studies and to identify insights not available through individual reflection alone.

Our study, relying on empirical and longitudinal data, addresses this need and adds to existing scholarship. Using focus group interviews with

writing center tutors, we investigate what emerging writing teachers learn through tutoring and how they anticipate using such knowledge as they transition to the classroom. Our findings have relevance for both writing center directors and WPAs. They may help writing center directors prepare tutors to reflect on skills they have learned and prepare to transfer them into the classroom. Moreover, these findings could inform teacher preparation in programs where many instructors have previous tutoring experience, as WPAs can design training programs that build on skills that instructors have gained through one-one-one work with students.

## The Role of the Writing Center in Writing Teacher Education

Existing studies of the writing center's impact on tutors, whether relying on anecdotal or empirical methods, have identified a consistent range of benefits for current and future composition teachers. One of the commonly cited ways that tutoring contributes to teachers' knowledge is through increasing their understanding of students' experiences and composing challenges. Through working with students at all stages of their writing, tutors develop a nuanced understanding of the writing process (Broder; Clark; Harris; Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick; Zelenack et al.). This awareness, in turn, can help tutors "develop sharpened diagnostic abilities" to identify students' challenges and needs, a skill they can "carry over immediately into the classroom" (Clark 348).

An increased awareness of the role and forms of writing across the curriculum (WAC) is another frequently mentioned effect of tutoring. Seeing a range of assignments, as Jackson explains, promotes a "solid grasp on the entire spectrum of academic writing and writing programs" (12). It also shows tutors what makes an assignment effective or ineffective (Clark; Harris; Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick; Zelenack et al.). Watching students work through challenging assignments helps emerging teachers to become "better prepared to create assignments that challenge and interest students after seeing what assignments work and don't" (Johnson-Schull 13). In addition to knowledge of assignment design, tutoring is frequently credited with improving confidence and skill in giving written feedback and one-on-one conferencing (Broder; Clark; Harris; Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick; Zelenak, et al.), both practical skills that translate more or less directly to the classroom.

Finally, writing center work may foster critical reflection on emerging teachers' philosophies and practices, as they learn principles of collaboration, process writing, and student-centered teaching. The non-evaluative nature of tutoring creates "a critical distance for reflection," allowing teachers "to step back and examine critically their pedagogical stances towards

students," viewing them more fully as individuals (Jacobs, Danes, Jacobs, and Craig 2). In her study of ten TAs, Cogie found that tutoring had "allowed them to understand the practical implications of student-centered theory and made them significantly more committed to practicing it in the classroom" (80). These studies unanimously find that future writing teachers can develop valuable knowledge and skills through tutoring.

The value of tutoring, however, extends beyond pedagogical development. In fact, much of what tutors learn is affective and interpersonal in nature (e.g., Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail; DeFeo and Caparas; Weaver). Although our research questions focused on teacher development, we found that tutors placed equal emphasis on skills and attributes that were not explicitly pedagogical—such as self-efficacy, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and empathy. These abilities resemble what Driscoll has called "writing-adjacent" skills that make a critical difference in student success.

Recent scholarship has recognized the important role that emotions play in tutoring (Lawson, Evertz and Fitzpatrick) and its importance to staff training (Lape). Earlier articles—especially pedagogical pieces—treated emotion as a disruptive force, something that risked derailing a tutoring session or detracting from the *real* work of improving student writing (e.g., Devet and Barbiero; Mills). Lawson identifies this trend in a 2015 review of research, noting that scholarship on the affective dimensions of tutoring often focuses on *negative* emotion and creates a binary between emotion and logic. Lawson reminds us, however, that psychologists have found that "rather than being inherently disruptive or the opposite of reason, emotion actually plays an integral role in cognition" (25).

