

University of San Diego

Digital USD

M.A. in Higher Education Leadership: Action
Research Projects

School of Leadership and Education Sciences:
Student Scholarship & Creative Works

Spring 4-22-2021

Appreciating Empathy: How Writing Center Collaborations Inform Leadership Development for Student Wellness and Success

Hugo Werstler

University of San Diego, werstlerhu@sandiego.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-mahel-action>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Digital USD Citation

Werstler, Hugo, "Appreciating Empathy: How Writing Center Collaborations Inform Leadership Development for Student Wellness and Success" (2021). *M.A. in Higher Education Leadership: Action Research Projects*. 67.

<https://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-mahel-action/67>

This Action research project: Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Leadership and Education Sciences: Student Scholarship & Creative Works at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in M.A. in Higher Education Leadership: Action Research Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.

Appreciating Empathy: How Writing Center Collaborations Inform Leadership Development for
Student Wellness and Success

Hugo E. Werstler

The University of San Diego

May 2021

Table of Contents

Abstract..... 4

Literature Review 6

 Empathy and Relationship Development in Higher Education 6

 Self-Efficacy as a Result of Collaboration..... 7

 Writing Centers 9

Context..... 10

Action Research Model 12

 Methodology 13

Cycle I..... 16

 Define, Cycle I 16

 Discover, Cycle I 16

 Dream, Design, & Delivery, Cycle I..... 18

Cycle II 20

 Define, Cycle II..... 20

 Discovery and Dreaming, Cycle II 21

 Need for empathy training in higher education. 23

 Practicing empathy in real time. 23

 Collaboration in action..... 24

 Workshop design and challenges..... 24

 Design and Distribute, Cycle II 26

Cycle III 26

 Define, Cycle III 26

 Design, Cycle III..... 27

 Discovery, Cycle III..... 29

Limitations 31

 The limitations for this project cover a wide spectrum of variables. They range from the amount of data collected all the way to a global pandemic. While each limit impacted the project in some way, the experience gained due to the limitations was also beneficial to my overall learning experience as a researcher. 31

 COVID-19..... 31

Limited Participation in the Cycles of Research.....	32
Time Allocation for the Workshop.....	32
Perspective Limited to One Campus.....	33
Conclusion	33
Major Findings.....	33
Empathy as a necessary skill for employees in higher education.	33
The use of appreciative inquiry for leadership development.....	35
Recommendations.....	36
Personal Growth.....	37
References.....	39
Appendix A Postconsultation Memo.....	43
Appendix B Recruitment Email for Cycle II.....	45
Appendix C Interview Questions for Cycle II.....	46
Appendix D Postinterview Memo	47
Appendix E Cycle III Workshop Presentation Slides.....	48
Appendix F Postworkshop Moderator Memo	56
Appendix G Postworkshop Survey.....	57

Abstract

The purpose of my action research project was to understand the practice of collaboration within the University of San Diego's Writing Center as an emerging leader in Higher Education. The goal of this study was to explore the benefits of empathy and relationship development as practiced by the Writing Center to develop leadership strategies for other campus organizations that regularly interact with the institution's student population. Using several research cycles of Appreciative Inquiry, I observed that the Writing Center functions as a stellar example of collaboration, focusing on peer-to-peer writing consultations with an emphasis on student empathy and relationship development. Working with leaders of the campus community, I then developed a workshop that highlights this style of collaboration as an educational practice and its potential benefits towards students' academic success and sense of belonging to the campus community.

Appreciating Empathy: How Writing Center Collaborations Informs Leadership Development
for Student Wellness and Success

As an employee of a higher education institution, the values of student success and wellness have steered both my career and educational goals. My aspirations are to one day establish myself as a leader of a campus community to better serve students in their pursuit of creativity, knowledge, and self-efficacy. Based upon this leadership philosophy, I constructed this project to better understand the student population that I interacted with daily, and I could acquire the skills to better assist them in their academic pursuits.

This presented me an opportunity to observe an organization of students at the University of San Diego (USD) that could inform my understanding on student culture and needs. My full-time role as the executive assistant of the Writing Program required that I work closely with the students of the USD Writing Center, an academic learning service that had been established in the 1979-1980 academic year. Their main service of providing in-person, peer-to-peer collaboration, based on principles of self-efficacy and positive reinforcement, aligned with my leadership philosophy and was the foundation for this project.

Having worked closely with the Writing Center and seeing the successful outcomes generated from the collaborations made between students, I formulated the following research questions for this study: How can collaboration, as practiced by the USD Writing Center, inform the development of leadership in higher education? How can this collected knowledge then be utilized and implemented in the service of the USD Writing Center and the campus community? In asking these fundamental questions, I sought to observe the effective practice of collaboration by an academic service organization to understand what key characteristics were taking place during these connections. I deduced that through my observations, I could utilize these

characteristics in the improvement of other campus services and the connection made between the student and employee populations at USD.

Furthermore, I recognized the need to develop these leadership strategies to address a rising problem in a lack of connection felt by college students to their institutions and their campus community. This crucial need for students' sense of belonging has been attributed to large institutional goals for USD, including student retention, academic success, and the development of a supportive campus culture. Recently, research and development have gravitated towards student identity and connection, such as the re-naming of buildings and structures on campus that promote inclusive excellence, or the creation of centers that provide services to specific student populations. This study is part of the larger conversation of the evolution of colleges and university as organizations and the role they play in the development of emerging adults and society. It was completed to provide further understanding of the student needs and a leadership strategy on how to address them.

Literature Review

I began the literature review for this project in 2019, looking to better understand the practice of collaboration in higher education and its effect on student wellness and success. I also reviewed literature on writing center history and pedagogy to understand if there was a correlation between their services and the services provided by other campus organizations. Finally, after observing the use of empathy in the first cycle of research, I reviewed literature on its importance in students' development and success.

Empathy and Relationship Development in Higher Education

A key concept of this study is the role empathy and relationship development have in student success and wellbeing. I have defined the term *empathy* based on Theresa Wiseman's 1996 article, "A concept analysis of empathy." The article concluded that empathy as a concept included four underlying attributes: (a) seeing the world as others see it, (b) understanding another's current feelings, (c) being nonjudgmental, and (d) communicating the understanding (Wiseman, 1996). All these attributes were observed in some way in the cycles of research conducted for this study and informed the development of the concluding leadership strategy.

Relationship development was defined for this study by its correlation to the concept of students' need for a *sense of belonging*. Strayhorn (2012) explained this concept as well as its importance stating, "Belonging - with peers, in the classroom, or on campus - is a critical dimension of success at college. It can affect a student's degree of academic adjustment, achievement, aspirations, or even whether a student stays in school" (p. i). Strayhorn further explained this important aspect of a student's experience in college is affected by their ability to connect to other members of their campus community as stated later in the book's introduction, "I will say this many times in different ways: positive interpersonal, peer interactions increase students' sense of belonging and sense of belonging leads to student success..." (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3).

Self-Efficacy as a Result of Collaboration

Collaboration, as an educational practice can be understood as a form of learning rhetoric by means of social interaction and negotiation. As stated in the article by Leahy (1990), "Hardly anything is written, be it literary or transactional, is the work of one person from beginning to end" (para. 30). This characterization mirrors that of collaboration in practice utilized in writing centers as well as in the workforce as I have experienced firsthand as an executive assistant as

well as establish the core tenets of leadership that will be built upon through the course of this study.

As stated earlier, collaboration as an educational tool in the classroom faces some contention, disputed by some educational professionals as resulting in “academic weakness” (Young, 1992, p. 3). This is brought on by the notion that academic work that is delegated out leaves students unable to comprehend information on their own. However, the legitimacy of collaboration can be supported through the notion of developing self-efficacy as result of its practice.

The background literature describes the impact of action research projects (Fraser, 2013; Salem, 2016; Takaku & Williams, 2011) on self-efficacy. In one such case, the action research project of Fraser (2013) sought to better understand student self-efficacy as it related to their academic success. Fraser observed that students identified as being in “academic difficulty” are challenged to overcome self-doubt and disbelief in their ability to achieve academic success. Their study worked to better understand this tendency and establish a course of action for support, and she indicated the largest theme to be addressed by the study was a “desire for connection” (Fraser, 2013, p. 40) with their institution. Collaboration is thus presented as a solution as stated in the project’s conclusion, “Possibly the most obvious implication that comes from this research is the call for academic counselors to work towards the creation of stronger relationships with their students” (Fraser, 2013, p. 42).

In another case, the correlation between self-efficacy and writing centers was directly recognized by Takaku and Williams (2011) in their study of determining student’s development of self-efficacy based on their abilities to seek help, in this case seeking out the services from a writing center. Their results differed with the general idea on the source of self-efficacy,

believing it to be correlated to the act of seeking help in the first place instead of the practice of collaboration with a writing center consultant that follows. Nonetheless, the study contributes to the legitimacy of collaboration as an educational practice and further develops my understanding of student self-efficacy in relation to the USD Writing Center.

