



University of Kentucky
UKnowledge

Theses and Dissertations--Educational Policy
Studies and Evaluation

Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation

2014

SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE CO-CURRICULUM: EXPLORING GROUP PEER TUTORING IN COLLEGE

James D. Breslin

University of Kentucky, james.breslin@alumni.nd.edu

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Breslin, James D., "SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE CO-CURRICULUM: EXPLORING GROUP PEER TUTORING IN COLLEGE" (2014). *Theses and Dissertations--Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation*. 23.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/epe_etds/23

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statement(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to UKnowledge as Additional File.

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless an embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

James D. Breslin, Student

Dr. Jane McE. Jensen, Major Professor

Dr. Jeffrey Bieber, Director of Graduate Studies

SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE CO-CURRICULUM:
EXPLORING GROUP PEER TUTORING IN COLLEGE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education
in the College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
James D. Breslin

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Jane McE. Jensen, Professor of Educational Policy Studies and
Evaluation

2014

Copyright © James D. Breslin 2014

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE CO-CURRICULUM: EXPLORING GROUP PEER TUTORING IN COLLEGE

In a time of upheaval in American higher education, student retention continues to be a chief concern on most campuses. Peer tutoring, like other peer-based programming, is asked to serve multiple functions as a low-cost, high-impact model. This study explored the cultures of these semi-structured, co-curricular, academic-social spaces and sought to understand what happens in a group peer tutoring context that impacts students.

Data was generated with students on two campuses during the spring 2014 semester using a two-phase qualitative approach. Data generating activities included observation of students and peer tutors in the tutoring spaces on each campus. The second phase of data generation included focus groups with more than 30 students on each campus.

Findings suggest that the student participants on these two campuses conceive of tutoring spaces as unique, that they engage with their peers in such contexts differently than they do in other places, and that programmatic structures may influence the outcomes they achieve. Implications range from contributions to more nuanced understanding of social learning theory to the critical importance of vulnerability in student help-seeking behavior.

KEYWORDS: College Students, Peer Tutoring, Student Development, Social Learning, Student Culture

James D. Breslin
Student's Signature

December 3, 2014
Date

SOCIAL LEARNING IN THE CO-CURRICULUM:
EXPLORING GROUP PEER TUTORING IN COLLEGE

By

James D. Breslin

Jane McE. Jensen

Director of Dissertation

Jeffrey Bieber

Director of Graduate Studies

December 3, 2014

For Farrah, who has always cheered me on, kept me going, and provided immeasurable support. Words cannot express the depth of my appreciation, respect, and love for you.

For Mary Jo, who always believed in me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ten years ago, I was a graduate student in anthropology working toward a Master's degree in that field. That all changed the day I interviewed for a Teaching Assistantship with Dr. Jane Jensen and Dr. Karin Ann Lewis. I want to thank them both for their friendship, mentoring, and support throughout my career as a student and new professional. I continue to learn so much from them about navigating higher education, producing quality scholarship, and seeking to understand the student experience holistically.

I have also been incredibly fortunate to work closely with the other members of my committee. Dr. Neal Hutchens has helped me hone my writing and editing skills by generously including me in multiple projects. His insights on the research process, guidance in navigating the program, and fervent support served to breathe confidence into my own analytic abilities, which in turn has seen me through the dissertation phase of the degree. Dr. Mike Mullen has kept me honest, regularly asking, "Why does this matter to me?" This seemingly simple question represents a genuine grounding in how my student-focused research could and should impact good practice in the field. Moreover, he has served as a model institutional thought leader as I have worked to begin a professional career that I hope will contribute to students' lives as his does. Finally, Dr. Kathy Sheppard-Jones graciously agreed to serve as the outside examiner and I appreciate her conscientious questions and comments.

Professionally, the Academic Enhancement team, including the hundreds of student-staff I have had the privilege of calling my colleagues, helped inspire this project from the beginning. In particular, I want to acknowledge Anna Sharpe, Ali Cicerchi, and Sy Bridenbaugh. These three professionals give me faith in the field and I thank each of you for supporting me through the dissertation in so many ways. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Dana Malone, an exceptional sounding board, thorough professional, and inspirational scholar. I owe much of my sanity, or what is left of it, to the friendships we've all developed in the department.

Personally, I want to acknowledge the support I received from my family, including that of my sisters, Meredith and Lauren. My mother, Mary Jo, always supported and cheered me on, asking me to believe in my own abilities as she did. I also want to express my gratitude to Jeff and Tammy Dicken. When Farrah first introduced me to them, I had no idea how much they would treat me like their own, ensure that I became part of their family, and show me such love and support throughout this journey. I also want to thank Claudia Jean for her attentive support and unwavering loyalty during long days of analyzing and writing.

Finally, I thank Farrah Dicken. My best friend, muse, research assistant, copy editor, and taskmaster. Supporting me through this process is but one

expression of your unending love and support. You have always been both cheerleader and champion, and I hope you realize just how much I have learned from you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction and Situating the Study	1
Peer Tutoring in Context of Major Transitions in Higher Education	2
Pilot Study.....	5
The Study	6
Research Goals	7
Research Questions.....	8
Relevancy of Peer Tutoring and Closing Gaps in the Literature	9
Organization of the Dissertation	11
Chapter 2: Context and Conceptual Approach	17
Background Literature	17
Academic Support	17
Historical Development of Academic Support Practice	18
Variation in Academic Support Structure and Function	21
Structural Issues Related to Peer Tutoring Implementation	22
Peer Tutoring and Connections to Academic Achievement.....	24
Peer Tutoring Impact on Development and Added Value.....	29
Conceptual Framework.....	30
A Social Frame for Peer Tutoring.....	31
Chapter 3: Methods and Analytic Approach.....	45
Research Design	45
Site Selection.....	46
Peer Tutoring at Mid-South University	47
Peer Tutoring at Urban Private University	48
Data-Generating Activities	48
Participant Selection.....	53
Confidentiality and Data Security.....	57
Analytic Methods	59
Validity Issues	61
Situating the Researcher	62
Backyard Research.....	63
Chapter 4: Situating Tutoring in Multiple Dimensions: Observing the Realities of Group Peer Tutoring	65
Introduction	65
Physical Spaces and Context.....	67
Wayfinding	70
Reception.....	73

Office Spaces.....	75
Tutoring Spaces, Furniture, and Resources	77
Anatomy of a Tutoring Session	86
Pre-Session	87
Arrival and Check-in	88
The Tutoring Experience.....	93
Wrapping Up	96
Cultural Norms	98
Attire and Appearance.....	98
Body Language and Other Nonverbals	100
Cautiously Casual.....	102
Attention and Being Attentive	103
Bodies in Motion	105
Tutoring Conversations	110
Opening the Conversation	110
Flow.....	112
Locus of Control.....	115
Shared Responsibility	119
Course Structure and Strategies.....	124
Getting Schooled in Tutoring Sessions	127
Chapter 5: “Dude, it’s a miracle:” Students’ Take on Their Peer Tutoring Experiences.....	131
Introduction	131
Structures and Their Significance	133
Physical.....	134
Programmatic	141
Co-Construction of Structures	148
Tutoring Contexts as Unique Cultural Milieus.....	149
Norms and Values.....	157
Reconceptualizing Help-Seeking Behavior	160
Peer Tutoring as Both Academic and Social.....	165
Academics, Course Content, and Grades.....	166
Social Experiences and Outcomes	173
Constructing Meaning Through Social Learning	178
Students Learn About Themselves and Their Peers.....	179
Strategies That Successful Students Practice.....	187
Responsibility and Ownership.....	191
Asked and Answered.....	195
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications.....	198
Group Peer Tutoring is Fundamentally Different	199
Social Learning as a Process	201
Structures Matter, in Some Unanticipated Ways	204
Group Experiences	207

Vulnerability and Voluntary Access	208
Tutoring and the Curriculum	212
Relevance	214
Limitations	218
Directions for Future Research.....	221
Final Thoughts.....	223
Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol	225
Appendix B: Student Information Form.....	228
References	230
Vita.....	239

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1, Focus Group Participant List.....	55
--	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1, Calculus Tutoring in The Center 106

Chapter 1: Introduction and Situating the Study

Although co-curricular academic support is not new, its popularity has certainly increased as mass higher education has evolved into universal higher education. Over the past two to three decades, colleges and universities have become increasingly focused on retaining and graduating undergraduate students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). A key component to these efforts has been the continued proliferation of academic support structures through all institutional types.

As higher education is continually asked to do more with less, and as public opinion and policymakers intensify pressure on colleges and universities to graduate students, peer tutoring has increasingly been implemented not only as a reactive intervention for those who are struggling, but as a proactive support mechanism available to all students. As higher education begins to transition from outdated, exclusive support structures to more inclusive and community-focused approaches (Brazzell & Reisser, 1999), legitimate questions are raised about the value of peer tutoring for all.

Considering the evolution of peer tutoring as an implemented academic support practice, the extent to which peer tutoring can impact students in college, and the present landscape in higher education, there is a clear need for more insight into how investing in this kind of support can benefit students. This study seeks to understand the micro-cultures that develop in these kinds of co-curricular environments, which by their basic structures serve as intersections of

social and academic experiences on campuses. What happens in these contexts that impacts students? How do groups of students construct meaning around learning? In exploring these and other questions, as outlined in the sections below, I learned more than I could have imagined about the student experience in peer tutoring.

I was fortunate to spend considerable time with groups of students who not only tolerated my presence, but also welcomed me into their world and their spaces. I spoke to dozens of college students on two different campuses who continually amazed me with how introspective, self-aware, and critical they had been in considering their experiences. Further, the students who were kind enough to participate in this study showed incredible care and concern for peer tutoring, even when their ideas, perceptions, and experiences varied greatly. They conscientiously and carefully explained to me the connections they make among their experiences on campus, both within and beyond the classroom. This study, thoroughly qualitative in nature, has many implications for research and practice in academic support. Moreover, I hope that it may serve as a reminder of the transformative power, rich and valid data generation, and sheer joy that can come from taking the time to speak to and seeking to understand the experiences of those we serve in higher education.

Peer Tutoring in Context of Major Transitions in Higher Education

It is critical to situate peer tutoring practices within the larger landscape of contemporary American higher education to better understand the broader

context and the pressures faced by researchers and practitioners. Continuing economic concerns dominate headlines and the fiscal realities are impossible for higher education to ignore. Campus leaders across the country are faced with often-painful decisions and readily reference the “new normal” where all are asked to do more with less.

In order to remain both relevant and viable, peer tutoring must find its place in the new normal, and researchers and practitioners need to join forces to refine practices that contribute the most to student success while also learning to communicate the value of these experiences for students in multiple ways. For example, while practitioners may often be focused on the individual student experience and on providing the best possible quality peer tutoring, they sometimes sacrifice rigorous assessment and continuous improvement. At a minimum, those responsible for coordinating peer tutoring programs should be able to demonstrate clearly the impact such programming has on academic achievement (from grade in course to institutional retention), added value (so as to demonstrate alignment with institutional mission and strategic goals), and institutional finances.

Added together, these ideas can create a powerful demonstration of the way that an academic support structure such as peer tutoring can be central to undergraduate education. That utilizing undergraduate students as peer tutors is one of the most cost-effective means to providing effective support merits recognition as well. In keeping with the current pace of rapid change, a carefully

structured tutoring program is capable of responding to and addressing assessed student need very quickly, often within days or weeks, as opposed to institutional structures such as course offerings which can take more than a year to move through a formal change process.

While finances are clearly a major stress for higher education, they are not the only external concern. Coupled to these economic woes are additional pressures that stakeholders place on higher education. Parents and politicians alike question the cost of American higher education and affordability has become a newsworthy topic (Andriotis, 2012; Jaschik, 2012). Additionally, these issues are being raised in response to businesses that continue to report that students do not have the skills needed to be successful in the private sector upon graduation (Hart Research Associates, 2010; Rose, 2010). Of course, further complicating the situation are highly critical claims that students don't learn enough even with college completion (Arum & Roksa, 2011). The current landscape for those seeking to provide effective, efficient academic support for students is perilous as each of these constituent groups may have valid claims.

Rather than a descriptive set of common practices currently in place, the situation calls for a set of "next" practices, based on promising implementations that can demonstrate clear results. However, to get at the how and why of successful peer tutoring programs, it is clear that qualitative inquiry is needed to examine what really happens among students in these contexts. Studies such as this, that examine the academic and social interactions among small groups of

students in a peer tutoring context, may be able to elucidate the contextual characteristics that can contribute to tangible results.

Pilot Study

I was fortunate to be able to conduct a small pilot study in spring 2013 that helped establish and refine the methods used in the current study. I was also privileged to be able to work with a small group of other graduate students, which allowed for great discussion and feedback on all aspects of the focus group process, including research design, participant recruitment, protocol development, logistical issues, coding of transcript data, and initial analysis.

This pilot study included only the focus group portion of the methods employed here, though I have had previous experience with participant-observation in other projects. The focus groups were conducted at Mid-South University (MSU), which became one of the two sites selected for the dissertation study. I used this opportunity to compare preliminary data analysis to the literature and thus was able to better identify and refine specific research questions for this project.

The pilot study also confirmed the utility of the qualitative methods employed here to speak to a set of research questions that aim to fill clear gaps in our understanding of how students interact in small groups in hybrid academic-social, co-curricular contexts. In these pilot focus groups, students who had accessed peer tutoring spoke openly, candidly, and often passionately about their experiences. The data generated in focus groups with these participants

was coded, and the themes that emerged helped to refine the protocol, recruitment methods, and focus group procedures.

Those interactions with student participants and the data they generated also helped shape expectations for this larger project. Using their own lexicon, students talked openly about feeling “lost” upon accessing peer tutoring for the first time and how they came to learn the norms and practices of a context that seemed to be different from anything they had encountered previously in their education. These students conceptualized the space where peer tutoring happens as being fundamentally different and apart from what happens in classrooms, labs, or faculty offices, but also fundamentally different from what happens in residence halls, study lounges, and dining halls. These powerful assertions led to the research questions below and, more broadly, to a theoretical approach that seeks to allow for an understanding of this context, both academic and social, that seems to be able to foster both learning and development.

The Study

This research has been guided from the design stage by a set of goals and research questions that have shaped what is to be investigated, how I have contextualized peer tutoring in the research literature, the lenses used to make sense of the questions and data generated, and the methods and analysis of the data itself. While many opportunities have arisen to pursue additional questions, investigate tangential and fascinating lines of thought, and explore related areas,

I have endeavored to limit the scope of this study intentionally by returning often to these goals and research questions. I remain eager to explore these additional areas once the present dissertation study is complete.

Research Goals

The primary goal of this research was to conduct a thorough exploration of college students' experiences in group peer tutoring contexts. These hybrid, academic-social spaces occupy critical intersections in American higher education. These contexts represent a place where academic and social experiences, academic affairs and student affairs, and institutional missions and private sector hopes for graduates can connect and interact; where roles, skills, and strategies can be learned and rehearsed; and where student culture may be reproduced and capital exchanged.

A secondary goal, which provides strong support for the first, is to provide an opportunity for the voices of the students themselves to be heard in the academic support research literature. From individual program case studies (e.g., Beasley, 1997) to large, multi-institution empirical research (e.g., Keup, 2006), the positivistic trend in social science research of the last several decades has led the literature to a place where many numbers and statistics have been generated in an effort to quantify students experiences in peer tutoring contexts. However, rarely do the students' voices themselves command sufficient attention to be included. This glaring exclusion from the literature may well intimate assumptions that higher education researchers and practitioners make about the

value of student voice or the ability of college students to be introspective and sufficiently critical of their experiences. Regardless of intent or assumptions, it is both surprising and disappointing that so much research regarding the college student experience exists without incorporating the voices of the population under study. Rigorous social science research practices call for the inclusion of such voices (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Glesne, 2006) and this study aims to provide one place for such inclusion.

Research Questions

There is one overarching research question guiding the study, in addition to several sub-questions:

- What happens in a group peer tutoring context that impacts students?
 - How do groups of students construct meaning around learning?
 - What ways does the physical space in which peer tutoring occurs impact students' experiences and outcomes? (physical spaces can impact or be impacted by the cultures that occupy them and thereby are relevant to this analysis)
 - How do programmatic structures influence student experiences and how do students navigate or construct them?

This main question encompasses the entirety of the peer tutoring experience and the myriad exchanges students may have while in this hybrid academic-social context. The focus and unit of analysis here is the group of peers, in an effort to explore the culture of peer-based academic support. This question seeks to

explore a gap in the existing literature and one I have observed in my professional career. My hope is that this qualitative study will allow the literature to move beyond simple cause-and-effect measures of course grades and retention numbers that typically are used to study this area of the field and initiate a more nuanced exploration of the ways students come to learn in these dynamic groups.

Relevancy of Peer Tutoring and Closing Gaps in the Literature

Peer tutoring matters because of the outcomes it can support students in achieving. The existence of tutoring on American college and university campuses has become ubiquitous (Hodges & White, 2001) and the praise for such models effusive. It is difficult to find even a single institution that does not offer some type of tutoring, and the vast majority of these employ a peer-to-peer model.

Influential researchers in the field have encouraged the popularity of such programming. For example, in exploring institutions that Document Effective Educational Practice (DEEP), Kuh et al. (2005, p. 196) placed peer tutoring as central to efforts to support student success: "tutoring is taken seriously at DEEP schools. This means, for example, both a great deal of responsibility and a great deal of training for tutors." They also assert that support structures such as peer tutoring "encourage students to work together to facilitate learning, improve their problem-solving skills, and help them apply knowledge gained in class in a variety of settings" (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 206).

Such high praise for this particular academic support model is quite common. A review of the literature, explored more fully in the following chapter, suggests that peer tutoring is associated with enhanced content knowledge (Smith, 2008), improved test scores (Fantuzzo, Riggio, Connelly, & Dimeff, 1989; Moust & Schmidt, 1995), and improved conceptual understanding (Mazur, 1997; Schleyer, Langdon, & James, 2005). Other research suggests that students experience more positive attitudes (Magin & Churches, 1995), an easier adjustment to college life (Ender & Newton, 2000), and improved confidence and self-efficacy (Beasley, 1997). In my own previous writing, I have claimed that peer tutoring is a context where “academic achievement, cognitive development, and the amassing and conversion of capital may be facilitated” (Breslin, 2011).

Moreover, this research fills a gap in our understanding of what peer tutoring does and how it actually functions in impacting students in the various ways described above. A simple review of the literature, particularly one that seeks to understand the relationship between student access of peer tutoring and academic achievement, reveals several articles that utilize a case study approach. Such works extol the virtues of particular programs and suggest that peer tutoring has clear, direct, significant impacts on student success measures. These measure often include course grade data, semester GPA, and occasionally first to second fall retention rates.

However, broader quantitative analyses such as that provided by Keup (2006) find a small but significant negative relationship between such student

success measures and tutoring access. This study in particular is noteworthy as it includes data from approximately 100 institutions. How, then, can researchers and practitioners reconcile a bevy of individual programmatic analyses that suggest a positive relationship with broader studies that demonstrate an opposite effect? To date, the literature offers no attempt at even a well-reasoned hypothesis, much less any empirical research or meta-analysis to make sense of this contradiction.

While institutional administrators pressure academic support and student affairs professionals to refine and implement practices that can support students effectively and efficiently, there continue to be broad assumptions made about the value of peer tutoring, the extent to which such support is worthwhile, and the ease with which outcomes may be achieved. This study represents a beginning at attempting to understand students' experiences in these contexts and could eventually help inform ideas about new or refined academic support practices. Peer tutoring is certainly relevant to the current landscape in American higher education and this study aims to fill crucial gaps in the research literature in an effort to impact both future research efforts and a major area of practice in the field.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter Two, Context and Conceptual Approach, begins with a review of the literature surrounding peer tutoring. This section situates peer tutoring as a particular type of implemented academic support practice and also provides an

abbreviated historical perspective on tutoring in higher education. The historical section, though brief, serves as an important signpost that academic support practices are not new, have not evolved as part of the massification of higher education, but have actually been part of the enterprise of American higher education from its foundations in the seventeenth century. This section then explores the major issues and perspectives that arise when studying peer tutoring. Particular attention is paid here to structural issues, academic achievement, and development and added value. Overall, this section demonstrates the need for qualitative work to contextualize the student experience in peer tutoring.

The second section establishes the conceptual framework through which I approach and make sense of this project, the research questions, and the data. Beginning with an assertion that peer tutoring is about both learning and development, this section first explores the interplay of these two processes. Beginning with the work of Vygotsky (1978) that has long been associated with peer tutoring, this section develops ideas about theories of social learning and introduces and explores notions of cognitive apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Moving from the more psychology-based theories to more cultural understandings of students and college campuses, this section seeks to integrate these two areas of theoretical understanding rather than contrast them. A key assertion here is that in order to understand student interactions on our campuses, we must endeavor to make

sense of student culture. Beginning with Bourdieu (1977), this section examines forms of symbolic capital (e.g., social capital), the ways in which co-curricular structures can impact the amassing and conversion of symbolic capital (Nespor, 1990), and transformational resistance (Brayboy, 2005). The overall goal of this chapter is to place the existing literature in context of an enhanced, holistic conceptual perspective with which to examine and structure practices such as peer tutoring.

Chapter Three, *Methods and Analytic Approach*, details the specific qualitative methods employed to generate data that speak to the research questions. I begin this chapter by situating the methodological choices I made in the context of the review of the literature and the constructivist approach found in the previous chapter. This chapter then pays specific attention to research design, site selection (including institutional and programmatic descriptions), and the observations and focus groups that were used to generate the data for this study.

This chapter also outlines the recruitment of focus group participants and provides a table that details specific information about each of the 63 students who volunteered. Interestingly, the participants represent an oversampling of traditionally underrepresented or oppressed populations, and possible explanations for this are offered. I then provide an overview of the analytic approach used to analyze the data, which primarily included open coding and thematic analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 2005). The final sections

address potential validity concerns, how I have attempted to mitigate them, and situate me as the researcher in context of my academic and professional roles. I take this last point to be particularly meaningful as, in any qualitative study, I appreciate that I am both an instrument of data generation and analysis.

Chapter Four, *Situating Tutoring in Multiple Dimensions: Observing the Realities of Group Peer Tutoring*, explores the data generated from the first phase of the study. Throughout this phenomenological phase of the research, I paid particular attention to the physical and programmatic structures that serve to frame the context in which students engage in group peer tutoring. This chapter begins with some of the rich data that was generated around the physical context itself. Using detailed field notes, I attempt to paint a vivid picture of the lived experiences in and around these spaces, and also offer some analysis and hypotheses for how they may impact students.

This chapter then examines the anatomy of a tutoring session on each campus, working chronologically through each step a student on either campus would take in order to gain access, enter the tutoring space, engage in a tutoring session, and extract him/herself from tutoring. A more nuanced and less verbal, but still highly meaningful, analysis of the cultural norms of peer tutoring contexts is also presented here. The observed realities represented here include students' attire, body language, ways of attending and being attentive, and how students move around the physical space. All of these pieces of data from the observation phase of the study knit together to form the norms and values of the

micro-cultures students produce in peer tutoring. Finally, this chapter dissects the conversations themselves that take place in tutoring sessions. In addition to the content of the conversation itself, this section examines the flow, locus of control, and responsibility for moving the conversation forward in groups on both campuses. Overall, this chapter both provides the data generated from the observations and concludes with my analysis of how this data might speak to the research questions.

Chapter Five, "Dude, it's a miracle:" Students' Take on Their Peer Tutoring Experiences, utilizes student voice to explore the themes that emerged from the focus group data. The process of generating data with my student participants through focus groups and analyzing that data as described in Chapter Three results in four major themes that I present here. This chapter begins by exploring how structures, both physical and programmatic, are important to the participants. Then, moving to another level of abstraction from the data, I explore how tutoring contexts constitute their own unique social milieus. This is a key feature of students' contributions from the focus group sessions and it relates to the following theme, that peer tutoring is both academic and social. Finally, this chapter explores the ways that students construct meaning through social learning. Among the key findings here are the ways that groups of students construct meaning about their social world, and how they take ownership of and responsibility for their tutoring session and, more broadly, their own learning.

Finally, Chapter Six, Conclusions and Implications, draws together all the data that has been analyzed. This chapter aims to make sense of all the data that was generated from both observations and focus groups and to offer broad thoughts and insights. As this is a qualitative study, there is no goal of generalizability. However, I do believe that the students who participated in this study offered a number of ideas and analyses that could be beneficial to future research and to practitioners at all types of institutions.

Specifically, this chapter asserts that peer tutoring is fundamentally different from other student experiences on these campuses and explores what this difference might mean. This chapter then turns to the importance of structure, though the impacts that structure might have on students is different than I may have originally hypothesized. I then explore notions of voluntary access and vulnerability. Students who participated in this study made it clear that the choice to access tutoring was very important to them and that this decision and the process they went through to make it are replete with meaning. Based on the findings of the study, I also call for a reconsideration and reconceptualization of "curriculum" in this chapter. Finally, in this chapter I address issues of relevance and limitations, offer possible directions for future research, and provide my own concluding thoughts and analysis.

Chapter 2: Context and Conceptual Approach

This study seeks to understand students' experiences in peer tutoring contexts, understanding such spaces as both academic and social places on college campuses. Further, the study employs a qualitative approach to move beyond prosaic associations between tutoring access and success measures such as course grades, semester or cumulative GPAs, and retention rates. In order to undertake such a project, it is critical to understand what the available literature can reveal about peer tutoring, which I review in the section below. Further, this contextualization of the study within the existing research literature is necessarily coupled with an intentional conceptual approach. The second part of this chapter outlines the conceptual framework I have constructed by attempting to align theories of social learning and development, rooted in the traditions of psychology, with social theories that emanate more from anthropology and sociology.

Background Literature

Academic Support

I take academic support to mean out-of-class, co-curricular experiences that engage students academically in some way. Far from existing as purely academic contexts, academic support structures often blend social and academic experiences, though with varying levels of intentionality behind programmatic structural design. Practically, these activities may include academic coaching, mentoring, tutoring, seminars, workshops, etc. Note that I intentionally exclude

academic advising from my definition of academic support. I recognize that advising has become its own field of practice and I believe it is functionally and structurally different from academic support.

Structurally, academic support is not a functional area that has a clear traditional “home” in the hierarchies of higher education. There are a wide variety of structural configurations, including: diffused models where academic departments within individual colleges provide their own programming; support programming targeted to specific special populations; more centralized academic support organized in academic affairs, sometimes operating directly under a Provost or out of one major college; or academic support services in a division of student affairs or student life. This lack of a typical place in institutional structures, on the one hand, does make academic support somewhat of an enigma. However, it also may mean that academic support is a nexus for so many institutional values that it is able to align with and exist in a variety of organizational structures.

Historical Development of Academic Support Practice

The notion of providing structured or semi-structured out-of-class academic experiences is rooted in English traditions of higher education. Tutorials, which are coupled more closely with the formal curriculum, have long been a staple at Oxford and Cambridge and are still a central part of academic life on those campuses today (Ashwin, 2005). While these practices have developed differently through the history of American higher education, they

have been present since the outset. In the seventeenth century, shortly after Harvard was founded, it became clear that students came to campus with varying abilities in Latin and, since all courses were conducted in that language, students could seek assistance with their Latin skills (Carpenter & Johnson, 1991).

This evidence is significant in that it clearly refutes the notion, popular among some academics and administrators, that academic support is something that became necessary following the rapid expansion of access to American higher education in the post World War II era. Similarly, academic support is not a need that was created by the humanistic, postmodern movement commonly associated with higher education in the 1960s and 1970s. Through varying structural configurations, institutions have consistently found that some kind of support is necessary to bridge the formal classroom or laboratory experience and the work students do on their own.

While the literature does not offer a complete overview of the development of tutoring throughout the history of American higher education, there are some markers. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tutoring existed both on and adjacent to college campuses. An advertisement for a “college tutor” from the late nineteenth century (Humphreys, 1874) also suggests that such academic support was marketed to prospective college students, particularly here for those aspiring to Harvard. This marketing of tutoring to those who could afford it may not be surprising considering the role

higher education performed at that time regarding the reproduction of social stratification. During the early twentieth century reform era at Princeton, initiated by Woodrow Wilson, tutoring was provided both by institution-employed preceptors and private tutors. As Axtell (2006) recounts, class attendance was often sparse and this became a significant issue for students as continually greater emphasis was placed on the results of exams. Until the prevalence of tutoring services apparently began to decline during the second World War, tutoring operations actively advertised in campus publications with mottos such as “we tutor but do not cram” (Axtell, 2006, p. 182).

During this same period of development, it is likely that students have consistently used each other as a primary resource. Seeing this happen on their own campuses, the notion of peer-to-peer support was then both a more formal extension of what students tended to do anyway and a relatively cheap option for institutions to provide academic support (Horowitz, 1987).

Of course, this model is not limited to higher education. Peer-based academic support has found a place in virtually every educational structure in contemporary America. From young children in primary education (Campbell-Peralta, 1995) to those in graduate and professional degree programs (Sobral, 2002), peer-to-peer support has been implemented in many different configurations.

Variation in Academic Support Structure and Function

The term academic support encompasses a variety of practices that are common to most institutions in contemporary American higher education (e.g., peer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, peer mentoring, etc.). Because individual programmatic implementations of academic support practices vary so widely, and this variation is coupled with a lack of a meaningful categorical or taxonomic system for adequately describing such practices, it can be quite challenging even to define or describe a particular academic support practice. For example, on many campuses and in many contexts, practitioners may use the terms tutoring and mentoring interchangeably. While there may be some conceptual and practical overlap, it is important to distinguish such practices as separate in order to situate them adequately in the literature and to be able to examine them as a researcher.

Many factors may vary across programmatic types and implementations, including who is providing the direct service to students (e.g., fellow undergraduates, graduate students, professional staff, faculty, a web-based vendor, etc.), where such initiatives fit structurally within an institution, and where students access such resources on campus (or increasingly online). Relatively common across tutoring programs is a primary focus on supporting a student in navigating course content itself, in one or more courses. Peer tutoring as an academic support practice varies widely and this has presented challenges to some researchers who have attempted to comment on its efficacy. The result

is an area of both practice and research that lacks clear, discernable divisions and convenient taxonomic categories. While such descriptive work could be helpful in the future, it is not among the goals of this project.

I understand a peer tutoring environment as a hybrid academic-social context, with programmatic variation regarding which is more emphasized. However, I believe there is something unique about a peer tutoring context. Students have frameworks and schemas for making sense of other spaces and programs even before they engage them, but this is not necessarily the case with peer tutoring. Conceptually, the context of a peer tutoring program is unique in the way that it blends a clear academic focus with a relaxed, casual, social atmosphere. Finally, as many peer tutoring implementations are designed to support group tutoring, I find that peer tutoring may provide an environment conducive to social learning and development and a space for the social construction of knowledge.

The current landscape may be understood as a set of intense ambiguities that confound existing definitions, categories, and labels for academic support practices. While researchers have attempted to situate studies in the existing literature, the scenario calls for the kind of deep data generation that a qualitative study can undertake.

Structural Issues Related to Peer Tutoring Implementation

Evaluating peer tutoring on a large scale presents a range of challenges. For example, peer tutoring takes on a variety of forms both among and within

institutions. While some general typologies have been offered (e.g., Topping, 1996), there is no evident standardization in how individual programs are defined or described. Conducting a meta-analysis of both research and previous literature reviews, Topping (1996) used ten dimensions to define tutoring types, including characteristics such as curriculum content, year of study, role continuity, place, time, etc. His resulting types include examples like “cross-year small-group tutoring” (p. 327) and “same-year dyadic reciprocal peer tutoring” (p. 333). Problematically, this typology fails to consider a number of programmatic dimensions that may be very relevant to understand the impacts of peer tutoring, including whether participation is voluntary or required, whether tutoring is appointment-based or drop-in, or the type or extent of any tutor training. Also missing here are more useful definitions of “same- or cross-age” and understanding of the transience or permanence of tutoring group membership. The typology seems to assume that all tutoring is scheduled and groups are permanent, though this is not clear. As a result, there is no useful, comprehensive set of types to describe peer tutoring scenarios. Thus it seems that the term “peer tutoring” itself must be understood not as an immutable edifice, but as an umbrella term that represents a broad diversity of implementation scenarios.

Given this landscape, peer tutoring as an institutional structure is problematic. While other campus services, such as career centers or counseling centers, provide a familiar, somewhat standardized menu of services, the

literature offers no such evidence of standardization for peer tutoring. To the contrary, what is striking about the available research on peer tutoring is the breadth of diversity in terms of how programs are structured, where they reside in institutional organizational structures, and even how basic components of each program function. For example, access may be mandatory, voluntary, or a combination; tutors may be undergraduate or graduate students (even though this may seem contradictory to the “peer” label); some programs are appointment-based, some are drop in, and some are much more formal with regular meetings after a student submits a request for tutoring.

This structural diversity has a number of implications. If published research offers substantial descriptive information about program structure and function, then perhaps a meta-analysis would reveal specific structural components that contribute to programmatic successes. However, this diversity also suggests that broad, multi-institutional studies that make reference only to “peer tutoring” without first establishing any prerequisites for inclusion in the analysis will be problematic. There is just too much variation at this point in the development of peer tutoring as a practice to lump programs together irrespective of these characteristics.

Peer Tutoring and Connections to Academic Achievement

Given this issue of a lacking lexicon regarding peer tutoring, some seemingly simple questions become challenging to answer. For example, a very basic query is to ask if students who access peer tutoring perform better

academically than their peers. That is, do they receive higher grades in the courses for which they accessed tutoring, are their overall GPAs higher, or are they retained from first to second fall at higher rates?

While the vast majority of the literature surrounding peer tutoring is either program-specific or largely conceptual, there are exceptions. Keup (2006) conducted a large-scale, multi-institutional study that examined correlations between accessing peer tutoring and a variety of outcomes, including academic achievement. Data was collected both at the beginning and end of the academic year for the first-year cohort, using CIRP's 2002 Freshman Survey and the Your First College Year 2003 Survey, which comprised more than 100 institutions and over 20,000 students (Keup, 2006). These data reveal that while just over half of all students accessed tutoring (not necessarily peer-to-peer) during their first year (Keup, 2006, p. 34), that access actually had a negative relationship with first year GPA (p. 42). As a result, this research found that accessing tutoring was related to lower overall success measures, leading Keup to hypothesize that accessing such services may be a proxy for at-risk students. However, the study was not able to evaluate such a hypothesis, as it did not control for demographic variables.

