University of Mississippi

eGrove

Spring 5-8-2022

Using Resilient Pedagogy to Rethink Consultant Training in the Writing Center Post Pandemic

Jessica Love Herron
University of Mississippi Main Campus

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis

USING RESILIENT PEDAGOGY TO RETHINK CONSULTANT TRAINING IN THE

WRITING CENTER POST-PANDEMIC

by

Jessica Love Herron

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of

the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

University, Mississippi

April 2022

Approved by:

_____

Advisor: Dr. Stephen Monroe

_____

Second Reader: Dr. Alice Myatt

_____

Third Reader: Dr. Jennifer Parsons

I dedicate this thesis to God, my mom, and the late Mr. Jason Jones, who helped foster my love of writing centers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge a few people who inspired, encouraged, and assisted in the creation of this thesis. To each of you, I am forever grateful. To the following:

- Dr. Stephen Monroe. Thank you for your guidance and encouraging words throughout this process. I know that you are exceedingly busy with all your roles and obligations on and off-campus, so I am eternally grateful that you took on me and this project.

- Dr. Alice Myatt. Thank you for helping me solidify my topic. At the onset of this project, my ideas were all over the place, but after meeting with you, I knew exactly what I wanted to write about.

- Dr. Jennifer Parsons. Thank you for insightful advice. I had been struggling with the reconceptualizing the "trauma" term for over a year now, and your suggestion helped me to solve this problem.

- Daymon Kiliman. Thank you for being my friend, mentor, editor, and any other role that I throw your way. From scholarship essays, class writing projects, to this thesis, you have been one of my biggest cheerleaders throughout my undergraduate career, and I am so grateful that Northwest brought us together.

- Dr. Rachel Johnson. Thank you for helping me gather my data for this thesis. Speaking with you about your efforts in our writing center helped to widen my focus beyond pure

consultant training, and in turn, helped me create more encompassing recommendations for

future implementation.

Positionality Statement

I am an African American undergrad who has consulted in both junior and senior college

writing centers. I currently attend a large, public research-intensive university in the South.

Abstract

Since becoming a writing consultant three years ago, I have been interested in how writing centers can improve their training practices. Specifically, I have always been interested in the invaluable nature of consultant-to-consultant relationships in comparison with standard consultant training manuals. Though my idea of consultant-to-consultant relationships and training was specific to the in-person writing center, the need to rethink this consultant interaction was reinforced by the recent pandemic when most writing centers transitioned to completely online operations. In March of 2021, I hosted a panel presentation and gathered data from writing consultants about the ways that their centers were responding to the pandemic. Using a resilient framework, I analyzed this data and previous consultant training initiatives in the literature to provide writing center professionals with recommendations for creating team building and collaboration-themed training programs for writing centers. Along with helping writing centers withstand future disorientation, this project will help to address additional issues within writing centers, like diversity and inclusion among staff and students.

Keywords: writing centers, team-building, consultant training, resilient

Preface

I will never forget the first day of my consultant training course at my community college. The first thing that my instructor and writing center director told us was that at least half of us (there were only four of us in the class) would drop the course and quit the writing center because it is such hard work. As the only black person in the class, my heart sunk like it often does in these situations. Before I knew it, my reflexes kicked in, and I blurted "Not me!"

As a minority and a product of a failing school system navigating English studies and writing centers, areas that have long been dominated by white women, I wondered if I actually was cut out for the hard work ahead. To make matters worse, I mispronounced a word and was corrected on that same day. Though I welcome opportunities to learn, on this day, it seemed like just another sign that this place was not going to be the place for me.

Needless to say, I stayed in writing centers, and I am happy I did, but I can't ignore the fact that one of the biggest motivators that I had in these earlier days was proving to everyone (including myself) that I deserved to be there. Whereas my coworkers spent the first minutes of each session making small talk with clients, I got straight to business, fearing that my skin color or my hair may make the client second guess my knowledge or my ability to consultant them. Still, client doubt in my capabilities was not my only fear. I was always on edge about mistakenly using African American Vernacular English in the writing center. I also noticed that, like myself, many minority clients were nervous about seeking help with the writing center, more so than white clients. Identifying with me, these students would often book me as their consultant. As someone who enjoys consulting all students, I feared this action would pigeonhole me as "for minority clients only."