Writing Centers

In the second half of the twentieth century, due to a high volume of student acceptances in colleges and universities (Boquet & Lerner, 2008), as well as reported decreases in written skills in the 1970's (Takaku & Williams, 2011), there was a surge of writing center formation and usage. Since then, college writing centers have served to assist their institutions' English departments as a service to further develop students' rhetorical skills (North, 1984).

Generally, the fundamental practice of writing centers is to utilize peer-to-peer student collaboration and follow policies that emphasize *higher order concerns*. This means veering away from remedial services that focus on *low order concerns* such grammatical errors and editing. North (1984) summarized writing centers in the following way: "Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (p. 438). The statement encapsulates the purpose of writing centers in developing students' rhetoric skills for students to develop confidence and self-efficacy as writers.

Furthermore, much of literature regarding writing centers shared a common theme of adversity. Many of the articles addressed a lack of understanding or support for writing centers from their larger campus communities. The results of this vary, with some centers being absorbed by larger student support services while others are pushed into far removed corners of campuses (Boquet & Lerner, 2008; Leahy, 1990; North, 1984; Salem, 2016). In the case of the USD Writing Center, it has been fortunate to be well supported by the USD's English department

and considered by the university's College of Arts and Science as an essential service for students on campus. However, the Center's own history of transitions into smaller spaces over the past 40 years demonstrates this theme found across the background literature.

Characterized by Richard Leahy (1990), writing centers occupy a space that is "not exactly an academic department; it doesn't graduate majors or (usually) offer credit. It is more of a support facility" (para. 3). Centers were founded to assist their institutions with the development of students' rhetorical skills, and in that process became pseudo educators while still being portrayed as an editing service.

The ambiguity thus lies in the actual purpose of writing centers being unclear to campus communities— "to produce better writers, not better writing" (North, 1984, p. 438, para. 2). This theme of ambiguity or misconception is also true for the practice of collaboration. There is background literature that refers to this theme as a point of contention that may be adding to the challenges faced by writing centers in higher education. In his study on collaboration and self-efficacy, Art Young (1992), described that there are some education professionals who do not believe it serves to develop students' knowledge or experience. In their opinion, collaboration is seen as shortcut for educators to not have to assign work to each individual student and an opportunity for students to split the information apart between group members, without understanding full concepts being addressed.

Context

The University of San Diego is a nonprofit, Roman Catholic private institute located in San Diego, California. It enrolls approximately 8,000 students each academic year, the split being about 5,000 undergraduate students to 3,000 graduate students. It offers 42 Undergraduate

majors, 35 Master's degrees, five master of law degrees, three doctoral degrees, and one juris doctorate degree (University of San Diego, 2019).

The USD Writing Center was founded in the 1977-78 academic year, staffed by student consultants currently enrolled in an on-campus academic program with supervision and funding coming from the Writing Program and faculty. The center provides service to all majors and degrees seeking help at any stage of the writing process on academic writing assignments. The staff consists of 35–40 students, enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

Consultants receive advance writing course credit as compensation for consulting for the Writing Center, apart from staff coordinators and graduate consultants receiving wages as well. The Writing Center recently transitioned into a new location on campus, the Student Learning Commons, being given more space and updated facilities. The building itself was completed in the summer of 2020 and is in a prominent location, situated next to the institution's main library, historical academic facilities, graduate schools, and restaurants. It is projected to impact the traffic of students visiting the writing center dramatically.

This Action Research project was conceptualized in 2019 at which point it had a different timeline and trajectory for completion. It was necessary to adapt the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the methodology utilized for the cycles of research and my perspective on the data that was collected. Furthermore, this project's main theme of collaboration was defined at the time by the interactions made between persons in a physical setting. That definition evolved at an expedited rate as meetings and collaborations were forced to take place on digital platforms instead.

These adaptations also altered my mindset as a researcher and employee of higher education. What I once considered valuable or necessary components of the role I held at the

university was shifted due to crisis management. Cultural norms like the clothing I wore during work hours were deemed unnecessary when working from home on a consistent basis.

Interactions between colleagues and students became less professional and more casual when the main method of communication was email.

Finally, the evolution during the COVID-19 pandemic that I experienced has radically simplified the philosophy I follow as an aspiring leader in higher education. As a leader, my goal is to cultivate the creativity and empowerment of students, actively listening to their needs as individuals and collaborating with them towards their pursuit of academic excellence and social development. Each person who joins a campus community has a story that deserves to be heard and if we take the time to listen, can inspire us to create lasting change for generations to come.

Action Research Model

For this study, I have selected Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for the action research methodology to follow due to its primary focus on improvement and growth versus other methodologies that focus instead on criticism and change. To summarize the methodology, as stated by Center for Appreciative Inquiry (2015), “AI begins by identifying [a] positive core and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, sharpen vision, and inspire action for change” (para. 2).

The selection came from the core recognition that within most methodology styles lies an assumption of criticism. I reflected on using an action research methodology that requires criticism to evoke development and change. It would have been constructive and healthy to utilize these other methods in the development of myself as an emerging leader in higher education and for an organization such as the USD Writing Center. However, it also causes friction as a beginning researcher whose position within an organization may be strained in the

observation and acknowledgment of criticisms. Furthermore, these methodologies do not adhere to my initial observation that drove my research questions to study the Center's use of collaboration to inform my leadership development.

As explained by its core creators, Cooperrider, Godwin, and Stavros (2015), "At its heart, AI is about the search for the best in people, their organizations, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them" (p. 97). This definition is what I acknowledged aligned with my research topic, anticipated results, as well as my leadership philosophy in higher education. I viewed this study as an exciting opportunity to observe and collaborate with individuals with unique insight on the questions I was trying to answer and work alongside them to develop strategies that would benefit the entire USD community.

This positive core is what the methodology seeks to build upon for any inquiry being made of organizational life. As an individual this spoke to me, especially in the context of creating positive change in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the university community. Its message that "every organization and community has many untapped and rich accounts of the positive..." (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8) spoke directly to the effect I wanted my study to have on the community. To recognize their potential to create positive change for each other and future generations.

Methodology

From the established positive core, AI follows a methodology of actions known as either the 4 "D" model or 5 "D" model (The additional step, *define*, is sometimes not included if the inquiry or goal is already clear to its participants). The steps of the 4 or 5 "D" model are as follows: define, discover, dream, design, and deliver.

The model directs participants to first define their inquiry or goal in using AI, establishing their purpose in using the methodology. This first initial or preliminary step also further establishes the principles of the positive core that is central to AI. One of these classic principles, known as the simultaneity principle, states that by merely asking a question about a component of organizational life, the process of creating change has already begun. “The questions we ask set the stage for what we find, and what we discover (the data) becomes the linguistic material, the stories, out of which the future is conceived and constructed” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 50).

Next, in discovery, participants are given an opportunity for dialog to understand their positive core. “During the discovery phase, people throughout a system connect to study examples of what makes them their best, to analyze and map their positive core, and to investigate their root causes of success” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 25). Discovery allows participants of AI to then reflect on the inquiry or purpose that was earlier defined and begin to dream and design effective change.

These next steps allow for incredible creativity and engagement in the system that is being changed through the AI methodology. As explained by Cooperider and Whitney, “It is an invitation to people to lift their sights, exercise their imagination, and discuss what their organization could look like if it fully aligned around its strengths and aspirations” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 27). The Dream and Design phases of AI also integrate more classic principles of the methodology, including what are known as the Poetic and Anticipatory principles. The dream and design stages ask that participants consider the endless possibilities between “the means and end of inquiry” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 51), liken to the endless interpretations one could make on poetry or art. The Poetic principle asks that

participants not limit their inquiry but imagine all potential outcomes as a reality. This further drives the positive core of the AI methodology, along with the Anticipatory principle, which states that positive imagery denotes positive action or change. By the time the 4 or 5 “D” steps of AI reaches, distribute, there is an established excitement or enthusiasm in delivery of the ideas that were discussed throughout the process of using AI.

This final step, also referred to as deliver or even destiny, seeks to build upon what was earlier discovered and imagined, now compounded towards the larger organization. Participants can share and practice the information gathered, allowing for new participants and further development of ideas. Summarized by Cooperrider and Whitney, this step is about, “Strengthening the affirmative capability of the whole system, enabling it to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 16). It is at this point that AI returns to its beginning stages and starts anew, reflecting on the progress and development of the previous cycle to define new inquiry and further promote the positive change that is developed through its process.

Appreciative inquiry is a powerful tool for action research due to its core philosophy of positive change. It asks participants and researchers alike to align their studies with the belief that the questions they are seeking to answer have meaning and the potential to invoke great change. This philosophy impacted not only the methods used in the cycles of research for this study but also its results, recommendations, and who I am as a researcher. In the following sections detailing my cycles of research, I have titled sub-sections by the steps of AI that I was currently following at the time to better understand the practical use of the methodology as a research tool.