Emerging scholarship takes a more nuanced view of emotion, suggesting that tending to the affective dimensions of tutoring can have a positive, generative effect for tutor and learner (Yoon and Stutelberg). Moreover, surveys of former tutors reveal that they consider the development of affective knowledge, including interpersonal skills, to be a significant benefit of tutoring work (Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail; DeFeo and Caparas; Weaver).[1] Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail found that writing center work helped tutors develop skill in collaborating with others, handling "complex rhetorical situations," and active listening (27–28). The tutors in Weaver's study specifically mentioned empathy as an important skill they gained from their work (23). And DeFeo and Caparas, who followed former tutors after they

1. Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail note that one complication of surveying former tutors is that we can't know whether they gained skills as a result of their tutoring, or they became tutors because they already demonstrated these skills. They dealt with this potential problem by focusing on "developing" of skills rather than simply the "acquiring" of skills (18).

entered the classroom, found that they were more confident and patient with learners as a result of their time in the center. They were more likely to transfer their interpersonal knowledge to new contexts when asked to engage in reflection and analysis and to consider how they might apply this knowledge in the future.

Overall, the literature on the role of writing center work in teacher preparation is overwhelmingly positive, crediting tutoring with improving future teachers' knowledge about students, writing across the curriculum, assignment design, and feedback practices, along with affective and interpersonal skills. Yet this list of benefits is based mostly on the reflections of WC directors and former tutors rather than systematic, data-driven research or qualitative analysis. The state of knowledge of the impact of tutoring on writing teachers is much like the state of our knowledge of TA preparation overall, based more on impressions and received practices than systematic analysis, suggesting the need for "a more intensive cycle of data-driven program assessment leading to curricular and co-curricular improvements of writing pedagogy education" (Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir 62).

## The Study

This study responds to Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir's call for data-driven research on teacher training. It builds on the model suggested by the Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Project (Kail, Gillespie, and Hughes), which points to the importance for writing center administrators of keeping track of former staff members and gathering data about the long-term effects and benefits of tutoring on teaching and "teaching-adjacent" skills. While previous studies have relied on surveys of writing center directors and writing program administrators (Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick) or interviews and observations of former tutors (Cogie; DeFeo and Caparas; Kail et al), we were interested in the experiences of *current* tutors, especially those who planned to teach. If tutoring does benefit emergent teachers, we hoped to see evidence of this development as it happened over time. To accomplish this goal, we conducted a longitudinal, focus-group, interview-based study of twelve tutors over the course of one academic year to see what they reported learning and how they felt their knowledge would transfer into future teaching or working contexts[2].

### *Research Context*

This study took place at a large, research-intensive university that serves as the state flagship. The writing center conducts approximately 7,000

2. This study was approved by the university's Office of Research Protections, IRB # 17-OR-245.

consultations per year for students at all levels and typically reaches an additional 2,000 students through events and workshops. The center employs graduate and undergraduate student tutors. Undergraduate tutors can work at the center after completing an internship course. Though many of them are English majors, some are in other disciplines, and therefore bring a wide range of knowledge about writing in the disciplines. Because our accrediting agency requires graduate students to have eighteen hours of credit before they can teach, the English Department assigns them to work as writing center tutors in their first year of post-baccalaureate study. Occasionally, more experienced TAs are assigned to the center as staffing needs fluctuate.

*Participants*

Tutors were approached at the first staff meeting of the year and invited to participate in the study. Twelve tutors volunteered and gave informed consent. Table 1 provides an overview of these participants.

Table 1

Study Participants

| Focus Group | Tutor* | Undergrad/Grad | Program of Study | Previous WC Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Ashley | 1st year GTA | TESOL** | 4 years at previous institution |
| | George | 1st year GTA | TESOL | None |
| | Jessie | 1st year GTA | TESOL | None |
| | Michelle | 1st year GTA | Creative Writing | 1 year at previous institution |
| B | Erin | 1st year GTA | TESOL | None |
| | Kendra | 2nd year GTA | TESOL | 1 year |
| | Laura | 1st year GTA | Literature | None |
| | Lisa | 1st year GTA | Creative Writing | 1 year at previous institution |
| C | Grace | Undergrad | English major | 3 years |
| | Mary | Undergrad | English Secondary Education major | practicum course |
| | Mun-Hee | Undergrad | English major | practicum course |
| | Natasha | Undergrad | English/ Psychology major | practicum course |

* Pseudonyms
**Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Participants included four undergraduate tutors and nine graduate students, a proportion which reflects the overall make-up of the writing center staff.[3] The majority were starting their first semester of tutoring, though several had experience in other writing centers.[4]