The sad thing is this isn't a unique occurrence for minorities. Entering white spaces like the writing center, we fight to prove that we are worthy of being in the space, even if, as shown in my example, no one asks for us to do this.

If we are lucky, these initial apprehensions soon fade away, and that was the case for me. Honestly, I don't know what it is about the writing center that influenced us consultants to start opening up to each other, to feel comfortable opening up—our remote location in a little used building, the peer-to-peer environment—whatever it was, barriers began to break down as time progressed. From child abuse, to estranged family relations, to mental health battles, we talked about tough topics and forged our own little support group when we did not have appointments. It was then that most of my apprehensions related to my race faded away. Instead, I began to see all of our races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and life experiences as aspects that made us unique and helped us to relate and learn from each other. We were more than just our races, more than just coworkers. We were friends. And from talking to my other friends who worked other jobs, this relationship was unique to the writing center.

Seeing immense value in the ways that we were able to connect and learn from each other, I focused my class research project on how we could work together to create a consultant led, heuristic approach to supplement consultant education. Then, in November of 2018, our center's director tragically passed away by suicide. Here we were again, gathered around in our little support group, but this time was different. This time our grief was universal.

To this day, I would argue that our center's director was the frankest person that I have ever met (as discussed earlier). If you were around him long enough, like we consultants were, you had no choice but to love his honesty, his wit. I always tell people that he was the perfect first boss—he refused to coddle me like my previous instructors. Because of his refusal, I was

forced to become the young professional that I am today, and I will forever be grateful to him.

He also reinforced my love for writing centers. I remember the day he showed me a picture he

took with legendary scholar Muriel Harris at a conference. I had never seen him "fan-girl" about

anything, which made the conversation even more confusing and hilarious.

     Our director was heavily invested in my research, which made it even harder to revisit it

after his death, but both he and the writing center have impacted my life too much for me to just

abandon it. For that reason, I dedicate this thesis to him.

Table of Contents

Introduction

As Holshue (2020) states, the first case of the SARS-CoV-2 infection in the United States was reported on January 20, 2020. As of September 3, 2021, there have been nearly 40,000,000 reported COVID-19 cases, and approximately 650,000 deaths (USA Facts, 2021). One of the many sectors impacted by this crisis is higher education. Campus closures and the transition to online instruction not only displaced students living on campus, but it also forced students and teachers alike into an almost completely online teaching and learning format that was foreign to most. As Piotrowski and King (2020) note, online testing integrity was questioned, and many consulting services were no longer available (pp. 62-64). In a survey of academics working in United Kingdom universities, one participant discussed how they are now seeing an increase in student mental health problems that have resulted from the inevitable challenges of moving to online instruction (Watermeyer et al, p. 632). Even as we approach the two-year anniversary of the first case of the SARS-CoV-2 infection, many higher education institutions are still facing difficulties resulting from the sudden shift in modality. Thus, it is becoming more apparent that educational systems must seek ways to build resilience into their practices to prepare for future crises.

Many schools have sought to document the changes in higher education resulting from the pandemic. Often absent from this conversation about educational changes are writing centers. A writing center is a place where students receive assistance on a variety of writing assignments. In the United States, writing centers are often found in institutions of higher education. In a study conducted by the National Census of Writing in 2017, all 482 four-year institutions surveyed indicated that they had writing centers. Of the 74 two-year institutions surveyed, all 74 indicated that their institutions had writing centers, as well. Since their inception many years ago, there has

been much discussion concerning what a writing center does and what it offers students, with a common misconception arising that writing centers are a type of extension of the classroom (North, 1984). Even today, clients often enter writing centers assuming that consultants are professors at the institution. On the contrary, a writing center's niche is that it is often staffed by student consultants.

Known as peer consulting, the idea behind writing center consulting practice is that, unlike a professor, the student consultant is not an expert, not intimidating. Whereas some students may feel hesitant to discuss their writing troubles with their professors out of fear of not being informed enough on the subject matter, the nonhierarchical and nonthreatening atmosphere of a peer-staffed writing center encourages a unique form of collaborative learning between the consultant and client (Carino, 2003, p. 96). The student consultant has often taken the same classes or professors as the client, giving them a unique opportunity to offer advice, discuss studying strategies, and relate to a student in a way that a professor cannot.