Cycle I

The first cycle of research for this study consisted of observations of peer-to-peer writing consultations hosted by the USD Writing Center, followed by the coding of the data collected and finally personal reflection. Following the methodology of AI, allowed for new discoveries to be made and directly informed the development of the subsequent cycle of research.

Define, Cycle I

I prepared for the first cycle of research by defining my inquiry based on my research questions and the BART system of group and organizational analysis (Green and Molenkamp, 2005). This system was crucial in my development as an emerging leader in higher education and introduced me to four key elements in group or organizational analysis: boundary, authority, role, and task. Each of these elements are observable and assist in the data collection of crucial themes that are displayed in group activities such as the collaborations taking place in the USD Writing Center. I utilized the BART system to establish my role and the boundary in participating in the writing consultation, participating exclusively as a silent observer. I also established that my task differed from the task of student-writer and consultant, in which I would focus less on the actual work that they were collaborating on and more on observing their interactions with each other.

Discover, Cycle I

The time frame of Cycle I was as follows: During the Fall 2020 semester, I reached out to the USD Writing Center community to ask if any consultants would be comfortable with me observing their consultations as a silent observer. The original intention was to observe the consultations in that physical space of the Writing Center. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent health guidelines established by USD, the Writing Center had

transitioned their service fully to an online platform in which they could meet with students remotely via web conferencing software. This allowed the Center to continue their consultations synchronously which adhered to the fundamental characteristic of their provided services.

Thus, all my observations were conducted remotely, via the web-conferencing software Zoom and WCONLINE. From my original invitation, which was made verbally during a staff meeting, I received email invitations from six consultants to observe an upcoming consultation that they would be having with a student-writer. From the six invitations, I was able to attend five sessions between the dates of November 9th to November 12th. Each session lasted approximately one hour, per the Center's policy, and at the beginning of each session I was given a moment to introduce myself and my research questions. Following this, I both muted my computer's internal microphone and turned off the camera that showed my profile. This was done to be the least intrusive to the session as possible. As the session took place, I took observational notes by hand, remarking not only the dynamic between the two participants but also the reactions that I had as an observer at present. At the end of each session, I thanked the consultants and student-writer for their participation and closed the web-conferencing software.

At the conclusion of the five observations, I began to code my notes for prominent themes and characteristics shown during the collaborations. My coding included the following themes: active listening, empathy, flexibility, positive criticism and reinforcement, relationship development, and vulnerability. Of these themes, the two most prevalent across all the collaborations that I observed were the themes of Empathy and Relationship development. In most of the sessions observed the student-writer expressed vulnerability in their ability to write, which was acknowledged and encouraged by the consultants. Some quotes that demonstrated this interaction made during the collaboration included, "From what you told me, what I hear is

the effect is had on you” and “That’s Ok, that’s what you’re here for.” The student-writer in turn shared their perspective on how this style of collaboration affected them, demonstrated in statements such as, “It feels great to bounce ideas off of each other” and “I feel a lot more confident writing about this.”

From this coding, I was able to reflect on the data in relation to my research questions and as a result I modified not only my understanding and definition of peer-to-peer collaboration but also the direction of my research.

Dream, Design, & Delivery, Cycle I

My first major reflection on the data collected from Cycle I was that the Writing Center consultants share a common mindset towards empathy and relationship development with the students that visit the Center for assistance. Their strategy to achieve success with students is to first understand who they are on some personal level and provide the information that the student-writer can use on their own later. This seems to be rooted in the consultants on-boarding training in which they are asked to uphold two fundamental qualities as consultants: empathy and assertiveness. Here is the description from the training manual issued to new consultants,

“The purpose of consulting is to help students in the writing and learning process. Thus, as consultants, they provide resources, help clarify writing concepts, and explain the writing process. The top two characteristics of a USD Writing Center consultant are: empathy, the ability to understand what the student writer is feeling; and assertiveness, the ability to feel confident as a consultant” (The University of San Diego Writing Center, 2021).

Furthermore, the interaction that I observed during the collaborations show a clear value to create a safe place for vulnerability which in turn further develops empathy. Student-writers

express their difficulty with writing techniques and theory which are acknowledged and affirmed by the consultant. They can create a common language that is built from their shared experiences as college students, from which the consultant can then modify their resources to best meet the needs of the student.

This was a revelation, as it presented a unique and powerful opportunity to adapt my research towards a broader purpose to the campus community. My second research question sought to understand how I could utilize the information collected in this study as an emerging leader in higher education. To this end, I reflected on how developing empathy for students that I serve as an employee of the university could produce better outcomes for their academic and social experience at USD. There was already an established slogan by the university known as the “USD Culture of Care” but often I have wondered how well it is utilized or if its potential is properly explained to the campus community. Continuing with the methodology of AI, I began to dream of a potential training or informational seminar from which I could present my findings as a supplemental tool to members of the campus community. If I could create a visualization of my action research findings in a succinct way, I theorized that employees such as myself and even campus leaders would recognize the benefits of introducing this method of collaboration in their daily work with students and even other campus employees. Thus, I formulated the design of my next cycle of research to understand the potential of this idea.

I planned out the next cycle of research, which would seek to adapt my original research questions as well as refine this idea of a final product that could be designed from the findings of my research. The final step of the AI methodology for cycle I, delivery, or destiny, was adapted into the second cycle of research as I invited campus community members to participate in my research.

Cycle II

The second cycle of research for this study consisted of individual interviews with campus administrators and staff on the findings from Cycle I as well as presented an opportunity to collaborate with them on the design of the final cycle of research. Following the methodology of AI, Cycle II consisted of first defining my inquiry based on my research questions in conjunction with the findings from the previous cycle, next, discovering the positive outcomes on empathy in the workplace in the context of the current situation facing the university, and finally designing a workshop based on that exact premise. Like cycle I, the final step of the AI methodology, delivery, was integrated into the beginning of the third and final cycle of research. AI was also utilized in the interview process themselves, giving an opportunity to the participants to utilize the methodology in the dialogue that we shared.

Define, Cycle II

Cycle II began with inviting several members of the campus community to participate in individual interviews in the early months of 2021. Beginning February 8th, 2021, I sent out email messages to a group of 15 employees of the University of San Diego that I identified as leaders of the campus community. I had determined that I wanted to gain the perspective of administrators of the campus community for specific reasons. The Higher Education Leadership Program provided by the School of Leadership and Educational Sciences at USD had already provided the opportunity to interact and learn from these individuals over the multiple courses that it provided. However, in my initial reflection on what to study for this action research project I realized that I wanted to create an opportunity for myself to also collaborate with campus leaders to further experience and understand the careers that I am currently seeking to pursue as an emerging leader in higher education.

Furthermore, both through my master's program at SOLES and through my current position in the College of Arts and Sciences at USD, I have learned to appreciate the impact and importance that the administration has on the institution. As campus leaders they not only design and operate the institutions policies and procedures but often set the standard for community culture. Part of the reflection on the findings from Cycle I was the conclusion that I wanted to create an outcome from this study that would be far reaching to the campus community. To make that outcome a reality, I would need the advice and input of current administrators.

Discovery and Dreaming, Cycle II

The goal of Cycle II was to be able to interview at least five of these community leaders and to have them represent a diverse group of experience and perspective on their work for the university. From the fifteen administrators selected, the campus organizations represented included the Athletics Department, Human Resources, Financial Aid, the English Department, the Mathematics Department, the Office of Student Affairs, the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, the Office of the Dean for the College of Arts and Science, and the School of Leadership and Education Sciences. I also made my selection based on the criteria that I had a previous or current relationship with the individual to increase my chances that they would respond to my invitation and participate in the study (The email invitation used can be found in the Appendices B). Of the fifteen administrators selected, nine responded to the email invitation, with two declining due to scheduling conflicts. The seven available administrators were scheduled for interviews from February 11th until February 23rd.

The interviews were structured as collaborations, with open ended questions to promote the methodology of AI over the course of the interview. While the interview questions were

individually curtailed to the position of the administrator, the format of the interviews all adhered to the following guidelines:

- Question 1: Define—What does the administrator do at work? How do they interact with students daily? These questions were meant to help focus the participant in reflecting on the role that they serve on campus.
- Question 2: Discovery—Where does the administrator practice or observe empathy in their work? After learning about the practices of collaboration in the USD Writing Center and its emphasis on empathy, this question allows the participants to observe similar characteristics in their own work.
- Question 3: Dream—Could a workshop on empathy be useful to you or your office? This question offers the participants an opportunity to reflect on their own organization and the potential for positive change by participating in a workshop involving empathy in the workplace.
- Question 4: Design—What other variables should I consider? What barriers should I consider might restrict me? This question sought to build off the expansive pool of experience that the participants had as leaders in higher education. From their perspectives they could advise me in the construction of a workshop on empathy with the greatest chance of success.