*Data Collection*

We used focus group interviews for data collection. This format allowed us to gather insights from multiple research participants in one setting and also allowed tutors to engage in conversation that elicited their reflections on what they had learned over the course of the year. As MacNealy explains, the focus group model "is based on the assumption that the interaction of members of a small group will facilitate the uncovering of ideas that probably wouldn't surface if individuals were asked separately about their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. . . . " (177). Good focus group research, then, is more than just an interview with multiple participants, but rather, is a "carefully planned" conversation, with participants placed in groups based on characteristics that allow for thoughtful discussion, and trained facilitators who follow specific protocols to achieve consistency across interviews and encourage interaction (177). In order to promote discussion, we formed groups of three to five participants based on tutors' status (undergraduate versus graduate) and availability. In separating undergraduate and graduate tutors, we hoped to create contexts in which participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts with a group of peers. We varied the composition of the graduate student groups based on participants' programs of study (e.g., creative writing versus TESOL) to provide a range of disciplinary perspectives. The focus groups were facilitated by trained graduate student researchers.[5]

In order to track how tutors' knowledge and beliefs changed over time, each group was interviewed three times during the academic year. The first interview took place early in the fall semester; the second, early in the spring; and the final focus group, late in the spring semester. Prior to each interview, the facilitator reminded participants to treat the focus group as

3. In a typical year, we have twice as many graduate tutors as undergraduates.

4. To some extent this was a sample of convenience, because these were the students who responded to our invitation. However, MacNealy notes that a sample of convenience is not necessarily a drawback for focus group research, especially for research that intends to gather local perspectives from "in group" communities (178).

5. We used graduate student facilitators rather than faculty, so that participants would feel comfortable sharing their opinions.

a discussion rather than a formal interview and encouraged them to reply directly to one another rather than to the facilitator. Interviews began with a warm-up in which participants were asked how things were going at the writing center and invited to share stories of recent tutoring sessions they believed had contributed to their learning. At each session, we asked a few core questions based on the existing literature. These questions were designed to elicit teachers' beliefs about students, their perceptions of effective writing instruction, and their opinion regarding whether writing center work was contributing to their development. If time remained, the facilitators asked follow-up questions to spark further discussion. These questions focused on participants' beliefs about writing assignments, their feedback techniques, the rewards and challenges of tutoring, and suggestions for future tutor training and support. The same protocol and questions were repeated at each focus group to allow us to see trends and changes over time. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

### *Data Analysis*

We collaboratively coded the data using grounded analysis procedures (Corbin and Strauss). Grounded theory attempts to account for the complexity of real-world research contexts by "building theory from data" rather than relying on a rigid set of codes (1). It consists of several rounds of coding that take place recursively throughout the data collection and analysis phases of a study. In the first round of coding, researchers generate an overall list of themes, while in subsequent rounds, those categories are refined and clarified (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña). Following these procedures, we created a set of twenty-four codes, then narrowed them to thirteen that illuminated the role of tutoring in teacher development (see the appendix).[6] While we were guided by our initial research questions, we remained open to themes that we did not initially anticipate.

## Findings

In the following section, we divide our findings into two parts, with the first being areas of learning that the tutors reported but for which we did not see significant growth or change over time. These findings broadly confirm what has been reported in previous studies of tutor learning. In the second section, we examine those elements of tutors' learning which exhibited evidence of change over the course of the study.

6. Once we had identified this final list of codes, both authors independently coded the data set. We then compared our codes and resolved discrepancies.

*Tutors' Self-Reported Learning*[7]

In general, our study confirmed previous findings regarding the value of writing center work for teacher development. As in previous studies, our participants valued "getting to see the variety of types of writing assignments that students are required to do across the disciplines" as "one of the benefits of working in the Writing Center" (Kendra). Seeing this range of writing assignments, both successful and unsuccessful, the tutors believed, would translate to their future teaching. As Laura, explains, "I have a better understanding of how to write assignment sheets that students understand" after working in the writing center.