Alternately, addressing such questions at the programmatic level is quite common. There are examples in the literature of researchers who have addressed questions of academic achievement by administering surveys to measure constructs surrounding students' beliefs about how access to peer

tutoring impacted their academic experiences. In evaluating a pilot peer tutoring initiative, Beasley (1997) administered surveys to both students and peer tutors at the end of the term. His findings included that students found sessions to be generally helpful, that they believed their study skills had improved, and that their self-confidence had improved (Beasley, 1997).

Evaluating a more established program, Royal (2007) created and implemented an instrument that measured several constructs. His findings, which his analysis demonstrates are both valid and reliable, included overwhelming numbers of students reporting that they believed they better understood how to complete an assignment, that they felt their knowledge of the material had increased, and that access to the program had influenced their decision to remain in the course (Royal, 2007).

Documenting a pilot program, Smith (2008) utilized a student survey to determine impact on student learning. This tutoring initiative was tied to particular course sections and student peer tutors were required to complete a full three-credit course in peer mentoring. The survey demonstrated that most students believed their learning was impacted positively as a result of interacting with a tutor. Supporting the finding from Royal above, the survey also found that students who did not use tutoring were comforted to know that there was a service available to them, even if they did not participate (Smith, 2008).

In an effort to evaluate the psychological effects of peer tutoring, in addition to academic achievement, Fantuzzo et al. (1989) utilized a sample of

100 students who were enrolled in an abnormal psychology course. Students were given pre- and post-instruction content-based tests and also completed inventories measuring fear of negative evaluation, social avoidance, and stress. Students were split into groups where they worked alone, in dyads, mutual exchange groups, and structured learning (tutoring) groups (Fantuzzo et al., 1989, p. 174). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this research showed that the students who worked alone scored lower on post-instruction tests than students in the other groups. Moreover, students who worked together in the structured groups were significantly less prone both to fear of negative evaluation and to stress (Fantuzzo et al., 1989).

Other researchers, myself included, have attempted to address this question directly by correlating access to quantitative achievement data (Lewis & Breslin, 2012). In this particular analysis, we were able to demonstrate that accessing peer tutoring even once during a student's first year showed a strong, positive correlation with course success rates and first to second fall retention rates (Lewis & Breslin, 2012). However, there are other studies that directly contradict these results. For example, one study encouraged at-risk students to access tutoring or supplemental instruction and found that there was no significant difference in semester GPAs for these at-risk students who accessed tutoring compared with the general population of students, including at-risk students, who did not (Hodges & White, 2001).

The different programmatic-level studies cited above suggest a very positive overall picture regarding the relationship between peer tutoring and academic achievement, among other measures. However, the broader literature does not necessarily bear this out.

This broader data, from a substantial data set (Keup, 2006), is in clear contradiction with the examples from the literature referenced above which show strong positive correlations with academic achievement. Of course there are different ways in which these contradictions may be explained. For example, one could hypothesize that program-based research in the literature is intentionally highlighting successful implementations of peer tutoring and, given that these authors wanted to put their “good data” out there, there is strong bias toward positive outcomes when the level of analysis is so localized. Another possibility, one that I have often heard anecdotally, is that GPA may not be an appropriate proxy for determining if peer tutoring can impact academic achievement. This line of reasoning suggests that students may have only had access to tutoring for one specific course and a semester or year GPA is impacted relatively little by a shift of one letter grade in one course (e.g., a student earning a B rather than C in a chemistry course does not change the student’s first year GPA all that much). In the larger study discussed above, that author offered her own hypothesis, suggesting that accessing tutoring “may actually serve as a proxy for students in academic difficulty” (Keup, 2006, p. 42).

I propose that while the overall average impact of peer tutoring may be a small, negative correlation with quantitative academic success measures, this may be an oversimplification. Coupled with the program-level evaluations cited here, this suggests that the impact of peer tutoring is actually context-specific. Whether this is due to the structure of the program, which consistent typologies might better illustrate, or due to particular implementation details is unclear. However, taken together, the literature does suggest that a minority of peer tutoring programs can demonstrate a positive impact on student academic achievement. The relative size of this minority, that is, the proportion of programs that can demonstrate positive impacts on academic achievement, remains unclear.

Given this inconsistency in the literature, the pertinent question becomes: what is it that happens in these contexts—in student interactions at the small group level—that leads to positive outcomes? If researchers can better describe these relevant contexts, perhaps new sets of practices can be articulated to enhance the peer tutoring programs that already exist. For now, this appears to be a substantial gap in the literature.

Peer Tutoring Impact on Development and Added Value

While the literature on the impact peer tutoring has on academic achievement is certainly mixed, the research available on how peer tutoring impacts student development is sparse. Analysis of the literature does suggest that peer tutoring can, under certain conditions, create contexts conducive to

development (Foot & Howe, 1998), but there seems to be little, if any, conclusive research in this area.

Studies have examined the extent to which peer tutoring impacts students beyond straightforward academic constructs. For example, reducing stress about coursework, increasing confidence in a student's abilities, and increased academic motivation have all been found to be impacted significantly by accessing peer tutoring (Beasley, 1997; Royal, 2007). While these types of constructs, most commonly measured through quantitative surveys, may serve as rough proxies for aspects of student development, the literature does not address development directly.

Taken as aspects of added value, these kinds of survey results are important and should not be dismissed. While they may not effectively evaluate developmental impact of tutoring, they do represent metrics that are at least as valuable as grade in course. The concept of academic self-efficacy is particularly significant here. Such a construct, which may have a relationship to access to peer tutoring, may represent both a transferable effect and one that can impact other metrics, including those referenced above that represent academic achievement.

Conceptual Framework

In my review of the literature regarding the academic support practice of peer tutoring, I explored the pressures in and around higher education that have resulted in a crisis atmosphere. As an implemented academic support practice,

peer tutoring is relied upon to provide meaningful, enriching experiences and students create and engage in a variety of such experiences within a peer tutoring context. As such, understanding and examining peer tutoring through a lens of socio-cultural peer to peer learning benefits from aligning a variety of theoretical perspectives. The literature and field certainly need enhanced, allied theoretical frameworks for further research to advance our understanding of peer-to-peer interactions in this area of academic support.

A Social Frame for Peer Tutoring

At its core, peer tutoring is about both learning and development. Student affairs practitioners, academic support professionals, and administrators all often espouse department and institutional missions and goals that are rooted in learning and development. However, it seems that far too few of these professionals are aware of the linkages between the two and how exploring and understanding their interaction can have powerful implications.

Though not my area of research, it does seem that those who study early and childhood education have advanced these ideas. While higher education has continued to borrow theoretical ideas from that work, the field has not seen a proliferation of theory in the area of social learning and development the way it has in, for example, individual-focused cognitive and psychosocial development theories (see for example Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Chickering, 1969; Perry, 1981).

In exploring the interplay of these ideas, Vygotsky rejected traditional developmental paradigms of the early 20th century. In defining his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), he distinguished between levels of actual development and potential development:

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

This conceptualization of development is critical to understanding the real potential value of peer tutoring as it elucidates that as skills are learned, the capacity for development follows and expands. Often referred to as scaffolding, this concept is a foundation of modern peer tutoring programs. This conceptualization of the interplay between learning and development also raises the question: in what ways does scaffolding affect learning in peer tutoring environments?

Further, Vygotsky provides a framework for how learning and development can interact in a contemporary co-curricular environment: "learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning" (1978, p. 90). How does the notion that both learning and student development are not simply related, but codependent, provide a powerful lens for making sense of peer tutoring? This Vygotskian conceptualization fits well with peer tutoring programs where the primary focus is often on enhancing performance in specific academic content areas, but where

semi-structured, rather than rigid, programmatic contexts may allow for reflective time wherein participants can begin doing the developmental work that such “organized learning” has set in motion.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this line of thought to me is that Vygotsky linked his understanding of learning and development directly to human social interaction: “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). The implication here is that both learning and development are advanced as peers co-construct knowledge socially in particular contexts. Peer tutoring then may be understood as a context that, ideally, has been carefully crafted to be a semi-structured, hybrid academic-social space where these kinds of interactions are valued, fostered, and common.

The implication, then, is that development begins with learning, but can only be sustained and advanced through social interaction. If we subscribe to this understanding of learning and development, we must then reconceptualize the value of social interaction to both learning and development from being something peripheral, an activity that is “nice” to include when it is convenient, to being a central component of curricular and co-curricular structures.

Building on both Vygotsky’s work and that of Piaget, Barbara Rogoff (1990) furthered ideas around social interaction, learning, and development in her book *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*. I mention her title specifically because in addition to introducing the notion of

apprenticeship, she places development within interaction. One of the goals she sets for her work is the development of a conceptual framework for “the developing mind” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 13).

Rogoff explores Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development in multiple dimensions. Particularly important to the work I intend to undertake regarding peer tutoring, she reveals how interaction within the ZPD relates both inward, to the individual, and outward, to the construction (or perhaps reconstruction) of the culture:

Vygotsky proposed that cognitive processes occur first on the social plane; these shared processes are internalized, transformed, to form the individual plane. Thus the zone of proximal development is a dynamic region of sensitivity to learning the skills of culture, in which children develop through participation in problem solving with more experienced members of the culture. (Rogoff, 1990, p. 14)

This conceptualization of the ZPD is quite useful to an examination of peer-to-peer academic support. If a goal of higher education is to support and advance cognitive development in students, as I believe it should and is often espoused to be, then a model that makes sense of how the social interaction within the ZPD relates to individual development is critical.

Understanding student culture is crucial to making sense of student experiences as they navigate curricular and co-curricular campus structures.

Rogoff addresses both the nature of culture and how it is reproduced and transformed within the context of the ZPD:

Culture itself is not static but is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting tools provided by predecessors and in the process of creating new ones. Interactions in the zone of proximal

development are the crucible of development *and* of culture, in that they allow children to participate in activities that would be impossible for them alone, using cultural tools that themselves must be adapted to the specific practical activities at hand, and thus both passed on to and transformed by new members of the culture. (Rogoff, 1990, p. 16)

Just as the social interaction that students might encounter in a peer tutoring context could help incite developmental processes within them, it is equally important to acknowledge that this is also a way for students to participate in the production and transformation of student culture. Particularly for students who are still transitioning into the role of a college student, this ability to explore and participate in student culture is replete with meaning. The research I have conducted explores how the opportunity to understand, participate in, and rehearse the role of college student in a supportive, semi-structured environment is a way to make sense of the student experience in the kinds of contexts included in the study.

In addition, Rogoff also examines the notion of active participation. She suggests that a focus on “the role of children as active participants in their own development” is integral to fully understanding the processes of learning and development (Rogoff, 1990, p. 16). In applying this lens to the higher education context, the notion of active engagement in development should inform how research interprets students’ experiences and interactions with their peers.

Related to Rogoff’s ideas on apprenticeship in learning, Collins, Brown, and Newman (1989) apply an apprenticeship model to cognition. The authors note that such models have long been common in specialized, highly skilled

trades and they are now attempting to adapt this idea to “the focus of the learning-through-guided-experience on cognitive and metacognitive, rather than physical, skills and processes” (Collins et al., 1989, p. 457). Inherent in their application of the apprenticeship model to cognitive skills is an assumption that such skills, just as physical skills, are generally acquirable. While this understanding of the developmental and intellectual work we hope students achieve (or at least begin) in college fits quite well with current attitudes in the field, such an assumption may have been quite contentious in the very recent past (and may still be in some areas of higher education today). In addition, this characterization of cognitive and metacognitive skills as learnable “trades” fits well with the understanding I have developed of the outcomes we design for students in higher education.

In constructing their model, the authors suggest that development of self-correction and self-monitoring are critical for cognitive apprenticeship to function effectively, as the “product” of such apprenticeship is much less apparent than, for example, the work of an apprentice tailor. Collins et al. (1989, p. 458) emphasize the importance of interaction in this process: “alternation between expert and novice efforts in a shared problem-solving context sensitizes students to the details of expert performance as the basis for incremental adjustments in their own performance.” This concept advances the ideas of social interaction found in Vygotsky and Rogoff by suggesting explicitly that there is substantial value to the back-and-forth between student and peer tutor, and that such

interactions involve “the development and externalization of a producer-critic dialogue that students can gradually internalize” (Collins et al., 1989, p. 458).

Further extending the importance of the social learning context, the authors suggest:

the presence of other learners provides apprentices with calibrations for their own progress, helping them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and thus to focus their efforts for improvement. Moreover, the availability of multiple masters may help learners realize that even experts have different styles and ways of doing things and different special aptitudes. (Collins et al., 1989, p. 486)

This conceptualization of a learning environment suggests an even more specific context to maximize efficacy. Collins et al. suggest that an effective learning environment will encompass multiple learners and multiple masters. Vygotsky and Rogoff both highlighted the social nature of learning and that engagement with others is critical to the learning process. However, the addition of Collins et al. to the conversation suggests that the inclusion of multiple students and multiple tutors may well be the most effective structural configuration. The authors also address the powerful impact this may have for individual learners: “such a belief encourages learners to understand learning as using multiple resources in the social context to obtain scaffolding and feedback” (Collins et al., 1989, p. 486).

Offering a broader perspective, Wenger (1998, p. 3) writes on the “assumption that learning is an individual process,” which has become so commonplace in American higher education. He flatly rejects this notion and proposes a social theory of learning. Wenger begins with a series of assumptions

that he encapsulates very effectively in a simple list, which I have abbreviated below. This list of premises fits very well with the conceptualization of learning that I have developed to this point:

- 1) We are social beings...this fact is a central aspect of learning.
- 2) Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises.
- 3) Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.
- 4) Meaning—our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful—is ultimately what learning is to produce. (Wenger, 1998, p. 4)

These assumptions frame a theory that values the group and the nexus of social interaction, and is capable of making sense of a hybrid academic-social learning context. These postulates allow for knowledge to be understood as socially constructed, culturally dependent, and reliant upon active engagement.

This last point in particular, active engagement, is of critical importance to understanding and examining a peer tutoring context. As the discussion of Rogoff above helped to illuminate, social interaction is certainly important, but engaging actively will lead to more powerful, transformative learning experiences.

Wenger also finds this notion of participation to be critical to his theory:

Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities. (Wenger, 1998, p. 4)

Thus, Wenger's theory aids in understanding how college students, particularly those new to higher education, can learn how to perform the role of being a college student through the participatory act of engaging in peer tutoring.

Learning to play such a role effectively is absolutely critical to a student's success, academic or otherwise, in higher education. This notion of identity construction in relation to the larger community also may serve as a bridge to understanding how the group-level social interaction in a peer tutoring context relates to and may directly impact an individual's identity development. Student development theorists and student affairs practitioners continue to demonstrate the critical nature of these developmental processes, and connecting them to different types of social interaction helps researchers and practitioners alike to better make sense of the holistic student experience (Chickering, 1969; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; McCall, 2005; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009; Wilson, 1999).

Wenger expands his ideas by developing the notion of communities of practice. While this concept may be congruent with the theories discussed to this point, which have evolved largely from psychology and educational psychology, I interpret communities of practice more as cultures and micro-cultures. Wenger describes his communities of practice as developing "their own practices, routines, rituals, artifacts, symbols, conventions, stories, and histories" (1998, p. 6). These descriptors indicate a structure, here a community, where the members construct various cultural artifacts and transmit them to new members. In this way, Wenger's communities of practice provide a clear point of articulation to more cultural approaches.

The various theorists included thus far provide a particular perspective on learning and development that is rooted in psychology. However, I believe Wenger's broader theory of learning provides an opportunity to introduce other theorists to the conversation, particularly those who are rooted in a more anthropological or cultural approach. The goal moving forward is not to contrast the various theories offered. Rather, I believe that there are points of alignment among them, and it is these I wish to highlight. I hope that placing such theories in conversation here will help develop a more holistic lens through which we can study socio-cultural peer to peer learning.

In order to study student culture, and in particular the micro-cultures that develop in a peer tutoring context, I believe it is critical to apply a social capital lens. Building on the earlier work of Weber, Durkheim, and Mauss, Bourdieu (1977) explored the differences between classes in various cultures and developed the idea of different types of capital. For those of us who view a potential value, or even a public good, of higher education as the possibility of supporting students in social mobility, these ideas are very powerful.

Bourdieu distinguishes between actual capital and symbolic capital, but is clear that the two are intrinsically related: "the capital accumulated by groups, the energy of social dynamics...can exist in *different forms* which, although subject to strict laws of equivalence and hence mutually convertible, produce specific effects" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183). Key to the discussion here is that symbolic capital exists only as a representation of more physical capital. In the

higher education context, the ability to amass academic capital is replete with meaning, particularly for students from oppressed backgrounds, and there are a variety of cultural opportunities to convert such capital to actual economic capital. Symbolic capital relies on disguising that which it represents, and herein lies the power for students in higher education:

symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical "economic" capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in "material" forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183)

Academic capital may then be understood as a form of symbolic capital that students can amass throughout their experiences in higher education. The ability to amass such symbolic capital can then relate directly, through a conversion process, to the amassing of economic capital, and thus lead to a type of social mobility.

A peer tutoring context is a co-curricular opportunity for new students to practice the role of a college student. Establishing themselves in such a role, regardless of their precollege characteristics or demographics, coupled with the academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills that may be acquired in such a context, can lead directly to the amassing of academic capital. Thus, a hybrid academic-social context such as peer tutoring may be understood as a focal point for transactions of symbolic capital in higher education.

In applying these ideas directly to higher education, Nespore (1990) explores how curricular structures influence the amassing and conversion of

social and academic capital. Helpful to the discussion here is his innovative understanding of the curriculum, which is taken to include all contexts where learning occurs, not just those in the classroom (Nespor, 1990). This understanding situates peer tutoring as more central to the student experience as it is included as part of the curriculum. He also suggests that the way in which students interact with and consume a curriculum impacts their social capital and their ability to convert such capital.

When applied to peer tutoring, this conceptualization could speak to questions that explore the ways in which students are receiving scaffolded support in the ability to amass and manipulate types of capital, while also learning content, how to perform the student role, cognitive skills, and metacognitive skills. Thus this lens adds a new dimension to the discussion of how we make sense of socio-cultural peer to peer learning. It also asks how a hybrid context such as peer tutoring may serve as an intersection of multiple dimensions of learning and development.

Incorporating and advancing some of these ideas, Brayboy (2005) employed a lens of transformational resistance in an ethnographic study with seven American Indians who attended Ivy League institutions. He explains transformational resistance as a process by which “rather than reinscribing their places in society as marginalized people, individuals work to move themselves and their communities away from sites of oppression” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 194).

Overall, he ties these individual students' actions to advancing legitimate social justice goals:

Schooling need not be solely about accolades and awards but can contribute to students' home communities in ways that engage larger issues of social justice. However, for transformational resistance to contribute to social justice outcomes, there must be support from powerbrokers within an individual's home community and the institutional setting. (Brayboy, 2005, p. 196)

I interpret much of the work he reports these students doing as acquiring the ability to amass and convert a variety of types of symbolic capital, in addition to amassing the capital itself, so that these individuals can gain the required support from powerbrokers. Brayboy also notes specifically that students gain such abilities from contexts well beyond formal classroom experiences. For example, Brayboy references students' use of faculty office hours. These somewhat less formal interactions can be one process through which students may learn to amass cultural capital through developing interpersonal relationships with a faculty member who could be a powerbroker, or may have access to them, at the university. This example is intended to demonstrate that aligning social and learning theories allows for the creation of a lens through which peer tutoring may be seen as part of a constellation of contexts where, in addition to skill acquisition across multiple dimensions, students are able both to achieve social mobility *and* generate opportunities for themselves to advance social justice goals for their own communities. I think it is clear that such lofty goals align well with the missions of contemporary higher education. However,

fitting these various frameworks together provides a new perspective with which to examine out-of-class, hybrid academic-social experiences.

I have endeavored for my research to bring this allied perspective to bear on a set of research questions that explore the group interactions that happen in a peer tutoring environment. Specifically, my research employs this framework to examine how students construct meaning around learning. I also utilize this frame to address structural questions that explore how both physical and programmatic structures can influence student experiences.

Chapter 3: Methods and Analytic Approach

As a review of the literature reveals, many attempts have been made to understand peer tutoring using quantitative methods. The lack of meaningful findings about what happens in these contexts is partially the result of the limitations of such methods. A qualitative approach is best suited to speak to research questions that seek a broad understanding and contextualization of peer tutoring through student voice and narrative coupled with a focus on explication. Further, a qualitative approach aligns with the constructivist framework I have employed, a set of theories that

maintains that human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is "right" or more "real" than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed separately. (Glesne, 2006, p. 7)

This approach, which Glesne (2006) suggests is most aligned with qualitative research, is also in accord with my own ontological and epistemological positions. A research study that aims to understand a sociocultural context and how students interact in the space by listening to student voice and interpreting the way students make sense of the experiences there in their own words connects directly to the strengths of qualitative research methods, which "derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22).

Research Design

The research questions cited above are best addressed by a qualitative approach that understands and values process rather than outcomes and the

ways individuals make meaning in their lived experiences. A two-site study allows for a comparative analysis that adds depth and highlights the ways that programmatic differences (e.g., physical, structural) impact student experiences. The two-phase design detailed below (observations followed by focus groups) allows for a broad understanding of group peer tutoring experiences on two different campuses while also generating and analyzing the personal, lived experiences of students in their own words.

Site Selection

In selecting sites, I began by considering four-year institutions since students typically have a longer potential timeframe in which to access tutoring, and then particularly those in the greater Ohio Valley region (as the literature shows no correlation between geography and academic support practices). To speak to the research questions, I selected sites that specifically employ a model that allows for group peer tutoring. I then considered programs that have achieved International Peer Tutor Training Certification by the College Reading and Learning Association, which verifies that a minimum set of standards and best practices are in place and evaluated regularly (Sheets, 2013b).

Fortunately, the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) maintains a public listing of all peer tutoring programs that have current certification status, which aided in site selection (Sheets, 2013a). I have chosen to use CRLA certification to help limit site selection in particular, as opposed to other types of certification such as the National Tutor Association, because CRLA

defines minimum standards but requires fewer specific structures for the tutoring programs it certifies. In other words, the standards are defined, but the program can meet them however it best sees fit, thus allowing for more programmatic diversity. This process resulted in fewer than 10 possible options.

In completing the site selection process, I personally contacted those professionals responsible for peer tutoring programs at four of the institutions that remained on the list and that represented programs whose own public materials suggested that group peer tutoring was available in their programs. Ultimately, the two institutions that fit all the criteria and agreed to participate in the study are Mid-South University and Urban Private University. Both institutions are from the geographic region identified above and serve students from similar academic, social, and economic backgrounds. These two sites fit all research criteria, agreed to participate, and provided sufficiently different institutional types and programmatic structures to allow for rich comparative analysis.

Peer Tutoring at Mid-South University

The Peer Tutoring Program at Mid-South University (MSU) provides free peer tutoring to all students on campus. The program has been in operation for several years, maintains CRLA certification, and provides a drop-in service. The result is that students engage in both group and individual peer tutoring. Mid-South itself is a large, public institution that enrolls students from its own state and from the surrounding region.

Peer Tutoring at Urban Private University

The Peer Tutoring Program at Urban Private University (UPU) provides tutoring for students across the institution, primarily in traditional gatekeeping courses. The service is appointment based, and students receive individual or group tutoring based on demand (e.g., the staff schedule multiple students with one peer tutor for high-demand courses). Urban is a mid-size, private institution that serves a primarily regional population.

Data-Generating Activities

I took the spaces where peer tutoring occurs as my field and I spent time observing student interactions there. I observed what happens in these spaces, how students navigate them, how groups form, how they look, feel, and sound in order to provide a richer, more contextualized analysis and understanding. My observations were not recorded and participants' identities were not disclosed. I did keep thorough field notes for each observation session, but these contain no identifiable information. By spending considerable time observing the interactions in peer tutoring spaces, I had hoped to better understand how students see and make sense of their world, or to "make the strange familiar and the familiar strange" (Glesne, 2006, p. 52). I believe that this goal was accomplished and that, through my observations, I began to see and experience the places where peer tutoring happens through students' eyes.

In particular, my observations took place in times and spaces where groups of students were interacting together within the tutoring environment. I

conducted observations across several visits to each site and from different physical places within the tutoring space (different rooms, areas, or tables). Overall, I conducted 10 hours of observations on each campus, for 20 hours of total observation time. Observations were conducted on various weekdays and at times throughout the afternoon and evening, beginning as early as 1:00 p.m. and ending as late as 10:00 p.m. This observation approach allowed me to better understand how students access, enter, and engage with the peer tutoring space and the programming itself. Other questions addressed in this phase include understanding the dynamic between students and peer tutors, investigating how the dynamic (e.g., tone, conversation, norms, etc.) changes when students are focusing attention primarily on a peer tutor versus each other, how students may manipulate the physical space and resources around them to construct their own experiences, and beginning to develop an understanding of the lexicon that students and tutors alike use to describe their interactions.

In addition, focus groups generated data that speaks to the research questions while paralleling the small group interaction I aimed to study. Glesne (2006) suggests the most appropriate test of whether focus groups are the best tool for generating data is the ease with which participants will engage with each other on the topic. The focus groups were held on each campus in rooms as close to the tutoring program location as possible in order to help activate students' memories. Students were invited to participate via an email message

and were offered free pizza for attending the focus group and their names were entered in a random drawing to win an iPad Mini.

I developed a focus group protocol with guidance from Krueger (1994) that proved very effective in a small pilot study (see Appendix A for the full protocol). Particularly germane here was the structured, somewhat linear format of asking certain question types in particular sequence: opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and a final question (Krueger, 1994). The questions were crafted to engage participants in reflecting back on early experiences at the university and to ask that they share stories from those experiences. Specifically, I asked how and what students heard about the program before they accessed it, what their first experiences were like, why they chose to return or not, how they engaged with others at the tutoring tables, and ultimately how their experiences with peer tutoring transferred to or informed other experiences as college students.

This process of focus group protocol development served as a narrative approach. By asking students to begin by attempting to recall the first time they heard about peer tutoring, I was endeavoring to have them tell me their stories from the beginning. Activating their prior experiences in this way, primarily chronologically, resulted in focus groups where students tended to tell stories, rather than just answer questions. By conducting focus groups, as opposed to individual interviews, I was able to observe another context where students listen, consider, and respond to each other. While I do not necessarily equate

this to what happens in peer tutoring, I did find value in asking questions about group experiences in the context of a group setting. As many of the examples in Chapter Five illustrate, students readily engaged in a conversation where they were sharing their stories and experiences with each other, not just with me. I believe that employing this narrative approach was central to the success of the focus groups as it allowed students to tell their stories from different points in time (e.g., when they heard about tutoring, what their first experiences were like, what kept or prevented them from returning, how they engaged with others in tutoring, etc.) while providing some structure to the conversation.

As with most qualitative projects, there is an aspect of emergent design as it relates to saturation (Glesne, 2006). I had planned to conduct at least 5 hours of observation at each site and ultimately conducted around 10. At that point it seemed that I had a clear understanding of the dynamics of a group on either campus. I then conducted 4 focus groups at each site. Krueger (1994) recommends starting with 3-4 focus groups with each type of individual before looking for saturation. While all of my participants were students, this research is largely exploratory and I was hearing consistent, familiar responses by the third and fourth group.

Based on the success of the pilot study, I further refined and developed the focus group protocol for the full-scale project. I also enlisted a colleague to serve as an assistant moderator of the focus groups, again using the structure suggested by Krueger (1994). Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed

to aid in analysis, in addition to the notes that I took as moderator and that my assistant moderator kept.

While I realize that individual interviews are commonly used as a follow-up to focus groups, I did not necessarily plan to conduct them as part of this study. The data generated during the pilot study spoke directly to the research questions, generated a number of themes, and included some rich narrative. Fortunately, the focus groups conducted on both campuses yielded a wealth of information, as the analysis in the chapters below demonstrates. Students clearly did not hold back during the focus groups and I am reasonably confident that they were being honest, open, and forthright. Even when a student reported a discrepant experience in a focus group, they were consistently willing to share and expand upon such experiences. In fact, some of the richest data came from students having the opportunities to hear how their peers' experiences with peer tutoring differed from their own. It was in those moments that the focus groups really took on a life of their own and my role as a facilitator became mercifully easy.

While perhaps a less traditional approach, it was particularly well suited to speak to the research questions, and maintaining a focus on those questions guided all my activities and decisions regarding the project. Other studies examining aspects of student culture have used this combination of qualitative methods quite effectively (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003; Rendon, 1994).

Overall, I believe a combination of observations and focus groups allowed me as a researcher to generate an understanding of the peer tutoring context with my participants that speaks to the research questions. In selecting an ethnographic-style approach, I invoke Geertz's notion of cultural analysis: "[it] is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape" (Geertz, 1973, p. 20). As with most forms of qualitative methods, I acknowledge that what I am after are not generalizable results and that such "analysis is intrinsically incomplete" (Geertz, 1973, p. 29). I have attempted to focus and limit the scope of this project intentionally by framing it within the literature of the field and by employing a particular theoretical framework.

Participant Selection

While identifiable student information was not collected in the observation phase of the project, the physical scale and spaces of the two programs required selecting particular locations (and therefore particular participants) of academic support practice for observation. At Mid-South University, peer tutoring takes place in two relatively large, open spaces. This open visibility allowed me to select areas within the peer tutoring environment to observe group peer tutoring specifically. It also afforded me the opportunity to move fluidly from one group to another at any time during an observation session. The tutoring at Urban Private University is provided in a variety of spaces, including small group study

rooms, open study areas that can seat many groups, and a collection of tables and chairs situated near a coffee and convenience kiosk, but all contained within one building. My primary contact at this institution was very kind to sit down with me and share the details of each regularly scheduled tutoring session so that I was able to observe tutoring when groups were most likely to be working together. While it was not possible to observe the entirety of any site all the time, I was able to work with my primary contacts to be intentional in selecting observation times and places that were most appropriate to address my research questions.

Focus group participation was limited to any student who had accessed peer tutoring within the last four semesters of the study period. This phase of the project was open and not limited to the students who were part of the observation. As peer tutoring typically targets courses that students complete in the first year or two of college, I was fortunate to speak with a diverse group of students who have accessed peer tutoring at different times. Students who had varying amounts of time to reflect on their experiences in college and to see how their experiences with peer tutoring may have impacted them beyond a single assignment or course added additional depth and richness to the focus groups.

While I had hoped to have a group of participants at each institution that is roughly representative of the overall population that accesses the tutoring program at that institution, I acknowledge that such representation was only partially within my control. I asked participants to complete a brief Student

Information Form (see Appendix B), which includes basic demographic information, as well as information about campus activities/engagement, students' level of interaction with the peer tutoring program, etc. I was very fortunate to have a very diverse population of students volunteer to participate in the focus groups. As Table 1 below details, the study included students from many different majors, years, and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Table 3.1 – Focus Group Participant List

Alias	Ethnicity	Age	Year	Major
Samantha	Caucasian	19	So	Psychology
Rachel	White	18	FY	Marketing
Elizabeth	White	18	FY	Interior Design
Kayla	White	19	Jr	Medical Laboratory Science
Megan	White	19	So	Chemical Engineering
Kreayshawn	Asian	20	Jr	Biology/Anthropology
Mike	White	20	So	Biology
Desmond	Asian	20	Jr	Psychology
Madison	Caucasian	22	Sr	Psychology
Cody	Asian	21	So	Finance/Accounting
Elsa	White	20	So	Secondary English Ed/English
Destiny	African	18	So	Medical Laboratory Sciences
Ryan	Caucasian	21	Jr	Marketing
Lauren	White	19	So	Gender & Diversity Studies
David	African American	18	FY	Accounting
Magnus	White	20	So	Finance/Economics
Victoria	White	20	So	Occupational Therapy
Zachary	Latino	19	FY	Nursing
Jennifer	White	19	So	Int'l Studies
Miguel	Hispanic	22	Sr	Marketing
Stephanie	White	21	Sr	Biophysics
Amanda	Hispanic	18	FY	Mathematics
Angel	White	59	PT	MSN/HESA
Cam	Black/African American	18		Electronic Media
Courtney	White	20	Jr	Psychology
Nicole	African American	20		Athletic Training

Table 3.1 (continued) – Focus Group Participant List

Alyssa	African American	21	Jr	Psychology
Terrell	Multiracial	18		Business Undecided
Rebecca	African American	18	Jr	Marketing
Morgan	Caucasian	20	So	Psychology
Alexandra	African American	18		Undecided
Amber	Caucasian	20		Occupational Therapy
John	Hispanic	20		Marketing
Veronica	African American	22	Sr	Spanish/Psychology
Aaron	White	19	FY	Undecided
Kiara	Mixed	19	So	Poli Sci
Sydney	African American	19	FY	Psychology
Danielle	White	21	Gr	Occupational Therapy
Haley	Mixed	18	FY	Pre-med/Natural Sciences
Charlie	African American	21	Sr	Environmental Sciences
Jayla	African American	21	Jr	Marketing
Annie	White	19	FY	Environmental Sciences
Alexus	African American	19	So	Chemical Science
Gemma	Caucasian/Asian	20	So	Occupational Therapy
Serena	Caucasian	22	Sr	Kinesiology/Pre Phys Therapy
Abigail	Caucasian	18	FY	Business/Spanish
Kennedy	African American	19	FY	Human Health Services
Mateo	African American	20	So	Pre-Pharm/Human Nutrition
Jaden	Black	22	Jr	Kinesiology
Nathan	African American	21	Sr	Human Nutrition
Paris	African American	20	So	Dietetics
Autumn	White	19	So	Ag. Biotech
Tim	White	18	So	Accounting
Anthony	White/Non-Hispanic	19	FY	Biology/Pre-Law
Olivia	White	18	FY	Business Management
Caitlin	Caucasian	19	So	Social Work
Suzie	Caucasian	19	FY	Chemical Engineering
Savannah	Caucasian	18	FY	Kinesiology
Arav	Other	20	So	Education
Amu	Indian	21	Jr	Biology/Physics Civil Engineering/ Political Science
Jordan	White	20	So	Science
Kabir	Turkish	20	So	Elementary Education
Brooke	Biracial	25	Gr	Psychology/Linguistics

This level of racial/ethnic diversity was an unanticipated facet of the study. In general, these groups show oversampling of minority students at Urban and Mid-South, both of which may be considered predominately white institutions. While I had anticipated a more homogenous group of students in the focus groups before I began the study, this diversity was much less surprising after conducting the observation phase of the research. Through my observations, it was clear that a population of students that was more diverse than the overall study body, at least according to the official data available from each institution, regularly accessed the tutoring programs on both campuses. Throughout the focus groups, it became clear that the pathways to accessing the tutoring programs at both institutions were not significantly different for minority students. They largely reported the same experiences as their white peers, particularly in terms of how they first learned about the tutoring program on their campus and why they chose to access it.