The interviews lasted between thirty minutes to one hour each, and once complete, I filled out a post interview memo to track my initial reaction. Each interview was recorded using the Zoom software and later transcribed using the online software *Happy Scribe*. The data that I collected covered several themes that were later coded and utilized in the construction of Cycle III's workshop.

Need for empathy training in higher education. In all seven interviews that I conducted; the administrators admitted to the need for empathy development in Higher Education careers. When asking about their daily interactions with students, several of the campus leaders defined their roles as not student-facing and lacked the opportunity to connect with them. One administrator stated:

I think it's really important to have training to handle or deal with students, because that is why we're here. But oftentimes we just don't know how to handle situations or maybe we treat them like colleagues and they're not... Maybe they're just freshly graduated from high school. And although they're not kids or the definition of what a kid is, they're still kids. I certainly have never gone through training and I think that after 12 years just trying to figure out how to best talk to students and relate...So I think, there's definitely a gap to fill.

This needs assessment was only compounded further when bringing in the current context of retention of students in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated by another campus leader, “When you're losing enrollment and I think it's across the board, everyone's losing enrollment, but it's like, what can we do to give you the best experience to make sure that that you're here, that you're a Torero? That we're, you know, we're seeing you through.” The need to connect with the student population had dramatically increased, as their ability to experience the campus culture slowly transitioned back from remote learning and they were assessing if USD was the best place to continue their college careers. I would use this theme in design of the workshop of cycle III, primarily in the initial Defining step that would take place.

Practicing empathy in real time. Due to the design of the interview structure utilizing

AI, several administrators showed empathy in real time using personal storytelling and statements of vulnerability. As a result, the narrations that were shared supported my observations of the Writing Center's style of collaboration. The administrators made personal connections ranging from their own children receiving similar styles of academic support and the success it produced, to actively using relationship development as a tool to help struggling students in a previous role. They were examples of the third step of AI, dreaming, and further developed my understanding of the practical application of the methodology which I sought to reproduce in the third cycle of research.

Collaboration in action. Another theme like the practice of empathy in real time was the observable collaboration that took place in each interview. Also based upon the interview structure utilizing AI, the open-ended questions offered an opportunity for collaboration between the campus leaders and myself as the researcher. This included examples such as recommended literature to develop my research further, offices or departments well suited for utilizing the findings of this study and sharing unique perspectives into the roles of faculty and administrators on a college campus. This theme also presented itself in each interview in the recommendations offered in the design of the workshop for the third cycle of research

Workshop design and challenges. The fourth theme that was coded were the design aspects for the workshop that would be featured in the third cycle of research and the potential challenges in implementing it. The theme was in conjunction with the last question asked in each interview regarding how to implement sharing my findings on empathy in Higher Education. As mentioned earlier in this section, the information that I had gathered from cycles I and II would be presented as a workshop in cycle III. This decision was made in part due to the coded theme of how to best deliver the information. The campus leaders that I interviewed advised in using

interactive workshops as stated in the following example:

. . . when you're talking about it together, when you're developing something together with someone with something, meaning a group that that's going to hold. As opposed to sitting listening to a lecture. So I think any time you can do a small group even to discuss a certain thing so that people can kind of formulate ideas together, it's going to support that theory and it's going to be more effective in terms of how to do this and responding to people's varied learning styles.

The primary reason to utilize this approach was in part understanding who the audience would most likely be. The challenge in sharing the information to faculty and staff is that they would come into an employee training or seminar with preconceived notions and experience regarding empathy and may be less interested in participating. As stated in one interview:

. . . so what persuasive strategies can you use to appeal to that sense of 'I'm the expert and here's how I can make you better develop a connection with your student'? . . . if you can have it as student success or student achievement or student centered, we're doing this for students and it's for the student, that goes a long way with helping them kind of diffuse their resistance to the outcomes, not towards you.

By delivering the information through an interactive workshop, it allows the audience to take an active role in how the information is being presented to them. It would be adaptive to the responses generated by the participants, and in turn become their own experiences and actions being shared. Doing so not only engages the participants on an individual level, but also would serve to suppress possible negative reactions to the information. By offering the material as a collaboration towards the mutual benefit of the student population, the participants can feel invested in the information provided by the workshop.

Design and Distribute, Cycle II

Built upon the themes and advice of the interview participants, I began the construction of the workshop that would be presented in the third and final cycle of research. I outlined the workshop using the AI methodology for multiple reasons. First, I had become familiar with the 4 ‘D’ Steps process of AI and could replicate it into the workshop. Secondly, I had begun to see the positive effects associated with using the AI methodology and its ability to create collaborative interactions.

At the conclusion of my second cycle of research, I was able to reflect once again on research questions. My observations on empathy development and the experiences shared with me by campus leaders of USD had allowed me to develop a contemporary understanding of collaboration and its importance as an emerging leader in Higher Education. My goal for the third and final research cycle was to practice this collaboration to better understand the second research question.

Cycle III

The final cycle of research consisted of the design and implementation of an online workshop given to the leadership staff of the USD Writing Center. The five participants then completed a postworkshop survey that was coded and analyzed. The cycle concluded with reflection over this last cycle of research as well as the study as a whole. The use of AI was utilized in the structure of the workshop and final reflections. However, the AI “4” “D” model was adapted to fit the conclusion of this study. The steps followed in the third cycle were as follows: define, design, and discovery.

Define, Cycle III

Based on the themes coded from the first and second cycles of research, I reviewed both my research questions and how to address them in a workshop format. My understanding of collaboration as utilized by the USD Writing Center was understood to coincide with the importance of relationship development and empathy. To convey that message to the campus community I would need to create space for others to make similar observations and provide an opportunity for empathy development. This became the goal of the third cycle of research and the foundation of the workshop that was developed.

I must also give credit to Dr. Pamela Villar, my aunt, in recommending a vital insight to a similar conversation happening in her work as a pediatrician. She explained that medical practitioners from Kaiser Permanente in the San Diego region were being given the opportunity to participate in empathy training and part of the information that was distributed was a video illustrating the dialogue of the academic researcher, Brené Brown. Brown has been widely known for her TED talk titled, *The Power of Empathy*. The video that was shown to the Kaiser Permanente community members was taken from Brown's TED talk, using animation to illustrate the main difference between empathy and sympathy (RSA, 2013). Viewing the video myself provided an epiphany for the design of the workshop that I would develop. In defining the meaning of empathy, the video provided the beginning steps of AI and established an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration by anyone who viewed it. I deduced that I could use the short video along with the narration of my observations made of the USD Writing Center to establish a connection to the use of empathy in our work at the university. The goal for this cycle was therefore to utilize the AI methodology to generate conversation of the use of empathy in Higher Education.

Design, Cycle III

Using the YouTube video *Brené Brown on Empathy* as a starting point, I developed the workshop on the 5 ‘D’ step model of AI, with each step providing an opportunity for dialogue and conversation between participants. The goal or ‘positive core’ of the workshop would be to discover the use of empathy already present in the participants and to offer a chance to design new ways to authentically connect with students and other community members. The workshop also utilized a slide show presentation as a visual representation of the information being shown. The slide show consisted of 14 slides in the following format:

- Slides 1, 2, and 3, Introduction: In the first section of the workshop, participants are given an opportunity to introduce themselves and participate in a quick icebreaker that establishes the ‘positive core’ central to the AI methodology. Participants take turns sharing a recent experience in which they experienced success or the success of one of their colleagues.
- Slides 4, 5, 6, and 7, Define: Participants view the YouTube video Brené Brown on Empathy (RSA, 2013) and are then given time to reflect and share their thoughts on how empathy is defined in the video. The video and the subsequent slide that presents the four attributes of empathy (Wiseman, 1996) allows participants to take part in the first ‘D’ step of the AI methodology. There becomes an established goal of understanding empathy as defined by the presentation and feedback by the participating group.
- Slides 8, 9, and 10, Discover: This section compares the observations of empathy made in the USD Writing Center during this study to that of the workshop participants. After explaining the findings and selective quotes from students, participants are given a chance to reflect and evaluate the use of empathy in their own

- work at USD. Through this process, participants further develop the ‘positive core’ that empathetic practice is possible and necessary in their daily work.
- Slide 11, Dream: The workshop next performs an exercise in creative thinking. Before the workshop participants are asked to reflect on a challenging situation they encountered at work. During this exercise, participants are asked to return to that experience and imagine the potential to change its outcome based on what they have learned in the workshop thus far.
 - Slides 12 and 13, Design: This section allows the participants to practice their new observations on empathy in real time. Situations and scenarios are presented by the participants or facilitator. Next, the group collaborates on how to best use empathy to create a successful experience or outcome for the individuals involved. This section also provided an opportunity to share additional resources between participants, further developing their connection to one another and their ability to service the campus community.
 - Slide 14, Distribute: The workshop concludes with the facilitator summarizing the development made by the participants and their ability to take what they learned and apply it directly into their work.