Though not experts in a discipline, most consultants demonstrate writing proficiency prior to being hired in writing centers, and some consultants take a preliminary peer consulting course to learn about writing center pedagogy and consulting strategies. Harris (1992) strongly refutes the notion that there is a direct correlation between consultants and professors, but she does recognize that peer consultants are a mixture of both peer and teacher (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 284). As peer coaching is a common practice used to enhance the skills of educators, consultant training courses often utilize peer coaching strategies to train consultants. Like the goals of implementing peer coaching in education, the goal of peer coaching exercises in writing centers is to refine consulting practice and enhance consultant reflection (Robbins, 1991, p. 7). In some cases, experienced consultants and inexperienced consultants are paired

together, with the inexperienced consultant either observing the experienced consultant's session or participating in some way.

When I hosted a panel discussion at a Southeastern writing center conference in March of 2021, my goal was to gather information about the peer coaching exercises that other writing centers were utilizing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including exercises like pairing consultants with varying experiences. To my surprise, many of these participants emphasized the impact of less formal and less training-focused activities in their centers. They discussed creating collaborative playlists and scheduling informal group meetings, explaining how those exercises helped them to build relationships with one another. From there, I realized that just examining consultant to consultant interaction as it relates to training was too limited, and that other activities, ones that fall more broadly under the categories of team building and collaboration, also need attention.

As a transfer student to a large public Southeastern university, a third-year consultant, and someone experienced in online writing center operations, my transition to a fully remote writing center went smoothly. I consulted in a completely online operation in Spring 2020, and my face-to-face writing center experiences, specifically my interactions with fellow consultants, helped to inform my remote consulting strategies. Contrarily, many consultants that I attended orientation with were new consultants, having never worked in the face-to-face writing center, and this situation was not unique to our writing center. At the Southeastern writing center conference, two of my panel participants were first-year consultants. As this demonstrates, many writing centers continued to actively recruit new consultants, consultants who have now only experienced an online or hybrid operations format. I believe the pandemic and the resulting educational changes present an opportunity for writing centers to research how they have been

responding to this disorientation in hopes of understanding how they can use disorientation informed, resilient pedagogy to design and implement collaborative consultant training in writing centers during and after the COVID-19 crisis. This would give writing centers the opportunity to transcend our usual practice of exploring peer coaching opportunities and allow us to be better equipped to withstand future disorientation. While Bonnie Devet (2020) and others have studied ways that writing centers can incorporate theoretic models into consultant training, I would like to expand my research to not only investigate consultant training and collaborative team building practices prior to the pandemic, but to also research current consultant training and collaborative team building exercises from a variety of academic institutions in the Southeastern United States. With this information, I intend to offer recommendations for writing center administrators to guide the formation and evaluation of consultant training programs post pandemic.

As mentioned previously, the last fifty years has seen an emphasis of writing centers in higher education institutions, and along with this emphasis on writing centers has been the thriving field of writing center studies. Writing Center theorists like Stephen North (1984) have worked to define the idea of the writing center, while other theorists, like Jeff Brooks (1991) advocated for minimalism in consulting. More recently, Elizabeth Boquet (2002) sought to theorize noise coming from writing centers. These examples are in no way meant to be all encompassing of the many strides that have been made in writing center studies, but they do illustrate some of the efforts that have been made to not only locate writing centers in theory, but also within the higher institutions in which they are located.

Consequently, writing center studies has become a thriving discipline, complete with professional journals, organizations, academic book series, and conferences (international, national, and regional) like the Southeastern conference that I attended in early 2021. Yet, as

young discipline, there are limitations within the available research. For instance, though there are many consultant training manuals, there is little research concerning consultant training, and most available research is specific to the demographics of a single writing center. With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting all higher education institutions, and subsequently all writing centers alike, it is evident that locating continuity and discontinuity between consultant training practices and programs is an important step in finding ways to combat future disorientation.

With this gap in the research concerning ways that writing centers can combat future disorientation, I intend to investigate the research that has already been done nationally on resilient pedagogy and COVID-19's effect on educational institutions to better understand how those practices can be realized in the writing center. I will also look at innovative consultant training practices that are currently being utilized in writing centers to locate the resilient possibilities of these activities. Furthermore, I will investigate how writing center administrators and consultants alike think that such innovations can be incorporated into consultant training. With this knowledge, I will offer recommendations for future implementation.