Confidentiality and Data Security

The risk of breach of confidentiality in this study exists in two ways: personally identifiable data generated from the focus groups somehow becoming exposed, and focus group participants exposing each other. To protect against the former, in order to protect participants' identity, the participants' real names do not appear on any reports, write-ups, or other documents. When the transcripts were typed up, only the participants' first names were included so if someone gained unauthorized access to the transcripts, they could not identify

the participants. Also, pseudonyms have been utilized for all reports. In addition, during the focus groups, participants were asked to use first names only when referencing themselves or anyone else. This protected their identity and the identity of anyone they talked about during the transcription process. Lastly, any identifying information (for both students and institutions) was changed in any subsequent write-ups.

Electronic files were kept in a password protected web-based account as well as backed up on an external hard drive, which was also password protected and stored in a locked drawer. This ensured no data was lost and use of the web-based account eliminated the need to carry a portable storage device that can be easily lost.

Any identifiable information was destroyed when the project was completed. The recordings and transcripts, which contain no identifiable information, were retained. This is so the researcher can review the data when necessary in the future. However, no one but the research team had access to the consent forms and the participants' identifying information before they were destroyed.

In order to minimize a breach of confidentiality from the focus group participants themselves, I reviewed confidentiality at the start of the focus group and obtained verbal agreements from the participants that what was shared in the focus group session as well as participant identities remain confidential.

Analytic Methods

My conceptualization of an analysis of qualitative data is far from linear. I understand it as an iterative process where I begin analyzing data as it is generated, which leads to further data generation and understanding. I recorded early ideas so that I could refer to them during later analysis and have a written record of the evolution of the way I make sense of the data being generated. My approach to data analysis is recursive and I conceptualize the process as one of deconstruction and reconstruction.

Reviewing recordings and transcripts, I used open coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 2005) and listened for emerging themes to conceptualize a first level of abstraction. Overarching themes began to emerge and I started to make assertions based on these. I cataloged the codes and eventually constructed an index of codes for my own use. However, I do believe it is important in writing the analysis up to review the context of particular quotes and themes, so I returned to the complete transcripts and audio recordings often. This part of the analytic process is centrally important to me as I wanted to be able to see and hear the themes that emerge from the participants themselves, in their own words. As a researcher I take seriously my responsibility to represent the voice, sentiment, tone, and meaning that my participants expressed in ways that represent them. While I certainly apply analysis that is framed by the existing research literature and focused by my conceptual approach, these are their stories.

It is also important to me to acknowledge that, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest, all such analysis both implies and requires choice. While I certainly believe the data generated speak directly to the research questions, my first priority in terms of analysis has to be telling the stories of my participants. I also recognize that "what links all the approaches is a central concern with transforming and interpreting qualitative data...in order to capture the complexities of the social worlds we seek to understand" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 3).

In addition to coding and thematic analysis, I also engaged in some narrative analysis of the stories shared in the focus groups. I consider narratives and analysis of them to be critical in speaking to the research questions, as narratives may serve as a "mechanism of exploring how social actors frame and make sense of particular sets of experiences" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 67). Of course there can be many layers to narrative analysis, from understanding the process of the telling of the story and its constituent parts, the content of what was said, and even semantic analysis of a participant's particular word choice (Riesmann, 2008). In general, I find Riesmann (2008) to be very helpful in deconstructing narrative in different ways and incorporated a number of analytic techniques appropriate to the narratives generated in the focus groups. In this study, I found it particularly useful to deconstruct the brief narratives my student participants told during focus group sessions. By seeking to identify the complicating action, coda, etc., as Riesmann (2008) suggests, I am able to

identify the crucial element or impact of a narrative that is most important to the participant. While much of my narrative analysis may ultimately be thematic, I do believe that structural analysis of some stories has helped contextualize the data and move the analysis toward a thicker description.

Validity Issues

As the researcher, I understand and accept a responsibility for acknowledging and exploring any areas where the validity of my research methods, procedures, assumptions, or findings may potentially be compromised. The research design and analytic methods utilized here represent a set of processes that come from the literature, enhance rigor and reliability by using multiple methods and multiple sites, and provide opportunities for checking and re-checking assertions made from the data. These periodic checks have taken the form of returning frequently to both the transcripts and focus group recordings themselves, reviewing notes from focus group sessions and field notes, and discussing progress regularly with others.

In addition, I joined a small group of fellow students who are proceeding on their dissertation projects along a similar timeline, which allowed for opportunities for peer review, analysis, and discussion of the research process. I also believe that rigor and reliability are enhanced in this study by the flexibility that comes with aspects of emergent design. This allows for follow up of seemingly discrepant cases and exploration of significant and interesting, yet perhaps secondary, themes.

Situating the Researcher

I recognize and acknowledge that as a qualitative researcher I am both an instrument of data generation and of analysis. Consequently, it is important to understand my own biases and potential influence.

I am a passionate student-centered professional who works with college students every day. As both a practitioner and researcher in higher education, I acknowledge that I do have my own opinions and biases. In my early work, I helped create and launch a large-scale peer tutoring program. I worked to achieve its initial certification and continue to be responsible for an assessment plan that includes that program. I also have strong opinions about the nature of inclusive versus exclusive academic support programming in American higher education and I believe that practitioners, those who administer programs and services, should be well-trained professionals who can navigate the higher education landscape effectively. Unfortunately, I find all too often that this is not always the case.

Academically, I have a strong background in anthropology, which has prepared me well for utilizing social theory in the context of studying group interaction. My experiences in anthropology have also honed my expertise in the qualitative methodology employed in this study and have provided me with training and experiences designed to help me situate myself as a researcher in any given context. As a result, this academic training in “making the familiar

strange” allows me, as a researcher, to overcome some of my professional bias related to this study.

Finally, as a researcher and social scientist, I believe in the power of higher education to serve as a transformative experience that can result in social mobility and social justice. I believe peer tutoring and other forms of academic support not only aid students in achieving typical positive outcomes, but also advance these humanistic and social justice goals by supporting students in generating cultural capital through exercising their own agency.

Backyard Research

With regard to site selection, I acknowledge the potential risks associated with doing “backyard” research that studies a program I have developed and am responsible for. However, I also believe that the experiences I have had developing this program give me particular insights that helped make sense of peer tutoring contexts. Part of the rationale for selecting two sites, in addition to comparing data across them, is that these two particular sites and my experiences in them can help inform each other. My insights developed while working at MSU helped me to better understand a new context at another institution, while immersing myself in their program helped me see and understand the peer tutoring program at MSU in new ways. Finally, in terms of participant protection, my particular role in The Center at MSU, director, means that I am three levels removed (hierarchically) from the peer tutors who work for the department. It is those individuals who work directly with the students

accessing peer tutoring. While some participants may have seen me passing through the tutoring space when they were accessing the program, it is unlikely that they would even remember my presence. Therefore I anticipated and encountered no issues above and beyond the typical power differential of being “the adult” in the room.

Chapter 4: Situating Tutoring in Multiple Dimensions: Observing the Realities of Group Peer Tutoring

Introduction

Peer tutoring seems so intuitively simple to many in higher education. Little is more idyllic to faculty and administrators than the image of students sitting together in a comfortable environment, texts splayed on a table in front of them, discussing and making sense of some academic topic, from mathematics to literature, engineering to educational theory. I believe it is this combination of a seemingly intuitive and easy to understand practice and the idealization of some long-lost golden era of higher education, which like most golden eras probably lacked the sheen to those who lived it, that has contributed to a dearth of research regarding the student cultures that develop in peer tutoring contexts.

I undertook the observation phase of this research in an effort to see and feel the experience of such contexts anew, to make them strange (Geertz, 1973) even as an insider to academic support in higher education, and to begin to understand how and why student interactions are structured. I was fortunate to observe tutoring sessions on two very different campuses, and in two programs that offer much structural diversity.

At Urban Private University, my contact allowed me access to any tutoring session I wanted to observe and worked with me to identify specific sessions where multiple students typically participate. This program is fairly structured and students are required to submit an electronic request for tutoring in a

specific course. My contact, who coordinates the tutoring program, receives these requests and matches students with qualified peer tutors whom she has hired and trained.

At Mid-South University, I had access to the entire tutoring space and program. While the program at Urban requires a request for tutoring that is then translated to a recurring, weekly appointment, the tutoring program at MSU is far less structured. Students do not submit any requests and are not required to do anything before they access tutoring. Students literally walk through the door and can typically access tutoring for a specific course the same day, if not immediately.

The sections below detail the different lessons learned from these observation experiences on both campuses, ranging from the physical structures where tutoring occurs to the specific kinds of conversations that different groups of students were observed having in the peer tutoring context. I conducted about ten hours of observations on each campus, or about twenty total hours of observation. At Urban I observed sessions that were led by six different peer tutors and that included about 15 unique students. My observations at Mid-South included approximately 17 peer tutors and 43 students accessing tutoring. The physical settings on both campuses, as detailed in the sections below, allowed me to see and hear bits of additional sessions, but these numbers represent students and peer tutors who participated in sessions that I observed in detail.

In some of the sections below, I recount parts of my experiences in narrative form. As stated above, I undertook this phase of the study to see these spaces anew, and to try to envision them through the eyes of a student. I present parts of this experience here for two purposes. First, it is helpful to have a sense of the physical spaces when considering students' experiences there and how the spaces could influence those experiences. Second, this context is useful both for the observation phase and to contextualize the focus group data, which is detailed in Chapter Five.

Presenting some of the observation data in this format speaks to Geertz's notion that "Small facts speak to large issues...because they are made to" (1973, p. 23). The ethnographic-style approach taken in the study is predicated upon this concept that observable aspects of a place and the people in it, while seeming to be small details or individual actions, signify the cultural realities of that context.

Physical Spaces and Context

The January wind was bitter as I walked to the learning center (LC) building at Urban and I was thankful I remembered to bring my scarf and gloves. Even with the unusually cold weather, I encountered several groups of students on my short walk, and most were talking and laughing cheerfully. Situated on a hill in the central part of campus, the building is attached to the main campus library and is surrounded by a mix of academic buildings and undergraduate student residence halls. With only light snow on the ground it seemed apparent

that the grounds were well maintained with manicured lawns, trimmed shrubs, and sidewalks that were clear and dry even as more snow was falling.

It was late afternoon and not quite dusk, so the bright illumination from the inside of the building allowed me to see clearly into the interior. On all three floors I saw mostly large, open spaces with a variety of furniture configurations. The ground floor also seemed to have a kiosk that sells coffee and snacks, as promoted by signs on the exterior. Basic tables and chairs, standing height furniture, and lounge chairs were mixed throughout the spaces and as I approached the entrance closest to me I could see students everywhere.

One evening several weeks later I arrived back at Mid-South after having left my office for dinner. As I exited the parking garage I could see my destination, the multi-purpose building that houses The Center, as the academic support department is known among students, surrounded by a variety of residence halls, including two large towers that are each about twenty stories tall. The building itself clearly had some paint peeling from cement columns and other exterior surfaces, gutters that were sagging or hanging off the roof, and light fixtures that either did not work or were not active.

There are some additional residence halls that I passed that appeared to have been built in the last decade or so, and nearby I could see tennis courts, a workout/recreational facility, and an aquatic facility. This clearly seemed to be an area of campus that had been designed for student affairs activities, or at least those that happen outside the classroom. There were no academic buildings

anywhere around the multi-purpose building. Signage on the exterior promoted a dining facility on the ground floor, a coffee shop on the second floor, and The Center on the third floor. I also noticed a significant amount of trash on the ground around the building. Even as winter was still dragging on, there was no snow on the ground. Along the sidewalks there were intermittent tire ruts that had destroyed some of the lawn and left chunks of mud in places along the sidewalks.

As different as the two campuses are in terms of both building use organization (where different kinds of buildings exist based on use), and architecturally, a couple of the similarities are interesting. In particular, both spaces place the tutoring programs on the third/top floors of their respective buildings, and both have food/coffee available in the same facility as tutoring, even if not on the same floor. While it could be tempting to compare the relative quality of the facilities and grounds to each other and thereby make some assertions about how the different institutions value their academic support services, it may well be more likely that the quality and maintenance of physical structures, as well as infrastructure, is more a reflection of the economic realities of each campus. Therefore, perhaps it should not be a surprise to find new, well-maintained facilities and updated landscaping on a private liberal arts campus and older buildings with deferred maintenance needs and a lack of attention to the grounds on the campus of a large, public, land grant university. My own experience of walking through these parts of the campuses, taking in the same

sights and sounds that students experience on a daily basis, did make me question the extent to which students consciously notice these details and how their perceptions of their own institution may be shaped by them, particularly in light of the academic support services provided therein.

Wayfinding

Upon entering the LC at Urban, I was across from a large rectangular service desk. I could see directly across the lobby, just past the desk, was a large opening that connected this ground floor of the LC to the third floor of the library. As I spent a few minutes watching the interactions between staff and students at the service desk, I ascertained that the desk staff were able to provide a variety of services. I also saw students asking for and receiving keys to what appeared to be small study rooms throughout the LC building. Based on posted signs, it seemed that students, or any member of the campus community, could reserve the rooms in advance online, or simply inquire if a room is available at the desk.

As I looked around the lobby on this first visit, I did not see a facility map or directory, and while I had an address for my primary contact, it was not clear where her office or the tutoring space was located. Following the students' lead, I approached and ask one of the two staff working at the desk. I was greeted warmly and given clear directions to the top floor. Each time I returned to Urban, this lobby, serving as a connection point between the LC building and the library, was a nexus of activity with people coming and going, students utilizing the

seating in the surrounding space, and a few conversations between what seemed to be course instructors and students.

On my first visit to The Center at Mid-South, I entered the multi-purpose building from the same level as the residence halls around it, but what was clearly the level above the dining hall. The building seemed to have been constructed into the side of a hill and the dining facility is on the ground level, facing the aforementioned athletic/recreational facilities, and the second level, where the coffee shop is located, opens out onto a plaza area surrounded by the residence halls described above.

The exterior doors to the building had multiple signs and logos on each, one of which was for The Center. As I entered, I was confronted immediately by a glass wall that encloses a staircase leading to the third floor. Seeing the coffee shop behind the stairs and to the left, I turned that way. The floor immediately inside the building was littered with pieces of the campus newspaper and paper napkins from the coffee shop. There were no signs or help desk to direct traffic, though students moving through the space around me seemed to know where they were going. As I walked toward the coffee shop, around the glass-enclosed staircase, I came to a set of double doors that had the logo for The Center. They were closed but not locked, so I entered and climbed to the third floor. After returning several times, I found that the amount of trash encountered on that first visit was a bit uncharacteristic, though the space was never clean. The floors

were dirty, glass walls were smeared from handprints, people leaning against them, etc.

Even just entering the two facilities on the different campuses, it is impossible to ignore the contradiction between the clean, gleaming building at Urban and the older, poorly maintained multi-purpose building at Mid-South. The relative “new-ness” of the buildings seems to be less an issue than regular maintenance and housekeeping. In subsequent visits to Urban I explored other buildings on that campus, including those that were not as new, and they appeared to be well maintained and clean, at least in comparison to other facilities at Mid-South. As I suggested above, this very well may reflect the financial realities at two different institutional types rather than the extent to which each campus administration values and prioritizes facilities.

Regardless, I find these conditions to be meaningful to this study. Kuh et al. (2005) and others have suggested that students’ experiences and perceptions are impacted by these kinds of issues. Moreover, the same texts also assert that student success can be impacted significantly by the extent to which students believe the institution they attend values and cares about them. Pascarella’s model for change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) suggests that these perceptions can color students’ interactions in and the meaning they make from all types of campus experiences. While the spaces described thus far have been exterior or adjacent to the spaces where peer tutoring happens, they certainly are places that students move through before and after tutoring sessions.

Reception

On my first visit to Urban, I climbed the stairs to the third floor on directions from the help desk in the lobby. The stairs were open on either side to the floors below and the windows to my left offered a sweeping view of part of the Urban campus and the city beyond. The top of the stairs led into an open study space for students with tables, booths, and lounge furniture. The wall to my right had a series of doors with office names on small plates next to them, the last of which was labeled Learning Center and was propped open.

Upon entering the space, I was struck by the size and amount of open space. Immediately in front of me was an unused reception desk, and behind it a wide hall with office doors scattered on either side. When I got to the end of the hall and turned left, I saw that this was an even wider corridor that seemed to run most of the length of that side of the building. There was another reception desk about halfway down, but again it did not appear to be staffed. I found my contact's office across from this desk without having spoken to anyone.

On my first observation visit to Mid-South, I reached the top of the stairs and immediately in front of me was a standing height reception desk. A female student was sitting behind the desk and using a computer. She noticed me as I approached, made eye contact, smiled, and said, "Welcome to The Center." She did seem to recognize me from training sessions earlier in the year (which I had attended in my professional administrative role), but I do not believe we had seen each other since as I typically use a different route to enter/exit my office

and she tends to work only later in the evenings. The stairs wind up into the middle of this space and were surrounded on all sides by a railing and 6-8 feet of walkway space. There were tables and chairs where students were working on three sides, and the desk occupied the last side.

I explained my lay story about my project and why I was there, and she directed me into a large, adjacent room. This space was full of tables and chairs, and I could see another reception desk on the far side, staffed by two students. I made my way past the rows of tables and chairs to this desk and into the offices beyond.

Given the juxtaposition of the physical spaces I discussed in the previous section, I find the reception experiences an equally interesting contrast. These experiences were consistent each and every time I visited each campus. I never encountered anyone working a reception desk in the Learning Center space at UPU and no staff aside from my contact ever initiated an exchange with me. Alternately, at The Center at MSU I was greeted consistently by students working at the two desks, though there were times where their attention seemed to remain more focused on the computer screen in front of them rather than me, even when we were having a brief conversation.

Given the research and change model introduced in the previous section (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), the differences in terms of interaction with people upon entering the spaces where tutoring happens may be very meaningful. As I explore later in this chapter, I believe this experience

raises questions regarding the ways in which institutions, and even departments or programs within specific institutions, communicate the extent to which they value the students and their experiences. I also believe these kinds of lived experiences, moving through the physical space repeatedly and interacting, or not, with people en route to accessing services, while not part of the tutoring experience as it is traditionally understood, certainly can contribute to students' expectations and state of mind when they arrive for a session.

Office Spaces

While tutoring does not take place in traditional offices on either campus included in this study, these are still spaces that students encounter, and that I encountered during this phase of the project. Further, the office spaces that are adjacent to tutoring spaces on both campuses provide further context for understanding the student experience there.

After walking down the long, wide corridor at Urban, I came upon my contact's office. Like all the others I had passed whose doors were open, her office was long and narrow, with a small window on the wall opposite the door. The walls were full, structural walls and the door could swing closed and latch, providing complete privacy when desired. Her work surface included an L-shaped desk and small round table with three guest chairs. While the furniture seemed fairly new, which was not surprising given the recent construction of the building itself, it barely fit in the space. The entire office area was also very quiet, almost clinical with white or drab walls and neutral décor, gray carpet tiles on the floor,

and bare walls. The overall impression of the physical space was something that is very clean, but that is also somewhat impersonal.

As I walked into the office area in The Center at Mid-South, I immediately encountered the exterior of a cubicle wall that forced me to turn left or right. A cutout of The Center's logo hung on the wall, but no other information. To my left was a narrow bullpen that had four older model PCs and four chairs, two of which were occupied by other undergraduate student staff. As I walked back to my contact's, the tutoring coordinator, office, I passed a couple of other offices. The walkway was narrow and all the walls were modular cubicle material. They were actually fabric and were stained in some places.

My contact's office was fairly small, about ten by ten feet, and contained an L-shaped desk and a small round table with two guest chairs. The walls had brightly painted wide stripes of green and navy, while carpet tiles with a maroon-based pattern covered the floor. The walls in her office were covered by a magnetic white board bearing both notes and documents, a cork board that held more documents and several personal photos (mostly of her family and dogs), and there were a few frames in the space with certificates or other pictures. Overall this space felt very lived-in. The spaces are tight as there seemed to have been an effort to cram as many work stations in as possible, and some places, particularly the fabric walls and carpet tiles, were a little worse for the wear.

Tutoring Spaces, Furniture, and Resources

During my first visit to Urban, I learned that tutoring can happen in a variety of physical spaces. Because the sessions are appointment based and the same small group of students typically meets with the same peer tutor on a regular schedule, the program allows the group to select their own location. My contact informed me, and my experiences over the next few weeks confirmed, that nearly all the groups choose to stay in the Learning Center building, though they utilize a variety of spaces within it.

Tutoring sessions at Urban often take place in the open areas described above, particularly the large space on the third floor. My description of this space from my observation notes is illustrative of the kinds of larger spaces available on all floors of this building:

There are floor to ceiling windows with commanding views of other parts of campus. A chunk of the space is open, like an atrium, to more study space below. The rest is carpeted (indoor/outdoor) and has a variety of seating options. There are three booths with high backs that are in the center of the space. Along the windows, there are several pods of four modern lounge chairs surrounding a low coffee table. There are four high-top tables with stools, as well as a few standard height tables/chairs. (January 22, 2014, 3:00p)

Each time I entered this space, I encountered both tutoring sessions in progress and other individuals or small groups of students, all of whom seemed to be focused primarily on academic work. The variety of seating options, hard and soft seating, high and low tables, lounge chairs with coffee tables, etc., provides an interesting mix of choices for students. Throughout my time observing tutoring in these spaces, I was able to join and observe group tutoring sessions

in the booths, high tables, and low tables, but never in the lounge furniture. While those sets of furniture were used, and in fact were occupied more often than not during my time there, they seemed to be used rarely by students during actual tutoring sessions. This may suggest that, while students recognize that tutoring is somewhat less formal than what they experience in a classroom setting, they conceptualize the experience as something more formal than simply studying with friends or classmates.

In addition to the furniture, the open spaces in the LC building contained a few large white boards on casters. There were two of these units on the third floor where much of the tutoring seems to take place. The building infrastructure did provide electrical outlets at most places where furniture was positioned and wireless internet throughout the facility. There were no additional materials, technology, etc. It also struck me that the furniture in the space was very spread out, and in fact I could identify several areas where more pieces of the same kind of furniture would fit and still leave wide areas for traffic, but instead the space was left open. While I do not know whether this was an intentional design choice or the limitations of a fit-up budget, this emptiness did stand out to me because I observed many times when most of the available seats in the space were full.

In addition to the open, collaborative workspaces, the LC building also has an abundance of small group study rooms, several of which are located on each floor. These are the rooms referenced above that students may reserve for use. I

observed several tutoring sessions in such rooms and they appeared to be appointed uniformly. These small, rectangular rooms are located off of main corridors in the building and one long wall is floor-to-ceiling glass, as is the door. Each room contains a basic rectangular table and six chairs. The finishes are similar to other areas of the building, except that at least one wall in each space has been painted with white board paint, making it writeable. The rooms are equipped with a variety of dry erase markers and an eraser, as well as a flat panel monitor that is mounted to the wall. There are various cables for students to plug laptops and tablets into the monitor and a set of laminated instructions is mounted to the wall beneath the monitor. In the sessions I observed in these rooms, peer tutors and students used the writeable walls liberally, though no group attempted to use the available technology.

While the tutoring program at MSU has a more open programmatic structure, allowing students to drop in for tutoring rather than requiring an online request or appointment, the tutoring happens only in the tutoring space officially designated by the program. As a result, there are only two large spaces where all the peer tutoring takes place. The primary space is one large, open room that comprises the interior of this square building. There are no windows at all, though four small skylights do allow some natural light to filter into the space. When it got dark during my first observation session, I noticed that the standard overhead fluorescent light fixtures did a decent job of illuminating the

space, but more fixtures than not had at least one bulb that was burnt out.

Again, my observation notes provide a useful description of the space:

This main area has tables and chairs to accommodate about 200 individuals, all of which are the same shapes/colors/style. The tables are a plain tan laminate and the chairs are blue plastic. All the furniture is on casters and is arranged in a grid of rows and columns. There are signs suspended from the ceiling that are printed in green and navy. Each sign lists a subject (e.g., Chemistry, Physics, Math 1[xx], Math 1[yy]&1[zz], etc.). As I did an initial walk through and around the tutoring area, it was clear that each sign corresponded to the subject for tutoring happening at the cluster of tables beneath it. Within these sections, signs on individual tables further distinguished what was happening at each. (March 3, 2014, 6:00p)

The rows and columns of tables were arranged fairly tightly, and I also noticed that there were additional chairs stacked together in various places along the walls of the space. The floors were covered in large tiles and were noteworthy mainly because of their condition. They appeared to have been covered with some kind of protective wax or coating, but they were noticeably dirty almost uniformly and the wax was peeling throughout the tutoring space. As I observed tutoring sessions in this space, I saw students regularly notice this as they lifted a bag or backpack off the ground to get a book or computer and found flakes of this dirty wax sticking to their belongings. The students were clearly annoyed by this and typically took some time to clean off their bags and then either placed them in a nearby chair, on the table if there was sufficient space, or attempted to hang them on the back of their chairs.

Additionally, all the tables and chairs for tutoring were within a series of structural columns that outline the space. There are eight columns in all, each

about ten feet from the nearest wall, forming a slightly smaller square within the square space. The areas between the columns and the walls did not have any furniture, save the stacks of chairs. Further, there were cordons that stretched between each column. Each was made of seatbelt material and was housed in a retractable unit that is attached one column, similar to what might be found in a bank or post office. These barriers, which were really more visual than anything else as any student could easily step under or even detach and retract one, directed traffic coming into the space to the reception desk. This is significant because in addition to entering the space via the main staircase I have already described, there are two exterior stairs that give access from the plaza outside. Each leads to a door on a corner of the building. The result is that the square space has access points at three of the four corners.

The other large space is the walkway that surrounds the staircase I described in the previous section. The walkway is only wide enough for one set of tables and chairs, so there are no rows/columns in this space. I counted about 80 additional seats in this space, meaning the total space for the tutoring program at MSU can seat around 280 students at one time. This space was noticeably different than the larger square room in terms of both light and temperature. There were far fewer ceiling light fixtures here, and several torch-style floor lamps had been added to the space. Additionally, even though it was March and the weather had become a bit milder, this space was far cooler. Consequently, several students and peer tutors in this space continued to wear

their coats and scarves, even though they were indoors. Some students even wore gloves.

The Center provides some additional resources to students and tutors in these two spaces. Immediately visible were the larger marker boards on casters that I saw throughout both spaces. These units appeared to be about three feet wide by six feet tall, so that when several of them were placed in proximity to each other they created a virtual wall, especially for those who were seated. I counted about a dozen of these units throughout both spaces. In addition, each table had a metal cup that contained a variety of pens and pencils, and I observed students using these liberally. Mounted to the columns in the large square space and some walls in the stairwell area were paper holders that contained plain, blank paper that students and peer tutors appeared to use as scrap paper. The Center also provided smaller white boards, similar to what one might find mounted to an office or residence hall room door, to the peer tutors, and I observed them using these with smaller groups of students or when all of the larger rolling white boards were in use.

While these resources were broadly available in the center, there was no access to technology for tutors or students. Additionally, infrastructure seems to pose a challenge in this space as there were only eight electrical outlets in the larger space. The Center has purchased many surge protectors and their cords were stretched between tables in all parts of the space so that students and tutors could charge their laptops and other devices.

While wireless internet is provided, my own experience observing in the space catalogued several times when the service crashes (I used a tablet and a cloud-based storage system to take observation notes, so I received a notification when the application could not connect to the online service to sync). I also heard students at different points throughout my observations at MSU asking each other and the tutors if they could connect to the internet. This seemed to be both a regular, recurring issue and a common frustration among students and tutors.

Overall, these spaces where tutoring happens are significant to understanding the student experience in peer tutoring. I have previously characterized the spaces where tutoring occurs as hybrid academic-social spaces. I find that the design and furnishing of these physical spaces on these two particular campuses reinforces that assertion, as does the way students utilize the physical environment. The arrangement of furniture in these spaces stands in contrast to nearly all instructional spaces in higher education, even though the square footage allocated to tutoring activities on each campus likely rivals the largest lecture halls on these campuses.

Rather than the auditorium seating found in lecture halls or rows of tables/desks found in most other classrooms, these spaces feature small pods of seating that orient students towards each other. While the more traditional classroom setting reinforces the notion that students are there to receive wisdom from the sage on the stage, these spaces place students in the action. However,

it is significant that the kinds of furniture students choose to utilize for tutoring is different still from what is commonly found in student centers or residence hall lounges and lobbies. Even when lounge furniture is available to students at Urban, and though they do take advantage of it at other times, students choose to use specific configurations for peer tutoring.

Critical to analyzing student experiences and cultures in these spaces is the notion of choice. Students and tutors on both campuses have access to furniture that is easily moved and reconfigured, and they do move and reconfigure it often. However, through none of my observation experiences did students configure tables and chairs into rows or even a semi-circle with a peer tutor at The Center, or any other arrangement that reflects a traditional classroom. Students' configurations invoke the notions of social learning and development I explored above (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978), but add a critical twist: students are choosing how to structure this environment and, thereby, are taking an active, participatory role in their experience and education. This participatory behavior, this exercise of their agency, is a crucial first step in creating the communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) or taking on the mantle of transformative resistance (Brayboy, 2005) presented in Chapter Two.

Therefore, by undertaking an ethnographic-style approach to understanding and making sense of these spaces and places where peer tutoring occurs, I have come to conceptualize these physical environments not just as a backdrop to the action of peer tutoring. Rather, these physical environments and

the materials within them are very much part of the experience, central to the student cultures that develop therein, and an additional aspect of the tutoring process that may lead to active and engaged learning. Beginning at this basic, physical level, students are practicing, even rehearsing, to be active and engaged learners.

Finally, critical to my analysis of these two tutoring spaces on two different campuses is the quality of the environment at each. As discussed throughout the descriptions above, and as noted repeatedly throughout my observation notes, students at Urban and at Mid-South experience very different physical environments in terms of maintenance, building upkeep, and even cleanliness. These differences are more profound than a simple assertion that students at Urban are working in a new facility while those at Mid-South have an older structure. As different as these environments are from each other, and even though the tutoring programs have their structural differences, students on both campuses manipulate and utilize their physical contexts in similar ways. They all create spaces where the focus is on academic work, typically placed on the table for all to see, and on each other. The differences in the quality of the environment as provided by the institutions was noteworthy throughout this phase of the project, and as a result I was attentive to any comments regarding such structures in the focus groups.

Anatomy of a Tutoring Session

In leveraging my observation sessions to better understand the overall student experience, I endeavored to learn about the anatomy or process involved in a tutoring session from the students' perspective. I began to map out this process by asking my contacts at each institution to describe how students gain access to tutoring, what they understand a typical session to look like, etc. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the time spent with students in the tutoring spaces sometimes revealed a different lived experience.

Through this phase of the project, I came to conceptualize a tutoring session as a four step process: pre-session activities where students request tutoring and/or prepare for a session; arrival to the tutoring space, checking in, and connecting with a tutor or pre-existing group; the experience of participating in a tutoring session while in the space; and how students extricate themselves from a session and the tutoring space. I could make an argument for adding an additional step regarding what happens after a student has accessed tutoring, though this is a set of largely internal processes, or what Foot and Howe (1998, p. 36) term "post-interactive reflection." I choose not to include these cognitive activities as a step here for two reasons. First, such activities are not clearly observable and may not result in direct actions in subsequent tutoring sessions that this method of observation can truly make sense of. My participants did not regularly reference previous sessions during my observations, and I therefore am cautious about making too many assumptions about the work they may or may

not do between sessions. Second, I believe there is an argument to be made that this kind of cognitive work is not necessarily conceptualized as the conclusion of the tutoring process. I believe additional study is needed in this area, including whether the concept of a "tutoring session" should be conceived as linear, as I present it in this section, or as more of a cyclical process, particularly for students who access peer tutoring regularly. I present the linear version here because the data generated in the observation phase of the project clearly and directly support such a conceptualization. The subsections below detail each step of the process and offer analysis of students' experiences therein.

Pre-Session

Pre-session activities vary significantly between the two programs included in this study, providing a valuable contrast. At Urban, students are first required to submit an online request for tutoring. In addition to submitting the request, before students can schedule tutoring sessions, they must also complete and submit an intake form, learning styles inventory, and electronically submit to a "tutoring agreement." Once the tutoring program coordinator receives all of the information electronically, she schedules the student with a specific peer tutor/group and emails the student to confirm the meeting time and location. While not insurmountable, it is possible to conceive of this process as a bit of a barrier to students who want to access tutoring at Urban. At a minimum, it fair to

suggest that most students who are willing to work through the process are at least fairly serious about wanting tutoring.

Alternately, at MSU, there is no application, request, or intake process. My interactions with both the tutoring program coordinator and students who access tutoring there suggest that all a student has to do is be willing to walk into the multi-purpose building and find the tutoring space.

On the face of it, the MSU approach seems very simple and straightforward for students compared to the process at Urban. However, in the course of observing students' actually accessing these spaces, there were some interesting patterns. These experiences are detailed in the following section.

Arrival and Check-in

At MSU, it is very apparent which students arriving have accessed the service before. They walk confidently into the space, interact with the student at the reception desk casually, and seem not even to need the signage to navigate the space. By contrast, students who are accessing tutoring the first time seem both meek and uncomfortable. These students enter the space slowly, often come to a full stop before they even reach one of the two reception desks, and just take in the entirety of the space. I read facial expressions and body language (e.g., arms crossed, furrowed brows, fidgeting) as overwhelmed, intimidated, and self-conscious. There certainly are times when the student at the desk sees such a student and waves her over to the desk. However, there are also times when the student at the desk is already engaged with other

students, answering the phone, or simply lost in her or his own work and does not notice the novice tutee.