We found that knowledge of students' writing practices and challenges was another significant dimension of learning. The tutors valued the opportunity to work one-on-one with clients, believing that these experiences prepared them for their own classrooms. As first-year GTA Michelle explained, tutoring "gives a sample of what teaching is going to be like because you get to work with students one-on-one, so you get to see from day to day like what different problems specific students are having." This knowledge of the challenges that student writers face allowed Michelle to feel more "comfortable" and "well-informed" about her future teaching.

The tutors believed that they had learned valuable strategies for providing feedback, which they hoped to transfer to future teaching contexts. They saw feedback that was positive and clear as crucial. These beliefs arose from the experience of working with clients who were discouraged by negative or vague commentary from instructors. These experiences led the tutors to see "the importance of encouraging students" while still offering "constructive feedback" (Erin) and "being as specific and clear as possible" in their comments (Michelle).

Previous studies have shown that tutors tend to report personal growth and improved communicative abilities (writing skills, listening skills) as a result of writing center work. In general, our participants saw these skills as an important aspect of teacherly knowledge and felt that working in the Center helped them develop a stronger sense of empathy, compassion, and patience. They provided a good level of detail when discussing the interpersonal skills that they acquired during their time in the Center. As Jessie put it, working in the Center helped her learn "how to communicate on the fly . . . [if] something comes up that I'm not ready for . . . . I've learned how to handle things better on the spot." Grace noted that she had gotten better at "setting boundaries for what I can and can't do with my time" as well as

7. Quotes have been edited for clarity and to remove verbal fillers unrelated to the content.

listening actively, including "doing a lot of repeating back. . . . If a student is explaining something to me, then I'll rephrase it concisely and . . . [reaffirm] their understanding instead of just [saying] *does that make sense* and getting a head nod." Mary said that tutoring helped her learn how to give "bad news," especially for students whose papers needed significant revision. She said, "I used to be really bad at giving bad news," but over time she learned to "do that in a way that students aren't frustrated . . . not so much saying, 'this is a bad paragraph, you need to rewrite it, [but] pointing to the good things that a paragraph has and then [pointing out] what you can redo." Tutors considered these skills not only professionally valuable but relevant to their personal lives. As George put it, "some of the communicative skills are things that will help personal, everyday life . . . it's a lifelong journey of learning those things, but becoming a confident communicator is going to help, not just as a teacher. Things like listening, patience, adaptability are going to help you."

One unanticipated interview theme was student identity and voice. Tutors often mentioned their desire to help students' preserve their own voice and their concern that academic writing makes students feel pressured to write in a voice that is not their own. As Grace said, "students think that they need to put on this academic mask in their writing, and they need to use all these *therefores* and *whatnots* and *thus* and *furthermore*, which is good, but in the process they've lost their personality and their own personal style . . . so I think pointing out . . . places where they can maintain personal style and still have an academic writing style has become important."

The tutors recognized this conflict as a site of tension, especially for multilingual writers. Erin noted that her linguistics coursework made her think differently about the relationship between language and culture, especially for students who write with an "accent." Kendra noted that this tension was especially acute for international graduate students, who are preparing articles for publication: "you want to help preserve their voice, but at the same time you understand that when they submit this for publication, if it's written in a voice that doesn't seem like it's a native English speaker, it's probably going to be kicked back to them . . . so it's challenging." Building on Kendra's comments, Erin remarked that "it's right for people to be able to speak with their own voice. We're battling this external world . . . of this is right and this is wrong and everything needs to sound like a native speaker of English, but in reality that will never happen . . . the Writing Center showed me the struggle of letting students feel valued and speak in their own voice. But then, how do we help them not get a really bad grade?"

The tutors didn't offer definitive solutions for helping students preserve their own voice. And to be fair, seasoned scholars continue to debate the best methods for helping students preserve their cultural and linguistic identities in their writing. But working in the Center has clearly given tutors first-hand experience with this issue and illustrated its complexities.

### *Evidence for Tutor Development Over Time*

Our longitudinal approach allowed us to capture changes in tutors' thinking over time. In the following sections, we examine dimensions of tutor learning for which we saw evidence of change.