Drawing from Universal Design for Learning (UDL), resilient pedagogy is a strategy that helps make assignments and classes as resistant to disruption as possible (Gardiner, 2020). Like its predecessor, resilient pedagogy is concerned with the neuroscientific aspects of learning but with an emphasis on different learning environments and modalities (Fornauf & Erickson, 2020; Gardiner, 2020). I am interested in how other writing centers are rethinking team building during the crisis and examining those practices within a resilient pedagogical framework. I have begun researching this topic for my honors thesis by surveying consultants at a (virtual) regional writing center conference. I posed the following questions to my participants: How are writing centers building and sustaining community among consultants during the disruption caused by

17

COVID-19? What are the most valuable elements of consultant collaboration that we should use as a framework to guide our focus? How could we be creative in offering collaborative opportunities now that many consultants are working remotely? This conversation generated written transcripts. I analyzed these transcripts from my presentation in a later section.

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to investigate how writing center professionals can use disorientation informed, resilient pedagogy to design and implement collaborative team building exercises in writing centers during and after the COVID-19 crisis. First, resilient pedagogy will be discussed to establish the framework used in this study. Next will be a brief overview of COVID-19's effects on educational institutions. Collaborative learning is discussed afterward, as it gives an overview of the basic principle of writing center pedagogy. I discuss consultant training practices next as an overview of the various consultant training methods writing center professionals are already implementing. This section also acts as a preview to the analysis with the transcripts later in the paper. Peer coaching follows because it describes a type of consultant-to-consultant interaction that may be realized by consultant training programs. Writing center practice is discussed last, as the discussion establishes key points about the relationship between consultant and client that are necessary to consider when discussing consultant training.

Resilient Pedagogy

Resilient pedagogy is a teaching approach that grew out of Universal Design for Learning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is described by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) as "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn" (CAST, 2022). Originating in the

disability community, UDL is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. Practitioners build flexibility into their projects so that the projects can be adjusted to fit all students' strengths and needs. Some examples of Universal Design are closed captions, automatic doors, and accessibility features on smartphones.

Though it emerged from the disability community, other fields have borrowed the principles of UDL to improve practice. In Kiedaisch and Dinitz's (2007) article, "Changing Notions of Difference in the Writing Center: The Possibilities of Universal Design," the authors detail their implementation of the nine principles of Universal Design for Instruction, a branch of Universal Design for Learning, into their campus writing center. Of these nine principles is flexibility in use, an instructional design that accommodates a wide range of abilities and provides choice in the methods of use (p. 53). By incorporating aspects of UDL and UDI into their writing center, the authors saw that they were able to naturally accommodate a wide range of students. This allowed the authors to shift away from the emphasis on differences and its resulting "othering" that can cause a wide range of issues in writing center practice, like unnecessary consulting complications and inequities.

Though many are still implementing the nine principles of UDI in academic spaces, as seen in Kiedaisch and Dinitz (2007), there has been a recent interest in how the flexible and accessible aspects of UDL can be implemented in online instruction and how such aspects can improve practice. In Scott et al's (2015) "UDL in Online College Coursework: Insights of Infusion and Educator Preparedness," the authors detail their infusion of UDL in the coursework of online, graduate level special education courses. Through a descriptive survey, the authors found that the participants perceived the course to be aligned with UDL principles and that the UDL principles may positively impact their learning and preparation.

19

As evidenced by the study of Scott et al (2015), there has been a growing area of UDL that emphasizes the different shapes that learning can take outside of the traditional classroom, especially since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This emerging branch of UDL has been coined resilient pedagogy, described by Dr. Joshua Eyler as:

> A course design strategy that helps make your classes, assignments, and assessments as resistant to disruption as possible. The way to think about this is regardless of which modality you're teaching in—online, in-person, or blended—you're designing one time and one time only (Gardiner, 2020).

Until recently, resilient pedagogy has had little traction in research studies. Yet, the drastic shift to online learning as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic evidences a need to understand how the changes made to the field of education will impact future practice.

COVID-19 Impact on Education

At the onset of the pandemic, academic institutions made drastic shifts to abate the crisis and continue practice, and recent literature has emerged that documents those changes. Choate, et al (2021) conducted a study to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher preparation in Washington state. As a result of the pandemic, student teaching/clinical practice hours were cut tremendously. This move is thought to be a potential disadvantage for pre-service teachers, as many believe that these practice hours are the most important components of pre-service teacher preparation (p. 52). In addition to the cutting of practice hours, many other pre-service teacher preparation requirements were either delayed or eased in response to the pandemic. One respondent to the conducted survey voiced concerns about how new hires will navigate the classroom with little to no face-to-face classroom experience (p. 55). In the end, the authors call for a more virtual components and hybridized methods placed in teacher preparation

programs (p. 56).