Students do make their way to the desk eventually, and are almost always greeted by the student-staff there. The student interacts with a touch screen computer monitor, inputs her institutional ID number (or swipes her university ID card), and selects the course for which she's accessing tutoring. Particularly for seemingly new students, the student worker explains "how it works" to the student. This conversation generally includes a brief explanation of the signage, that the student can join any table in "their subject," and that the peer tutors are all wearing the lime green shirts. Students who the desk staff seem to perceive as returning students (in observing, this seems to be determined by the speed and confidence with which a student approaches the desk, how familiar they seem interacting with the sign-in system, etc.) receive a brief greeting and are often asked "you know where you're going?" In the large majority of such interactions I observed, the student answers with a quick "yep" or "I'm good." For these students, there is a clear sense that speed is important to them. They want to get to the tutoring tables, they walk in and through the space with purpose, and they approach a table and take a seat confidently.

After checking in, newer students wade slowly into the space, looking up at the signs suspended from the ceiling. When they arrive at a cluster of tables indicated for their course, these students tend to stop and survey the landscape. They are far more likely to be cautious in choosing and approaching a table.

Moreover, even when a student chooses a table where only one seat is currently taken, they are still more likely than not to ask, "is it ok to sit here" or otherwise indicate to the seat for approval. The reply to such requests is completely consistent in tone and content, even if the words vary, both from peer tutors and other students: "yeah," "of course," and "pull up a chair" are all common responses.

Arriving for tutoring for the first time at UPU is a very different process. A new student arrives on the floor and makes his way to the LC office. I observe some students who stop along the way and read the nameplates by other office suite entrances, as I had to do, but I never observe a student asking anyone else for directions. Once inside the LC office suite, the student makes his way down the same hallway I did and finds a peer tutor, and sometimes another student, waiting outside my contact's office. The peer tutor is always quick to make first contact and typically opens the conversation with, "Hi, are you Jim? I'm Jane, your tutor." Once all participants are present and introductions have been made, the group has to decide where they want the tutoring session to take place. I observed two different scenarios here. First, the tutor has a preference and has already selected a location. Second, the tutor seems fairly ambivalent about location and simply asks the group where they would like to go.

Alternately, for groups that have already had their initial meeting, they have agreed on where subsequent sessions will meet. If the group prefers a study room, the tutor typically makes the reservations, arrives early, and ensures

the room is unlocked and available. If the group meets in an open space, the first participant to arrive selects a table or booth, and other members just sit down as they arrive.

I observed these interactions and recount them in detail here because they illustrate so many issues associated with tutoring, including locus of control, locus of responsibility, differences in programmatic design, etc. Specifically pertinent to my research questions, the experience of arriving and checking in for tutoring on each campus is most interesting when juxtaposed with the pre-session requirements.

As detailed above, students at Urban have to complete multiple forms, submit assessment results, and select specific days/times they are available just to be scheduled with a group. While this may serve as an initial barrier, it also provides an opportunity for the program coordinator to help shape students' expectations for what happens when they arrive for tutoring. The coordinator's email details where students will meet and who the tutor will be, in addition to providing basic date/time info. This provides at least an initial framework or schema for students who have never accessed the program before. Further, completing the intake process serves as a shared experience for students. So, even if a student is accessing tutoring for the first time and meeting someone new, they know that this person has gone through the process as well. In general, this seems to be far less intimidating overall than the process at MSU.

At Mid-South, the ability to simply “walk in” for tutoring does mean that students can access the service as early in the semester as possible and as immediately as they would like after they determine they want to access tutoring. However, initial experiences certainly seem to intimidate and overwhelm these students. The focus group data presented below will corroborate this assertion.

All of this is not to suggest that one approach is better than the other. And in fact I would expect that if additional tutoring programs had been included in this study, I would see many more kinds of intake and arrival experiences. That being said, because higher education professionals want to encourage students to access services like peer tutoring, want them to do so voluntarily, and want them to have affirming experiences that encourage them to return, it is important to acknowledge that any approach will present students with small challenges to overcome.

These kinds of small challenges may well serve as valuable learning experiences for students. However, particularly for students who are still transitioning from high school and may associate a substantial stigma with tutoring, these seemingly minor trials may be sufficient to discourage access. There are legitimate questions here regarding the kinds of capital (Bourdieu, 1977) students need in order to make the decision, and follow through with it, to access support like peer tutoring. It is also relevant to my study that college students, who often access tutoring as a result of some kind of struggle with

course work, encounter an additional, albeit different kind of struggle in converting their desire to utilize tutoring with actually gaining access.

The Tutoring Experience

In both programs included here, the actual time that students spend working as a group with one or more Peer Tutors during a formal tutoring session is comprised of periods of conversation and quiet working time. As students sit down at a tutoring table, the initial activity pattern is entirely consistent on both campuses. Students begin by unpacking, literally. What had been clean, uncluttered tables are almost instantly transformed into a veritable college brochure study setting. Almost invariably, students unpack at least one textbook, notebook or binder, and often some kind of study aid (e.g., graphing calculator for a math class or molecular modeling kits for organic chemistry). Technology varies most from table to table and session to session. At both campuses, most students produce a laptop out of their bag, most of which are even the same brand. Occasionally a student will use a tablet instead of a laptop, and in the course of my observations I only saw students using iPads. This unpacking instantly transforms the tutoring spaces from somewhat simple, sterile environments to places that look lived in. Further, this ritual unpacking, which pervades every tutoring session I observed, appears to signal both the beginning of the tutoring session itself (i.e., students perform this ritual before or as they speak to each other for the first time at the table) as well as the notion that what happens here is primarily academic in nature. This ritual is purposeful in and of

itself and serves as an outward demonstration that students have gathered in this place at this time for a particular purpose and are relatively focused on that end.

At Urban, I observed a combination of sessions that were initial meetings of groups with tutors and those that were continuing from previous meetings. In the context of this particular program, the beginnings of these sessions vary depending on first or subsequent meeting. During initial meetings, the Peer Tutors all seem to cover a rough script that has been proscribed by their supervisor, and some even openly state that they “just have to get through this stuff.”

Initial conversations in these situations focus first on the students’ goals for the semester and then on the results of the learning styles inventory the student completed as part of the tutoring request process. A half-page form the student is expected to complete prior to attending the first tutoring session guides the goal setting conversation. While this kind of activity does align with recommended practices conceptually (Whitt et al., 2008; Yasutake & Bryan, 1996), in practice it seems to amount to little more than a formality, a minor hoop for students and tutors to hop through before they can “really get to it.” The following exchange typifies the kinds of exchanges I observed about this process:

The peer tutor asks some initial questions, including who her instructor is and what goals she has for the semester. The goal question in particular seems stiff and I guess that this is something he has been asked to do in training. Her response is that she wants an ‘A’ in the class, and he

responds that "that's always a good goal." After they both chuckle, the tutee asks very specific questions from her homework. (January 22, 2014, 5:00p)

While there is some variation, both where tutors skip this step entirely (observed once) and where they take it more seriously (requiring students to state multiple, more robust goals), students by far cite the grade they hope to earn in the course as their only or primary goal. Peer tutors at Urban accept this almost without exception. Further, in no subsequent session I observed does either the student or a peer tutor reference students' goals. Thus, while on paper the program is working to structure the tutoring experience conceptually by asking students to set and focus on semester-based goals, the reality is that this activity appears to have no real bearing on the tutoring experience.

During the second part of the introductory conversation at Urban, I observed tutors asking students about their learning styles inventory results. Students frequently seemed to have forgotten they even completed the assessment and often could not recall which style is strongest for them without prompting from the tutor. When students disclose this information, tutors uniformly respond with 2-3 suggestions for how students might leverage that learning style when studying on their own. These seemed to be very canned, rehearsed suggestions and I learned when speaking to some tutors before or after sessions that they are required to learn such suggestions during their training. Similar to the goal setting conversations, I only observed learning styles being discussed during initial tutoring sessions, and even then only briefly.

For all other situations, both subsequent sessions at Urban and all sessions at MSU, tutoring sessions begin immediately with students' questions about course material. Occasionally, these discussions are punctuated with questions or comments about other aspects of the course or even more personal topics. These core conversations are explored, deconstructed, and analyzed thoroughly in their own section below.

Wrapping Up

Disengaging from a tutoring session is a fairly simple experience in both programs. At Urban, sessions have scheduled end times, so this is a natural part of the process with an established end to each session. On some occasions, I observed sessions at Urban where students asked questions of the peer tutor, worked through any number of concepts or problems, and were comfortable with their understanding of the material. At this point, the group agreed to adjourn early.

At the end of most sessions at UPU, tutors remind students that they can contact the tutor between sessions (which are typically held once weekly for one hour) and often exchange mobile phone numbers early in the semester. Tutors actively encourage calls, text messages, or emails when students have questions between sessions and offer to schedule additional sessions before major exams or assignments. At Urban, when the group packs up to leave, each individual simply goes her or his separate way. Neither tutors nor students have any need to return to the LC office where they initially met.

At Mid-South, the drop-in model of tutoring allows for students to leave or join groups at any time. As a result, there is a somewhat regular flow of students coming and going in each group. In fact, based on my observations, group membership rarely remains stable (no students arriving or departing) for more than about twenty minutes. The result is a very fluid, dynamic environment where the group identity is often in flux. When students depart, they typically thank the peer tutor and sometimes wish their fellow group mates good luck. As they do when arriving, departing students stop by one of the reception desks in the space and interact with the touch screen system. Students are asked to rate their experience on a five-point Likert scale and then to enter their institutional ID number or swipe their university ID card. Students complete this process with remarkable speed, often requiring them to stop at the desk for no more than 3-5 seconds.

In general, the anatomy of a tutoring session is largely consistent within each program. There are substantial differences when comparing groups' experiences across both programs. Perhaps most noteworthy is that student groups on both campuses seem to have a high degree of consistency, but what that consistency looks like is defined largely by programmatic choices that practitioners and administrators have made on the campuses. Also interesting here is that student groups find ways to maintain consistency regardless of these structures. Of course the groups at Urban are consistent in that they met regularly as a formal unit. While there is more variation among the groups at

Mid-South, I did observe students returning regularly, sometimes already as groups, to work with a particular tutor on a specific day or time.

Cultural Norms

I have suggested above that peer tutoring contexts are hybrid academic-social spaces. Moreover, this phase of the study aims to understand how students groups construct their experiences in these places. The brief sections below offer somewhat “thicker” descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of observed cultural norms in the peer tutoring context, particularly those norms that are seen rather than heard. The next major section of this chapter explores the peer tutoring conversations in more detail, so the goal here is to paint a more vivid picture so that those conversations are not mere abstractions, but are situated in a particular culture, that is, student culture.

Attire and Appearance

Throughout each observation session, I was careful to note the attire worn by each group member, both students and peer tutors, and their general appearance. Across all tutoring groups I observed relatively little variation in what students choose to wear to their tutoring sessions. A sample from my field notes illustrates one group (number and letters denote participant number for that group, which I assigned randomly for shorthand, and assumed gender and race based on appearance):

1f/w: jeans, long sleeve plaid flannel shirt, shoulder length blond hair
2m/w: jeans, red hoodie, short brown hair
3f/w: black yoga pants, maroon sweatshirt, brown hair in a pony tail
4m/b: jeans, gray t-shirt, short hair

PT1m/w: khaki shorts (odd for weather), short red hair
PT2m/w: jeans, short facial hair, short dark hair
(March 6, 2014, 3:30p)

This group's appearance is typical for all the groups I observed. All participants tended to wear blue jeans or, for women only, black yoga pants. T-shirts and sweatshirts were most common, though some participants did wear button down- or polo-style shirts. On both campuses, many students wore apparel with their institution's name/logo. Most male participants had short hair while women tended to have longer hair that was often worn in a ponytail. In general, students seemed to be clean and attentive to their appearance.

These appearances suggest to me that students do not alter their appearance to attend tutoring sessions from other activities on campus. Also noteworthy here is that there is no distinction between peer tutor and student attire and appearance. The result is that students are accessing this academic support service that is provided by other students who look, act, and dress just as they do.

That being said, when compared to my own experiences interacting with students in many different contexts on college campuses, I find that students dress and appearance in the peer tutoring environment is more akin to that in a classroom rather than, for instance, a residence hall. I observed far less athletic wear in these tutoring spaces (e.g., mesh shorts, sleeveless shirts, etc.) than I have encountered in residence halls, recreational facilities, etc. While I could easily hypothesize that this is a result of students accessing tutoring shortly after

attending their classes, my observations regularly went well into the evenings, as late as 8:00p.m. at Urban and 10:00p.m. at Mid-South. Therefore, students' appearance may be intentional despite being out of class at that point in the day.

Body Language and Other Nonverbals

While I claim no expertise in analyzing the meaning behind body language, I did observe trends in this area that merit some mention and thoughtful consideration. For example, as a group sat around a tutoring table at MSU, all four students were leaning forward with their hands and arms on the table. Three students had a pen or pencil in one hand, and the fourth was holding her graphing calculator. The peer tutor was standing, but had one hand on the table, palm down, and was gesturing to an open text book with his other hand. Every individual in the group was sitting relatively straight and appeared very focused. Even more interesting, when the peer tutor began to use a marker board to work through a sample math problem, all four students continued to lean forward, and focused all their attention on the peer tutor (all making eye contact, no side conversations).

This scene is typical across all groups I observed, though of course there are variations. At times when students are not engaging directly with each other or a peer tutor, they continue to lean into the table and focus their attention on the combination of materials (e.g., notebook/binder, textbooks, laptop, calculator, etc.) in front of them.

This body language, which remains relatively consistent through different kinds of activities (talking as a group, focusing on a peer tutor leading a sample problem, working relatively independently), suggests that this is an active environment. I saw very few instances of students leaning back in their chairs, looking off into space, or exhibiting the glazed-over look that is familiar to so many instructors. The resulting spaces appear almost as perfect visual illustrations of the social learning environments described by the theorists referenced previously:

Interactions in the zone of proximal development are the crucible of development *and* of culture, in that they allow [students] to participate in activities that would be impossible for them alone, using cultural tools that themselves must be adapted to the specific practical activities at hand, and thus both passed on to and transformed by new members of the culture. (Rogoff, 1990, p. 16)

Beyond body language, group members show additional nonverbal indicators of engagement. When one student asks a question, others at the table typically look up and make eye contact with the interlocutor. Both during the asking of the questions, and the response, which could come from another student or from a peer tutor, other students in the group often nod, cock their heads to signal that their understanding is not tracking with the explanation, or smile when a fellow participant has an “aha” moment.

These seemingly casual behaviors suggest that being part of a peer tutoring group is not just a self-serving activity. Students are engaged in an active learning context and even seem to be invested in the learning of their fellow group members. While they each have their own materials, homework, or

problem set to work through, they consistently return to interacting as one unit and offer each other both challenge and support.

Cautiously Casual

Normative behavior in the tutoring programs at both Urban and Mid-South helps elucidate the ways that students make sense of these contexts. As I observed sessions in both settings, the group conversations often centered around specific questions that students had regarding course material, whether a homework assignment, preparing for an exam, or material that had been covered in class. While the entire group will often engage in working through such a question, there is a set of social norms enacted that regulates this practice.

Most significant to my research questions is that it is the students in the group who most often determine who will ask the next question. Moreover, this is often done using nonverbals that include hand gestures and head nods. For example, I frequently observed sessions where a student had asked a question, the group worked through that material, and another student wanted to interject at the same time that the original student was beginning to ask a follow-up. The second student raised a hand a few inches above the table and extends the index finger (visualize making the number 1 with your hand). Alternately, the second student might use a pen or pencil in a similar gesture. This is a visual cue that the student has a question, but the cue is directed at the original interlocutor, another student, rather than the peer tutor. At this point the

student who asked the original question has options about how to proceed: she could signal back with the number 1 hand shape to ask the student wait before asking; nod her head to the second student to indicate that he should proceed with asking his question; or verbally ask if his question is about the material or another topic.

These interactions, which at a glance seem so simple and almost not worth notice, reveal a fascinating aspect of the power structure in the peer tutoring environment. In the more traditional academic setting, the classroom, it is the master who regulates who speaks in turn. In the peer tutoring context, the tutor certainly is recognized as having the specialized knowledge in a particular area, but such recognition does not result in the same power differential as in a classroom.

Attention and Being Attentive

The nonverbal participation in conversations and cultural norms described above all suggest that peer tutoring is an environment where students often attend to each other rather than just their own work or needs. Throughout the experiences observing tutoring groups, I began to pay close attention to sightlines, eye contact, and how students attend to each other and to peer tutors.

As described in detail above, the tutoring program at Urban has a fairly rigid structure that allows for consistent contact between students and a peer

tutor. As a result, the students almost always have the attention of one specific tutor. However, the programmatic structure at Mid-South is much more fluid.

Here I observed groups of students, which themselves are often adding or shedding members, working with a variety of peer tutors who sometimes circulate through the space. I observed many times when an individual student has a question and there was no peer tutor sitting at the same table.

This may trigger a variety of behaviors. A student who had been working through a personal problem often begins by looking around at the other students at the table. In almost every session I observed, the student will only ask a fellow group mate a question if eye contact can be made first. This appears to be an acknowledgement of availability and willingness to work together. If there has been a lull in the group conversation and each member is focused on her or his own materials, the student is more likely to look for a peer tutor. Rather than relying on less conspicuous eye contact, students in The Center at MSU raise a hand, just as students do in a traditional classroom. Once a peer tutor sees the student, and makes eye contact, the hand comes down and the student seems to understand she or he is next in queue. In practice, this is often how group conversations begin or resume. A student signals for a peer tutor, and when the peer tutor arrives back at the table, the whole group's attention is focused on the group, rather than the individual.

Bodies in Motion

The notion of physical movement during a group tutoring session is highly consistent on each of the campuses in the study, but provides a stark contrast between the two. At Urban, groups are cohesive, regular, and consistent. I observed that once the group forms and each member selects a seat, it is quite rare for anyone to get up before the end of the session. When group members do move in the space during a tutoring session, they do so to be able to write on the nearest marker board or dry erase wall.

Sessions at Mid-South are a significant contrast to this physical stability. Bodily movement is a factor in nearly every group I observed, and in some cases it can be so intense and quick as to make it challenging to keep track of all the interactions. Certainly there are peer tutors here who I saw standing up to use the large, mobile dry erase boards with a group of students. Further, it is fairly common for a peer tutor to ask a group of students for a volunteer to work out a problem on the marker board, which requires them to stand and move through the space.

Even more frequent at MSU are peer tutors' movements in the tutoring space. Each time I observed a session at The Center, I saw tutors move from table to table within one subject area. I found this movement particularly difficult to capture in my field notes until I begin diagramming the activity. As the example below illustrates (see figure 4.1), understanding this movement can, at times, be critical to understanding what constitutes a group in this tutoring

environment. This figure represents three tutoring tables in close proximity to each other that were all labeled for the same calculus course. Students are identified by a number, which I simply assigned as I begin observing them, and a subscript that includes a symbol, to indicate apparent gender, and a letter, to indicate apparent race/ethnicity. Similarly, peer tutors are identified by the abbreviation "PT," and a similar subscript described above, but that also includes the number I assign for this session. Eleven students and three tutors are represented.

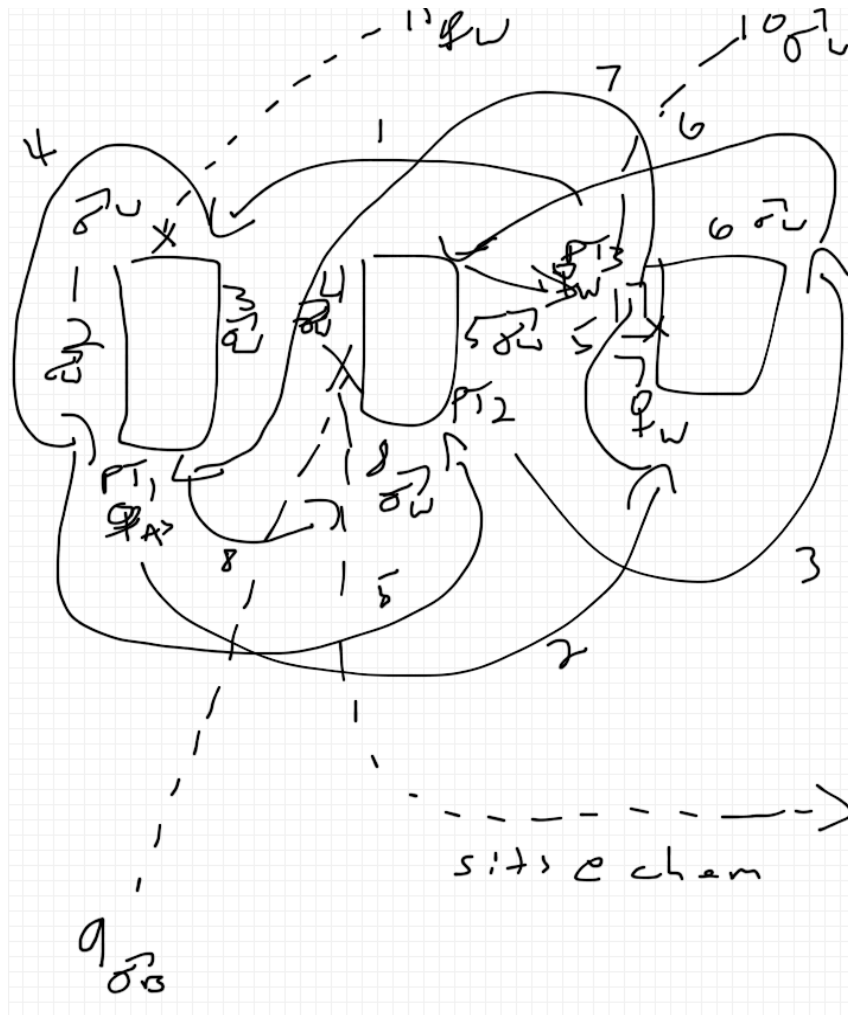


Figure 4.1: Calculus tutoring in The Center. (March 6, 2014, 5:00p)

Reproduced here from field notes, this diagram represents the movement of individuals around these tables for about a half hour. Solid lines, with arrows to indicate direction, represent movement of peer tutors, while dashed lines represent the movement of student group members. Solid lines have also been numbered so that the order in which movements of tutors occurred can be tracked both spatially and sequentially.

One of the first noteworthy observations about this session is that students are relatively static. They certainly move in their chairs, turn in different directions, etc., but student group members were only observed standing up and moving during this session when they were entering or leaving the group. The peer tutors move quite often, each averaging one move every ten minutes during this time. This kind of physical movement helps to demonstrate just how fluid groups are in The Center at MSU.

Further, students are arriving or departing relatively often as well. As figure 4.1 indicates, three students join the session and one leaves during the time observed. While all this movement is fascinating, my field notes indicate that most of these students were still at a table for calculus tutoring well after I stopped the diagramming exercise, indicating that many students come to tutoring having planned to spend well more than an hour there. This is corroborated by information from my contact that places the average student time in peer tutoring at about 90 minutes.

Critical to my research questions, this kind of movement throughout a peer tutoring environment raises important questions about the nature of what “group tutoring” really means, how a group is defined, and how different kinds of groups, such as fluid versus static, might result in experiences that have different impacts for students. This seems to be one of the most substantive differences between the two programs. The static groups at Urban are clear, consistent, and easy to understand.

However, at Mid-South, the group experience appears to be quite different. The notion that students do not begin and end their individual tutoring time together, and that peer tutors sometimes take this team approach to support a large number of students, may have multiple implications. Throughout my observations on both campuses, I did not hear or observe any signs of frustration among the students regarding how the group tutoring was structured. Of course, for many students, the program on their campus may well be their only exposure to this academic support practice. Even allowing for that possibility, it is interesting that students seem to be so willing to be flexible, patient, and understanding in these contexts.

More specifically related to defining the “group” in group peer tutoring, this figure from my observations at Mid-South suggests that even that simple category, group tutoring, can be challenging to define. Using this specific session as an example, questions about group definitions include, “Is the entire set of tables one group? Or do the students at each table constitute a group? Do peer

tutors who move frequently and consistently among the tables count as a part of each group (if group is table-based) or are the groups more student-facilitated and peer tutors should be understood as only transient members?”

At different times while observing tutoring at MSU, I saw students turning to their peers at neighboring tables to ask for assistance. Further, there are times when a peer tutor will use one of the large marker boards and two or three tables will all attend to that peer tutor, shout out answers to questions, and suggest next steps. Given these further complicating factors, I have come to understand groups in the tutoring context at MSU to be not just fluid, though they clearly are, but also to be multi-layered, dynamic, and organic. This analysis demonstrates that students’ focus may be less on working with the same individuals consistently, even during the same session, and more on working with a group of peers who meet their cognitive and topical needs.

While this data indicates that the ideas of social learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and cognitive apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990) are thriving in this context, it also interrogates assumptions that may be inherent in those theories. Perhaps the need for social learning experiences is not necessarily dependent upon a consistent, static group. Based on the literature, I believe that for such experiences to be meaningful, students need a supportive environment to engage in them. Therefore, while static groups where students can build rapport may be one, perhaps more traditional way of fostering such an environment, it may not be the only way.

Students' interactions at MSU made it clear that they did not already know the other students in their tutoring groups, even if they had accessed tutoring multiple times. In the absence of the more regular, structured format of recurring appointment-based group tutoring, where tutors can work intentionally to build rapport between and among all members, I suggest that some other social force is at work to create a sufficiently supportive environment. The micro-culture at Mid-South is responsible for establishing this kind of environment. Rather than relying on one peer tutor, the program leverages multiple peer tutors in each area to create a space where social learning is valued and common.

Tutoring Conversations

It is easy to conceptualize the discourse among students in their groups as the real essence of what happens in peer tutoring. As the previous sections have detailed, there is much more happening in such contexts. It remains, though, that tutoring conversations are central to understanding students' experiences. While the following chapter that presents data from the focus groups includes the students' take on their conversations, I observed many hours of dialogue and the sections below present my understanding and analysis of what I heard.

Opening the Conversation

Throughout my observations, I saw that tutoring sessions begin in a consistent pattern. Initial sessions at Urban often begin with a conversation

about semester goals and learning styles, as detailed above. More regular sessions on both campuses, though, often begin with a peer tutor asking a straightforward question: "What do you guys want to work on today?"

Throughout the observation sessions, this is the most common sentence that moves the participants from the pre-session phase where they are getting settled and unpacking materials to the heart of the session.

As simple as it is, that question does reveal some important information. First, tutors invoking such an opener are establishing that this is a place where things are "worked on." While that may seem like a plain, basic assertion, a stroll through almost any campus library, another place where higher education faculty and staff expect to see students "doing work," quickly reveals that this is a different environment. Second, this question relies on an implied assumption, namely that students have arrived to the tutoring session with specific ideas or goals that they want to accomplish. Interestingly, I found it extremely rare for a student to attend a tutoring session without having brought questions or requests to discuss specific topics. Even when students are clearly floundering in the course material, they are expected to have and readily produce the beginning of an agenda for the session.

While such an opener is quite simple, it effectively sets the tone for the tutoring session. While tutors are regularly recognized as the content experts, this does situate the students in a place of having some control of and responsibility for the session. More broadly, this sets up a reciprocal relationship,

where tutors provide support, sample problems, and the content expertise, but where students have to regulate the conversation, identify what they need, and prioritize those needs. I conceptualize the cognitive work being done here largely as an outward expression of self-regulated learning, and thereby connect it directly to the higher order goals and outcomes often associated with academic support practices.

Flow

An easy, comfortable back-and-forth seems to develop in a variety of ways within tutoring groups on both campuses. The peer tutor, though clearly recognized as the content expert, rarely takes a didactic role, and does not necessarily facilitate the conversation for the entire tutoring session.

In some of the more regular sessions at Urban, I observed that students, who are expected to come with specific goals or questions to accomplish or answer during the session, often take turns in asking questions. A major variation here is to whom the students direct their questions. For example, one group session I observed for a 100-level math course at Urban was comprised of all first-year students. These students consistently posed question to the peer tutor. By that, I mean that while asking they made eye contact exclusively with the tutor, other members' attention was even focused on the tutor rather than the tutee who asked the question, and no other group member responded to the question before the tutor responded.

Even with more transient groups, I observed similar behavior in some of the sessions at MSU as well. As a result of this self-imposed structure, the peer tutor becomes responsible for maintaining the flow of the conversation. There are instances where the tutor will answer questions in turn, only engaging other group members in the course of working out a problem, understanding a concept, or exploring the logic of a question. In other instances, the peer tutor responds by offering some initial, cursory information and then essentially restating the question for the entire group, thereby "allowing" the other students to participate more actively. Conceptually, this kind of response from the peer tutor effectively creates a space where students may be more comfortable in exercising their own agency to regulate the flow of the tutoring session themselves, and thereby practicing or rehearsing the role of effective, self-regulated learners who can structure high-functioning social learning contexts.

I find a significant distinction and departure from this model in some groups. There are many sessions I observed wherein students asked a question while looking around at various group members, including, but not limited to, the peer tutor. In these instances, any group member would offer an initial reply, and often peer tutors seemed to intentionally allow a silence in the conversation rather than jumping in immediately. This small gap provided a space for the group members to reflect on the question and/or work out how they wanted to respond.

While these two approaches or types of flow can exist within the same session, I do find that there is one consistent variable to which they seem to correlate: how often the group members have accessed tutoring. Basing this assertion on how comfortable student group members seem in the space, how readily they engage, and the extent to which they are already familiar with (e.g., know by name) the peer tutor(s), it seems that students who are more familiar with the tutoring space and program are more likely to access their peers as possible content experts in addition to peer tutors.

I observed a prime example of this behavior in an organic chemistry tutoring session at Urban. Student participants were at least sophomores and, even though the group had only met a few times to that point in the semester, the participants engaged with each other and the peer tutor equally, and with the same expectations. That is, students seemed to expect that fellow group members would be just as critical to understanding the material as the peer tutor would be.

In such instances, the student participants have often been accessing tutoring for more than one semester, and are often more advanced students. This may suggest a connection with the cognitive developmental work that students may be doing through their careers. A sample section from my observation notes illustrates this behavior:

Group moves on to questions about IR spectrum. 1 is asking the specific question, but is supported by 2 who chimes in three distinct times to support 1's question or add bits of info to it. As 1 tries to clarify her question, 2 asks what she means, and a short back and forth follows

about what exactly the question was asking. Working in tandem with the PT looking on, both tutees are collaborating to understand where each other is [in terms of understanding the concept at hand] and when they achieve that, 2 uses a drawing from her notes to explain how a graph should look to 1. During this time PT makes no comment, but does look on attentively, nodding slightly. (January 30, 2014, 5:00p)

Taken broadly, the observation data demonstrates that the flow of a tutoring conversation can vary greatly. This variation seems to be a result both of tutoring styles employed by individual peer tutors, but perhaps more so a factor of how the student participants in tutoring structure their experience. This important finding suggests both that peer tutoring is able to meet students where they are, developmentally, and that it is an experience that students themselves can actively and intentionally structure to meet their needs. These concepts are critical to understanding that group peer tutoring is not a monolithic practice; rather, it encompasses a variety of configurations and it is this variety that seems to have the ability to impact student experiences and success so powerfully.

Locus of Control

As evidenced in the discussion regarding the flow of conversations in group peer tutoring, the control of the conversation is a constant negotiation and one that often plays out in subtle, sometimes unspoken ways. Further, my analysis of the observation data reveals that such control exists at two different levels: within the context of discussing a specific topic (usually a course concept) and, more broadly, the overall direction and content of the conversation. While the programmatic characteristics and physical spaces at Urban and Mid-South

contrast extensively, this is an aspect of the tutoring conversations that is consistent across campuses, programs, and groups.

Within the context of discussing course content, academic concepts, or specific assignments/problems, the student participants in peer tutoring almost always control the conversation. The opening question that peer tutors repeat time and again, "What do you guys want to work on today," effectively and immediately cedes this level of control to the students present. Through observing sessions on both campuses, I noticed a pattern in how students tend to ask their questions. Rather than focusing their attention on problems or concepts sequentially as ordered in assignments or textbooks, students seem to try to connect the next question to the previous topic. Phrases such as "kind of like he was asking," or, "going off of that," were quite common in the sessions I observed.

I find that these verbal transitions serve multiple purposes. First, they do move the conversation clearly from one question or topic to another. Second, they do so in a way that shows respect for other students' questions and the camaraderie that comes from their shared experiences of not knowing. Finally, such transitions serve to help students connect or link course concepts together.

These connections may serve to help students understand course material as a set of interconnected knowledge or theory rather than a more simplified list of discrete bits of knowledge. Corroborating these ideas are the moments I observed where students would work together on problems in an organic, as

opposed to linear, sequence and would verbally make connections across concepts.

At a broader conversational level, I observed that peer tutors often tend to take control. While students almost always drive the conversation within the domain of academic topics, it is peer tutors who often work intentionally and carefully to keep conversations productive and focused. While students rarely seem to introduce purely social topics to tutoring conversation, I did observe times when conversations become unproductive.

For example, one session at Urban was scheduled for a pathophysiology course, but the conversation often drifted to a student's displeasure with the course instructor. In fact, this student began the session in this vein: "I think we should start off by saying she doesn't teach us at all in class, she just gives out a 15-page study guide and we have to go over it ourselves...she skips PowerPoint slides...we are totally lost" (January 27, 2014, 5:00p). In response to this opening, the peer tutor asked to see the study guide in question and began to ask the students about it, careful not to join in the complaining. Throughout this session, this student in particular regularly returned to disparaging the course instructor.

While the peer tutor seemed very wary to address this issue directly, it did introduce negativity to the entire group that I did not encounter elsewhere. Eventually, the peer tutor did employ a small, albeit clear, corrective conversational tool:

Student 2 blames a different faculty from last semester for why she doesn't know something now. PT asks who she had, 2 states name, PT responds, "oh, I love her." It seems this comes across as a gentle chastisement to 2, who smiles and works (for the first time) to move the conversation forward. Nothing even close to hostile or tense, but I definitely get the impression PT is becoming weary of blaming faculty from 2 in particular. (January 27, 2014, 5:00p)

While this exchange happened in the last third of the session, there was no further mention of the faculty instructor, which is markedly different from the entire session up to this point.