*Recognizing the complexity of tutoring and teaching.* One change we observed as the tutors moved through the year was an increased sensitivity to the complexities of tutoring and teaching writing. When asked what constitutes effective writing instruction, what challenges student writers face, and what kinds of feedback benefit students most, the tutors frequently responded with a variation of "it depends." For some, this growing awareness of the contingent nature of writing instruction was one of the biggest changes in their knowledge and practice during the year.

For example, Mary, an undergraduate tutor planning to teach high school English, showed a clear change in her orientation to tutoring, and by extension teaching, as the year progressed. In the first focus group, Mary, as a new tutor, described how she had struggled with "setting the agenda" with clients but was now "settling into the groove. I know my system now . . . focus on the higher order and then lower order." The "groove" and "system" Mary relied upon helped her develop confidence. Yet in the second focus group, Mary began to question the utility of her "system." She explained that "One of the things I noticed last semester is that . . . I tried to use the same structure for each of my appointments, and that is not something that's really feasible because every appointment is different. Every client is different." This developing awareness that a one-size-fits all approach was not realistic given the diversity of students led Mary to begin to "trust the students' worries" about their own writing and to "focus more on that [students' concerns] than what I think is important."

In the final focus group, Mary built on this previous realization, noting that "we need to meet students where they're at . . . we need to meet them at their understanding and then develop from there." Though similar to her comments in the second focus group, this final version demonstrates an increased level of abstraction. Rather than simply focusing on how to structure a consultation, she expresses a developing philosophy of teaching

writing—one that extends beyond the context of writing center consultation and can be adapted to future teaching.

Another example of this understanding of the contingent nature of writing instruction is evinced by Laura, a first-year GTA studying literature. In the first focus group, Laura noted her surprise that the students she was tutoring "don't understand they have creative control of their papers" to incorporate their own cultures and voices. This observation led Laura to try "to encourage students" and to "empower their voice in their papers" through her tutoring practice. In the final focus group, however, Laura brought new levels of nuance to her discussion of the role of student agency and voice. In reflecting on her learning over the year, Laura reported that:

Over time I've come to kind of understand even though it's their creative process, and you can empower them to write it however they want to write it, there's also times where they just need someone to be like, "No, you can do it this way and it will work."

Here, while Laura still holds to her original belief that "writing is a creative process" and that she can "empower" students to approach a project in their own way, she acknowledges that this strategy is not always effective; there are times when students need a directive approach. This new awareness is not a rejection of her earlier position, but an acknowledgement that any principle or value in writing instruction is subject to situation and context. This contextualization, we argue, is a crucial awareness for developing teachers.

*Personalizing and empathizing with student writers.* For most tutors, working in the Center improved their understanding of students' challenges and needs, and personalized their approach to teaching. Ken Bain, who conducted a longitudinal study of the most effective postsecondary instructors, notes that the best college teachers are those who "take their students seriously as human beings" and show interest in "students' lives, cultures, and aspirations" (145). It seemed to us that working on-one-one with writing center clients helped the tutors begin thinking of students in these terms. Erin, for example, explained that working in the center had taught her "to focus on [clients] and see them as individuals, so that when I am a teacher and I don't just have one student, but I have many more that . . . I am able to focus on them as an individual . . . and not just see [them] as this mass of students."

Closely related to seeing students as individuals was empathizing with them as writers and as people. The tutors frequently spoke about frustrations as writers, which mirrored their clients' difficulties. For instance, discussing how clients struggled to focus on higher order concerns when faced

with a detailed assignment sheet, Mun-Hee said, "I really sympathize with that 'cause when I have a writing assignment I go for something that's easy first." Beyond just empathizing with clients' writing challenges, interacting with students one-on-one gave the tutors a richer picture of students' socioacademic lives. Kendra, for instance, emphasized that student writers' challenges were not only related to writing, but to issues like "adjusting to campus life" and the anxiety and "fear going into that first college assignment." This awareness of students as individuals with challenges that the tutors could empathize with was one of the most frequently reported benefits of writing center work.