Following the workshop, participants were asked to complete a survey that the moderator can use to develop and improve the procedures of the workshop. For cycle III, the answers collected from this survey were used in the reflection process and final conclusion of this study.

Discovery, Cycle III

After completing the workshop, my main reflection on the third cycle of research was the positivity I felt was generated between myself and the Writing Center leadership staff that

participated. This feeling was reciprocated in answers on the postworkshop survey that the group filled out. When asking the question, how do you see yourself using the information and/or experience of this workshop moving forward? One participant answered: “This information is incredibly useful! Empathy is most definitely an area for reflection that is always fruitful. I will be able to refer back to this workshop when thinking about the complex topic of empathy and how to utilize it.” Their responses all identified the workshop as being successful in sustaining a conversation around empathy and developing connections between its participants.

Most importantly, the workshop was successful at giving the individual members of the group a chance to reflect on their own experiences with empathy and realize its importance in the work that they do at USD. I drew this conclusion after reading the response of one of the participants that said,

It was helpful to have time during the workshop to reflect on the ways that empathy filters into our work at the Writing Center. Talking through different examples of types of student writers we have encountered helped me identify specific situations where empathy can aid in consulting and relationship building. As an aspiring high school teacher, I hope to use the rest of my time as a Writing Consultant/Coordinator as an opportunity to practice empathy while working with students. Actively working on practicing empathy will help me prepare to best serve my students down the road. This workshop reminded me that empathy also extends beyond formal settings of work. There are opportunities to extend empathy to others in everyday life and in daily interactions and relationships.

The outcomes of this workshop expressed in the survey vary from individual to individual, but the overall theme of connecting to the topic of empathy and how to apply to their

work in Higher Education was a shared experience. They also expressed the success of the application of the AI methodology. By having the workshop structured in a manner that cultivating a positive core came first, followed then by actively collaborating about the topic of empathy, the engagement with the participants was successful. As stated by one participant in the postworkshop survey, “I enjoyed the feeling of collaboration within the workshop itself as it was discussing collaboration and empathy.”

Limitations

The limitations for this project cover a wide spectrum of variables. They range from the amount of data collected all the way to a global pandemic. While each limit impacted the project in some way, the experience gained due to the limitations was also beneficial to my overall learning experience as a researcher.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the trajectory of this project and my ability to complete this study as a researcher. Beginning in the March of 2020, my priorities as an employee and graduate student shifted drastically when it was announced that we would send the undergraduate students’ home for the remainder of the Spring semester, followed shortly thereafter by the rest campus community. At that time, my focus was on establishing online procedures for my work, seeking resources to help students move back to their childhood homes, and making difficult decisions on how to interact with my immediate family. Because of this and due to the fact my main community of observation (The USD Writing Center) had just been separated, I placed this study on hiatus.

It was not until late into the Spring 2020 semester that I considered reaching out to the Writing Center to begin observation for the first cycle of research. However, the transition to an

online service was still in its infancy and I did not feel I would be able to observe their use of peer-to-peer collaboration as it would normally occur. Thus, I waited until the following Fall 2020 semester to begin the first cycle of research once their services online had begun to become normalized.

Limited Participation in the Cycles of Research

My observations from my first cycle of research were gathered from only five consultations over the course of the Fall 2020 semester. Before COVID-19, the USD Writing Center would on average conduct 750 consultations in that same time. The sample of data that I was able to use for this study may not reflect important details about the use of peer-to-peer collaboration.

Furthermore, I was only able to facilitate the workshop developed in the third cycle of research to one USD campus organization. The postworkshop survey provided useful information towards developing the workshop, however, I was not able to present it to another group or organization. This limits my understanding of its impact or effectiveness in delivering the information gathered. It is also my opinion that while presenting the workshop to the Writing Center leadership staff had its benefits, it required adapting the information presented to not sound tiring or overused.

Time Allocation for the Workshop

A challenge that was brought up regularly in the second cycle of research was the time allocation necessary to attend the empathy workshop created. The organizational systems utilized at the University of San Diego does not present many opportunities for administrators, staff, or faculty during their daily schedules. The information that is provided may be condensed to accommodate the highest number of participants. While the information provided by the

workshop created in this study can be presented in 20 minutes, the official runtime that includes the dialogue generated between participants is closer to 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Perspective Limited to One Campus

The major findings of this study are limited by the gathered information from only one academic institution. The workshop that was developed through this research was created to allow any employee in Higher Education to participate. However, the strength of the observations made in the USD Writing Center are diminished if the participants are not a part of the USD community. Much of this study is based on the idea of developing connections between organizations on college campuses, and it would benefit to have the stories told of other academic services providing similar experiences to the Writing Center.

Conclusion

Major Findings

The major findings of this study show the impact that empathy and relationship development have on the practice of collaboration in higher education. Academic institutions like USD provide an example of the interconnectivity between individuals in vastly different roles, with the ability to connect and understand one another through our shared stories and experiences. The practice of collaboration is given significant meaning in the context of a campus community like USD because it provides an opportunity for individuals to deepen their relationship with others and in doing so create a lasting impression on their connection to the community. Along with the major finding on the influence of AI on leadership development, the conclusion of this study found that impactful change is possible through the simple actions of active communication and positive thinking.

Empathy as a necessary skill for employees in higher education. The COVID-19

pandemic has directly impacted the culture of Higher Education institutions and an institution's ability to establish a sense of connection or belonging with their student population. For most students, their relationship with USD over the course of 2020 and 2021 has relied on their access to a computer, a web camera, and stable internet connection. While these tools provide the necessary components for continuing their education, they are not conducive for social or relationship development. Employees of the university, especially those that are not student facing, have now spent an entire academic year without contact to the student population. Social skills that are prerequisites for most positions on campus have not been utilized or developed.

Therefore, as the current climate of the pandemic changes and individuals are allowed to gather on campuses, it will be imperative that these social skills are practiced and grown to best serve the student population. The workshop developed through this study is one such tool that can be utilized by employees of USD to reconnect with these social skills. It is an opportunity to practice together and reflect on the impact that empathy has on a student's relationship with the institution's community and their sense of belonging.

Empathy is also a necessary skill for employees in higher education because the context of the COVID-19 pandemic linked the campus community to a shared experience of crisis and hardship. Part of the explanation that researcher Brené Brown makes in the difference between empathy and sympathy revolves around the metaphor of someone being trapped in a dark hole (RSA, 2013). When someone is down in this hole, a person who can empathize with them is committed to climb down into the hole. There, they can tell the person that is stuck that they too know what it feels like to be trapped down here in the dark, and that they can climb out together. The past year uniquely bonded the campus community to a shared experience of suffering and hardship that each had to experience in their own way. These experiences provide an opportunity

for connection and to empathize with each other as the community seeks new ways to interact and communicate.

The use of appreciative inquiry for leadership development. A major finding of this study was the practical application of the AI methodology as a form of action research as well as leadership development. Over the course of three cycles of research, the methodology was successful in the analysis of observations and developed action that followed. This conclusion was important; that despite the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was still completed successfully because of the methodology used.

The pandemic quickly dissolved several resources used by campus organizations, including the social interactions that were frequent and normal to a college campus like USD. However, the crisis caused by COVID-19 also created the circumstances best suited for utilizing AI. The main philosophy of AI can be thought of as looking at “what's left.” What part of an organization that is put through a crisis remains positive? In the case of USD Writing Center, it was recognized to be the staff themselves. Their adaptation to an online system was built upon the core premise that if they could communicate with students in some way, no matter how unordinary, they could develop a connection.

Similarly, campus organization and offices will be confronted with situations of lacking resources and the necessity to make difficult decisions that will affect the well-being of individuals involved. Utilizing AI as a leadership practice during these situations provides an opportunity for campus leaders to not only define the positive core of their organizations but also promotes the opportunity to collaborate with others towards unique and creative solutions.

Furthermore, the application of AI that was utilized in this study have shown its ability to develop action and change when confronted with lacking resources. Testimonials from

participants in the third cycle's workshop give evidence towards its success as demonstrated in the following statements:

- “It was also nice to have time to share personal experiences and make connections between this topic and that work that we do.”
- “I loved hearing different perspectives and seeing how the information presented applies to our professional and personal lives.”
- “I enjoyed the feeling of collaboration within the workshop itself as it was discussing collaboration and empathy.”

These testimonials display the authentic connections generated between the participants even though they were all interacting from separate locations in a digital space.

Recommendations

As stated in the first major finding of this study, it is recommended that the workshop used in cycle III be further developed and utilized by the campus community at the University of San Diego. Participating in the workshop allows for employees and their organizations to jump start the process of reconnecting with the student population as they return to campus. It is also recommended that the workshop be presented to student-facing organizations as stated in the interviews of cycle II. These include the One Stop Center, academic learning centers, and the executive assistants of the College of Arts and Science. The groups listed have immediate contact with students and represent a wide range of experiences that would benefit from the workshop's AI methodology.