Clearly, this peer tutor had tried to guide the conversation to more positive and productive place by choosing not to acknowledge, verbally or otherwise, the students who were decrying their instructor. She only chose to offer any kind of acknowledgement after more than half the allotted time for the session had passed and the continual barbs had led to students' excuses for why they did not know material from previous courses in the discipline.

This example demonstrates that, while peer tutors often seem to understand that they may assume control of a conversation at any time, they are reticent to do so forcefully. It is not clear if this is the case because tutors recognize that being so heavy-handed could be detrimental to the tutoring environmental and to student participation in particular, or if it is simply a positive side effect of the age proximity and would be sufficiently awkward for all involved. Regardless, a gentle remark when the right opportunity arises leads to immediate and substantial change, demonstrating the extent to which tutors are in control of the larger conversation.

Shared Responsibility

Across tutoring sessions on both campuses, I found common expectations inherent in the conversations that conceive the tutoring experience as a shared responsibility. Put simply, peer tutors expect that students who access tutoring will have learned critical material from prior course work and will come to the tutoring session having already attempted the assignment/problem/concept at hand. Similarly, students expect peer tutors to understand course material thoroughly and to be able to provide strategy suggestions, course navigation techniques, and generate additional sample problems/questions instantly.

The tutoring conversations I observed throughout the study demonstrate that peer tutors clearly expect students to have content knowledge from previous coursework. During one session at Mid-South, I was able to observe two calculus tutors conferring about how best to help a trio of students on a particular topic. The tutors were quite concerned that the students were struggling to understand the material because of what the tutors perceived as “gaps” in students’ understanding from prior coursework. As the tutors were deciding how best to support these students, they spoke privately and lowered their voices (I was only able to hear the conversation as I was on the periphery of the tutoring space where they seemed to step to be out of students’ earshot). In this session, the tutors made a quick list of 3-4 topics from more basic math courses the students needed to understand and proceeded to provide mini lessons on those topics using one of the large white boards. At no point in this

session did the tutors ridicule or criticize the students for not knowing and, in fact, framed the mini lessons in the context of "wanting to be sure everyone understands the background behind these kinds of problems" (March 5, 2014, 7:00p). In this instance, the tutors seem to give the students the benefit of the doubt that they do not know the necessary material because of some failure of previous coursework as opposed to individual deficits or failure to gain what they should have from high school math courses.

I observed a similar situation at Urban, but with an important difference: the previous course in this case is one the students took at the university, as did the tutor. As my observation notes clearly demonstrate, the tutor in this case holds the students to a different level of expectations. This section of notes is from the last ten minutes of the session and tension had clearly been building as the tutor found that the two students had major gaps in understanding from previous courses and admitted to not putting in much time studying for the current course:

PT becoming ever so slightly more rigid/critical. E.g., "what's the normal level of sodium supposed to be" <long, uncomfortable pause> "you guys should've learned that." 1 finds it in her book and the conversation moves on...

Seems to me this group is doing a dance now. PT is pretty clear that they haven't done the work they should have to this point, including potentially in previous semesters. She is still engaging with them, absolutely professional, no edge to her voice or anything of that sort. However, she is also unforgiving when they cannot answer a question. (January 27, 2014, 5:00p)

This example illustrates that, when a tutor can determine that students are not putting in what the tutor believes is sufficient effort, the tone of the conversation

can change substantially. This particular session is the most tense that I observed and, while the peer tutor refrained from rebuking the students too sharply, the impact of her words and tone were clear. Based on students' resulting eye contact (or lack thereof), slumped body language, and disheartened facial expressions, it is clear the students understood the larger implicit message.

More common in the conversations I observed are students who are accessing tutoring without having attempted to understand the content/work the assignment beforehand. These situations were straightforward every time I observed them and were handled clearly and directly in both sites. Moreover, students seem to be very aware of this expectation. The exchange below from an observation session at Urban typifies this:

PT asks what he wants to work on and 1 mentions his homework.
1: Yeah, i really want to work on my homework, and I know I should have at least tried it before now, but ... (trails off)
PT: (lightly) yeah, you definitely should try it on your own, so please do that before next time
(March 27, 2014, 2:00p)

This was not the only session I observed where students readily admitted to not having attempted the work before accessing tutoring. This was the group's first session, and the tutor seemed to be slightly more understanding as a result. In other situations, peer tutors often ask students to attempt the work themselves before the tutor will even engage on the topic.

As many of the sessions I observed for the study are tied to math and natural sciences courses, much of the work the students do is problem-based. In

these contexts, students regularly request that peer tutors generate additional examples or sample problems. Through all the observation sessions, no peer tutor had an issue complying with such a request and, while some did use the textbook in support of this work, many were able to create new problems at will. I find it particularly interesting that this expectation is pervasive, as I saw for instance toward the end of a session for a French language course:

PT: Only a few minutes left, anything else you want to work on?

1: Maybe an exit test? This has been hugely helpful, really.

PT: Oh good. Do you want me to make it hard, because I can make it hard (small laugh)

1: Oh yeah, do.

(January 27, 2014, 4:00p)

In considering the kinds of questions students ask during tutoring sessions, I notice a pattern across most tutoring conversations. Many conversations in a tutoring session begin with students wanting to know “how” to do something, but those discussions tend to evolve into questions about “why” it (whatever the concept is) works that way. These kinds of higher order questions certainly suggest that students access tutoring to understand material, not only to complete homework assignments. More pertinent to the notion of tutoring as a shared responsibility, implicit in these kinds of questions is an expectation that peer tutors can explain not only the mechanics of a certain course/topic, but that they know and can explain the material at a conceptual level. In practical terms, students seem to expect that peer tutors understand the material at least as well as graduate teaching assistants.

Finally, the observation sessions illuminate that students who access group peer tutoring on these campuses are also responsible to each other. Specifically, students are responsible not just for their own learning, but for contributing to their peers' understanding as well. An example from an organic chemistry session at Mid-South illustrates this notion of responsibility to more than oneself:

He [3] asks a question about molecular mirroring and PT exclaims that 1 had just been working on that. PT asks 1, "do you want to give it a try?" 3 does not seem to be put off by this at all and very happily directs his attention to 1, as PT looks on quietly. 1 slowly walks through a similar process she had done with PT maybe 20 minutes before. She gives a brief explanation of the concept as she understands it, she uses the same molecular modeling kit and constructs the same models, and she proceeds to ask 3 questions similar to what PT had asked her. As 3 eagerly answers her questions, and as he looks to his book or manipulates the models, 1's eyes flash toward PT fairly often, and he nods and smiles enthusiastically, though he doesn't say anything. Important here is that PT is effectively sitting behind 3, so 1 can glance at him easily and 3 cannot see anything PT is doing. 1 continues through the example, eventually asking 3 to bind the molecules together using pieces from the kit. She also regularly asks 3 why he makes certain choices or assertions. 3 speaks very quickly and 1 smiles and nods approvingly, as if 3 is rehearsing how to do this. 2 looks up occasionally, nodding slowly or slightly, and then his head goes back down to his own book/notebook. 3 eventually finishes and asks if he did it right, 1 says she thinks so and looks to PT for approval, who says, "yep, that's it!" Everyone is clearly very happy with themselves and 3 says he thinks he "gets it" now. PT then encourages him to do a few more problems like it. 3 looks in his book and asks PT if these would be good to do, indicating to several questions. PT looks over his shoulder and says, yeah, if you can do those, you'll be good to go. (March 4, 2014, 4:45p)

Note that throughout this exchange, student 1 is eager to try to explain the information, student 3 is eager to learn from her, and student 2, while neither the interlocutor nor the responder, seems to feel compelled at least to attend nonverbally to the conversation.

There is a social pressure in action here that is not present in the same way in a typical college classroom. While it would be convenient to conceive of those academic experiences as a shared responsibility, the lived experiences of course instructors suggest that students do not necessarily feel the same need or pressure to contribute productively to class discussions, ask thoughtful questions, or otherwise engage in the classroom. That the conversations are so different in peer tutoring contexts may be a result of the norms of student culture acting on a hybrid academic-social context. While the domain of the conversations is typically academic, the modes of interaction more closely resemble students' social interactions as opposed to those in the classroom. This notion of tutoring sessions as a shared responsibility speaks directly to the concept of hybrid academic-social experiences.

Course Structure and Strategies

Observations across the two sites included in the study show that the content of tutoring conversations varies, but that the domain remains largely academic. Even in those moments when students are trying to get to know one another, to build rapport, and to establish new relationships, academics are the central topic. By this, I understand academics as a conversational domain that includes not just course material, but also classroom experiences, major/minor/program choices, instructors, teaching assistants, course materials, textbooks, and course strategies. In practice, this distinction is evidenced by students and tutors readily asking questions of each other such as "what's your

major” or “which professor do you have,” while rarely asking each other “where are you from” or “are you going to the basketball game tomorrow.”

At Urban, peer tutors do have access to the information that students submit at the beginning of the semester, both the learning styles inventory results and the students’ written goals. While one or two tutors spent considerable time discussing these during the first, or second group meeting, they scarcely were mentioned in later sessions. However, academic topics aside from basic course content are part of many tutoring sessions.

In the example below, the group is at the end of a math tutoring session and had been discussing strategies for navigating course lectures (tutor offers suggestions in response to specific questions from the students), how to write out complete answers on exams to earn full credit, and why the instructor requires certain formats. The students also asked the peer tutor how she studied for the course and what approach they should take, and she continually emphasized that doing practice problems is the best way to determine if they really understand the material. She then gave them suggestions (mostly online) for where to find additional sample problems once they had completed those in the textbook. The conversation then turned briefly to the particular instructor:

1 and 2 agree prof can be distracting (lectures wander off on tangential topics) and unclear.

1: I mean, she has her PhD, so she knows her stuff, but ... they don’t teach you how to teach in PhD school

PT: (laughing) PhD School?

1/2: Graduate school, doctoral school, whatever (all laughing)
(January 30, 2014, 6:00p)

Though the students may not be confident in their own lexicon for discussing it, they are demonstrating understanding of a valuable insight, specifically that most doctoral programs do not include much, if any, pedagogical training. This exchange is slightly different from sessions where students express frustration and even verbally bash instructors because the students in this group understand their faculty as products of a system that, to them, is imperfect and incomplete. These kinds of exchanges are places where student groups make meaning of their collective experiences in higher education and come to develop more sophisticated personal epistemologies.

At Mid-South, where groups can be more fluid, these kinds of conversations do not necessarily occur at a certain point in the session. This is in contrast to Urban, where less content-specific discussions generally seem to occur toward the end of a session. Tutoring groups at MSU tend to weave conversations about course strategies or structures throughout a session. The following excerpt from observation notes was taken during a session that included four students and two peer tutors at MSU, and while the rest of the group attended to the conversation, this particular conversation occurred between one student and one tutor:

The conversation between PT3 and 2 is more conceptual and 2 already seems to have a solid grasp on the material. Her questions are complex and she uses the language of chemistry fluently ... PT3 also adds comments here and there about what kinds of items to expect on the test (e.g., how "he," presumably the instructor, writes certain kinds of multiple choice items), how to think about different concepts (he uses analogies here), etc. (March 4, 2014, 4:00p)

This conversation about course strategy is different because it is initiated entirely by the peer tutor. While no students at the table inquired about the kinds of questions the instructor asks on exams, the peer tutor volunteered the information.

Getting Schooled in Tutoring Sessions

I began this chapter by asserting that research has failed to consider peer tutoring adequately because of its apparent simplicity. If the participants on both campuses taught me anything throughout the observation phase of the study, it is that tutoring is anything but simple. I have come to understand tutoring not as a place where students and tutors gather in some idyllic setting to “talk about academics,” but as places where serious work is done. This work includes the effort to understand and internalize concepts from individual courses or other academic constructs.

However, there is much other intellectual work happening in these spaces. As detailed early in this chapter, the two programs that welcomed me into their worlds have substantively different programmatic structures, physical spaces, resources, and norms. Acknowledging these differences between programs, there remains some remarkable symmetry to the kinds of conversations groups have in these contexts.

The comparison of the physical spaces available for tutoring on each campus suggests that the conversations and interactions that happen in these environments impact students far more than the environments themselves. The

other way to understand this finding is that campuses may create as many comfortable, attractive, and high-tech study spaces as they can afford, but the spaces alone do not lead to these kinds of interactions. The people make the difference.

However, it is important not to assume that because the observations yielded only positive interactions that negative experiences do not exist. Throughout all the observations conducted on both campuses, there were no examples of students who seemed to be angry, frustrated, or otherwise unhappy with their experience. This observation in and of itself is striking, just given the number of students who were observed. While I make no claim that this means students do not have negative experiences, as I am sure they do, it does suggest that such experiences may either be rare or difficult to observe (i.e., perhaps students internalize their frustrations and show few outward signs when they are displeased).

Further, dissecting the anatomy of a tutoring session reveals the ways that students and tutors can work together to structure tutoring environments that work for their particular groups. Both physically and cognitively, these groups are making a series of decisions regarding how to construct each session. Moreover, students and tutors do not necessarily follow a script. Tutoring sessions are rarely didactic in the traditional sense and while topics covered within one session can have a very broad range, they often arise and are

discussed organically and thereby help students make connections across different conceptual areas or even disciplines.

Integral to developing this understanding of the tutoring experience is the notion of choice. Nearly every aspect of tutoring that I observed, analyzed, and considered involves some aspect of student decision-making. This facet alone distinguishes these peer tutoring contexts from traditional classroom environments. While students clearly expect peer tutors to have a thoroughly-developed understanding of course content and familiarity with course structure, that is where the similarities to instructors or teaching assistants ends. Students do not come to tutoring sessions and wait quietly for peer tutors to tell them how the session will go, what the day's objectives are, or pick up where the last session ended. Rather, both students and peer tutors seem to have a clear, almost immediate understanding that this experience is flipped. The students themselves make these choices and the peer tutors tend to facilitate achieving the objectives set by the students.

This understanding of group peer tutoring situates students at the center of the experience in a context where control, and thereby power, is a shared resource. I find that this more egalitarian social structure is what allows for an adaptable, pliable environment where student groups can be both supported and challenged, and where conversations in the academic domain can lead to some of the gains referenced in Chapter Two.

Specifically, I find this student-structured space that tends to exhibit more heterarchical (Bondarenko, 2007) social organization is a place where students may both amass and convert forms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Nesper, 1990) while rehearsing roles of successful college students or scholars. By situating students at the center of a primarily academic experience, but by also incorporating aspects of students' social lives, peer tutoring allows students to explore these new roles through questioning, supportive dialogue, and critical inquiry.

My findings suggest these social structures and forces are the driving mechanism behind the power of social learning that was first explored by Vygotsky (1978). On a more practical level, instructors and researchers alike should take interest in the notion that while so many faculty bemoan the difficulty of soliciting student engagement in the classroom, whether in class discussions or even just answering questions, these tutoring environments are fertile ground for such engagement. While the observations were conducted on only two college campuses, they encompass substantially different programmatic structures and student experiences, and yet yield strikingly congruent data regarding the power and impact of hybrid social-academic contexts. The following chapter will explore students' take on their experiences in these hybrid spaces.

Chapter 5: "Dude, it's a miracle:" Students' Take on Their Peer Tutoring Experiences

Introduction

Just ask them. As I conceived and developed the concept for this project, and eventually clarified the research questions that have guided me through it, I often found myself quite surprised at the lack of information about what really happens in group tutoring sessions. Further, for all the research that has been conducted and literature that has been published about peer tutoring in college, there is a significant lack of student voice. Given that we, as researchers and practitioners, are endeavoring to understand an academic support practice where the primary service providers are students, and the beneficiaries of the service are students, I believe we have been remiss in attempting to make sense of their experiences while largely excluding them from the meaning-making process.

My earliest notes that led to the development of this study come back to one phrase in particular: just ask them. Of course this is a broad generalization of what can be achieved by employing qualitative methods like focus groups. However, I find that the simplicity of that phrase still rings true for this project. This research was undertaken as an exploratory project, seeking an understanding of experiences that groups of college students share. In many ways the careful development and refinement of the methods I used was my way of finding the most effective ways to "just ask them."

Through the development of a focus group protocol, crafting the questions that I wanted to pose to each group, I was careful to remain conscious of the fact that the students who would participate in the project were the experts. I was trying to learn from them and understand their experiences in peer tutoring as they do. This notion of the qualitative researcher as student, often espoused in the literature (e.g., Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), conceptualizes the relationships and inherent power structures between researcher and participant differently than much of the quantitative work that has been conducted about peer tutoring.

I found this approach critical in the research process and I believe that students responded directly, immediately, and positively when it was clear to them that, even while I am obviously older and am not “one of them,” my interactions showed deference to them. By respecting their schedules, their priorities, and their preferences (even if only for such trivial things as what kind of pizza they like and which days/times were best to meet), I believe my pre-focus group interactions with students helped to create sessions where students were willing, if not eager, to share their experiences with me. Moreover, I am grateful to the students who participated in these focus groups for many reasons, but perhaps most of all for their deep, strong desire for me not just to hear their experiences, but also to understand them as they do. Much as they describe peer tutors’ persistence in helping them to understand course material at a conceptual level, the participants in this study *worked* to help me

understand their experiences in group peer tutoring, the meaning and value those experiences have to them, and why, as MSU sophomore Mateo put it, “Dude, it’s a miracle.”

My contacts at both institutions were critical in making initial contact for participant recruitment, and in helping find suitable spaces for conducting the focus groups. Students who participated in either phase of the project were also very willing to share their opinions on the type of pizza that would be most attractive to focus group participants and the best days and times to schedule the sessions. In total, I conducted eight focus group, four each at Urban and Mid-South. The participants included 63 total students, 61 at Urban and 62 at Mid-South, and, as detailed in Chapter 3, the demographics of the participants represent a diverse population of students on these campuses across multiple dimensions (e.g, race, gender, geographic home, selected major, etc.).

I have attempted to tell their stories using the themes below, ranging from ideas around context and structure to notions of social learning and the culture of tutoring itself. In keeping with the research questions and methods employed in the study, my hope is that these themes present the students’ experiences, beliefs, and values in their words and on their terms, paired with my analysis of the data we generated together.

Structures and Their Significance

After completing the observation phase of the project, and as referenced in the previous chapter, I was very interested in exploring the meanings students

ascribe to the structures within which they operate. These include issues surrounding the kinds and qualities of physical structures, as described in the observation data. In addition, I refer here to programmatic structures. While the tutoring programs at both Urban and Mid-South are certified by the College Reading and Learning Association, this credential primarily ensures that certain levels and types of training and assessment are in place. The actual delivery of tutoring students, the means, mode, policies, and practices, are left to each institution to determine, and as we have seen already there are some stark differences between the two programs in this study.

Physical

As pronounced as the differences in the physical places and spaces where tutoring happens on each campus were to me, as the researcher, in the observation phase, they often seemed like relatively minor details when speaking to students in focus groups. While allowing for the notion that such campus spaces are so familiar to students that they become part of their background environment, I find it significant that students often would not mention anything about these physical structures when responding to questions about how they would describe tutoring to people who did not attend their institution or to their parents.

Even given this lack of focus in initial responses, it is still clear that the physical spaces in which tutoring occurs do matter to students. While students did not make comments about the cleanliness or maintenance of physical spaces,

they did make it clear how the location of tutoring on campus may impact student access. For example, Samantha, a sophomore psychology major at Mid-South, talked about her first time accessing tutoring related to this kind of convenience:

I was a freshman last year, I lived in [a residence hall nearby] so I would just walk over, me and my friends and I would, you know, do our calculus homework or our chemistry homework together. And if we had questions, sometimes the tutors could help us with the same question at the same time, which was really nice because it was kinda like collaborative.

Similarly, Serena, a senior kinesiology and pre-physical therapy major at Mid-South, noted that the distance from her residence hall was a potential barrier to accessing tutoring:

I didn't really know where it was the first time. I mean, I was told that it was on [south part of campus]. I was told it was near the [multi-purpose building]. I was told that it's a great place to go. But my dorm was on the north end of campus and most of my classes were. So the first time I even came around South Campus was, I had an exercise class and I got familiar with the area. Then I learned where [building was] was and the [Workout] Center. And after I was here a bit, I found it but...that, that was kind of hard. But I, I knew it existed so when I found it I knew what it was and maybe that it could help.

Emphasizing a similar sentiment, Kayla, an MSU medical laboratory science junior from Michigan, noted that proximity can be a barrier to accessing tutoring and employed a metaphor that encapsulates the idea that relative distance on campus is not a minor issue to students:

It's a big thing with a couple of my friends 'cause like I lived in [omitted] Hall freshman year so, I mean, that was a frickin' mile away. So most people just didn't come just 'cause they didn't feel like walking a mile to the other side of the planet to go to The [Center].

In a similar conversation with students at Urban about why some students may choose not to access tutoring, the physical location of the service was perceived as a possible barrier. Olivia, a first-year business management major from Ohio, offered such a hypothesis:

I would say probably like if you don't have a class in the [building] and you're really lazy and you never go there. It's on the fifth floor, although [laughter] you can take the elevator. So [laughter] some people don't wanna do that, so it's...I mean, it's not necessarily out of the way because you can take the elevator and you'll probably end up there anyways at some point in time. So just take it to the fifth floor and get a tutor. But if that's not your mindset and you're just really lazy...

There are some meaningful implications about the emphasis students on both campus place on the location where tutoring is conducted, particularly in relation to residence halls. In practical terms, some students who accessed tutoring, particularly those who did so early in their careers, sometimes attribute this access at least in part to the service essentially being in their paths. In the passage above, Samantha suggests an attitude that since tutoring was so close, and was there anyway, she and her friends figured they might as well give it a shot. However, when tutoring is perceived to be far away and students are not yet sure if it will be "helpful" to them, accessing such a service may be perceived as not worth the effort.

In examining these ideas of physical location more conceptually, it merits examination that students are primarily concerned with physical proximity to their residence hall. Even while administrators, faculty, and staff may understand peer tutoring as a primarily academic enterprise, students on both campuses in

this study are not concerned with its physical relationship to other primarily academic spaces. Even while students mentioned that they might be studying in a variety of places when they realize they want to access tutoring (i.e., not just their residence halls—could include libraries, academic buildings, coffee shops, etc.), it is proximity to some of the most social spaces on their campuses that matter most to these students.

To provide additional context, it is important to acknowledge that the tutoring programs on each campus operate different structures (appointment versus drop-in) and on different schedules (tutoring happens later into the evening at Mid-South). I was surprised at the focus on location on campus, particularly at Urban where students are required to make an online request and then an appointment. I suggest that students may have these strong preferences because they conceptualize tutoring spaces as “theirs,” places that they take ownership of, that they can have some control over, and that they can manipulate to suit their individual and group needs.

Supporting such an assertion is the way that, once in tutoring spaces, students will make intentional decisions about physical spaces and resources in an effort to make the most of their experiences. Exerting this kind of control is apparent in both programs, but perhaps more evident at Urban where a group of students may negotiate with a peer tutor to select a location for a particular tutoring session. While nearly always within the Learning Commons building, students do seem to take ownership of this part of the tutoring experience.

Haley, in her first year at Urban, described this brief negotiation with one of her initial tutoring sessions:

I know that my tutors asked me if I was comfortable studying in the [LC]. And we like found different places because I can't really study in complete silence. So we found other places and like we met in [a different building] and wherever I was comfortable. And they like adjusted to my schedule if I had a meeting or something or if they had somewhere to be.

I take this negotiation as meaningful because it does convey both control and ownership of the tutoring session by the student. Nicole, an athletic training major from Pennsylvania, provides an additional example of this kind of spatial flexibility:

It might not always be in the same location. Like sometimes, like people use project rooms 'cause there's like big white boards like all over the wall. And if your tutor knows that you need a white, like a white board room, like they can't always get the same room but they usually try and get one or they get like a huge white board or somethin' like that.

Adding Nicole's experience to the conversation here demonstrates that not only will students take ownership of the tutoring spaces, but that they actively employ the peer tutors, and by extension their capital and agency, in accessing and securing spaces conducive to their learning.

While the flexibility to meet in different spaces is broad at Urban, students at Mid-South are restricted to meeting in the defined tutoring areas within The Center. Several focus group participants from Mid-South described an environment that is "tight" or "close." In the only extended conversation about the tutoring space at MSU, Suzie effectively describes her interpretation of the tutoring space and engages several other participants in helping her:

Suzie: I know I'm a big fan of like analyzing the room and how it's set up, like color-wise and structure and seating and how that affects people. I think the way it's set up is very conducive to learning and interacting...

Jim: Uh huh. You mean, like physically the way...

Suzie: Yeah. That's...

Jim: ...that it's arranged? OK.

Suzie: The structure of it.

Jim: Yeah.

Suzie: I think the way that the seats are, you're all together in a group so it's, and it, it's not like a gigantic table. It's small enough that, you know, your computers touch. So when, when it touches, you know, like "Oh, sorry," but like you get that initial conversation going. And then the way like, they're just like little, I think they're like little ropes that just barely separate the two sections. But it looks more inviting, you know, like "Oh! Math is done. Well, chemistry, there's a seat over there. Well, I can just hop on over there." And then also the colors. I think they're able to keep you awake. Now at the library, you know, they're nice dark relaxing colors...but sometimes that puts you to sleep. But here, you know, this bright green wakes you up and the very white walls keep you wide awake.

Jim: OK.

Suzie: Oh, and also like the random poster thing. The things that hang up above...

Amu: That tell you where your section, like what class you're looking for?

Suzie: Yeah, like the shape of it is interesting. Like, it's not just a flat sign.

Jim: Uh huh.

Suzie: So like it just kinda gives it more...attitude...atmosphere...

Female: Character [whispered]?

Suzie: Character. [laughter] Thanks!

I recorded in my notes during the session that this seemed to be a very thorough, thoughtful analysis of many aspects of the physical spaces in The Center. Given her careful consideration of space, lines, relative size, light, color, and other aspects, I wondered if Suzie was an architecture or design major. I amended my notes from that session with surprise when, from her student info form, I learned that Suzie is first-year chemical engineering major.

I offer the extended excerpt and my initial reaction to it here because I think it represents multiple levels of meaning. First, once Suzie got the group talking, there was much head nodding and other nonverbal affirmative feedback. Moreover, students were animated during this part of the focus group and they seemed very interested in dissecting the space. This suggests that students are very observant in these spaces and that they are making meaning based on the physical characteristics of a tutoring space. Next, I believe this conversation exposed a poor assumption I had not recognized as a researcher, specifically that students likely would not analyze the physical features of a space to this degree of detail. Clearly, these students have internalized minute details about the space, even the shape of the signs that are posted.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the students' comments in this section seem to imply an assumption of intentionality. The students seem to believe that the tables being sufficiently small that their laptops and other belongings bump into each other is an intentional programmatic choice. This is fascinating to me, especially considering that since I ordered the furniture that is

currently used in this space, I know it was selected because it was the cheapest option to be able to fill the room. While The Center had entertained proposals for supposedly more effective learning space furniture and layouts, this was all the department could afford. If this notion that students assume that institutional choices are intentional, and that they are centered around what is most conducive to student learning, it follows that students are likely determining, at least in part, the extent to which a program, service, or even the institution values them based on their interpretations of such institutional choices.

Programmatic

As most of the students who participated in the focus groups had only attended their current institution, it was not surprising to hear that they believe the tutoring program at their institution is the best structure for them. A major distinction between the two programs in terms of structure is how students access the services, via an appointment system or on a drop-in model. On each campus, students who participated in focus groups emphasized different aspects of that campus's tutoring program and why such structures are best for them.

At Urban, there seems to be at least several days time between requesting tutoring for a particular course and actually being able to attend a tutoring session for the first time. As detailed previously, Urban students complete a request form, are then asked to take a learning styles inventory, complete an intake form, and negotiate the time for a tutoring session. As a

result of the data in the observation phase of this project, I characterized these steps as a potential barrier to access.

Students spoke about each part of the process openly, and seemed to find real value to each piece. More broadly, I was fascinated that students construct real meaning out of the overall process of requesting tutoring. Kristen, a sophomore occupational therapy major from Ohio, expressed the general sentiment very succinctly, "You have to take the initiative to go and request the help, so it kinda makes you grow up." Other students referred to the process and effort of requesting tutoring as "humbling," but did so with a positive connotation, and supported the notion that choosing to take such action is an outward sign of growth or "growing up."

Alternately, at Mid-South, the process of accessing tutoring is nearly immediate. Students in these focus groups highlighted the ease of access, and beyond even initial access the relatively loose structure of the program in terms of time limits and availability. Suzie, the observant chemical engineering first-year student, recalled her initial experience coming into The Center:

I also remember, as I was walking up the stairs, the lady at the front desk was very nice. And I don't know if I looked new, [laughter] but she, she very quickly directed me to help me sign in and then to get me where I wanted to go.

Even in this brief excerpt the speed and efficiency of the interaction comes through. It stands out to this student that she was acknowledged by a staff member even as she was still walking up the stairs into the space, got signed in quickly, and received help in navigating the space to get what she wanted. While

an outside observer could characterize this as a less personal, or even less caring approach, the students in the MSU focus groups all placed a high value on this sort of raw efficiency.

The other major programmatic structure that was referenced passionately in every focus group, but that differed widely between the two campuses, is the availability of group versus one-on-one tutoring. While this study has been focused on group tutoring, and the focus group protocol was directed squarely at this practice, students on both campuses mentioned one-on-one tutoring in various contexts. In practical terms, the tutoring program at Urban does offer both formats to students, whereas the program at MSU is almost exclusively group tutoring due to its drop-in model. The students at Urban who reference one-on-one tutoring do so in terms of their preferences, or what they believe “works for them.” While those students have had experiences with both structures, and to a certain extent can select what they receive by declaring a preference for format, the students at MSU have more limited choice.

At Mid-South, students often referenced how their expectations of what peer tutoring might be before they accessed it the first time included the possibility of one-on-one tutoring. A representative example of this, Mike, a sophomore biology major from Pennsylvania, discussed his expectations in the context of his initial experiences:

Mike: I thought it'd be more one-one-one 'cause like when I heard peer tutoring I thought it'd be like you came in and there was a tutor and they just like helped you. But then like when I sat down, I realized it was like a more collaborative like table setting...

Jim: Uh huh.

Mike: ...which I kinda liked a little bit more than just one-on-one. But, yeah, when I heard peer tutoring I thought it'd be like more of a one-on-one but it worked out.

Mike's contributions here are interesting, and while I do not know if he had accessed tutoring elsewhere in his academic career, I do find it significant that he judges the group model to be better for him than one-on-one would have been. In a similar vein, Anthony, who describes himself as a pre-law/biology major, explained that while one-on-one tutoring is not available in The Center at MSU, the program on that campus is highly effective:

You can't just have one-on-one tutoring. And sitting next to the person who's also in the same class, have them explain it to you, is also just as beneficial as having the peer tutor come to you. So I think like whenever I came in, I thought it was just gonna be like one tutor with me, just like for an hour. But since it was such a big group of people, just having someone there else to talk to you is great too.

These comments are illustrative of initial experiences within a tutoring context that did not match students' pre-tutoring expectations. Through their subsequent experiences in the tutoring program, these students have done some significant cognitive reconstruction of what effective tutoring can look like. I take this process as significant because it demonstrates that even while students are doing cognitive work around course material and the social structures within peer tutoring, they are also keenly aware of programmatic structures and these aspects of a tutoring program seem to contribute to students' efforts to make meaning around effective learning strategies.

Finally, there is one central programmatic feature that students on both campuses emphasized vigorously as being critical to their use of the service, their own success, and the success of the program: cost. The students at Urban in particular were emphatic about the importance of access to tutoring at no additional cost. Kiara is a political science sophomore from New York who transferred to Urban from a community college in New York City and at different times in the discussion referenced how being relatively far from home and attending a private institution puts a strain on her resources as well as her family's. Given this background, Kiara seems particularly attuned to the value of a quality service at no additional cost to students at the institution:

Kiara: Because it gets expensive.

Jim: Sure.

Kiara: I definitely know that. It gets expensive. Like I'm a transfer student. So I previously went to a different institution. And like paying for it, like some peer tutors you pay up to like twenty dollars a session...

Jim: Uh huh.

Kiara: ...per session. Some even require forty when it gets like closer to finals week and stuff like that. So, after a while it kinda eats away on those dollar signs so... If it's free, it's important.

Other students also employed a similar conversational device of comparing their experiences with free peer tutoring at Urban to experiences, theirs or others, at different institutions. John, a marketing major from West Virginia, suggests that differences in cost and also quality may relate to institutional type:

Compared to like to my other buddies who go to big state schools, they say with their tutors they have to pay `em out of pocket and they may not

show up on time or be half an hour late compared to here where your tutor's there fifteen minutes of ahead of time, gives you like a reminder, "Hey! We have tutoring tonight. Will you be there?"

This reference to "big state schools" drew lots of nonverbal agreement from John's peers in the focus group at Urban and it begins to suggest a relationship between students' experiences in a free tutoring program on their own campus and their beliefs about individual institutions or institutional types in higher education. Terrell, an undecided student from Tennessee, encapsulated this connection that is echoed in many places throughout the focus groups:

I think the main thing that stands out is that it's free, you know, that like we don't have to pay out of pocket because I think that that shows that the school really puts education at the forefront because if, like if universities expect the students to pay, then maybe they can't afford the type of services that they're receiving so I think the fact that they're making it free for everybody makes it feasible for everybody to take the initiative to get the help and achieve the good grades.

Terrell apparently has internalized this notion of free services for all students as a mechanism by which his institution is attempting to level the playing field.

Throughout each successive focus group I became increasingly intrigued with the extent to which students make meaning from the mere availability of tutoring at no additional cost. Demonstrating just how meaningful this is to students,

Gemma, an occupational therapy major from Ohio, connects this programmatic feature with her university's mission:

Yeah, something that that kinda reminds me of is just like kind of with the Jesuit mission on like building the whole person and dedication to like, not just like, oh, getting a good grade or like, oh, learning this material. But like forming like who you are.