As in the conclusion drawn by Choate et al (2021), many authors see innovation as a key component for academic flexibility and resilience post pandemic. In fact, Zhao and Watterson (2021) argue the pandemic has created an unprecedented opportunity to enact educational changes that did not receive much traction previously. Of the changes they suggest is the personalization of coursework, calling this a necessary component for uniqueness and self-determination (p. 6). They also call for new models of instruction that are "student-centered, inquiry-based, authentic, and purposeful" (p. 8). Though such innovations may seem like momentous tasks, authors like Major (2020) highlight that higher education is more innovative than we may have ever imagined, with educators utilizing technology, tools, and varied teaching strategies to allow for both synchronous and asynchronous learning (pp. 265-266).

According to a recent study, such variety in teaching and learning formats can be very beneficial to students. Instead of solely moving class to the online format, the students studied in George's (2020) article were required to utilize a variety of learning resources, including a visual consultant, detailed workbook, and the MyELearning platform. Their professor hoped that the multiplicity of formats would enable students to earn high marks in the class and thus evade grade and learning decline. The research found that providing students with a variety of resources could prove more effective than just simply transitioning in person classes to the online format (pp. 45-46).

This increased focus on learning and teaching outcomes brought on by the pandemic has caused some authors to rethink their usage of long used applications. In their article, Adams and Wilson (2020) discuss how the discussion board is often used after students have finished a reading, falling short of creating community in asynchronous higher education courses. Instead,

the authors research how a collaborative annotation tool called Perusall could support the

development of community. This research is especially relevant due to the pandemic and the

drastic shift to online learning. The authors conclude that the increase in text-interaction and

peer-to-peer interaction was indicative of community growth throughout the course as a result of

using Persuall to capture in the moment learning (p. 258).

Though these authors focused solely on educators responded to the pandemic, many

parallels can be drawn to the field of writing centers. Like the pre-service teachers of

Washington state, writing center consultants hired during the pandemic began their consulting

careers with little to no experience in the in-person writing center. Now, these consultants are

transitioning from predominantly virtual formats to either hybrid or in-person ones. Like the calls

for innovation in education, writing center practitioners have long called for innovation in the

ways that we train our consultants, and such innovative methods are reflected in writing center

literature. As this paper seeks to understand how writing center practitioners can rethink their

consultant activities post-pandemic, it is important to first establish current orthodoxies in both

writing center practice and theory.

Collaborative Learning

Collaboration is sharing ideas, cooperating, and accomplishing a goal with the help of

others. When collaboration is merged with learning, it can produce positive outcomes for student

collaborators. As Stewart (2018) expresses in her interpretation of collaborative learning theory,

collaborative learning specifically distinguishes knowledge construction as a result of peer

interaction (p. 1). Bruffee (1984) adds to this claim on collaborative learning theory when

arguing that the only way for people to think better is to learn to converse better with their peers

(as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008). Students are able to gain more knowledge when they

integrate their perceptions with outside ideas, and they are able to construct new knowledge as a result (Stewart 2018). Chen (2017) concludes that the implementation of collaboration in the learning process allows students to be engaged in learning, and when this happens, they not only gain a better understanding of the concept, but they also retain knowledge longer.

Collaborative learning differs from traditional teaching methods as it allows students to learn based on the knowledge of their peers. As stated by Bruffee (1984), when teachers implement collaborative learning activities, they organize communities in which students can teach each other (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 207). Learning is still present; however, students are able learn within a different context that enhances understanding (Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 207). Osman et al (2010) all agree that a collaborative classroom poses less threat to students, which allows them to engage in the learning process more effectively (p. 118). When students are less apprehensive about the learning process, they are able to retain substantial amounts of knowledge.

The success of collaborative learning justifies the widespread implementation of collaborative learning activities in classrooms around the world. In the article "Perceptions of EFL College Students toward Collaborative Learning", Chen (2017) uses interviews to determine if a collaborative learning exercise could promote knowledge construction among Taiwanese students. Each of the fifteen participants are second-language English learners and are enrolled in one of three universities in northern Taiwan. The students are first asked questions about their perception of collaborative learning; afterward, the students participate in a collaborative exercise. During the final interviews, the students state that the collaborative exercise heightened their understanding of the English language by being surrounding them with

different perspectives. They also feel that through collaborative learning, they are able to solve problems that they would not be able to solve alone.