Looking at the longitudinal data offers us a unique perspective on how tutor learning developed throughout the year. For example, Lisa, a first-year GTA working toward her MFA in creative writing, experienced a change in her relationship with and attitude toward students through the course of her tutoring. While Lisa was never negative about students and, indeed, from the beginning sought to believe the best about them, she struggled to connect and empathize with clients at the beginning of the year. This was partly because Lisa tutored mostly online. Being physically removed from the students, she explained, "I can't sit with the student and watch them have their ah-ha moment or hear their responses to the question that I ask." This distance was "the biggest challenge" of the format and resulted in Lisa believing that "I have a lot more difficulty understanding where a student is coming from and empathizing with them. . . . It's really easy to become frustrated and just sit there in front of the computer and say things to myself like 'My god, how did you get into college?', which is not the mindset I want to bring to working with students." Though Lisa clearly knows that an understanding mindset is more productive, cultivating and sustaining empathy while tutoring online initially proved difficult.

In her second semester, Lisa switched to face-to-face tutoring, a change that helped her better relate to students. In fact, in the second focus group, when asked, "What is one thing you learned from working in the writing center that was a surprise to you?," she responded, "I like students. Most of them arrive with goodwill rather than recalcitrance." In comparison to her first focus group where she had the desire and drive to connect with students but struggled to do so, this simple sentiment of "I like students" signals a positive change. This change may have resulted from switching to face-to-face tutoring, or from having simply acquired additional experience. Regardless of the reason, this new attitude toward students was the primary thing Lisa hoped to carry into her future teaching, saying that "When I'm set loose with my own students next semester, I hope I will remember this experience and treat them with the respect they deserve."

Another tutor, Mun-Hee, made a transition over the course of the academic year from a self-focused to a student-centered approach to tutoring. In her first interview, Mun-Hee described anxiety over her own writing skills, which she perceived to be lacking: "It's so painful," she said, "because I go back to my own writing sometimes . . . and I feel like, are you kidding, you're at this level and you mean to actually tutor somebody?" When asked to describe a challenging session, she described a consultation with a "bulky guy from a fraternity" who didn't seem responsive to her feedback. This consultation caused her to reflect on her positionality in relation to students: "It was probably . . . my pre-established bias and his physicality… and a little bit of defensive behavior" that derailed the session. "I felt at times self-conscious because I am of different race," Mun-Hee said, expressing her worry that both American and Asian students might respond differently to her because she is Korean.

In this early interview, we see Mun-Hee beginning to work through her anxieties about her ability and biases toward students. In a follow-up interview, she noted: "Last semester I was too busy being scared of students; I didn't notice that students coming to the writing center are scared." She began focusing on caring for the anxious students instead of focusing on her own fears: "I should handle their feelings carefully because their writing is their expression and it contains a lot of their feelings. I need to handle that with care." Mun-Hee remarked with surprise that some of her earlier fears turned out to be "stupid worries" because she discovered that "[students] really trust me." She moved from being anxious about her own writing to showing an increased desire to alleviate student anxiety. Like Mun-Hee, many of our participants reported that tutoring experience helped them view students through a more humane, empathetic lens, recognize and address students' affective needs, and better understand how students' affective responses shaped their ability to collaborate and learn.

*Developing a philosophy for teaching writing.* A common theme among all the previous sections is the tutors' active reflection on their beliefs about writing instruction and their developing identities as teachers. In other words, the tutors were not only acquiring discrete facts and practices but were beginning to develop a coherent teaching philosophy. This development can be seen in Mary's growing awareness of the complexity and contingency of writing instruction and in Mun-Hee's desire to attend to students' emotional needs. For the majority, their developing teaching philosophies emphasized the affective domains of teaching and learning. For example, the question "what do you think of as good writing instruction?" routinely yielded responses such as "good writing instruction should be

compassionate and take into consideration the very real challenges and fears that a lot of students face" (Kendra); "good writing instruction is as personal as possible. It is empathetic" (Lisa); and "it just starts with a lot of respect" (Michelle).