While this kind of connection may be explained in part by some exceptional messaging from the Urban's offices of admission or public relations, it seems that there is something much deeper at work here when students from MSU are added to this conversation.

As different as the programmatic structures on the two campuses are, they both operate at no additional cost to the students. This feature was highlighted by many students in the Mid-South focus groups and, like their counterparts at Urban, they became very animated when discussing it. Amu is a junior biology and physics major from rural Kentucky. She accessed peer tutoring frequently during her first several semesters at the university and, like a few other participants on both campuses, had recently begun working as a peer tutor for the program. Amu infers a direct connection between free access to tutoring and the enactment of an institutional value of caring for and supporting students:

It's like [MSU] actually puts some sort of effort in. Like [MSU] cares about their students, like they don't want us to fail. They don't want us to like pay extra money, even though tuition's like pretty high. I mean, like you can see like [MSU] or whatever department, [The Center], like they, they care. And it just felt nice that I'm already stressed as it is about paying for college or something. It's just, it takes a load off.

Elsa, a sophomore secondary education and English major, connects free tutoring to institutional priorities: "it's an investment that [MSU] makes in its students. Like it's something that helps retain kids here."

Even while some students acknowledge an understanding that services aren't necessarily free, but built into their cost of attendance, they find it critical

that peer tutoring is offered at no additional charge. This is perhaps the aspect of the structure theme that I find most surprising. Even as a scholar-practitioner who considers himself very student-centric and attuned to students needs, I was surprised at the meaning and inferences students make from what many administrators view simply as a budgetary decision.

These clear connections that students construct suggest that the availability of free peer tutoring is not something that students take lightly or consider to be a "nice" amenity. The extent to which students believe they matter to their institution is impacted directly just by the service being available. Moreover, students on both campuses demonstrated that they are very much aware of their university's mission, goals, and values, and that their conceptualization of these institutional structures relates directly to their beliefs about the institution.

Co-Construction of Structures

In examining this theme of structures, both through physical and programmatic domains, students are reporting and demonstrating that they are active participants in these environments. They negotiate the use of different spaces, places, tables, and resources with peer tutors and other program staff, and they are well aware of the institutional priorities that may, or may not, be reflected in how programs are implemented and available on campus.

This focus group data suggests a need to reframe ways that higher education researchers and practitioners make sense of academic support

services like tutoring. We often use the language, as I have in this text, about students “accessing” peer tutoring or “attending” tutoring sessions. This language marginalizes the extent to which students are active, participatory agents in constructing tutoring experiences. Students certainly work within the structures, programmatic and physical, that institutions and departments design for them. However, students do not carelessly or unthinkingly move through tutoring sessions. They demonstrate respect for the structures in place, and working within them they seek to find ways to maximize their outcomes from participating in peer tutoring.

Tutoring Contexts as Unique Cultural Milieus

Peer tutoring is different. I conceptualize a college campus as place where many different individuals, representing different institutional identities (e.g., administrator, faculty, staff, student), interact and intersect. Already in this and the previous chapter I have touched on some of the different kinds of spaces on college campuses and how the data indicate that different places are home to different milieus. The research questions that guided this study seek a cultural understanding of students’ experiences in group peer tutoring contexts.

Throughout the focus group discussions, student participants employed a variety of techniques to help me understand how they make sense of their tutoring experiences. The initial questions on the focus group protocol are designed to be grand tour questions (Maxwell, 2005), seeking descriptions of

peer tutoring in students' own words, on their own terms, and with as little influence from me as the researcher as possible.

Throughout the analytic process, I was struck by the consistency with which students invoke other places and settings on their campus in attempts to help me understand what the tutoring context is to them. As students seem to characterize peer tutoring as a primarily academic setting, many of these contrasting statements seek to explain what peer tutoring is or is not relative to other academic experiences, including those in classrooms, faculty office hours, and more informal conversations with faculty and graduate teaching assistants outside class.

A particularly passionate comparison was constructed by several participants in one of the Mid-South focus groups:

Destiny: And I think everyone is willing to talk with each other, compared to like just a regular class where everyone's tryin' to like, argh, yeah.

Elsa: Yes! Yes!

Destiny: Yeah. It's not like awkward to talk to other people here.

Elsa: Yes.

Destiny: But in my class it just feels super awkward.

Elsa: Yeah! That's precisely what it is. Yeah!

Ryan: And sharing ideas and like kinda spitballing on how to do things is...

Elsa: Uh huh.

Ryan: ...is like what you're supposed to be doing so...

This rapid, excited exchange demonstrates that, during the focus groups, students were working together to make sense of the experiences they have had in tutoring sessions in an attempt to help me understand them. It should be noted here that in this excerpt, the theme of which is mirrored in many other focus group discussions, the students acknowledge that they have some idea that “sharing ideas,” being “willing to talk to each other,” and “spitballing” are things that may be expected of them in traditional classrooms, but that they do not regularly engage in those activities there. The underlying assumptions the participants are making here seem to be that the tutoring context is primarily academic, but the social milieu differs somehow from class. However, this difference seems somewhat subtle and elusive, even to the students who are trying to describe it to me. A short time later in the conversation, Elsa returned to this topic and offered some extended analysis, perhaps after a small amount of reflection after the initial exchange:

Where is awkward not awkward? I think in a classroom it can be awkward because like you're, you're like not supposed to talk and then like, if you are like allowed to talk during like a certain amount of time, like “discuss this with your peers” or something, it's always labeled “discuss this with your peers.” But discuss this with your peers. You're like, “I don't know my peers.” And like the thing is at [The Center], like you get to know your peers. Like you sit at the same table long enough you're like, “What's your name? What's your major?” You know, like and you cycle through all that for about half a second. And then you're like, “OK, well, we both don't understand this so like where do you not understand it?” And like, that's something where you can kind of let the students teach themselves too.

Elsa seems to be trying to focus in on the differences between milieus in tutoring versus a classroom. She does seem to hit here on two major themes that are

repeated throughout the focus groups on both campuses: awkwardness and perceived intentions based on structures. The term “awkward” was used frequently enough in the focus groups that it became an *in vivo* code used to represent the sentiment of feeling socially uncomfortable, particularly among one’s peers. The latter part of Elsa’s contribution highlights a key feature of peer tutoring, that students have self-selected to participate and, in creating an environment where students express vulnerability by their mere presence, the tutoring context is a place where awkwardness is greatly diminished. This difference from a traditional classroom seems to contribute directly to students’ willingness to begin conversations, acknowledge what they do not yet understand, and work together with people they may have just met to learn a new concept.

This effort to describe peer tutoring by contrasting with class often began with comparisons of students’ interactions in each context. However, students were also eager to highlight the differences based on their interactions with faculty and how those experiences may have contributed to their efforts to seek “other places” for learning. Amanda is a first-year mathematics major at Urban who is from the Dominican Republic. Even though she clearly loves math, she contributed the following story from a math class at the university in the context of a conversation about what makes peer tutoring different:

Some teachers are intimidating, also. [laughter] My math teacher will call your idea stupid in front of everyone if he thinks that your idea is stupid, which keeps me from participating in class. And I learn by, by talking a lot and by participating. If I can’t participate, I just zone out and like fall

asleep with my eyes open. And I just need to participate, and he calls everyone's idea stupid. He's like, "That's brilliant, but stupid at the same time. And here's why...." I'm like, "I don't, I don't wanna be called stupid," so I'd rather go to a stress-free environment where I can ask the stupidest question, like "Why is two plus two four?" And they won't look at me like I'm crazy.

This is a very direct example of the kinds of fears of academic inadequacy or low levels of academic self-efficacy that students exhibit when talking about their interactions with faculty. As the protocol makes clear, students were never asked questions about their experiences with faculty, yet those experiences became part of the conversation in all eight focus groups.

These ideas are mirrored in students' comments about trying to talk to faculty during scheduled office hours. Stephanie, an Urban biophysics senior from Maine, is involved in research on campus and serves as an officer in the campus physics club. Even in her final semester of an undergraduate career that seems to have earned high praise from faculty on campus, she makes this distinction:

It's also sometimes easier than going to the professor's office hours because a lot of times professors, they teach something in class and it's the only way they know how to teach it or explain it to someone, so going to another tutor, someone that can bring it down to your level, you can help, it can help you understand it much better.

These kinds of comments from students, when taken together, indicate that students are inclined to approach two seemingly academic milieus, class and peer tutoring, in very different ways. Even when a student like Stephanie has excelled, the combination of power differentials, knowledge gaps, and levels of academic self-efficacy mean that tutoring is fundamentally different from class.

Students conceptualize the experiences differently and take very different approaches to navigating and interacting with individuals they encounter in each.

While mentioned somewhat less than class, students also described tutoring by contrasting it with other spaces on their campuses. In several of the MSU groups, students even contrasted the peer tutoring available in The Center with other tutoring programs on campus. Elsa focuses in particular on the math help desk:

[The Center] is just a very encouraging environment because it's led by students, and so it makes it more comfortable like you were mentioning with the [math help desk]. I went to the [math help desk] one time, and I just felt overwhelmed because there was like no organization to anything. And I liked how there was organization here because like you go, you sit at a table, you wait, max five minutes, you've got somebody. And there's usually at least two to three people on a shift so it's not a big deal. Whereas at the [math help desk], I was scared to even like talk to the professors because it was like "Well, I'm just wasting their time" or "They're just gonna help me for two minutes and here's the next person." And so, and they're on a schedule too and they're ready to get in, do their stuff, and leave. And so, I just, you feel like you're like wasting time or like...nuisance is a strong word, but that sort of feeling when you're there. But like when you're here, it's just very comfortable.

While faculty sometimes staff this other tutoring service, it also employs undergraduate and graduate students. However, the model of tutoring seems to be quite different from what is offered in The Center and Elsa is alluding to those differences in contrasting the two. Later in the same group, Ryan and Elsa returned to these kinds of comparisons. As a marketing major, Ryan had been discussing different options for tutoring in business courses, and the group began comparing various tutoring operations on campus, including the math help

desk, tutoring offered in the business school, and the peer tutoring program offered in The Center:

Ryan: But I can always go over to like the Business College and do it.

Jim: Yeah.

Ryan: However, they're more like the [math help desk] and whatnot where it's like kind of...

Elsa: Yeah. Affluent.

Ryan: ...at [math help desk] you get the feeling of, you ask a question and they're like, "My gosh, you *don't* know how to do that?"

Elsa: Exactly! Exactly!

Ryan: And you're like, "Whoa! This is why I came in!"

Elsa: Yeah! I know! It's like, "Who, back it up!" [laughter] Yeah, exactly.

While it was not an intention of the protocol, these kinds of conversations do contribute new understanding. Even while the broader field does not have a common taxonomic of classification system, it should be clear that students do not see "tutoring" as an absolute or universal construct. They seem willing to try different options on their campus, but are also very sensitive to the cultural context of each.

Students also defined peer tutoring by contrasting it to other places they may try to study on campus. Kayla, the medical laboratory science junior at Mid-South, contrasted peer tutoring to studying in the campus library very concisely: "Or you can go to the library, you spend like a solid three-quarters of your time on Facebook and Twitter and other things not homework related."

While nearly all of the participants' contributions regarding what the peer tutoring context is like are positive, there were also some negative experiences. Amanda, the Urban student whose math instructor sometimes refers to students' ideas as stupid, spoke about a tutor who she worked with briefly: "I just felt like he wasn't making me feel confident about the material I was learning." As a result, Amanda stopped attending sessions with that particular tutor and found another one whose help made her feel more confident. While this does represent a negative experience, which in itself is important to acknowledge, Amanda's reaction here further shows how peer tutoring is a unique milieu. As students have indicated above, negative experiences with faculty may be enough for a student to disengage for the remainder of a semester. In Amanda's case with a peer tutor, she simply found another individual with whom she felt more comfortable.

Taken together, the various ways students have described peer tutoring in the focus groups intimate that, to them, it is a different cultural milieu than they encounter anywhere else. In this milieu, even negative experiences, though rarely referenced by the participants, may be processed differently. This distinction is a critical finding as it suggests that students are engaging with each other around academic issues in peer tutoring contexts in ways that simply do not happen in other places. This further supports the notion that peer tutoring is central to the student experience, and to the formal curriculum as defined by Nespors (1990), as it contributes both to students' learning in specific courses and

to their broader cognitive and epistemological development. The remaining subsection below explore the ways in which tutoring is unique.

Norms and Values

If the assertion that peer tutoring contexts on these two campuses are places that have their own unique milieus, it should be possible to distinguish particular cultural norms and values in these places. To some extent, the data in the previous chapter that came from the observation phase of the project supports this claim. In particular, students raising their hands, interacting with each other in particular patterns, and manipulating programmatic structures all constitute examples of such norms. In further exploring these ideas, the focus groups on both campuses generated rich data that speaks to the norms and values that the micro-cultures of peer tutoring produce and reproduce across different groups and domains.

Beginning from a concrete level, the clearest evidence that peer tutoring operates under a different set of norms and values from other campus contexts is the repeated explanation from students they had to learn how to behave, interact, and make effective use of tutoring. In a group at Urban, Victoria, an occupational therapy sophomore from Ohio, talked about some of the cultural expectations of the tutoring program there:

I was actually really unprepared for my first session 'cause nobody ever really told me what exactly you do in peer tutoring. I thought they were actually gonna like reteach the material. [laughter] I didn't know you like had to go with questions, so I just kinda sat there and [laughter] didn't know what to do. So we just like went through like the book and I just

had to kinda do it on a whim. It was kinda like...whatever I could come up with at the time. So, then I learned that you have to prepare

Similarly, Suzie, the chemical engineering first-year student at MSU, had to observe her peers behavior in peer tutoring to understand how to obtain attention from a peer tutor: "My first experience at [The Center] was I came the day *before* math was due. And it was really, it was awkward at first because I didn't *know* that you were supposed to raise your hand." At the surface, these examples from both sites demonstrate the ways in which students become accustomed to the norms in each program.

However, there is another element present in these comments. This is yet another place where students describe, define, and make sense of peer tutoring as a place that is active. Not only do they expect the tutors to be active, but students very quickly come to understand that there is a cultural expectation that they will be active. Beyond raising a hand for a tutor's attention or the need to come prepared, participants again focused on the importance of peer tutoring as a place where "work" is done. Kayla, the MSU junior who contrasted peer tutoring with her experiences in the library, emphasizes this aspect of tutoring: "I think for me it was a lot of just like, "I have to stay focused while I'm here." Like I'm not gonna sit at the Chemistry table and go on Facebook or be distracted. Like if you're here, you're gonna be doing something productive." This notion of being productive appears to be critical to groups in both tutoring programs. Alexandra, an Urban student from Chicago, explains that "work" is valued on both sides of the tutor-students relationship:

My first, my tutor, her name was, she was really nice so that was important, and open 'cause I'm kinda open I guess. And she was really cool and, she was like, "OK, so tell me about your past experience in this subject." And I think for her, that made her say "OK, this is what I'm working with" and that helped me like, "Oh, yeah, you're pretty much working with nothing," but... [laughter] but that was OK. She like took that challenge and ran with it. And we both like really worked, from that day forward it was a, I guess a co-effort kinda thing. You work, I work. So that type of thing. She's awesome.

While it can be so common to hear students bemoan the academic work they need to do, though such sentiments are fairly pervasive throughout Western society, that attitude is juxtaposed against this kind of comment. Alexandra expresses not just a desire to work, but she wants to do it as part of a larger social unit. The concept of co-work is illustrative for peer tutoring as it establishes a shared sense of responsibility coupled with a shared sense of progress. I do not take lightly that students report being ready and willing to work, but moreover describe the experiences where they contribute a substantial amount of effort together as "awesome," as Alexandra does above.

Students who accessed tutoring at MSU, in a program that is entirely group-focused, also emphasized the collaborative nature of their time in The Center and how it contributes to their social lives. Mike, the Mid-South biology major from Pennsylvania, explains how this process has worked for him:

I feel like it's a good way to like make study like friends too 'cause a lotta times you might be like there for homework or and then you're there with other students that are in the class. So then, you know, maybe in class you never get the chance to talk to them. But when you're working on problems together at [The Center] (inaudible), I think it's a lot easier to be like, you know, "Hey, if you wanna study for this later," it's a lot easier to like make friends and stuff too.

I take comments like this to be very concrete, practical outcomes of the social learning theory (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) that serves as the foundation of this research. Mike's comments reveal that, through coming to learn the norms and values of the peer tutoring program on his campus, he has grown his social networks in ways that would not have happened otherwise and connected with peers who can model and recreate the micro-culture of peer tutoring on their own and on demand. For groups of students who come together in peer tutoring, they move beyond the simple reproduction of the culture they encounter by appropriating much of that culture for themselves, thereby enhancing their social networks, growing their cultural capital, and learning how to generate more opportunities for social learning outside the formal tutoring sessions offered by their institution.

Reconceptualizing Help-Seeking Behavior

The descriptions of students' experiences offered to this point, and especially their own words about what tutoring is and what it means to them, paint a very clear, meaningful picture of how students are impacted and impact each other. Of the many themes that have emerged from this data, I believe that reconceptualizing the meaning of help-seeking will be one of the most powerful contributions this study can make to the field. Further, when discussing this issue in their own terms, students became both fiercely passionate and even somewhat judgmental of their peers based on their decisions whether or not to participate in peer tutoring.

As Elsa suggested during a Mid-South focus group, students are very much aware of the negative connotation associated with tutoring that comes from American secondary education: "Tutoring gets like a bad rap when you're in high school. You know, like 'Oh, you're getting tutoring.'" Even using a mocking tone at the end of this comment, Elsa highlights a critical issue for practitioners who want to encourage students to choose peer tutoring voluntarily. Angel, a nontraditional age Urban student, also highlighted some of the negative self-talk that can plague students when they might be deciding whether or not to access academic resources: "when I first started tutoring I thought, 'Well, I'm probably the only one in the class taking tutoring and probably not grasping the material right and I'm struggling with it.'" These contributions from both campuses show some of the challenges students face to accessing tutoring, and clarify that often those challenges are very much associated with messages about help-seeking behavior that students have internalized over time.

Nicole, the Urban athletic training major, explained how participating in group tutoring can counteract these negative messages effectively and efficiently:

I think the fact that they're, you do recognize that so many other people are being tutored as well kinda helps reduce that like stigma of like, "Oh, you're being tutored so you have like some kind of like disability or... you're, you're not as bright or something." And it just goes to show you like, you know, regardless of the subject matter, your progression in your major like everyone needs tutoring and that's really helpful too.

Speaking here about her initial experiences in group peer tutoring, Nicole touches on another important aspect of the group: shared experience. This facet

of group peer tutoring may contribute to a rapid change in students' attitudes around help-seeking and accessing campus resources.

Going further, Elsa suggested that this is not a subtle change. Rather, students who access group peer tutoring become champions of the cause and take pride in the choice to seek support:

I think it's just the perception that tutoring gets and trying, you're trying to disprove a bias, you know. Like "Oh, you have to get tutoring?" No, it's like, "Yeah! I get tutoring. I get to on a regular basis actually."

This dramatic change in attitude about help-seeking serves to "flip the script" and can contribute to students' sense of pride, academic self-efficacy, and sense of personal responsibility. The students who participated in the focus groups on both campuses seemed to take a healthy amount of pride in the fact that they actively sought out, found, and effectively utilized resources that helped them achieve positive academic goals.

Interesting to this project, as it relates to group behavior, some participants reported that this change in attitude plays out in group interactions in other areas. Anthony, still a first-year Mid-South student, explained how this has already impacted the way he and his friends talk about and access co-curricular academic support:

I was, we were all struggling with Gen Chem. And so, we were all sitting in a study room in our dorm, and we were like, "We can't figure this out so let's go to [The Center]" kind of thing.

This rapid spread of a cultural understanding around help-seeking has powerful implications. If this kind of stigma or "bias," as one student called it, can be

reframed not only when students access group peer tutoring, but also when they talk to their friends about it, then perhaps there are tipping points on a given campus around this behavior. In other words, if enough students access group peer tutoring, have positive experiences, reframe help-seeking as positive, and then spread that message to their peers, higher education practitioners may be able to impact students' beliefs, expectations, and behaviors in exceptionally positive ways by providing high-quality services.

In exploring these ideas in the focus groups, I encountered a sentiment and theme I had not expected: students who participate in group peer tutoring judge their peers negatively when they struggle and refuse to access the same service. Zachary is nursing freshman who came to Urban from Washington, D.C. He even employed a frustrated tone in discussing his peers who do not use the tutoring program he does:

I think, *my* personal opinion, I think you're more dumb not to go to get, to get help than to just like sit, sit in a chair and like not speak up and fail your next exam. And I think a lotta people do see that. I know tutoring does have a negative connotation to it, but in the long run, I think it definitely pays off that all of us do get help.

Here Zachary actually takes the negative stigma and, after overcoming it himself, actually conceptualizes the aversion to help-seeking as highly negative. In an MSU group, Abigail, a business and Spanish double major from Illinois, suggested that sometimes her peers miss the value of participating in tutoring: "They claim that they're too busy but like they don't realize that when they're doing their homework and it's taking them so long, they could be saving so much

time coming here.” Abigail struggles to help her friends understand how accessing tutoring would actually save them time, rather than adding even more study time to their day or week.

Building on the notion that students who access tutoring become the standard bearers for it, Danielle discusses how the combination of being open with her peers about her use of tutoring and an evident increase in her academic performance have made her an influencer among her peers:

That’s just how it is for our major. It’s competitive. It’s hard to get into. Hard to *stay* in it. So I think like if you’re admitting, “OK, well, I’m getting tutoring,” it’s like “Well, I’m smarter than you.” That’s just, it’s not all of [Urban]; it’s my class, it’s my major, it’s my program. But I know like, I’m very vocal about my tutoring and I think I’m the first one in my class who’s ever had tutoring. So I’ve noticed people are starting to get tutoring once they realize, “Hey! She is not stupid. Like she’s actually pretty smart and she’s getting some of the highest grades in the class. What is she doing? What do I need to do to be like her?”

Of course these kinds of experiences only help to confirm for students that accessing tutoring in college really is a positive choice. In a different group at Urban, Gemma even went so far as to suggest that this reconceptualization of help-seeking can help students become more self-aware and encourage them to use other support services:

I think, as far as going to tutoring, sometimes like it can be hard for people to say like “Oh, I need help and I need to get a tutor,” and, and go and do that. And I think being the tutoring like, that’s really like self-aware and acknowledging that you need help with something and going to work on that. And that can help you like, like help open your eyes into other areas of your life too where you might need to do something like that besides academics.

It is clear that the students on these two campuses understand their peer tutoring programs as unique cultural milieus. However, because they are interpreted as student spaces, students often seem willing to try them, explore the tutoring spaces both physically and conceptually. Beginning by trying to understand tutoring from this cultural perspective has allowed my participants and I to generate data that speak not only to the practical, rather obvious norms and values, but also to move into much more meaningful levels of abstraction. Ultimately, if access to tutoring has impacted students' social networks, which they then leverage to create more effective group study environments, and even encourage students to reframe what it means to be willing to seek help, then peer tutoring must be understood in the field as the deep, meaningful practice it really is.

Peer Tutoring as Both Academic and Social

I have asserted that peer tutoring is a co-curricular context that is unique, in part, because it truly spans students' academic and social worlds. In the focus groups on both campuses, the protocol questions asked students to recall experiences around peer tutoring in an intentional, chronological way. The themes that emerge from the focus group data undeniably cast peer tutoring as both academic and social. This section follows that same chronological pattern through which students shared their stories and experiences. While they always began with grades or other lower order academic concerns, students quickly transitioned to discussing experiences that, while they may be primarily related

to an academic domain, are replete with meaning with regard to social interaction.

Academics, Course Content, and Grades

When asked why they chose to access tutoring the first time, students in all the focus groups used quick, incisive, and often humorous references to their grades. Stephanie, the biophysics senior at Urban who has become quite successful, recalled her early rationale: "it was like halfway through my first semester when I realized, 'OK, maybe I should probably get a couple of tutors for the subjects I'm getting Ds in.'" These kinds of comments, which students regularly made with mocking tones, never failed to elicit laughter from other participants, as well as eager and emphatic agreement. In the early minutes of each focus group, students talked about earning Ds and Fs on particular assignments, quizzes, or exams, and how this was a moment of dissonance for them. Perhaps not surprisingly, students at this point typically referenced "getting" or "receiving" these kinds of grades, a phrasing that locates responsibility for a grade not on the student.

However, for many of the students who contributed to this topic in the focus groups, their experiences with unsatisfactory grades, as they define them, went beyond mere disappointment. Haley, a first-year Urban student, was so taken aback upon receiving an exam grade that she failed to exhibit standard social norms of classroom behavior:

I got my test and I gave it back to my professor. And I just kind of left 'cause I was, I was in shock that I got an F, especially 'cause he had just

announced that the class average was a seventy-seven. And I got like a forty-two. So I just handed it back to him and I left 'cause I was just...I was in shock.

Repeatedly using the word "shock" to describe her state of mind, Haley could not process what to do with a paper on which she received a failing grade and simply handed it back to her instructor, which created a somewhat unusual, awkward situation, and then left the class. Certainly for some students, a failing grade might be a "bummer," but for many of the participants this experience impacted them more deeply.

Jaden is a kinesiology junior at Mid-South and is originally from Ohio. Like Haley, his experience with receiving a failing grade made a clear impact when it did not match the expectations he had set for his own performance in a 100-level math course:

When I had Math 1[xx], I mean, I was pretty like...I was confident. I was like, "Oh, this is just easy stuff. This is like all the stuff I did in high school." And then I started to struggle and I'm like, I thought I got a hundred percent on my exam but I got a fifty. I'm like, "What the heck, man?" [laughter] And I went to [The Center] and then eventually I got a ninety-five on my like final exam. So I was like, "I'll take that."

Jaden and Haley both had early experiences with grades that did not meet their expectations and that affected their own understanding of what it means to be a successful college student. Aligning directly with the research Lewis (2010) has conducted regarding dimensions of personal epistemology, this resulted in an intentional decision to change their behavior. For these students, that decision was to try out peer tutoring.

I include Jaden's full comment above to provide some context but also to demonstrate one way he perceives peer tutoring has impacted him. Again, in working through the focus group protocol, students were asked what kept them coming back to tutoring. Just as they immediately referenced their grades in explaining why they accessed tutoring initially, students in all focus groups talked about an increase in their grades after accessing tutoring. Olivia, a first-year MSU student from Ohio, phrased it like many other participants: "The As I get in my class [laughter] keep me coming back."

If my data generation and analysis had stopped at this point, it might have confirmed much of what the quantitative literature implies: that students seek tutoring for grades and the main impact of tutoring can be measured via grades. However, the comments on grades in the focus groups are actually relatively sparse, and as the excerpts here have shown, relatively brief. To be clear, students at both Mid-South and Urban suggest that grades may have been a factor for their initial access, and while they serve as some low level of "proof" of the efficacy of group peer tutoring, grades do not tell the whole story. The participants had much more to say.

Students were very clear that what they really want out of participating in peer tutoring is genuine conceptual understanding of academic topics and material. Using their own lexicon, students told me they want to learn deeply and that they use peer tutoring to achieve this aim. Megan, a chemical engineering first-year at Mid-South, linked these ideas:

I notice a change in my grades, like from doing it on my own in-, instead of like not getting the actual answer and just getting like frustrated. I would be able to come and actually understand it, and then it would make my like exam scores go up because I actually understood what I was doing rather than taking a guess and actually getting it.

While grades and other quantitative measures of student success are important, not just to students but also certainly to administrators, Megan's comment here demonstrates one reason why researchers and practitioners should look beyond those basic measures. Megan is speaking here about her own learning, and in particular about how participating in peer tutoring has helped her achieve a level of conceptual understanding that has fostered some academic self-efficacy.

Haley, the Urban student who described the "shock" she experienced when she received an F grade, later discussed when she realized that she was getting what she wanted from peer tutoring: "It was like when I was studying with my friends and they would say they didn't understand something, and I was able to explain it. That's when I knew it was working." Like many other students who participated in the focus groups, Haley was not simply interested in being able to recognize or even calculate the correct answer to an exam question.

Lewis' work is particularly informative here, and she compares these moments of extreme dissonance that students may have to the self-defined "bottom" that an alcoholic might have:

The crisis precipitating an alcoholic rock bottom is considered necessary for the person to be able to admit that there is a problem. Once the individual hits bottom, he reaches out for help from peers and comes to understand he cannot resolve the issue on his own. For some students there may be a need to find their own academic rock bottom in order to

prompt an intentional shift in personal epistemology. (Lewis, 2010, p. 158)

Like Lewis, I hypothesize that perhaps after students experience these extreme moments, they may be most likely to utilize resources available to them, including peer tutoring. Advancing these ideas further, I suggest that when students take these steps and find that a group peer tutoring context is a place where they can interact with their peers and engage in a social construction of knowledge, the students become highly loyal to the program and exhibit high levels of buy-in and ownership. This is not to say that a student must have reached such a “rock bottom” to participate in and enjoy all the potential outcomes of peer tutoring, but the narratives that students repeated throughout these focus groups, like Haley’s, often aligned with this pattern.

Annie, an environmental sciences first-year at Urban, talked about the ability to apply what she had learned in peer tutoring:

I think for me it was like that I saw like progress in like with like my Spanish, like I was startin’ to like understand like the grammar concepts more and like actually being able to like decipher some of what my teacher was saying. [laughter] And so like for me it was like showing like that I *was* making progress and it wasn’t like just like a lost cause that like going to tutoring was actually like *doing* something for me.

Language acquisition can often be challenging and I offer Annie’s example in particular because it reflects a different discipline from many of the math and science courses that students reference in their stories about tutoring. Whether the ability to understand what a mathematical formula means or to comprehend and internalize grammatical structures so that one may become conversant in a

new language, students' comments indicate that group peer tutoring is a place where deep, conceptual learning happens.

In fact, among all of the participants and their comments at Mid-South, the only negative experience students recounted, which happened twice, was when a tutor would focus on answers rather than understanding. Autumn, a sophomore agriculture major, spoke of her frustration: "I was kinda bothered because the assignment that I was working on, the tutor was like tryin' to give me the answers to the questions instead of explain it to me." For the students who participated in the study, it was not enough to have answers to questions in their tutoring sessions. The two students who referenced experiences like this used them as incongruent experiences that stood out to them against more "normal" sessions. I find these experiences valuable because they do suggest a conceivable reality where not all peer tutors or tutoring sessions are ideal, but they also reinforce the finding that these students are not participating in peer tutoring simply to find answers.

Finally, participation in group tutoring seems to foster a sense that grades are more earned, as opposed to given, and that students recognize themselves as capable actors. By the latter, I mean that students realize that coming together in a group with a peer tutor is a way to achieve the level of understanding that they seek both to be successful in a course or on an exam, and to achieve some level of personal academic satisfaction. Stephanie illustrates

this concept in one of the Urban focus groups, though this theme is present throughout this phase of the study:

So like when I first started getting bad grades, I was just like, "Oh, I'm a horrible student and blah-blah-blah." But now, it's more of "I don't care what grade I get on the test. All I care about is how well do I know the material?" Like it's, I'll get a test back and I'll get a D on it. It's just like, "OK, well, I know that I got this D because I don't fully grasp this concept. And it's this concept that just screwed me over here, here, and here."

Later in this focus group, Stephanie proceeds to describe how she will come back to the tutoring group when she receives a test or assignment back to help her interrogate what she did not understand. These kinds of strategies are fairly sophisticated for undergraduate students to practice, particularly when doing so completely voluntarily and self-directed.

However, I believe that because their basic concerns (i.e., grades) are typically assuaged as a result of peer tutoring, students can choose to focus on learning material at a more conceptual level. As their comments demonstrate, the grades are certainly still important to them, but their academic work often seems to become about more than grades. Students engage in tutoring together, they submit an assignment or sit for an exam, and will sometimes come back to process the results of that assignment or exam together. As the next section explores, students in both of these programs are leveraging their group tutoring experiences, which remain primarily academic, to form communities of learning and of practice, with all the complexities that Wenger (1998) suggests, that are inextricably related to more social experiences and outcomes.

Social Experiences and Outcomes

The previous section suggests that group interactions in peer tutoring foster increased academic self-efficacy. Some of the participants in the focus groups then suggested that this kind of confidence leads to an increase in students' willingness to engage in other areas. Sydney is from Indiana and is a psychology first-year student at Urban. During her focus group, she spoke often about the pressures she feels, both internally and externally to succeed in college, and how this pressure may have led her to withdraw somewhat socially in her early days on campus. She also spoke about the broader impacts of working with her peers in the tutoring program on campus and the ways those experiences impacted her social life:

I think just having the confidence that, you know, I am under-, I'm getting the information, I'm understanding the information, I'm doin' the best I can, I've been able to like have fun on campus and not staying in my room having a pity party because...I don't know anatomy and physiology.

Sydney suggests here that working with her peers in a group tutoring environment helped her both overcome some academic self-doubt that she had been harboring and become more open to engaging in more fun, social experiences on campus.

Social outcomes of participating in peer tutoring were a broad theme that emerged from the data we generated, but it was sometimes a challenge to explore this theme with my participants because they see their social experiences as secondary to their academic experiences in peer tutoring. Therefore, even in

the focus group conversations when I would ask specifically about how tutoring may have impacted them in other ways, many of their responses were still very much related to academics. I now conceptualize this blending or hybridization not as a challenge. Indeed, in the real world I do not believe it is possible to cleave the two. However, I have found that for the students who spoke to me about these experiences, they were telling me about some of the first times they had really engaged with a peer group through an academic domain for a sustained time (i.e., more than for a class discussion).

Morgan, the sophomore psychology major at Urban, seems to have a very positive ongoing relationship with her former Latin tutor:

My tutor and I like still like text each other like funny Latin puns [laughter] which is like really lame, I understand. But like [laugh], we'll like, he'll text me and I'll be like "That's wrong. Like you're wrong." And like he'll like text me like in French or like German like 'cause like so many different languages that we know between us and like we guess like which language is what. Or like, so like seeing him on campus is like kind of a delight at times and like we have mutual friends...