Furthermore, it is recommended that time and space be provided for employees for collaboration practice that utilizes the AI methodology. The benefits shown as a result of the workshop developed for cycle III should be utilized by the Learning and Development team from

the office of Human Resources. The workshop utilized in this study or one similar should be prepared to present the basic principles of AI and the 4 or 5 'D' step process. It should also give space for individuals or groups participating to collaborate with one another on creative solutions to current problems.

Finally, it is recommended that the workshop developed from this study be utilized as a tool specifically for the USD community as they return to in-person services in 2021. The need to re-establish connections among the community provides an opportunity to also establish a culture based on empathy and kindness, reaffirmed by the institution's commitment as stated in its core values:

The university is committed to creating a welcoming, inclusive, and collaborative community accentuated by a spirit of freedom and charity and marked by protection of the rights and dignity of the individual. The university values students, faculty and staff from different backgrounds and faith traditions and is committed to creating an atmosphere of trust, safety and respect in a community characterized by a rich diversity of people and ideas.

This opportunity can be framed as part of the steps recommended for administrators, faculty, and staff to return to campus life.

Personal Growth

I am uncertain what the conclusion of this study would have been if I had not made the observation of empathy in the Writing Center. I have no doubt that it would not have been so enriching, nor deliver what I believe could be a useful tool for the USD community in the transition back to on-campus learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. I entered into this project with the personal goal to try and develop in some capacity as a leader in Higher

Education. What I did not expect was to experience that growth in the active collaboration built upon the methodology of this study. When I strategized my cycles of research, I was deliberate in placing myself in front of administrators across campus in an effort to emulate the leadership that I was observing on a daily basis. In reflection, what I desperately wanted was to not be left out of the conversation. To be included in the actions taken to improve and develop the university. And over the course of this project, I came to understand that what I was seeking was within me all along.

When I transitioned off of the USD campus in March of 2020, much of the reflection that I made on my cycles of research were conducted with my two roommates at the time- my grandparents. Each day, we would debate the basic tenets of my inquiry, including the definition of leadership and its role in Higher Education. Our conversations would last long into the night, arguing for and against the ideas presented by one another. And it was from our conversations that I began to understand the true meaning of collaboration and its role in developing as a leader. Here were two individuals, both with professional leadership backgrounds in the medical field and a lifetime of experiences, debating the practice of leadership in a contemporary academic setting with an individual from a younger generation. I was being given a rare opportunity to practice my leadership in action without even knowing it. The AI methodology is based on the principle of recognizing the good that exists in every individual. This recognition provides the momentum necessary for growth and change. If there could only be one major finding from this study that I could take with it would be to remember that principle. It is what allowed me to realize the immeasurable value of the conversations I had with my grandparents, and it allowed me to recognize the importance of empathy development in the collaboration observed at the USD Writing Center.

One of the final slides of the workshop that was used in cycle III of this study includes the following quote by author and leadership coach, Lolly Daskal, “What’s empathy have to do with leadership. Everything. Because leadership is about having the ability to relate and connect and listen and bond with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives” (Daskal, 2021). When I presented this slide to the participants, I framed its meaning to our roles in higher education. Each of us hold a position of leadership as part of the campus community, our experiences and expertise interweaving into the development of the students who attend and live at the university. As employees, the “people” that Daskal refer to are in fact our students, and we have the opportunity as leaders to inspire and empower their lives through empathy and connection. This final exercise was meant to solidify the entire meaning of the workshop, and in fact represents my most updated philosophy of leadership.

I am extremely grateful for everyone that contributed to my understanding and development over the course of this study. It is my hope the findings from this research provide them with an opportunity to reflect on their own strengths and beauty as individuals, and that together, we can encourage and inspire the next generation of students to do the same.

References

- Boquet, E. H., & Lerner, N. (2008). After "the idea of a writing center." *College English*, 71(2) 170–189. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25472314>
- Carino, P., Evertz, K., Mullin, J. & Nelson, J. (n.d.) Administrative (chaos) theory: The politics and practices of writing center location. In C. Murphy & B. Stay (Eds.), *The writing center director's resource book* (pp. 225–235). New York, NY: Routledge.

Center for Appreciative Inquiry. (2016). More on AI. Retrieved from

<https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/>

Childers, P. B. (1992). Designing a strategic plan for a writing center. In C. Murphy & B. Stay (Eds.), *The writing center director's resource book* (pp. 53–70). New York, NY: Routledge.

Cooperrider, D., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry, a positive revolution in change* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Daskal, L. (2021). *Why the empathetic leader is the best leader - Lolly Daskal*. Retrieved from <https://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/whats-empathy-got-leadership/>

Fraser, J. (2013). *Fostering a sense of self-efficacy in undergraduate students: Potential effects on students who are in academic difficulty*. Retrieved from https://ole.sandiego.edu/bbcswebdav/Pid-1398710-dt-content-rid-21603050_1/xid-21603050_1

Green, Z., & Molenkamp, R. (2005). *The BART system of group and organizational analysis boundary, authority, role and task* [Ebook]. Retrieved from https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/5d02f08cc78417c2bdaa8b2a/5d73b3827288d57c6736b947_BARTSystem.pdf

Grindle, M. E. (2013). *Beyond the numbers: Building changemaker communities*. Retrieved from https://ole.sandiego.edu/webapps/blackboard/execute/content/file?cmd=view&content_id=_1398699_1&course_id=_57258_1

Kreig, M. (2018). *Building belonging: The impact of physical space on student sense of belonging in student leadership, involvement, and changemaking at the University of San*

- Diego* (Master's thesis, University of San Diego). Retrieved from <http://digital.sandiego.edu/soles-mahel-action/18>
- Leahy, R. (1990). What the college writing center is--and isn't. *College Teaching*, pp. 43–48. doi:10.1080/87567555.1990.10532187
- Lowe, K. (n.d.). “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail”: Strategic planning and management for writing center directors. In C. Murphy & B. Stay (Eds.), *The writing center director's resource book* (pp. 71–78). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mohr, B., & Watkins, J. (2002). *The essentials of appreciative inquiry*. Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communications.
- Morton, T. M., & Simpson, Z. (2013). The space between: Pedagogic collaboration between a writing center and an academic department. *Perspectives in Education*, 31(4). Retrieved from <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC151346>
- North, S. M. (1984). The idea of a writing center. *College English*, 46(5) 433–446. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/377047>
- OpenSource Leadership. (2019). *Documents available for download*. Retrieved from <http://www.opensourceleadership.com/documents/>
- Peters, B. (n.d.). Documentation strategies and the institutional socialization of writing centers. In C. Murphy & B. Stay (Eds.), *The writing center director's resource book* (pp. 71–78). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rothwell, W., Stavros, J., & Sullivan, R. (2015). *Practicing organization development: Leading transformational change* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons. Hoboken, NJ.
- RSA. (2013, December 10). *Brené Brown on empathy* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

- Salem, L. (2016). Decisions...decisions: Who chooses to use the writing center? *The Writing Center Journal*, 35(2), 147–171. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43824060>
- Stavros, J., Godwin, L., & Cooperrider, D. (2015). *Appreciative inquiry: Organization development and the strengths revolution. In practicing organization development: A guide to leading change and transformation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons. Hoboken, NJ.
- Strayhorn, T. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging*. London, England: Routledge.
- Takaku, S., & Williams, J. D. (2011). Help seeking, self-efficacy, and writing performances among college students. *Journal of Writing Research*, 3(1), 1–18. Retrieved from http://www.jowr.org/articles/vol3_1/JoWR_2011_vol3_nr1_Williams_Takaku.pdf
- The University of San Diego Writing Center. (2021). *The New Consultant Manual*. San Diego, CA. Sundmacher, D.
- University of San Diego. (2019a). *Majors and minors - college of arts and sciences*. Retrieved from <https://www.sandiego.edu/cas/majors-minors/>
- University of San Diego. (2019b). *The renaissance plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.sandiego.edu/university-operations/renaissance-plan/>
- University of San Diego. (2021). Mission, vision and values. Retrieved from <https://www.sandiego.edu/about/mission-vision-values.php#:~:text=The%20University%20of%20San%20Diego%20is%20a%20Roman%20Catholic%20institution,ethical%20conduct%20and%20compassionate%20service>
- Wiseman, T. (1996). A concept analysis of empathy. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 23(6), 1162–1167. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.1996.12213.x
- Young, A. (1992). College culture and the challenge of collaboration. *The Writing Center Journal*, 13(1), 3–15. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43441913>

Appendix A

Postconsultation Memo

This memo template is to be used immediately after Writing Center consultation session in order to process and reflect on immediate thoughts and reactions.

Interview Date: _____

What are your immediate reactions to the consultation?

What surprised you about the consultation?

What expectation were correct or incorrect?