Likewise, in the article "Adding Collaborative Peer Coaching to Our Teaching Identities" by Jewett and MacPhee (2012), a high school implements a collaborative peer coaching program in which teachers work in pairs to try to understand issues related to their work. Each pair finds time in their teaching schedules to collaborate, which includes constructive conversations that could potentially improve teaching practice. Neither teacher is deemed "the expert"; rather, the teachers work together as co-learners. By working together as equals, apprehension was eased which allowed true collaboration to ensue. Although reluctant at first, the teachers were very happy with the outcome of the program because it allowed them to work through issues collaboratively rather than being evaluated. This collaborative sharing of knowledge about teaching, which later led to the formulation of questions, promoted higher-order thinking and a better understanding of the teaching profession. Like the teaching profession, writing center consultants collaborate and share knowledge with their clients and fellow consultants. To ensure that their practices promote higher-order thinking, many writing centers implement consultant training methods, which is why it is discussed next.

Training Approaches: Theory Based, Individualized, Peer-Led, and Multimodal

In many writing centers, staff education programs are used to educate prospective consultants on writing center pedagogy, theory, and practice. Often embedded within these programs are a series of training and development activities. These types of activities can take many forms, including web programs (Hughes and Tedrowe, 2013) (Estes and Martina, 2010), systematic self-reflection dialogue (Devet, 2020), self-authored consulting guides and handbooks

24

(Gill, 2011) (Moore et al, 2009), and multi-institutional blogs (Ryan, 2018). Though they can take many forms, the goal of these training activities is often the same: to help consultants become better at consulting.

Though writing center practitioners boast of the many benefits of such training activities, many only see them as sufficient to supplement writing center theory courses. According to Hughes and Tedrowe (2013), from the beginning stages of their simulated training program, called CS/CR, they envisioned it is a complement to rather than a replacement of other consultant training methods (p. 2). Similarly, Moore et al, (2009) posit that the purpose of their guides is to help consultants recall information that may have been forgotten from consultant training courses (p. 5). Though these authors view developmental activities as supplements to writing center theory-based courses, to prepare consultants, writing center administrators often believe that consultants need theory-based courses and development activities to prepare them for writing center work. Hughes and Tedrowe (2013) make this argument explicitly in their article. They argue that though consulting classes and coursework prepare consultants for work in the writing center, consultants often wish that they had more realistic and reflective activities to prepare them for consulting (p. 1).

As discussed, staff education programs and training and development activities immerse consultants in writing center theory and guide them to translate theory into practice. Yet, writing center practitioners like Dintz and Diedaisch (2003) note that consultant voices are often left out of these types of consultant-focused conversations (p. 63). Further, practitioners like Ryan (2018) point out that little research has been done to examine how consultants talk about themselves and amongst themselves, especially during this early stage of consulting where training and developmental activities are vital to informing individual consulting strategies (p.

10). Thus, many writing center administrators are turning to consultant-led training and developmental activities.

This type of consultant autonomy has been a key feature in training programs in recent years. One example comes from an institution where consultants are given a voice in the creation and implementation of modules in a multimodal web-based training program (Estes and Martina, 2010, p. 2). Similarly, at another institution, Moore et al (2009) share how one of their consultants researched best practices for consulting Asian, non-native English speakers, and this consultant used the research to create a guide to aid fellow consultants in her center (p. 4). This type of consultant led, consultant-to-consultant training has proven very effective for staff education. According to one consultant, this type of consultant collaboration allows for the dispersion of unique perspectives and provides solace that many consultants struggle with the same issues (Devet, 2020, p. 23). Further, some practitioners insinuate that this type of consultant led, consultant centered approach to training should have been the focus from the beginning. According to Hughes and and Tedrowe (2013), there is no better way for consultants to learn and develop their skills than by collaborating and creating training activities that they and future consultants can utilize (p. 3).