The sentiment expressed here suggests that Morgan and her tutor are now part of each others' social networks. While this kind of more lasting connection (student-student or student-tutor) happens, many students report simply that they see and acknowledge group members and peer tutors on campus. Even Angel, the nontraditional commuter student who spoke about some of the challenges she has faced, reported this kind of interaction:

I think for me, being a commuter student and living an hour away, I don't get to enjoy a lot of the things that some of the people who live on campus do. I would say the peer tutoring was a very positive experience after, after the first one I scared off. [laughter] And I think the person

I'm, that I use, we've stayed friends. And I see them on campus and they're, "Oh, hi! How're you doin'?" Even though I don't have them as a tutor this semester, I have somebody else. I mean, it's just, the relationship stays.

Students on both campuses echoed these ideas. Almost every participant had a comment or story to contribute about seeing a fellow student or a tutor from their session on campus and, at a bare minimum, having someone to speak to and acknowledge. At Mid-South in particular, these narratives were paired with the oft-cited claim that such interactions "make a big campus seem smaller." Many student participants went further and explained to me how these initial connections made in their tutoring groups can play out in other contexts. In a Mid-South focus group, Abigail and Autumn discussed how these connections can be useful to them:

Autumn: You know, just...whether it's the students or the tutors that are here, you know, you recognize 'em, you meet them, so then when you see 'em on campus it just makes it feel smaller 'cause you see people that you know.

Abigail: It's kinda like a social event in a weird way.

Autumn: Yeah.

Abigail: 'Cause you meet so many people through it too.

Autumn: Nerdy social.

Abigail: Yeah. And then if it's somebody...

Autumn: [laugh]

Abigail: Yeah, right. [laughter] And you meet someone that's like in your class. And then like when you have to do a group project, you're gonna do it with them because you already know who they are and you know that

like they know what they're talkin' about as well 'cause you don't wanna have that kid that like, "Oh, you do all the work." You know what I mean?

This exchange demonstrates that these students recognize their interactions in their tutoring groups as different from other social interactions and they even coin a phrase, "nerdy social," in the process of trying to frame it.

As I became more interested in this process, which seems to be the socialization of academic engagement, I began to look for commonalities across students' experiences in an attempt to understand how engagement in a tutoring group leads to these kinds of highly positive outcomes. The basis for this is summed up effectively by Magnus, a sophomore finance and economics major at Urban. Magnus and the other students in the group had been reflecting on my question about what it has been like for them to work with other students in their group when Magnus offered this adage: "it's good to know that someone else is on the same struggle bus as you." Said with a smile, this comment elicited both laughter and strong agreement from the group.

The experience of seeking help in a group setting, even in the face of the stigmas referenced above, is a social process of making oneself vulnerable to one's peers. When students come together in these groups, acknowledge that they share a lack of understanding, and then work through a learning process together, the experience fosters a spirit of togetherness and community. I believe this is the basis for students' sustained social interactions outside their tutoring groups. Destiny, a Nigerian sophomore at Mid-South, recalled a moment

when she felt this strong sense of community: "it's kind of like, 'Whoa, we are family! We're all struggling with this together!'"

While this sense of struggle seems to incite these social bonds, it seems clear that students consistently conceptualize peer tutoring as a primarily academic space. As outlined in Chapter Three, the population of students who accessed tutoring seems to over-represent minority students on both campuses. As the student comments from this chapter indicate, students do not report different experiences in terms of how they heard about tutoring initially or why they chose to access it for the first time. Moreover, the observation phase of the project resulted in no observed differences in student experiences based on assumed race or ethnicity. For example, students did not self-segregate in peer tutoring on these two campuses as they might be expected to in a cafeteria setting. This is yet another indicator that these students conceptualize the peer tutoring context as more academic than social and tend to apply the norms of behavior exhibited in classrooms as opposed to more social settings.

Students' experiences and outcomes, both academic and social, are coupled tightly in group peer tutoring. In exploring the theme that tutoring is both academic and social, this analysis has demonstrated that effective tutoring relies on both and that this interconnectedness is part of what makes peer tutoring not just a unique milieu, but also a place where communities of practice support students in achieving many higher order outcomes.

Constructing Meaning Through Social Learning

As this chapter has progressed from more concrete experiences and outcomes to increasing levels of abstraction, so too does student learning in group peer tutoring. The final theme that has emerged from the focus group data I generated with my participants that speaks directly to the research questions focuses directly on social learning. As demonstrated to this point, tutoring groups make some intentional choices about how to structure their time together. They also describe and define peer tutoring in ways that constitute a unique social milieu and as a place where social and academic worlds truly overlap and interact.

As a result, the learning that takes place in peer tutoring expands far beyond the breadth and depth of course material. The notion here of constructing meaning through social learning represents the ways students learn about themselves and their peers, what a "successful student" might look like and how they rehearse that role together, and even developing increasingly sophisticated ways of making sense of their own learning and education. Using their own lexicon and offering example after example as I probed to try to understand their experiences, the focus group participants became animated, introspective, and enthusiastic in their responses. In addition to their words, a variety of nonverbal behaviors made clear that this was very important to them. I emphasize their experiences around their ideas here as they emphasized them to me.

Students Learn About Themselves and Their Peers

Earlier this chapter, I discussed how participating in group peer tutoring can contribute to normalizing help-seeking behavior. While this remains a powerful finding, within this theme there is a more internalized process of reconceptualization and normalization. In other words, I see students making different meaning of help-seeking as they come to understand it not as a sign of weakness but as a strategy for success, and they adjust their behaviors accordingly. By participating in group peer tutoring, students come to understand the notion of “struggling” with academic material as a normative experience. Based on the substantial emphasis and time the focus group participants talked about “the struggle,” this is no small shift.

The term struggle itself is one that students used in every focus group across both sites. In my analysis, the struggle that students reference refers to moments of dissonance, where not only are new ideas, theories, or concepts new and unfamiliar to them, but where even achieving a basic understanding requires effort in excess of what they have needed to use in previous academic experiences. Because these moments of dissonance are internal, students cannot see each other enduring them and seem to believe that their personal struggle is unusual, if not unique, among their peers.

Magnus, the finance and economics sophomore at Urban, described his experience in a Latin class:

I had never taken Latin before and I missed the first class and evidently went over everything in the first class. [laughter] So, I was kind of way

behind already. And some of the kids in the class had like already taken like twenty years of Latin, it seemed like. [laughter] And, you know, it was easy to them. You open that first page of that book and your mind is just lost. I mean, it, it took a, a couple months before I actually started to grasp things just because there's so many different things.

Even though Magnus had only missed the first class meeting, he constructed an assumption that his peers must have had many years of Latin training beyond his own experience. This kind of negative self-talk and overgeneralization can easily lead to feelings of isolation. As Magnus' example illustrates, not only does he assume that his own skills are lackluster, but that many if not most of the other students were much more comfortable than he was. In constructing an experience this way, asking anyone for help—professor, fellow students, or a peer tutor—would require making himself highly vulnerable, which in social terms is not a small risk.

When students do choose to take such a risk by participating in group peer tutoring, the results are plain. Terrell, the Urban student from Tennessee, talked about his experiences in working with other students: "I...think it's better to have the other person there because, you know, you know that you're not alone struggling." I acknowledge that this feeling of togetherness, that "I am not alone," is not, by itself, a wholly innovative finding. However, only in talking with participants in focus groups and witnessing how difficult it is for some of them to ask questions in initial tutoring sessions has this concept been translated to real terms. Even allowing for whatever import we might place on this interaction as

researchers and practitioners, it is hard to overstate how critical this realization was for the students who participated in this project.

The first result, as Kiara put it, is the realization that, “the struggle, the struggle is real.” Once student acknowledge this, the change in attitudes around help-seeking behavior described above become much easier for them to achieve. Amu and Brooke discussed how these realizations occur in the tutoring program at Mid-South:

Amu: I’ve seen people struggle. Again, maybe it was chemistry or math. Can’t really or-, orient, orient myself at that setting. But random people meeting and they’re like, “Oh! You’re struggling? Well, so am I! Come here. Come and have a seat.”

Brooke: The “me too” concept. Me too!

Amu: Yeah. Yeah! It’s like me too! And then that makes a common denominator...

Jim: Uh huh.

Amu: ...between everyone. It’s like, “OK, you’re in my same class. We’re both struggling. Therefore, I’m not the only one.”

Because of the programmatic structure of group peer tutoring, students have these epiphanies not in isolation, but physically surrounded by their peers. I also believe that this process of making oneself vulnerable and coming to understand that “struggle” is both real and pervasive provides the overwhelmingly positive experience that then becomes the basis for evolving attitudes and behaviors.

In continuing to talk about the environment and atmosphere of The Center at MSU, Amu continues her analysis of how struggling becomes normalized:

And it makes it, it makes you feel like it's OK to actually struggle and not know it. And it makes it OK to ask someone that you probably don't even know, like "How did you do it?" Because you all came here because you didn't know.

Again, comments like Amu's demonstrate that this shared experience may be at the root of many of possible positive outcomes for students who participate in group peer tutoring.

Students in the focus groups also reported that this shared experience of struggle extends beyond just those students who access tutoring. In fact, several students on both campuses offered examples of sessions where peer tutors also struggled with the material. Amanda from Urban puts this succinctly: "I just expected them to be like geniuses at what they did, but they're just like us." While students continue to recognize their peer tutors as content experts, they also come to acknowledge that this expertise is not innate, but rather the result of struggling, of working through the same learning processes students themselves are currently traversing. Amu from Mid-South offers a more detailed example with her rather insightful analysis:

The tutor that I went to didn't know the concept because it was something really minute, but of course I stress over the details that I really didn't need to worry about, but I want to know. And so, we like struggled together. And that struggling together was like...hmm...I learned more from struggling *with* someone to talk it out, like to physically talk to someone instead of me talking to a wall trying to figure out a concept, helped me out more in the long run than me just sitting there on my butt in my dorm room saying, "OK, I'm gonna crack down and study."

Like many other students who offered these kinds of examples, Amanda and Amu had experiences that helped them realize that not only do they and their

peers all struggle at time, but so do peer tutors. Moreover, students come to believe that “struggling though” something not in isolation, but with others, leads to a deeper understanding and learning.

Beyond these ideas of normalizing and destigmatizing “struggling” in college, students also begin to see themselves and their peers as a community in new ways and dimensions. Specifically, this begins with the understanding that students’ peers, both fellow classmates and peer tutors, genuinely care about them. Destiny, the sophomore from Nigeria at Mid-South, described this as her best experience:

Destiny: I think for me it was like a particular question. And like I was trying to solve it but I couldn’t figure it out. Then I went to a tutor and that question was like super random. The professor just decided to place it in there, and it was a hard one. So the tutor started. We were all like, “OK.” [laugh] No one really got it, so he kept on solving, solving. Everyone was like using papers and stuff. Then we finally got it down it was just one last part of like the equation that we were plugging in wrong. So it’s kind of like funny to figure out like just one part of a question could keep you there for one hour.

Elsa: Yeah.

Destiny: So I was like grateful that the tutors like were taking effort to like...see that I got the problem solved. And I’m like, “OK, just go home. We give up.” So I was like, yeah, that was like my best moment here, I guess.

Like other students on both campuses, Destiny retells a story here that illustrates just how much both the peer tutor and other group members were dedicated to working through one particular problem together. Destiny even references this as her “best moment” in The Center, emphasizing in her story that everyone at the table was involved in working through this problem. Her gratefulness for this

dedication is connected to an unspoken belief, at least in this one passage, that her peers were willing to do this because they care.

Victoria, the sophomore occupational therapy major at Urban, was very direct about the idea of "care:"

Victoria: As Nicole said earlier, that they actually care about you...

Jim: Uh huh.

Victoria: ...like my peer tutor would actually hold like extra sessions like before a test or a big quiz, just so that it would help us to kinda reassure ourselves that we do understand this material and that we are prepared for it. So, it was really nice that they would kinda go outta their way to help you and make sure that you succeed in the class.

Students very consistently interpret the actions of their peers in terms of whether or not those individuals care about them. It is important to note here that this sense of caring does not in any way supplant the value of understanding conceptual material. Rather, demonstrating persistence in supporting students through their struggle to achieve conceptual understanding is the most common way that the peer tutors in both programs demonstrate that they care about their students. Haley at Urban offered another instance when a tutor went out of his way for her:

It was like twelve thirty, like midnight. And I called my tutor. I was like, "I'm sorry. Are you up? I need help." And he was like, "Yeah, sure. Meet me wherever." And I drove up here, and he studied with me 'til like three o'clock in the morning. And that was really helpful because it was like three o'clock in the morning [laughter] and he was willing to help me. And I really, I was *so* confused. And it helped a lot. Like I just, that's something I'll never forget.

In this example, Haley's experience from group tutoring led to a connection, her tutor, that she could utilize in a very personal, individual way when she felt she was in dire need of support.

This sense of caring certainly seems to impact the way students in the focus groups make sense of their experiences. Students on both campuses often used expressions like, "it's more than a job to them" to describe their tutors. Some connected the points that I have made in this section themselves and understand their tutors' motivation to be driven, at least in part, as a way of giving back to and further fostering this caring community:

They've struggled through it, and you can see that. And that's why they know what they're doin' 'cause they have struggled through it and they want you to feel the same way as they do now in the subject that they're teaching or the subject that you go for tutoring.

Finally, students distinguish this sense of community as distinct from other places on campus. Destiny alludes to this in speaking about why she continues to participate in tutoring at MSU:

And like they're friendly. They don't give you this look like, you can tell when someone doesn't want you there, no matter how hard they try to hide it. But like you never get that from [The Center]. It's just like everyone is happy doing their job, and they actually wanna help you. So that's one reason why I kept on coming.

Other participants shared some rather unfortunate experiences and perceptions about faculty with whom they have interacted. Students at both Urban and Mid-South shared consistent narratives in that they find that both students/peer tutors and faculty want them to understand material thoroughly and deeply, but that faculty don't really seem to care if they understand or feel comfortable with

that material. In one MSU group, Elsa summed up this sentiment: "They don't care. [laughter] They don't. And so, but we care. And so, like go to somebody who cares." Savannah, the kinesiology first-year at MSU, told a more detailed story:

Savannah: I went to one of my teachers one time last semester and I told her, I was like, "I have a really stupid question, but I just need clarification." And this is before I like came to [The Center] or anything or knew anything about it. And she practically told me I was stupid and told me I needed to drop her class. She was like, "You really don't know this. You're not gonna pass my class. You should probably drop it." And that made me really discouraged. And then I came here to [The Center] and like I was kinda nervous to like ask some questions, but then I like realized they're really nice people and they're not gonna judge me.

Jim: Uh huh.

Savannah: And even if it is a stupid question, like I said before, people have asked 'em. So like, I'm, I don't know, I don't like going to my professors and asking them questions because of that experience. And it's really nice that they're very understanding here.

Jim: Sure. Sorry that happened, by the way. [laughter]

Savannah: Oh, it's, it...I passed her class, by the way. [laughter]

Jim: Good for you!

While I provide this narrative as an example, it does illustrate the same theme that emerged from the data on both campuses in that students make major distinctions between their peers and faculty in terms of what each group is willing to do for them and the extent to which each group cares about them and their learning.

Strategies That Successful Students Practice

In analyzing the data and themes that have emerged from them, I hear students on both campuses suggesting that participating in peer tutoring is a way to learn, implement, and rehearse strategies that are effective for them. In the previous section, it is clear that students reframe the concept of struggle from something that is a barrier and that may well be insurmountable to a normal part of the learning process. Building from that assertion, I hear that students also value the ways in which peer tutors support them through that struggle. Amu, who was very vocal in her group at MSU, talked about how peer tutors have worked with her and her peers: "they actually made you struggle through it. They're like, 'Oh, you don't know the answer? Well, why don't you show me this?'"

In reframing this part of the learning process, students are beginning to acknowledge that people who they have perceived as "smart" are not necessarily innately so and that they tend to take advantage of the resources available to them. Nathan, a senior human nutrition major at Mid-South, recalled getting to know one of his first peer tutors:

I remember I met him. He was really, really smart, and he helped me with like all my chemistry, he was really patient, he had everything...everything he just said was perfect to me. And he was [laughter], so, so he was goin' to pre-med and he was a sophomore. And I was like, "This guy's gonna make it in life!" [laughter] I'm like, "He is so smart! He has no life. He's just really gonna make it!" [laughter] I see him at a party. I was like, "Hold up!" Like "You're not supposed to be here." And then I realized [laughter] he's a normal person and like he probably parties more than I do. But he just had his stuff together. So I was like, "Dang, I wanna be just like you."

For Nathan, as well as for a number of other students across the focus groups, these kinds of experiences represent moments when they realized that achieving the academic success they desired did not necessarily require them to sacrifice goals in other areas or activities that they enjoy.

As students make these connections, their subsequent stories spoke to the different ways that they then tried and tested to achieve the balance they wanted. While there are a great many examples from the focus groups, I want to highlight some of the representative examples here. Throughout the groups on both campuses, students told similar stories and provided similar examples, and so even though the context of each may be different, the process students go through seems consistent on these two campuses.

In wrapping up a session at Urban I asked students what else they thought I should know about tutoring that we may not have covered. Magnus, the business student who had struggled in his first Latin class, talked about how he has, effectively, found ways to recreate situations that resemble peer tutoring but without using formal programmatic structures:

Magnus: I...think one really effective way to understand the subject is to talk it through with your other classmates. And so, at least for like with me for Latin, I, I was like, "Hey, anybody else strugglin' in this class?" 'cause and then like, you know, ha-, more than half the class raised their hand. And so, we just have like a weekly thing where we got together and went over things. And, you know, one person has a diff-, different perspective than someone else and they can explain it if you guys have different styles of learning and stuff...

Jim: Sure.

Joe: ...like that. So...I, I think those really help too. And so, you know, I, if I see I'm strugglin' in a class, I try and be that like, "Get a group," you know.

Jim: Uh huh.

Joe: There's plenty of classrooms at night that are unused. And you can just come in here and write all over the whiteboards and talk it out with other people.

This is a very candid example from a student who has found a strategy that has been very effective for him, group peer tutoring, and has taken on responsibility for his own learning by reproducing the kinds of structures and practices that symbolize peer tutoring to him. I find it particularly meaningful that in organizing these technically informal, though seemingly somewhat structured, groups, the students come back to classrooms in the evenings. This kind of intentional decision making about something that seems as simple as a place to meet demonstrates that students are making informed, reasoned choices, not just getting together haphazardly.

Destiny, a sophomore at MSU, also referenced the value of being in a particular kind of environment or context:

And like some days I'll just come sit here even when I'm done with my homework and be like, "Hey, I'm just gonna sit here and listen to you people." [laughter] I'm sure they thought I was creepy but [laughter] oh well.

Her last comment, which elicited a round of laughter from the other participants, also evidences a level of maturity and sophistication in the strategies she uses to learn. Given the initial feelings students described about struggling and help-seeking, that Destiny would brush off the concern that someone would find her

creepy just for listening to a tutoring session so that she can better understand something shows a clear prioritization process.

Taken together, these kinds of focus group contributions from students on both campuses show a burgeoning sense of responsibility for their own learning. While this is explored further in the next section, the data here also show students practicing and rehearsing the roles of successful students. Though successful strategies are individualized and can vary greatly, students who participated in group peer tutoring employ an array of tactics to test different strategies, find what works, and incorporate it into their definition of being successful. This represents a substantial shift. Just as the understanding that most successful students aren't simply innately "smart," students are realizing that success, defined both individually and broadly across many domains, is something that is achievable. In a field where some practitioners like to think of themselves as "social justice educators" (ACPA Commission for Social Justice Educators, 2014), this realization could conceivably incite a new sense of mobility for students, whether socially, economically, or politically. I do not claim that group peer tutoring does this in a vacuum or that every student who participates achieve such outcomes, but this does help administrators, faculty, and staff to reframe the relative value and potential of this kind of co-curricular academic support practice.

Responsibility and Ownership

Institutional mission statements, student learning outcomes, and concerned politicians are just some of the places and people who claim to want college graduates who are self-regulated, independent learners. Speaking directly to these ends, the final piece of this theme of students constructing meaning through social learning in peer tutoring is rooted in students' sense of control and responsibility. The students who participated in these focus groups talked very earnestly about the connection they perceive between choosing to access a service like peer tutoring and the way that making that choice is emblematic of taking responsibility for their own learning. By enacting their agency and making any number of intentional choices about their learning, students are effectively achieving an understanding that the locus of control in the learning process is on them. This is a substantial change, as it encourages students to ask questions like "what do I want to learn" rather than "what do I need to learn for this test." I also find that this shift is critical because coming to an understanding that they are responsible for their learning seems to incite and instill a desire for some students to seek out more effective strategies, refine their interests, and begin emulating practices that represent self-regulated and independent learning.

In her focus group at Mid-South, Elsa discussed that part of this process is coming to understand that learning is individualized and that, for her at least,

part of assuming responsibility for her learning meant making intentional, sometime difficult decisions:

But like, but like, yeah, responsibility of learning. So knowing that you have, knowing that you have a constant resource, you have no reason not to go access it. If you make time, like you make time to go party or whatever, you make time to like go like have trivia night somewhere, which is fine! Trivia nights and parties are good! But, you also need to make time for your learning. And learning doesn't happen at the same rate everybody else does. And so like, one of your friends might be like a super-fast learner, but you have to take it upon yourself to say, "I need this." And so, I think sometimes in friend groups it's hard to be the one to say, "I need this." And so, you have to pull yourself away, and you're like, "I can't do this tonight." And so, you go and you get studying but then, or tutoring, and then you feel so much better about yourself. And you're like, "Why do I not do this all the time?" And so, it's just understanding and assessing yourself, your own learning style, and knowing how to learn.

Even while these decisions are seemingly small scale and, as a result, low-stakes, Elsa claims here that making those small choices throughout any given day or week are what make a significant difference.

She couples this with the ability to be critically introspective. The process, as this student explains it, is that she took ownership of and responsibility for her own learning, recognized that learning is an individualized process, and as a result she has come to value the metacognitive activity of thinking about her own learning. The more concrete result is that Elsa now seems to have more realistic expectations for the amount of time, effort, and resources she will need to achieve a certain objective and she can make decisions about how to allocate her own time, effort, and other resources accordingly.

In the course of a similar conversation in one of the Urban focus groups, Magnus related taking on responsibility to the building of one's character:

That's kinda the big thing about colleges. You know, you go from your parents and now you're on your own. And it's a lot of responsibility, and it's how you, I guess, act in those situations is how, what really defines your character. And so, by going to get the tutor, because you realize you're not doing well, well, that's really good compared to, you know, other people who just want to put on a face that they're extremely smart.

Here Magnus suggests that he conceptualizes taking on this responsibility and seeking resources and support when needed as a positive attribute to his "character," and in the same passage assigns a negative connotation to those who want to "put on a face" of being innately smart. This kind of strong judgment value, which could be perceived as defensive, came across in the focus group as being critical of his peers rather than feeling the need to defend his own choices.

In the same conversation at Urban, Angel, the nontraditional commuter student, characterized participating in tutoring as a choice she made, at least in part, to disprove some skeptics in her life:

I can say that I had so many people telling me, "You can't do this. Why are you doing this at your age? You're not gonna be successful because of your medical problems." That just made me be like, "OK, I'm going to be successful. I'm gonna do what I have to do to make sure I'm successful." And I have, the other problem, I have five kids and all of them are in college. So...you know, it's hard 'cause now the shoe's on the other foot, you know? And so it is somewhat humbling, but you have to say, you know, "If I'm gonna be successful, I have to get some help."

I add this excerpt to the conversation because it helps demonstrate that this process of taking on responsibility for one's learning may not necessarily be limited to the more traditional-age, residential college student. While not every student among the 63 who participated in the focus grouped shared these kinds

of opinions, many did have narratives that outlined this process, it was consistent across groups on both campuses, and when one student introduced these kinds of comments others were quick to agree.

Even when Veronica, a senior Spanish and psychology double major at Urban, referenced a negative experience with a peer tutor, there is evidence that she took control of the situation:

Veronica: One person, she just was not helpful at all. Like talkin' to me like I was like...I did *not know* what I, like talk to me like I was stupid.

Jim: Mmm...

Veronica: And I hate that feeling. And so I had to like talk to [the tutoring coordinator], and we had to change 'cause I don't like when people talk to me down...like you're, even though you're sm-, you may think you're smarter than me, but don't get twisted. [someone laughs] Like I'm still intelligent, I just need help in this one class. So [laugh], so I like that the [tutoring program] will work with you if you're not meshing well with your peer person tutoring you.

This final example demonstrates that a negative experience with a peer tutor was not sufficient to dissuade Veronica from exercising her agency and taking action, and thereby control, to further her own learning.

Taken together, these contributions suggest that once students have made a decision to seek help and want to learn in a peer tutoring context, they are willing to be persistent in obtaining support that is effective for them.

Ultimately I believe this speaks to Magnus's point above regarding "character."

To the students who participated in this study and contributed to this part of the conversation, they seem to conceptualize the process of taking responsibility for and ownership of learning opportunities as actions that are layered in meaning.

To them, these processes represent a choice to become active and engaged learners, and they place deep, personal value on having made that choice.

Asked and Answered

I began this chapter by discussing parts of the process that led to the development of this study and how they emanated from my early note to “just ask them.” Conducting these focus groups allowed me to do exactly that. Moreover, the analytic methods employed here helped to clarify a variety of emerging themes into some broad areas for consideration. I have endeavored to tell students’ stories, beginning largely with their own words and employing their lexicon, and through this chapter the themes have become more abstract and complex.

Going to back to the original focus group transcripts and listening to the recordings provides confirmation for me that I have represented their stories faithfully, even if I cannot do so comprehensively here. While the four major themes explored in this chapter speak directly to the research questions and are situated within the context of the theory and literature with which I framed the study, there are certainly more themes that I hear coming from the data.

While I hope to explore those additional themes in the future, those included here provide new context for the field and new ways of making sense of students’ experiences in group peer tutoring. As students construct their experiences in peer tutoring and, thereby, create distinctive cultural milieus on these two campuses, I find that much of the transformative power of tutoring

lies in the unique intersection and interaction of the social and academic worlds. Based on the data generated with my participants in this study, I also hypothesize that group peer tutoring can be one of the first places that students perceive and conceptualize “academic” and “education” as active, participatory dialogues rather than unidirectional transmissions of knowledge. A remarkable feature of peer tutoring is that students are reframing the meaning and responsibility of being a student by working with each other, directly aligning experiences here with the theoretical assertions from Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (1990), and Wenger (1998).

Finally, while some distinctions certainly do exist, it is striking to note the consistency with which students describe their experiences in peer tutoring and what they believe they have gained from participating. The focus group protocol was designed to be very open and general in keeping with the exploratory nature of the project. As a result, I did not anticipate the incredibly congruent patterns of responses and emerging themes. Of course, as this is a wholly qualitative project, I make no claim that these themes are generalizable. What I can offer with confidence is that on these two campuses, which represent very different institutional types in the same geographic region, two different programs with many contrasting structures have been places where students construct similar experiences. In wanting to verify my claims that so many of the themes are consistent, I put sections of focus group transcripts side-by-side, with the result that, in many places, I could have mixed students from the two campuses

together in groups and reasonably been able to expect the same kinds of comments. In the following chapter, I will provide some concluding thoughts and implications for the field.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

Admissions yield rates, first-to-second fall retention rates, graduation rates, career placement rates, loan default rates. The list of metrics by which higher education measures itself, and is measured by others, continues to grow. However, while considering these statistics may have great value, most involved seem willing to acknowledge that there is more to a college education than just graduating in four years with as little debt as possible. Similarly, while using course grades, GPA, retention, and graduation rate data may reveal some interesting trends that correlate with participating in peer tutoring, there is more to the story. I have attempted to tell a chapter of that story, perhaps the beginning, through this exploratory study.

The extent to which the results of this study are generalizable is not addressed here as there was no goal of generalizable results. The research questions that guided this study, from development and planning on through to data analysis and write up, seek to understand what it is about tutoring on these campuses that may impact students, their experiences, and the ways they construct meaning around learning. The sections that follow represent conclusions and implications I have drawn from this exploratory study and provide fertile ground for further research opportunities. I hope that others may strengthen the effort to understand student cultures in these contexts by engaging in the dialogue.

Group Peer Tutoring is Fundamentally Different

In drawing conclusions from the data generated with students, it is important to recall that the tutoring programs included in the study represent only group tutoring and are programs where specific kinds of tutor hiring practices and training are in place. Through both phases of the study, the observations and focus groups with students, it is clear that group peer tutoring represents a space where students engage in group behaviors that are, at the very least, unusual on our campuses, if not entirely unique. In attempting to help me understand how they make sense of tutoring, students regularly contrasted their experiences there with other places and spaces on their campuses. The result is a clear, if not somewhat unexpected, differentiation that emerges from the students themselves.

The list of things that peer tutoring is not is varied and includes classes, labs, instructor office hours, recitation section meetings, other academic support programs, residence hall spaces, and libraries. Both the observation and focus group data indicate that student behavior is substantively different in peer tutoring contexts than in other academic settings. Moreover, through this study, group peer tutoring as it is structured and conceptualized on these two campuses has emerged as a context where students are very quickly conditioned to become active, engaged, self-directed learners. The implication here is not that students must instantly become proficient at these complex, higher order behaviors, but rather that they demonstrate a willingness to try them.

For example, students may not always know what questions to ask to help refine or develop their understanding of a particular concept. However, they appear to learn very quickly that a relative taboo in peer tutoring culture is to point to a problem, concept, or page of notes and simply indicate that they don't "get it." Peer Tutors ask students to ask them questions. In working in small groups, the process of formulating, refining, and eventually asking the "right" questions becomes collaborative.

This example demonstrates the extent to which a basic, concrete practice (how to use peer tutoring to understand course material) is only the most visible layer of meaning making that happens in group peer tutoring. The deeper analysis undertaken here has peeled back this top layer to better understand the critical ways that social learning operates in peer tutoring. In this example, the process of finding and refining questions to ask represents a way that students first seek to contrast what they already know or understand with what they do not. Doing this collaboratively creates a shared experience where students are tacitly acknowledging and coming to realize both that "not understanding" is normative and that they can better achieve success by struggling through something together rather than suffering alone.

Group peer tutoring is different. The way students engage, the physical structures, the loci of control and power, the level of activity and engagement, and the kinds of social learning that happen are different here than in other places in students' lives. The enthusiasm with which students explained this to

me and the sheer devotion to the tutoring experience and process suggests that students value and crave this kind of interpersonal engagement. It may not always feel “easy,” but students clearly find it worthwhile.

The notion of peer tutoring as a unique context on campus merits further study. If this finding could be demonstrated to be somewhat generalizable, it could inform practitioners’ understanding of the programs they structure. Generalizability aside, the finding that this context may be a unique part of students’ experiences on these two campuses indicates a need to better understand the cultural realities of other student spaces (e.g., the ethnographic work undertaken by Lewis & Jensen, 2006), how they impact learning, and how they knit together, or stand divided, to frame students’ overall experience in college.

Social Learning as a Process

While I addressed the conceptual construct of social learning at length in Chapter Two, another outcome of this research is the need to reconsider social learning in these peer tutoring contexts in an effort to understand how students construct meaning together there. The example used in the previous section, where students struggled together in an effort to discern the “right” questions for them to ask, also illustrates the processual nature of social learning. Even reading the literature about social learning, including that examined in Chapter Two, can lead to a binary understanding of it. In other words, social learning may be understood as something that students either do or do not do.

However, the data generated in this study, through both the observations and focus groups, supports an understanding of social learning as more akin to developmental processes. I have come to hypothesize social learning as a concept that, like student development, is a process. An example from this study helps illustrate this understanding. Returning to the notion of scaffolding as it emanates from Vygotsky, the observation data yielded multiple examples of peer tutors and students supporting others in learning to ask the right questions. This is an example that is easy to identify as scaffolding. However, some of the slightly older students (i.e., those who reported themselves to be juniors or seniors), offered examples in focus groups that highlighted much more advanced examples of scaffolding. A keen example here is the student who, upon learning that peer tutoring was not available for a course, took it upon himself to ask his classmates about forming a "study group" which ultimately included about half the class and effectively reproduced many structural components of peer tutoring.

This example is significant because while the result is that the students are "doing" social learning in their study group, there are some important distinctions from students voluntarily choosing to access an existing resource such as peer tutoring. A key feature in the zone of proximal development is support by a slightly more advanced peer. Such a study group, where all students are in the same class simultaneously, lacks an obvious content expert. This suggests to me that the students who participated, who I reasonably

assume to be mostly advanced students because it was a 400-level course, have come to understand that creating an effective social learning context does not require one content expert. Rather there seems to be an underlying belief that each group member may be able to support the others in different areas of the course content. In other words, these students seem to believe that the "distance" between a student and a more advanced peer may be very small, but that such a structure can be highly effective for them.

While this example has clear relationships to personal epistemology and cognitive development, this is a much more nuanced understanding of social learning and how it relates to the formation of communities of practice. Moreover, these students have ostensibly come to understand that they do not have to rely on an external source (e.g., their university-provided tutoring program) to be able to obtain the benefits of an academic-social learning context.

I acknowledge that this line of thought emanates from a study that only includes students on two different campuses. As such, additional research is needed to help explore how social learning might become more advanced, what drives such a process, and to what extent more complex understanding through such a process may be transferable or iterative. The evidence available here does suggest that students who experience peer tutoring and construct meaning in such communities seem interested in leading the creation or continuation of such structures later in their student careers. While I employed the example of

the student who formed a study group for an upper division course above, it is also noteworthy that at least three focus group participants, who were invited to participate on the basis of having accessed peer tutoring within the past four semesters, had since become peer tutors themselves.

Structures Matter, in Some Unanticipated Ways

The research question that guided the study contained two sub-questions that focused heavily on structure, both physical and programmatic. In response to these questions, I submit generally that structures on these two campuses certainly do matter and result in direct impacts on group learning and meaning making. However, the findings here around the ways in which these structures matter differ from how I may have hypothesized based on my prior experience in the literature and as a practitioner.