Appendix B

Recruitment Email for Cycle II

EMAIL FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION

Dear [Name]

I am reaching out to you as a leader in Higher Education in hopes that you may have time to participate in my Action Research Project regarding the practice of collaboration in the USD Writing Center. I, of course, understand that it may be difficult to find time in your schedule currently, but I wanted to reach out since I consider you a leader at USD that I admire in the work that you do and cherish your insight that you have given me in the past.

At this time, I would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview with me at a time that is most convenient to your schedule over the next two weeks. I will make arrangements to hold the interview via Zoom that would only require 30-45 minutes.

The purpose of my study is to observe the peer-to-peer consultations that take place in the Writing Center in order to develop leadership strategies that can be shared with organizations and departments in academic and student services.

If you are interested in participating, I would ask you to review the attached consent form and abstract from my project proposal. I have also included the interview questions if you would like to review them before-hand. You can then reply to this email to notify me of your interest and availability.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration in assisting me in my study of collaboration at the University of San Diego and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Hugo E. Werstler

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Cycle II

The following questions are to be used in order to better understand the interviewee's perspective on collaboration in higher education in relation to the observations made from the previous cycle of research. The questions will be asked sequentially in order to adhere to the Appreciative Inquiry 4 'D' step process. With permission from the interviewee, the entire interview will be audio recorded. The interviewer will take general notes during interview, followed by a written memo immediately following the interview (see appendix B).

- Question 1: Define- What does the administrator do at work? How do they interact with students on a daily basis?
- Question 2: Discovery- Where does the administrator practice or observe empathy in their work?
- Question 3: Dream- Could a workshop on empathy be useful to you or your office?
- Question 4: Design- What other variables should I consider? What barriers should I consider might restrict me?

Appendix D

Postinterview Memo

This memo template is to be used immediately after interviews in order to process and reflect on immediate thoughts and reactions.

Interview Date: _____

Interviewee Name: _____

What are your immediate reactions to the interview?

What surprised you about the interview? What expectations were correct or incorrect?

What processes went well in the interview?

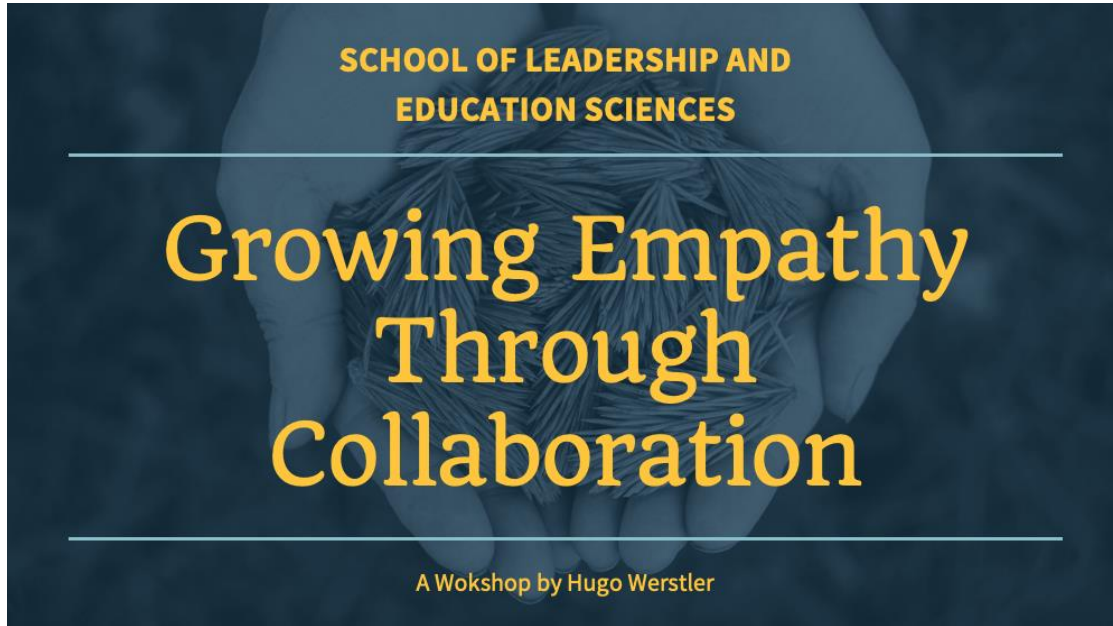
What processes would you like to change or prepare for the next interview?

Appendix E

Cycle III Workshop Presentation Slides

These slides were presented to participants of the workshop that took place in the third and final cycle of research. Much of the information provided is given in person and is not reflected in the actual text shown in the slides.

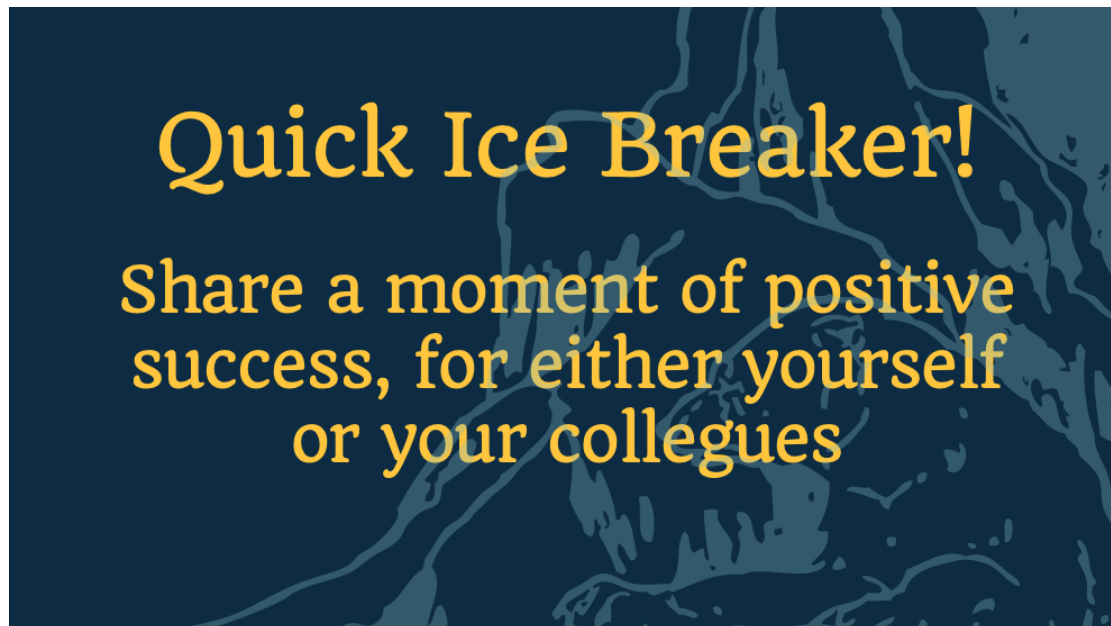
1.



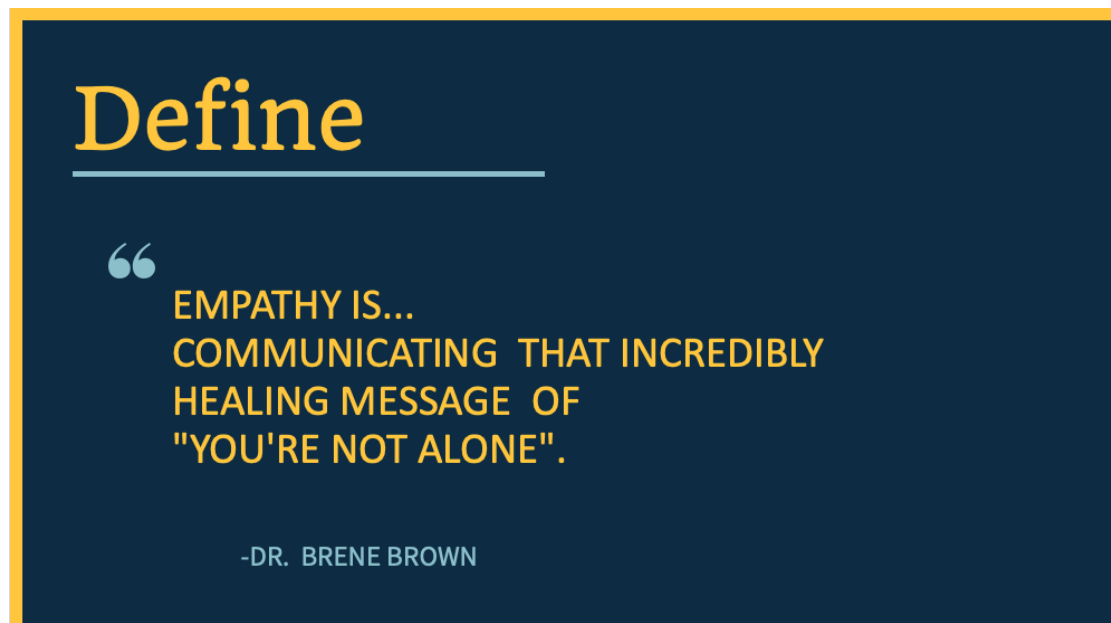
2.