Many tutors' developing teaching philosophies incorporated not only their experiences in the writing center, but also their identities outside of it. Kendra, for example, attributed her beliefs about compassionate instruction to her "personal values that consider people as valuable and as worth investing in." For some, the writing center assisted them in incorporating their values into their teaching persona. For example, George, a first-year GTA in the TESOL program, noted in the first focus group that working in the writing center sparked "a shift in my own attitude towards writing and my own attitude towards teaching." This shift, George went on to explain, built on his perception of himself as "someone who's celebratory, [who] want[s] to celebrate things in other people's lives." As he began working in the writing center, George started to apply this celebratory ethic to his clients and believed "that as a teacher someday, that's something that I want to apply to my students." For George, this philosophy of celebrating students' accomplishments wove together his values outside of academia with his growing awareness of the emotional stakes of writing, prompting him to give encouraging feedback to his clients. Such findings support arguments by Jacobs, Danes, Jacobs, and Craig that the writing center provides a valuable space for teachers to reflect on their philosophies and practices. The non-evaluative nature of tutoring, along with the interpersonal negotiation of working one-on-one seems to have helped these tutors develop not only valuable practices, but also a teacher identity that integrates their sense of themselves as ethical and emotionally intelligent people.

## Discussion

Our study confirms previous findings that writing center work does contribute to the professional development of preservice teachers (Broder; Clark; Harris; Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick; Zelenack et al.). Based on our interviews, it seems clear that tutoring imparts skills that emerging teachers can use in future classrooms. While some aspects of teaching (lesson planning, curriculum design) do not arise in a tutoring context, many other dimensions of teaching and learning do play out in the one-on-one writing center environment.

Beyond the benefits noted by other researchers, our study highlighted dimensions of tutors' development that dealt with their understanding of voice and identity in writing, particularly for linguistically and culturally

marginalized students. The tutors in our study not only demonstrated increased knowledge of linguistic issues, but, more importantly, were engaged with the complex relationships of language, culture, identity, and faculty expectations. Given the resilient nature of teachers' standard language ideologies (Schreiber and Worden), the complexity and sensitivity of the tutors' positions on student language is encouraging. The fact that these discussions took place among peers, rather than in the presence of a supervisor, suggests honest questioning and growth on tutors' part. Their interest in this issue, and commitment to helping students' preserve their own voice, suggests the benefits of training that invites tutors and writers to negotiate the "contact zone" between academic English and students' home languages and discourses (Pratt). Although the tutors may not have theoretical knowledge regarding students' right to their own language (SRTOL) or translingual pedagogies, their discussion of student voice shows that they recognize the importance to students of composing texts that will help them meet their academic goals without sacrificing their cultural or linguistic identity (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur; National Council of Teachers of English).

Our interviewees demonstrated a significant focus on the affective domains of tutoring and teaching. While previous studies have acknowledged the importance of tutor and client emotion (Hughes, Gillespie, and Kail; DeFeo and Caparas; Weaver) most discussions have treated the emotional dimensions of tutoring as distinct from the cognitive (Lawson). For our tutors, however, these dimensions were deeply intertwined. Their empathy and awareness of student emotion, for example, were not separate from their knowledge of students' writing challenges. In fact, when asked what they had learned from the writing center that they would carry into teaching, the majority of responses focused on emotion, be confident, care about students, respect students, treat students with kindness.

An additional contribution of our study comes from its longitudinal nature. By following tutors for a year, we saw their growth over time. This growth seemed especially apparent in graduate students—perhaps because they anticipated entering the classroom soon, while for undergraduate participants, future teaching was farther away (if indeed they planned on teaching). The graduate students even talked about the fact that they were encountering the *same* students, in the *same* classes, that they would teach the following fall.

We noticed changes over time even in cases where tutors did not perceive a change (after all, they did not have access to their transcripts over time, as we did). At the end of the year, several students, including Mun-Hee and Mary, told us their ideas "didn't change much" (Mun-Hee) or "I

do not think my beliefs have changed" (Mary). Because tutors' self-perception sometimes varies from what we see in their transcripts, it may be that qualitative interviews are a more effective means of tracking tutor development than surveys or single interviews, which don't show change over time.

Finally, it is important to note the role that the focus groups themselves played in not only capturing but also promoting tutor development. Being asked to reflect on their tutoring could spark changes that otherwise might not have been as marked; in other words, the study itself may have resulted in growth. In their study of tutor development, Defeo and Caparas note that "Although the tutors' comments about their tutoring processes yielded sentiments and realizations that would make any writing center administrator proud, it is unclear whether they reflected on their experiences and made these connections independently, or whether the phenomenological reflective process is itself (at least in part) responsible for their ability to make these connections in retrospect" (156). Studies like theirs and ours suggest the benefits of reflection for emerging teachers.