As the observation data outlines in detail, I entered this project keenly aware of the physical and programmatic structures on the two sites included in the study. Physically, I attended to everything from the exterior appearances and upkeep of the buildings and grounds to the visibility and user experience of the spaces. Programmatically, I was very attuned to possible differences in the extent to which tutoring may be voluntary versus required, drop in or appointment-based, group size, static versus shifting group membership, etc. Perhaps the most remarkable initial finding I noted when working through the analytic process was the consistency with which students spoke about their tutoring experiences regardless of all these programmatic structures.

What I have come to understand is that these structures do frame students' experiences and are important. However, what remains far more meaningful is the extent to which flexibility exists within these structures. This organic, malleable notion of flexibility is at once immensely complex and stunningly comprehensible. For students transitioning into higher education, the existence of these structures can be reassuring, comfortable, and congruent with previous academic experiences and expectations. Stated simply, students feel comfortable when they know the rules of the game.

The flexibility becomes critical when students have an idea to innovate or reshape their own experience in some way. First, I believe that students are only willing to try this because they have encountered an environment whose structure they can understand and can feel comfortable and confident navigating in the first place. Next, I suggest that students begin by making small modifications, both physically and programmatically. For example, they ask for specific resources (e.g., a large marker board), to use a certain seating arrangement, or try a new type of problem on their own first. As students find success in this process, they then become willing to be more daring and experiment with their social learning experiences.

At this level, students may enact their agency to help lead a group session. They may ask peer tutors for very specific kinds of questions or supports, negotiate with tutors or other staff for use of various resources, and initiate conversations at a tutoring table without a tutor being present.

Ultimately, some students even report bringing groups together on their own to recreate spaces and experiences that look, feel, and mirror outcomes similar to what they have achieved in peer tutoring.

I make no claim that every student who accesses peer tutoring eventually exhibits the behaviors above. However, these examples all come from the data my participants and I generated in this study. I propose that these kinds of outcomes may represent a new way to make sense of students' development through social learning. By this, I mean that social learning is not a binary process that is accessed and engaged in or not, as discussed above. Rather, I have come to understand social learning as a complex developmental process through which students may work in their group peer tutoring experiences.

The flexibility that is inherent, if not immediately apparent, in the tutoring programs included in the study may serve as both the context for this process and part of the fuel that facilitates it. Additional research in this area could help refine an understanding of this process that happens in a group context. While it may seem similar to notions of cognitive development or increasing complex personal epistemologies, a critical difference is that it happens within and because of the group and, thereby, is not isolated within the individual. Further research could examine the complex and varied ways groups of students utilize structural flexibility in an effort to help describe the processes through which groups of students work.

Group Experiences

Related to the previous section, I acknowledge that I chose to study group tutoring experiences exclusively. While this choice was made in response to the research goals and questions identified for the study, there would be merit in a comparative analysis that includes one-on-one peer tutoring. Such comparative analysis could provide broader context for many of the findings here, as one-on-one tutoring is just as popular as group tutoring on college campuses.

The present study does clarify that students tend to have strong feelings about the value of group experiences. The recruitment process for focus group participants yielded a group of students who, while diverse in many ways, accessed tutoring repeatedly. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that these are students who represent those who have largely bought into the concept of group peer tutoring. The relatively few students who discussed any negative experiences seemed to conceptualize them as aberrations from more normal (i.e., positive) experiences.

I acknowledge that a limitation of this study is that it cannot make conclusions about the relative value of one-on-one academic support experiences, as a result of the focus of the research questions. Even with that caveat, I do find that student interaction in a group setting is critical to all the positive impacts and outcomes that the data suggest. The unique intersection of students' academic and social worlds that they encounter in peer tutoring is at

the very heart of understanding the outcomes. I find that these kinds of experiences are critical in developing an understanding that the material learned in a classroom does not exist there in a vacuum, but instead is part of a reality where overlap, connection, intersection, and nuance are ever present. Students who come together in tutoring groups are learning that meaning making does not happen individually, isolated within oneself, but is a much larger, culturally-relevant process.

Based on the data and analysis, group peer tutoring on these campuses is a place where students learn course material, and do so deeply at conceptual levels of understanding, but also where students may begin to shape and refine the much higher order outcomes higher education asks of them. Amassing and converting types of cultural capital, rehearsing the roles of learner and scholar, shifting the focus from self to community, and honing the ability to inquire critically, including introspectively, are some of the ways that peer tutoring may impact students.

Vulnerability and Voluntary Access

In reviewing my analysis of the data, I encountered an assumption that I had not previously recognized. A shared programmatic characteristic of both sites included in this study is the voluntary basis on which tutoring is available to students. In analyzing the focus group data, students spoke repeatedly about their choice to access tutoring, what that has come to mean to them, and how they perceive their peers who choose not to access tutoring even if they may be

struggling in a particular course. In speaking about how they came to utilize tutoring, students cited presentations during orientation, recommendations from advisors and counselors, suggestions from professors, reviews from their peers, and even on-campus marketing campaigns as factors that may have influenced their decision to access peer tutoring.

Because the participants place such an emphasis on this choice, I find it important to qualify explicitly that in addition to not being generalizable results, the findings here may have little bearing on programs that require students to access them. Unfortunately, the notion of mandatory student access of academic support programming seems to be quite popular. In particular, programs that support oppressed or marginalized populations seem to favor this strategy (e.g., see Hutchens, Deffendall, & Peabody, 2011 as an example in support of first generation college students).

I find this approach substantively different from the programs included in this study. In population-specific programs it is not uncommon for students to be told that college will be more difficult for them due to a particular demographic association. While such assertions are supported by the rather overwhelming literature on achievement gaps, the processes by which students come to access academic support are drastically different, and therefore I question whether outcomes would be consistent.

The students who participated in this study largely reported experiences in and outcomes from tutoring that emanated from their choice to access tutoring.

Inherent in that decision to go and participate in tutoring is a choice to make themselves vulnerable. In Chapter Five I discussed how participating in peer tutoring has served to normalize and destigmatize help-seeking behaviors for many students. This willingness to allow themselves to be open and vulnerable is critical to the outcomes that groups achieve in peer tutoring. Further research is needed to understand whether students who are required to access services, often by holding concrete resources such as scholarships in the balance, have similar experiences.

This connection to vulnerability allows for future research that delves more deeply into the implications of such processes. I am interested in particular in some of the recent work in this area that seeks to understand and reject the traditionally negative connotations to vulnerability and reconceptualize it as a demonstration of courage (Brown, 2012). I believe the application of this work could frame a future study that further explores the process by which students come to a setting such as peer tutoring, where they are willing to acknowledge and express vulnerability in a relatively public place. While her work focuses more broadly on adults, I find that ideas from Brown (2012) could help align and answer some questions about student motivation, individual benefits of accessing peer tutoring, and ultimately help researchers and practitioners understand how to better encourage students to reach out to resources. I acknowledge the work that Lewis (2010) has contributed in this vein and that it has been valuable to the analysis here. I further suggest that an exploration of the concept of college

student vulnerability and how it relates to decision making around resource access would be a powerful contribution to the field.

Broadly, such research that seeks to make sense of vulnerability, voluntary access, and connections to help-seeking behavior could have profound implications for both research and practice. If such a study could be leveraged to create an understanding of how students reach a point where they are willing to be courageously vulnerable, or to dare greatly (Brown, 2012), perhaps the field could develop a more nuanced understanding of how to provide all kinds of support services to students more effectively. Additional research could examine the transferability of students' willingness to seek help. For example, the students on these two campuses suggested that participating in peer tutoring has made them think of seeking help in new ways. A future study could examine the extent to which the same students are willing to access resources in other areas of their lives to determine if this one experience is transferable, or if the process is repeated similarly across other domains.

For the present study, student vulnerability appears to be an essential component in understanding these students' participation in peer tutoring, how they benefit from it, and how one of those benefits may be a new conceptualization of help seeking. I have asserted that by engaging in group peer tutoring students who participated in my study report having become more active, engaged, and self-directed learners. Beginning from a place of vulnerability and practicing these behaviors, which are typically very new to

them, represents a way that students can initially “get in the game.” In other words, the outcomes that may be achieved through peer tutoring, driven by students’ courageous choices to be vulnerable, should be understood as a way that students may begin to live the life of the mind. I take students’ enthusiasm for and devotion to their tutoring experiences as evidence that this new way of understanding “school,” “class,” or “academics” energizes them and provides positive reinforcement for their original willingness to be vulnerable.

Tutoring and the Curriculum

As a practitioner, I often encounter a bias or assumption that academic support programming such as peer tutoring is something that is “nice” for higher education institutions to be able to provide. The implication of such a statement, of course, is that such structures are not critical or essential to student learning. At its most basic level, higher education tends to understand “curriculum” to be the variety of course offerings that are available. I support Nespor (1990) in his assertions that the curriculum should be about student learning, which the field already acknowledges should and does happen outside the confines of a classroom or laboratory.

Peer tutoring is not just “nice.” The data generated on the campuses in this study all suggest that group peer tutoring is a place where students learn broadly and deeply, engage academically and socially, and work toward an impressive array of complex, higher order outcomes. I do not believe that tutoring is the only structure through which this is possible. Rather, I suggest a

recognition and reconceptualization of the curriculum and co-curriculum. I reject the notion that what my participants report doing, thinking, and collaborating on in their respective tutoring programs is not central to the curriculum.

American higher education must come to understand that the classroom is not the altar of knowledge and the rest of campus the vestibule. If it is student learning that we value, we must come to recognize that structures like group peer tutoring are curricular. While I do not expect this call to lead to broad personal popularity for me, I find it critical if American higher education is serious about enhancing student learning and truly placing it at the center of what we do.

Why does this matter? Higher education faces difficult choices today, many related to an economy that is permanently altered and a rapidly changing public and political perception. Decisions are made quickly and, if the rhetoric is to be believed, based on evidence and data. The reality seems to be that resources are directed first to the most critical areas of operation. If the field continues to place group peer tutoring and other effective practices on the periphery, they will continue to be cut. The data here suggest that cutting tutoring on either of these two campuses would negatively impact student learning. The literature and attitudes in the field do not currently reflect this.

Understanding that tutoring is central, rather than peripheral, to student learning has implications beyond resource allocation. When higher education and the people within its systems come to understand effective academic support

practices as critical and curricular, they further normalize and destigmatize student access, and thereby support effective student learning. While the American notion of the rugged individual is very powerful imagery, and is translated in higher education to the student or professor who toils alone at a desk with only his books and his ideas, it is not the way to effective learning. For those who have worked in higher education, we also recognize that this stoic isolation is often not the reality. All the while, we expect students to work hard, work alone, and “get it.”

Higher education needs to reconceptualize the curriculum to focus not just on credits, classrooms, and faculty, but to include student learning. This study has demonstrated that peer tutoring on these two campuses can be a way for students to “get in the game” in their higher education, and as such it is time to recognize that group peer tutoring is not just an exhibition event.

Relevance

In Chapter One, I suggested that this study may be relevant because of the outcomes that peer tutoring can support students in achieving. After conducting the research and working through the analytic process, I realize that some of my initial expectations for this project were too conservative. While I make no claim that peer tutoring is a panacea for all the current concerns in higher education, I have found that peer tutoring on these campuses may be more impactful than I would have hypothesized.

Stepping back to take a broad view, the literature offers numerous positive case studies about increased course grades and national data supports the assertion that tutoring has become ubiquitous on American college campuses. However, stated simply, there is no broad-scale data that reflects consistently positive outcomes and no qualitative data that examines how peer tutoring works. I have attempted here to contribute to filling that latter gap.

Practitioners in academic support programming try varying models on their campuses, structure physical spaces, create programmatic policies and standards, hire and evaluate peer tutors, and write reports on the success of their tutoring program, all without the benefit of a research literature that helps make sense of what students are doing in these spaces and how they may make sense of and be impacted by the learning that happens there.

As I referenced above, if nothing else, this study has confirmed that tutoring, at least at Urban and Mid-South, is far more complex and multi-layered than it might appear from the outside. While the data for the study was generated only from these two sites, there is a normative value to these two campuses. Urban and Mid-South are specific to their individual locales, but they are not unusual in any apparent way. Other ethnographic-style research (e.g., Hamilton, 2013) has employed such normative sites in an effort to explore new areas of research by beginning with mainstream experiences, a notion that may be applicable here.

With the complexity of peer tutoring in mind, and taking a broader view of the landscape, institutions seem to set relatively incongruent standards and expectations for the professionals who coordinate tutoring on their campuses. In my own experience, I have observed varying levels of credential requirements, expected previous experience, and preferences for domain expertise. By the last point, I mean that some campuses may fill a tutoring coordinator position with an individual who has a background in learning and cognition, while others look for advanced degrees in mathematics or chemistry, or whichever discipline is most popular in that program.

This study matters in part because it demonstrates a clear lack of understanding and nuance about peer tutoring in general by revealing what can really happen in these contexts. My own observations suggest that institutions seem to be more consistent about the credentials and experience they want faculty and staff to have who run counseling centers, advising centers, disability resource operations, etc., yet there is no clear set of standard expectations regarding the credentials for an effective tutoring center coordinator.

The result may be a landscape in higher education where tutoring programs produce uneven results, possibly due in part to a lack of clarity in what could or should happen in peer tutoring. In recognizing the complexity inherent in group peer tutoring, this study serves to problematize this practice and to call for more nuanced understanding and research. More specifically to this example, further research could suggest a more standard set of expectations, in terms of

education, experience, and abilities, for tutoring coordinators, to provide guidance for institutions when they fill these critical positions. This aligns with a recent call that addresses who should staff programming roles more broadly:

This is a pretty complicated scenario for gifted amateurs to manage. The times require reflective, student-centered professionals, expert to be sure in their respective disciplines but also knowledgeable and skilled in areas required by the management functions they perform. They must also be familiar with policies and practices that are linked to student success, broadly defined to include satisfaction, persistence, and high levels of learning and personal development of the increasingly diverse students enrolling at their institution. (Kuh et al., 2005, p. xiv)

If higher education is serious about student learning and believes that it relates directly to the metrics listed at the beginning of this chapter, we must begin to evaluate and standardize the expectations for these professional roles. In balance, administrators must hold academic support professionals responsible for the demonstrated success of their programs. The standards of tutor training and program operation provided by organizations such as the CRLA, as discussed in Chapter Two, may be a starting point for developing recommendations for best practices.

Beyond the question of “who” on campus is responsible for structuring peer tutoring, this study is relevant because it helps to reframe what may be expected from a peer tutoring program. The lack of research in the field has helped foster a broad disparity in higher education in terms of expectations of and support for programming like peer tutoring. Further research is needed to better understand the impacts of tutoring more broadly, but the data generated on these two campuses indicates an array of positive outcomes for students.

I acknowledge that peer tutoring may seem like a relatively small, even miniscule, part of the college experience for students today to many in higher education and to observers, politicians, parents, and concerned citizens. However, the sheer amount of financial, physical, and human resources that institutions invest in tutoring and other kinds of academic support programming should provide at least a basic level of motivation for those in the field to undertake work like this that helps make sense of students' experiences. Beyond that, this study is relevant because it demonstrates that what may seem like a relatively minor service or operation on a particular campus can make substantial positive contributions to the learning outcomes set forth in institutional missions and strategic plans.

Limitations

I readily acknowledge this is not generalizable data. I do not even claim that all students who regularly participate in tutoring on both these campuses achieve all the kinds of outcomes described here. However, what is clear to me is that there is nothing inherently different about the students who participated in the focus groups from students I observed who did not volunteer. This study has demonstrated the potential power, reach, depth, and impact of group peer tutoring. That being said, just throwing a program together and calling it "peer tutoring" should not be expected to achieve these results.

The site selection process began by accessing the list of peer tutoring programs that have achieved international certification by the College Reading

and Learning Association. While this is only one type of program-level credential, it does potentially limit this study and its findings. Beginning with this group of programs may mean that these campuses are places where student-centered professionals are already thinking critically about their work, evaluating outcomes regularly, and continually seeking to improve practices. In other words, there is the potential that due to the selection process this study was biased toward programs that are already relatively high achieving.

Allowing for that possible bias, the overall research objective was never to examine an “average” or “typical” program. As a result of the choices made, I believe that the data and analysis presented here represents the experiences and narratives of the students who participated in the study. If I were to make claims more broadly than that, I would only go so far as to suggest that this data represents the *potential* that peer tutoring has to impact students. While I was fortunate to work with wonderful students on both campuses included in this study, I have no reason to believe that the programs themselves or the institutions are exceptional in terms of how they provide peer tutoring. In fact, the many parallels that exist across the two campuses and programs may suggest that student outcomes from peer tutoring are transferable across institutional types and even some programmatic structures, though of course further research would be required before such a claim could be made.

Beyond site selection, open participant recruitment also limited the study in some ways. As I referenced above, the population of students who

volunteered for the focus groups was relatively diverse, at least in comparison to the entire student body on each respective campus. While this diversity contributed to the generation of rich focus group data, it is noteworthy that there were no observable or reported differences in students' experiences or outcomes based on race, gender, year, etc. Further research could discern how or if such identities impact student outcomes from peer tutoring.

This may also be complicated by the kinds of students who volunteered for the focus groups. The participants were students who accessed tutoring multiple times, most across multiple semesters. As a result, these are students who clearly have passionate connections to the tutoring program on their campus. Therefore, I have worked to emphasize that not all students necessarily achieve the kinds of outcomes described here and to characterize the benefits of accessing peer tutoring as potential impacts. Future research could also intentionally recruit students who only accessed tutoring once, or stratify participants by ranges of tutoring sessions attended, to develop more comprehensive comparative analysis.

Finally, for the present study, the participants contributed overwhelmingly positive answers to focus group questions, even when asked specifically for discrepant experiences. Only a handful of students reported any experience that could be characterized as negative, and nearly all of those seemed to conceptualize such experiences as unusual. Similarly, the observation phase yielded no students who appeared to be having a negative experience on either

campus. While there is no doubt that such experiences do occur, this study captured very few. Considering that the research questions were focused on potential impacts for students, this lack of discrepant cases may not be entirely surprising, but does merit mention when considering implications.

Directions for Future Research

As this is an exploratory study, I have encountered many areas where future research could continue to help fill the gaps in the existing literature. I offered some ideas along these lines throughout the text, but include the list below as a more comprehensive collection of possibilities:

- An examination of tutoring programmatic structures that results in a typology or classification system for the field.
- Similar studies replicated on different campuses, across different institutional types and programmatic structures.
- More focused research that delves deeper into the ideas around college students' perceptions of and willingness to engage in behaviors that are, in essence, public acknowledgements of vulnerability. Such a study could inform how to better encourage students to access all the supports available to them.
- A study that compares outcomes for students who choose peer tutoring voluntarily to those who are required to attend tutoring sessions.
- Research that examines who fills the professional roles on campus that structure these kinds of academic support practices, what their credentials

and experience includes, and the potential for connections to program outcomes.

- Additional ethnographic style studies that examine student culture in other places on campus. Once a set of contemporary studies exists (such as the present study and that undertaken by Lewis and Jensen, 2006), a meta analysis may be able to make sense of the places where students' academic and social worlds intersect and the outcomes of those experiences in relationship to each other.
- Conceptual work that utilizes this research and other studies like it to better make sense of a possible process of social learning development.
- A study that examines the potential relationships between students' engagement in peer tutoring and the extent to which they exhibit self-regulated or self-directed learning practices.
- Research that explores the outcomes associated with accessing peer tutoring and whether there are differences related to student identities, including gender, race, SES, first generation status, age groups, etc.
- Research is needed to better understand different modes and types of peer tutor training and the possible connections that differential training experiences have, or do not have, to the ways tutors engage with students. Such a study could further seek to document potential connections between tutor training experiences at the program level and the outcomes achieved by the students who access the service.

Final Thoughts

The conclusions and implications I offer here are not the final word. Alternately, I hope they will be the beginning of the next phase of an important dialogue. For far too long higher education has tacitly acknowledged peer tutoring as “important” without any research-based understanding of what happens in these contexts, much less what the range of possibilities are. I hope that this work may serve as a wake up call. For all the rhetoric about data-driven decision-making and evidence-based practices, academic support is an area of practice that consumes many resources and yet remains largely understudied and underevaluated. I call for researchers and practitioners to seek to understand, respect, and educate the whole student and acknowledge the cultures they reproduce on campus.

I also hope that, as a field, higher education can consider the significant value that qualitative studies such as this can have in understanding student experiences. I was and continue to be impressed by my participants. Whatever assumptions faculty, staff, and researchers might make about students, a research process that actually includes engaging with and speaking to students is a strong reminder that they can be very self aware, they may be constantly evaluating and negotiating their opportunities on campus, and that they are potentially eager to speak about their experiences and contribute to making their campus a better place for those who come after them.

Finally, I submit that group peer tutoring matters, that it is a place where academic and social worlds intersect and collide, and that it can represent many of the ideals and outcomes we claim to hold most dear in higher education. This study demonstrates the extent to which experiences in peer tutoring are intensely human. The social learning that occurs in tutoring contexts, as well as the implications for social capital, role rehearsal and attainment, and developing a community of learners, are what impact students on these two campuses. Through this study the participants supported my own learning in understanding their experiences and demonstrated the persistence, care, compassion, and determination in overcoming “the struggle” that they value so highly from their own tutoring experiences.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the powerful role that peer tutoring can play in the student experience. Moreover, it is clear that peer tutoring is a special environment on these campuses and that students come to expect, welcome, and value the challenging learning processes that happen there and that happen together, in their peer groups. Developing more nuanced understanding of student cultures and how students move through and interact within these contexts should lead to more effective, supportive, and flexible practices.

Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction to be covered by moderator:

Hello and welcome to our session. I want to start by thanking you all for taking the time to join us for our discussion on peer tutoring. I know as college students you have a lot on your plate so I appreciate you making the time to come today.

My name is Jim and assisting me today is/are [name the assistant moderator if present]. The session today is part of the research I'm doing about peer tutoring. I am interested in learning more about students' experiences with peer tutoring in college.

You should have all received a copy of the Informed Consent Form in your e-mail. I would like to take a few minutes to briefly go over that now so you know exactly what you are agreeing to by participating in this study. (Moderator will review the IC – do not read it to them but highlight the main points of each section. Have each participant sign a copy and offer to give them a hardcopy to take with them if they would like it).

So, today/tonight we will be discussing your experiences and perceptions about peer tutoring. There are no right or wrong answers only differing perspectives. We are interested in all points of view, so please feel free to share your perspective even if it differs from what others in the group have said. Also, we are interested in hearing from all of you. So, if you aren't saying much, I may call on you by name. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about the questions. My role here is to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. Please keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as well as positive comments so please do not feel the need to filter what you say.

Before we begin, let me share a few ground rules. This is a research project protected by confidentiality. That means when we write up or report the information from this study you will not be identified in that process by anyone on the research team. As we are group here today, I ask that we all respect each member's confidentiality by not sharing what we discuss here with anyone outside the group. We will be on a first name basis and later no names will be attached to comments.

Also, we will be recording the session to ensure that everything that was said is accurately captured. Please speak up and only one person should speak at a time. We don't want to miss any of your comments and if several people speak at once, the recording will get distorted. [Assistant moderator name] will be

taking notes as well during our session. This is again to help us capture as much as we can from our conversation here today.

Our session will last about two hours. Let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help remember each other's names. Let's find out a little about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your first name, your major, and what you enjoy doing when you are not busy with schoolwork.

(adapted from Krueger, 1994, p. 113)

Focus Group Question Protocol

Opening Question:

1. Let's go around the group and have each of you share your first name, year, major, and something you enjoy doing when you're not doing schoolwork.

Introductory Question:

2. If you were trying to explain the [specific program name] to a friend back home, how would you describe it?

Transition Questions:

3. If you would, think back to when you first heard about peer tutoring in [program/center name]. Tell us how you heard about it and what you heard.
4. What prompted you to come for the first time?

Key Questions:

5. Along those same lines, think back to your first visit to peer tutoring and tell us about that experience.

Follow-up:

- 5a. Was it what you expected? How so or how not?
6. What stood out to you about the peer tutoring experience at [program/center name]?
7. For those of you who've come more than once, what is it about peer tutoring at that keeps you coming back?

Follow-up

7a. If anyone here chose not to come back, tell us about what influenced your decision not to return.

8. Tell us about your experience working with other people while at peer tutoring, whether tutors or other students?
9. How did your experience in [program/center name] impact your other experiences at [institution name]?

Potential follow-up:

9a. Academically? Socially?

Final Question:

10. Offer a brief summary then ask –
Have we missed anything? Is there some aspect of the peer tutoring experience we didn't discuss that you think we should?

Appendix B: Student Information Form

Student Information Form

Name:

Name You Go By:

Ethnicity:

Age:

Classification:

Major:

Alternate E-mail address (other than your school e-mail):

Please answer the following questions as candidly as possible. Feel free to use the back of the sheet if necessary.

1. Where did you grow up? Please list the state and city.
2. Please describe the type of school you attended for middle and high school (public, private, etc).
3. Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend college? If not, please describe your parents' and/or siblings' highest levels of education.
4. Have you attended [institution name] since you began college? If not, please list where you transferred from and when?

5. Please list your current living situation whether on-campus (area of campus) or off-campus.

6. Are you involved on campus? If so, please list the full names of any clubs, organizations, or jobs you've ever been involved with on campus and describe your level of involvement (i.e. do you hold an "official" position in the organization?).

7. Please describe the number of times you attend peer tutoring in an average:

- Week:
- Month:
- Semester:

8. If you had to describe your experience with peer tutoring in [program/center name] in one minute to a friend, what would you say?

9. Please indicate if you are willing to participate in an individual interview (circle one) Yes No Maybe

References

- ACPA Commission for Social Justice Educators. (2014). Commission for social justic educators - welcome. *ACPA College Student Educators International*. Retrieved July 30, 2014, from <http://www.myacpa.org/commsje>
- Andriotis, A. (2012). Five states where college tuition is soaring. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved August 22, 2012, from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444772404577589294216364300.html>
- Arum, R., & Roksa, J. (2011). *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ashwin, P. (2005). Variation in students' experiences of the oxford tutorial. *Higher Education, 50*, 631-644.
- Axtell, J. (2006). *The making of princeton university: From woodrow wilson to the present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beasley, C. J. (1997). *Students as teachers: The benefits of peer tutoring*. Paper presented at the 6th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, Murdoch University.
- Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N., & Tarule, J. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of solef, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.

- Bondarenko, D. M. (2007). *What is there in a word? Heterarchy, homoarchy and the difference in understanding complexity in the social sciences and complexity studies*. Paper presented at the Explorations in Complexity Thinking: Pre-Proceedings of the 3rd International Workshop on Complexity and Philosophy.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005). Transformational resistance and social justice: American indians in ivy league universities. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(3), 193-211.
- Brazzell, J. C., & Reisser, L. (1999). Creating inclusive communities. In G. S. Blimling & E. J. Whitt (Eds.), *Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Breslin, J. D. (2011). Evidence-based or just good for the soul? Examining the efficacy of peer tutoring in college. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice*, 1(1).
- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*: Penguin.
- Campbell-Peralta, P. J. (1995). *Reducing suspensions of minority males through a group guidance/mentoring intervention program*. (Master of Science), Nova Southeastern University.

- Carpenter, K., & Johnson, L. L. (1991). Program organization. In R. F. Flippo & D. C. Caverly (Eds.), *College reading and study strategy programs* (pp. 28-69). Newark: International Reading Association.
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Collins, A., Brown, J. S., & Newman, S. E. (1989). Cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching the crafts of reading, writing, and mathematics. In L. B. Resnick (Ed.), *Knowing, learning, and instruction: Essays in honor of robert glaser* (pp. 453-494). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ender, S. C., & Newton, F. B. (2000). *Students helping students: A guide for peer educators on college campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Fantuzzo, J. W., Riggio, R. E., Connelly, S., & Dimeff, L. A. (1989). Effects of reciprocal peer tutoring on academic achievement and psychological adjustment: A component analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *81*(2), 173-177.
- Foot, H., & Howe, C. (1998). The psychoeducational basis of peer-assisted learning. In K. J. Topping & S. Ehly (Eds.), *Peer-assisted learning*: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York City: Basic Books.

Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Boston: Pearson.

Hamilton, L. T. (2013). *Paying for the party*: Harvard University Press.

Hart Research Associates. (2010). Raising the bar: Employers' views on college learning in the wake of the economic downturn: Hart Research Associates.

Hodges, R., & White, W. G. (2001). Encouraging high-risk student participation in tutoring and supplemental instruction. *Journal of Developmental Education, 24*(3), 2-10.

Horowitz, H. L. (1987). *Campus life: Undergraduate cultures from the end of the eighteenth century to present*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Humphreys, E. R. (1874). *College tutor Advertisement*. Boston.

Hutchens, K., Deffendall, M., & Peabody, M. (2011). Supporting first generation college students. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice, 1*(1).

Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z., Vogt, K., & Leonard, J. B. (2007). Living-learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher Education, 48*(4), 403-434.

Jaschik, S. (2012). Rejected for being in-state. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved August 14, 2012, from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/08/13/one-cal-state-department-refuses-let-out-staters-over-state-residents>

- Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 525-542.
- Jones, L., Castellanos, J., & Cole, D. (2002). Examining the ethnic minority student experience at predominately white institutions: A case study. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 1*(1), 19-39.
- Keup, J. (2006) Promoting new-student success: Assessing academic development and achievement among first-year students. In J. H. Schuh & E. J. Whitt (Series Ed.), *New Directions for Student Services: Vol. 114. Understanding Students in Transition: Trends and Issues*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (Second ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lewis, K. A. (2010). *Developmental dimensions of personal epistemology: Undergraduate reflections on academic life*. (PhD), University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.
- Lewis, K. A., & Breslin, J. D. (2012). United we stand, divided we fall: An intentionally inclusive model of peer tutoring for co-curricular academic

support. Louisville, KY: Poster presented at the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education Student Success Summit.

Lewis, K. A., & Jensen, J. M. (2006). *Homo academicus at play: An ethnographic study of the academic work of first year students*. Paper presented at the 31st Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Anaheim, CA.

Magin, D. J., & Churches, A. E. (1995). Peer tutoring in engineering design: A case study. *Studies in Higher Education, 20*(1), 73-85.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interpretive approach* (Vol. 41). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Mazur, E. (1997). *Peer instruction: A user's manual*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs, 30*(3), 1771-1800.

Moust, J. H. C., & Schmidt, H. G. (1995). Facilitating small-group learning: A comparison of student and staff tutors' behavior. *Instructional Science, 22*, 287-301.

Nespor, J. (1990). Curriculum and conversions of capital in the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 22*(3), 217-232.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Perry, W. (1981). Cognitive and ethical growth: The making of meaning. In A.W. Chickering & Associates (Ed.), *The modern american college: Responding*

- to the new realities of diverse students and a changing society* (pp. 76-116). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education, 28*(3), 261-277.
- Rendon, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education, 19*(1), 33-51.
- Riesmann, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, J. (2010). Study: College grads unprepared for workplace. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved September 5, 2012, from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127230009>
- Royal, K. D. (2007). *Results of the study assessment*. University of Kentucky. Unpublished report. Lexington, KY.
- Schleyer, G. K., Langdon, G. S., & James, S. (2005). Peer tutoring in conceptual design. *European Journal of Engineering Education, 30*(2), 245-254.
- Sheets, R. (2013a, December 6, 2012). Current certified tutor training programs. Retrieved May 23, 2013, from http://www.crla.net/ittpc/current_certifications.htm

- Sheets, R. (2013b, December 6, 2012). Itpc certification requirements.
Retrieved May 23, 2013, from
http://www.crla.net/itpc/certification_requirements.htm
- Smith, T. (2008). Integrating undergraduate peer mentors into liberal arts courses: A pilot study. *Innovative Higher Education, 33*, 49-63.
- Sobral, D. T. (2002). Cross-year peer tutoring experience in a medical school: Conditions and outcomes for student tutors. *MEDICAL EDUCATION, 36*, 1064-1070.
- Topping, K. J. (1996). The effectiveness of peer tutoring in further and higher education: A typology and review of the literature. *Higher Education, 32*(3), 321-345.
- Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. A. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(6), 577-596.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitt, E. J., Nesheim, B. E., Guentzel, M. J., Kellogg, A. H., McDonald, W. M., & Wells, C. A. (2008). "Principles of good practice" for academic and student

affairs partnership programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(3), 235-249.

Wilson, T. (1999). You know i'm triracial, right? In K. Manning (Ed.), *Giving voice to critical campus issues* (pp. 113-133). Lanham, Maryland: American College Personnel Association.

Yasutake, D., & Bryan, T. (1996). The effects of combining peer tutoring and attribution training on students' perceived self-competence. *Remedial & Special Education*, 17(2), 83-92.

Vita

James D. Breslin

Education

Master of Science, 2009
University of Kentucky
Higher Education

Bachelor of Arts, 2003
University of Notre Dame
Anthropology

Professional Experience

January 2011 – Present: Associate Director, Academic Enhancement, University of Kentucky

May 2006 – January 2011: Assistant Director, Academic Enhancement, University of Kentucky

January 2005 – May 2006: Teaching Assistant, Academic Enhancement, University of Kentucky

Publications

Breslin, J. D. (in press). An Allied Framework for Social Learning in Peer Tutoring Contexts. In Sanders, L. (Ed.) *Learning Centers in the 21st Century: Design, Delivery, and Performance*. National College Learning Center Association.

Breslin, J. D. & Voigts, K. (in press). Incorporating Critical Constituents: Integrating Students into Assessment Planning and Analysis. *Briefs on Academic Support in Higher Education*. In Shepherd, R. & Breslin, J.D. (Eds.) ACPA Academic Support Monograph Series.

Hutchens, N. M., Sun, J., Blanchard, J, & Breslin, J. D. (2014). Employee or Student?: The First Amendment and Student Speech Arising in Practica and Internships. *West's Education Law Reporter*, 306(2), 597-616.

Hutchens, N. M., Sun, J., & Breslin, J. D. (2013). A (Virtual) Land of Confusion with College Students' Online Speech: Introducing the Curricular Nexus Test. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law*, 16(1).

Breslin, J. D. (2011). Evidence-Based or Just Good for the Soul? Examining the Efficacy of Peer Tutoring in College. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice*, 1(1).

Breslin, J. D. (2009). Employing LASSI in a Proactive, Preventive Model: Academic Enhancement at the University of Kentucky. *LASSI in Action: Learning from the Experiences of Fellow Educators*, 9(5).