3.



4.



5.



6.

Define

Research shows a correlation between empathy and the development of college students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy.

"Possibly the most obvious implication that comes from this research is the call for academic counselors to work towards the creation of stronger relationships with their students."

JESSICA FRASER, 2013

"I will say this many times in different ways: positive interpersonal, peer interactions increase students' sense of belonging and sense of belonging leads to student success so those charged with increasing college student success should think just as much about campus climate and policies governing social interactions as they do about predictive analytics, intrusive advising, curricular alignment, and early alert systems. It all really matters."

TERRELL L. STRAYHORN, 2019

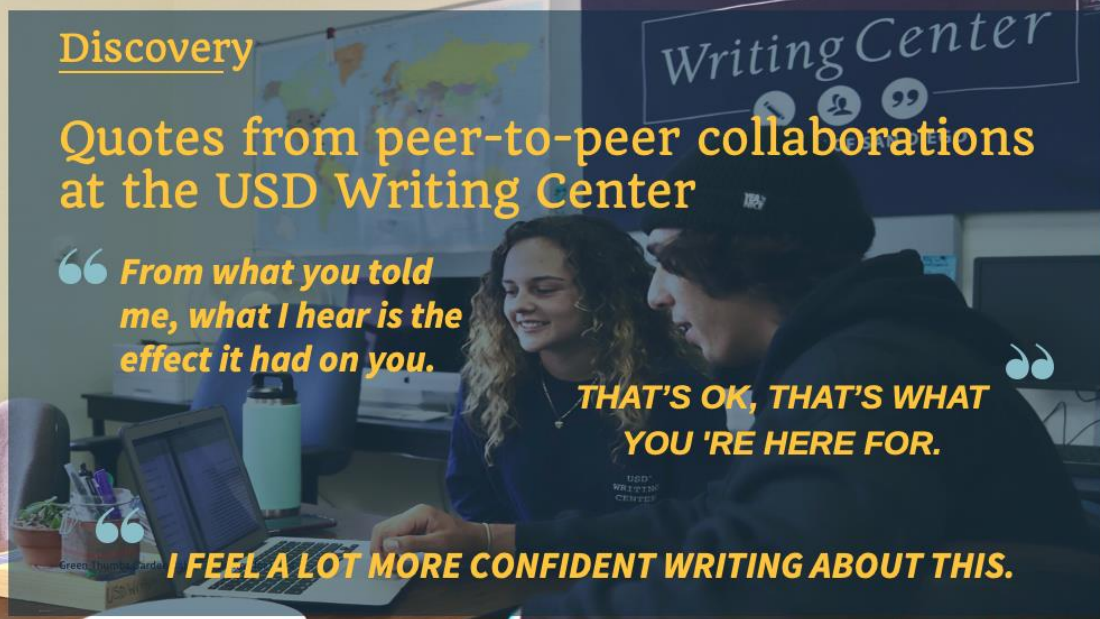
7.



Discovery
PEER-TO-PEER
COLLABORATION
IN THE USD WRITING CENTER

*Consultants are trained to collaborate with students visiting the Center based on two principles; **empathy & assertiveness.***

8.



Discovery
Quotes from peer-to-peer collaborations
at the USD Writing Center

“ *From what you told me, what I hear is the effect it had on you.* ”

THAT'S OK, THAT'S WHAT YOU 'RE HERE FOR.

I FEEL A LOT MORE CONFIDENT WRITING ABOUT THIS.

9.

Discovering empathy in our own lives...

Reflect on a situation when you
connected with someone while
working?

How was the connection made?

Did the connection impact you in
some way? Did it change the outcome
of your interaction with the person?



10.

Dream

**REMEMBER THE EXAMPLE YOU WROTE DOWN
BEFORE THE WORKSHOP?**

**Take some time to reflect on the situation that you found
to be challenging. Could the outcome have changed if you
had empathized with the person(s) involved?**

Were you utilizing empathy without knowing it?

11.



12.

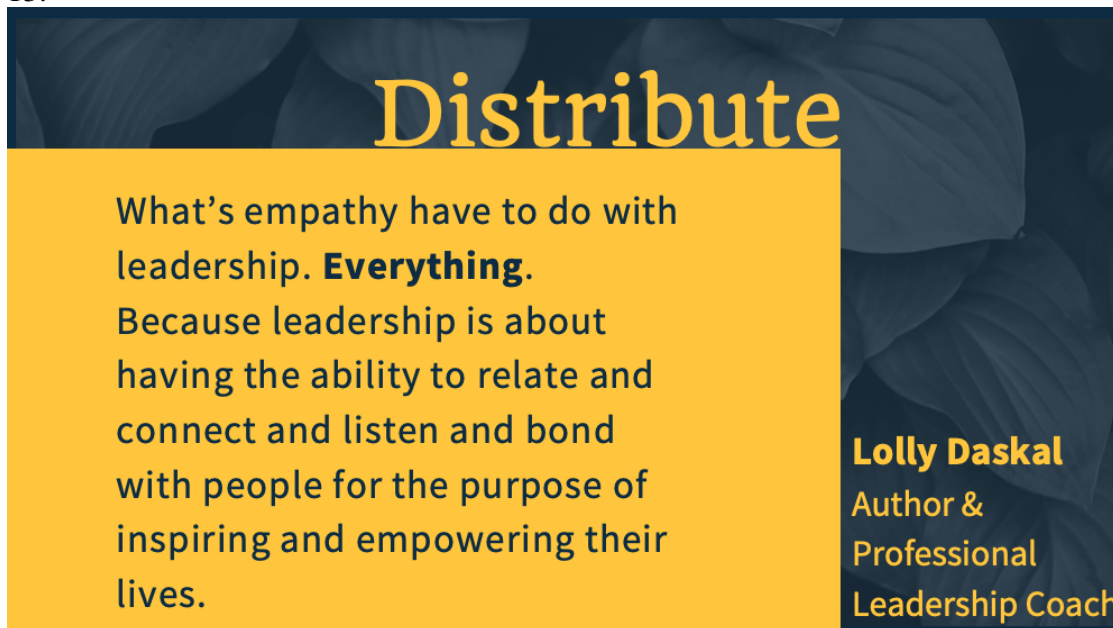
Design

OTHER RESOURCES

AS A COMMUNITY, WE HAVE THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE TO HELP ONE ANOTHER. WHAT RESOURCES CAN YOU SHARE TO REINFORCE A CULTURE OF EMPATHY AT WORK?

The icons represent: 1. Handshake (Empathy/Community), 2. Open book (Knowledge/Experience), 3. Lit lightbulb (Idea/Innovation), 4. Map (Resources/Location).

13.



Distribute

What's empathy have to do with leadership. **Everything.** Because leadership is about having the ability to relate and connect and listen and bond with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives.

Lolly Daskal
Author &
Professional
Leadership Coach

14.



15.

Resources

<https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/>

Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ervwgu369Jw>

Daskal, L. (2021). Why The Empathetic Leader Is the Best Leader - [Lolly Daskal](https://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/whats-empathy-got-leadership/) | Leadership. Retrieved 30 March 2021, from <https://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/whats-empathy-got-leadership/>

Wiseman T. A concept analysis of empathy. *J Adv Nurs*. 1996 Jun;23(6):1162-7. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2648.1996.12213.x. PMID: 8796464.

Fraser, Jessica. (2013). Fostering a sense of self-efficacy in undergraduate students: Potential effects on students who are in academic difficulty. (Action Research Projects). Retrieved from https://ole.sandiego.edu/bbcswebdav/Pid-1398710-dt-content-rid-21603050_1/xid-21603050_1

Strayhorn, Terrell. (2018). College Students' Sense of Belonging. 10.4324/9781315297293.

A photograph of a glass jar with a metal clasp, filled with several blue and white markers. One marker has "Writing Center" written on it. The jar is sitting on a wooden surface, and a small green plant is visible in the background.

Appendix F

Postworkshop Moderator Memo

Workshop Date: _____

What are your immediate reactions to the workshop?

What surprised you about the workshop? What expectations were correct or incorrect?

What sections did you feel went well in the workshop?

What sections would you like to change or prepare for the next workshop?

Appendix G

Postworkshop Survey

The following survey will be made available online for the participants of the workshop developed in cycle III to fill out at their discretion. It will ask for the feedback and general reflection on the workshop that the researcher can then utilize in the develop of the workshop in the future.

The opening statement on the online survey states, “Thank you for attending the workshop on *Growing Empathy through Collaboration*. Please answer the following questions and if you need to contact the facilitator/researcher, Hugo Werstler, you can email him at werstlerhu@sandiego.edu.

1. What is your role or position at USD?
2. How relevant did you find the information from today’s workshop?
3. How clearly was the information presented?
4. What areas of the workshop were most effective?
5. What areas of the workshop could be improved?
6. How do you see yourself using the information and/or experience of this workshop moving forward?