As shown, writing center administrators have recently shifted their focus to consultant-led training activities; still, the reality for many writing centers is that consultants often have many obligations in addition to their work in the center. Thus, it can prove difficult for administrators to schedule such collaborative activities. Owing to this dilemma, many administrators have prioritized flexibility in their activity and course design. This may mean that consultant training is a predominantly web-based operation. In one writing center, Estes and Martina (2009/2010) created online self-guided training modules on various consulting-related

topics (p. 2). For these authors, a web-based approach was an opportunity to bypass conflicting

schedules and create a program that was both flexible and highly adaptable. This also meant that

the authors were able to create individualized consultant training approaches for varying degrees

of experience (p. 2). Yet, web-based designs are not the only ways in which writing center

administrators are becoming more adaptable in their training. In fact, some administrators are

revisiting their long-used handbooks. In the case of Gill (2012), she believed that by removing

the negative language in consultant handbooks, consultants will be encouraged to be more

flexible in their consulting methods (p. 12).

Yet for some writing center practitioners, a sense of community is also a hallmark of

these activities. These communities can take many forms, like communities of consulting

practice (Hughes and Tedrowe, 2013, p. 3) or amongst consultants themselves (Estes and

Martina, 2010, p. 3) (Devet, 2020, p. 22). According to Devet (2020), the group format of her

consulting activity forged a kind of community in which, as we see often in consultant to client

interactions, consultants teach each other how to be consultants (p. 22). To further illustrate the

benefits of such interactions, it is important that we first establish points related to peer coaching.

Peer Coaching

Stemming from the postulation of collaborative learning, peer coaching involves people

within a similar community working together to accomplish a precise goal. Specifically, peer

coaching is a process in which professional colleagues reflect on current practices (Slater and

Simmons, 2001, p. 68). While reflecting on current practices, colleagues can discover ways to

collaborate in order to solve problems and improve practice (Jewett and MacPhee, 2012, p. 105).

Jewett and MacPhee (2012) further this notion by concluding that conversation magnifies

wondering, which forms questions that colleagues work collaboratively to answer (p. 106). Bowman and McCormick (2001) suggest that the use of peer coaching among a similar community is effective because colleagues are not only able to observe each other, but they are also able to provide suggestions, assistance, and support (p. 256). Slater and Simmons (2001) add to this claim by inferring that since peer coaching focuses on personal development rather than evaluation, colleagues are less apprehensive about the process (p. 68).

Like the literature involving the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, literature regarding peer coaching is most common in the field of education. The main goals of implementing peer coaching in education is to refine teaching practice and enhance teacher reflection (Robbins, 1991, p. 7). Bowman and McCormick (2001) state that when teachers participate in peer coaching, they are able to gather and internalize new knowledge as a result of collaborative learning (p. 256). With this new knowledge, Robbins (1991) declares that teachers are able to form hypotheses, conduct experiments, and allow other teachers to observe and take notes (p. 3). This form of collaboration, Jewett and MacPhee (2001) state, develops a level of confidence and provides a two-way learning opportunity for teachers. Slater and Simmons (2001) add that when peer coaching is enforced within educational institutions, it promotes reciprocity among faculty.

In an article by Slater and Simmons (2001), a peer coaching program is implemented at high school level that allows groups of two or three teachers to assist each other with their teaching in hopes of connecting staff development with whole school improvement. The seventeen teachers attend an orientation that introduces the program and four sessions that train the teachers on how to correctly act as peer coaches. They are then paired, and the actual program begins. The teachers meet every three weeks to discuss peer coaching and review new skill areas. The information gathered from surveys concluded that 29% of teachers strongly

agreed and 59% agreed that coaching improved their teaching skills. Many felt that the program improved their confidence in teaching and also motivated them to try new teaching strategies.

With a foundational view of staff education programs and the peer coaching relationships that can arise from such programs, I will now explain the common practices of the writing center.

Writing Center Practice

Writing center practice lies in the basis of communication between a consultant and client. As North (1984) states in his theory of writing center practice, the goal of the writing center is not to make better papers but to make better writers (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 69). Thus, the primary tasks of a writing center consultant are to explain to the fundamentals of writing to the consultant and also guide the process of writing. However, Brooks (1991) and Harris (1992) both agree that the demand from clients and the consultants' own need for perfection can increase the likelihood that the consultant fixes the paper instead of acting as the facilitator of knowledge construction. When this happens, Brooks (1991) continues, the consultant has not been a consultant at all; rather, they have been an editor (p. 219). With this, it can be assumed that the object of the writing center consultants is to not to correct clients but to teach clients to correct themselves. To do this, Bruffee (1984) concludes, consultants must work with their clients collaboratively (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 207).