As teacher and tutor educators ourselves, we find these results both enlightening and encouraging. Still, our study has limitations, which could be addressed in future research. One limitation is the relatively sparse information we collected regarding our participants' past and concurrent experiences with writing, tutoring, and teaching. While we collected demographic information such as area of study and years of previous teaching experience, and while our participants occasionally volunteered information about experiences outside of the center that contributed to their learning, we did not conduct systematic interviews with each participant about their backgrounds. As a result, we have little insight regarding how past experiences such as previous tutoring, academic coursework, or their own writing education shaped their learning. Given the diverse experiences and training of tutors, this is perhaps particularly important. Future research could address this limitation by collecting more extensive background information from each participant. Such data, whether in the form of surveys or interviews, would allow researchers to account for the range of experiences in and outside the writing center that contribute to tutor development.

Similarly, while our study provided evidence that tutors' knowledge developed over the course of the study, these self-reports are not direct evidence of tutor improvement or benefit to students. Moreover, we do not know if the knowledge and practices tutors intended to utilize in their future teaching will indeed transfer to the classroom. Future research could incorporate direct observations of tutoring sessions. Extending the length of the study would allow researchers to follow tutors into the classroom, providing evidence of the impact of tutoring on their pedagogical practice.

Future researchers may want to look more closely into tutors' understanding of voice in relation to SRTOL, both for native and non-native speakers (Canagarajah; Canagarajah and Matsumoto; Shafer). Tutors' discussions of international students' struggles, for instance, suggested their awareness that cultural and vernacular differences in writing can be assets rather than detriments, yet at the same time, these aspects of writing are often singled out for remediation by faculty members. The tutors' interest in students' voice and in language variation raises questions for writing center administration: are tutors learning about these issues as part of their training? How do tutors' language attitudes shape their decisions in working with students from a range of language backgrounds? As these topics and issues become established parts of writing center theory, more research will be needed to understand how they play out on the ground level (Fitzgerald and Ianetta).

## Conclusion

As emerging teachers transition from tutoring to teaching, reflection is an important tool, as Weaver argues, which can help tutors "more consciously transfer knowledge" (23). Both writing center directors and writing program administrators can promote reflection and transfer. Writing center directors, for example, might include opportunities for tutors to discuss what they are learning in the writing center and consider how it might apply to future teaching, as part of their professional development. Once tutors become classroom teachers, WPAs can play an important role in fostering reflection on how skills developed in the writing center can be transferred to classroom teaching.

Reflection while teaching may be of particular importance. The tutors in our study were not always sure how tutoring might contribute to their future teaching, though they believed it would. Michelle, for example, noticed that though she had been actively reflecting on how to translate her tutoring experiences to the classroom, "I'm still not really sure how to do that, but it's something that I've been trying to process and figure out." Jessie concurred, saying "I know it's going to affect my teaching," although identifying these effects would "take reflection" and "me actually being in the classroom and just seeing it once I'm doing it." By providing opportunities for reflection (including group reflections similar to the focus groups), WPAs can help ensure that the beliefs and practices tutors gain do indeed impact their classroom practice.

Of course, we have not yet followed tutors into the classroom to track how the skills they discussed in the study show up in their classroom.

However, our focus groups did make clear that they had acquired new skills, developed complex ideas about writing and teaching, formed personal, empathetic relationships with their clients, and begun to see themselves as seasoned, competent professionals with much to offer.

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## Appendix: List of Codes

**Knowledge and Beliefs**
Good Writing
Good Writing Instruction
Perceptions of WAC
Perceptions of Students

**Affective and Interpersonal**
Embodiment
Empathy
Interpersonal Skills
Tutor Emotion (positive)
Tutor Emotion (negative)

**Tutor Reflection**
Future Teaching
Source of knowledge (or belief)
Tutor growth (writing center)
Tutor growth (non-writing center)

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