Bruffee (1984) builds on his argument by hypothesizing that the basis of all knowledge is linked with conversation. Because of this, the conversation between the consultant and client forges a social context in which the formation of knowledge takes place (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 210). Bruffee (1984) implies that peer consulting is directly linked to

collaborative learning. To successfully forge a true collaborative relationship between consultants and clients, Harris (1992) concludes that the primary job of writing center consultants is to ask questions (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 275).

Harris (1992) builds on this assertion by simulating the dialogue of a writing center consultant, in which the phrase "ask questions" appears three times (as cited in Barnett and Blumner, 2008, p. 279). Questions, Harris (1992) states, lead to discovery, which is why they are such an effective consulting strategy. Thompson and Mackiewicz (2014) infer that this is true because questions allow consultants and clients to fill in their knowledge deficits and check each other's understanding (p. 37). Because of this, both Harris (1992), Thompson and Mackiewicz (2014) agree that the questions writing center consultants ask indirectly guide their clients into correcting their own writing. The conclusions of both Harris (1992), Thompson and Mackiewicz (2014) reinforce North's (1984) perceived goal of the writing center.

Purpose

The recent pandemic has shown that academic spaces should incorporate more resilient and innovate modes of instruction to withstand future crises. With its practice being embedded in collaborative learning theory, the writing center is one of those academic spaces. In recent years, writing centers have been moving toward more innovative consulting activities, many of which allow for some type of peer coaching to take place. In reviewing the resilient teaching, collaborative learning, and consultant training literature, while also analyzing transcripts from my panel presentation, I will provide recommendations for administrators to design an activity specific to their writing center. By providing recommendations, writing center administrators will be able to gear their training programs to their specific writing center, demographics, and needs.

Methodology

In March 2021, I hosted a panel presentation at a virtual Southeastern writing center conference with representatives from approximately six higher education institutions. My objective was to learn about how other writing center professionals were navigating the new environment, seeking tips that they had learned and issues that they were running into, with a focus on resilient pedagogy. This research at the conference, though small, nonetheless is an example of how consultants themselves can be drawn into writing center research and contribute to conversations concerning how we can innovate our practices.

 I began the presentation by discussing my experiences in writing centers, and how my coworkers and I often navigated disorientation together. I then discussed how, unlike the localized disorientation that we had experience in our writing center, the disorientation of the pandemic was affecting all writing centers alike, which necessitated the discussion of consultant training and collaboration practices. I then gave a brief overview of the history of resilient pedagogy and discussed how our writing center encouraged consultant collaboration during the pandemic.

After this brief introduction of the topic, the attendees and myself were divided into virtual rooms to discuss the following questions. These questions were developed after a thorough review of the relevant literature. Once these questions were completed, an expert in writing center pedagogy reviewed the questions for content and relevance:

#1 As we have all been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, how have your consultant training practices or methods changed?

#2 What are some lessons that you all have learned about team building during a

pandemic, and what are the resources that you all have utilized?

#3 As we think about ways to implement resilient pedagogy into writing centers, what are

the most important/valuable elements of consultant collaboration that we should use as a

framework to guide our focus?

#4 One thing that was very valuable to me in the face-to-face writing center was the

ability to constantly rethink/reconceptualize my consulting practices by listening

in/observing other sessions. I would listen to the questions that my coworkers asked,

study their body language, and view how they navigated their sessions, and this really

informed my consulting practices. How could we be creative in offering similar

opportunities now that many consultants are working remotely?

#5 In the context of writing centers, how do we design a resilient collaborative consultant

training model that works for the face-to-face, online, and blended writing center?

#6 Upon finding ways to build resilience into team building and collaboration in writing

centers, how can we store the information we gain, include it in orientations, etc., so that

we are more equipped for later issues?

The groups were given time to answer the questions amongst themselves. They then

returned to the main room to discuss their answers. To keep a record of the answers for future

use, the attendees were asked to record their answers in the "chat" section, and conference

administrators were tasked with storing the transcripts.

Though these transcripts are a great resource for showing how Southeastern writing

centers responded to the pandemic, there is also a wealth of innovative consultant training

programs in the literature. Since these programs can give great insight into innovative practices

that can be realized in both the in-person and virtual writing center, I analyzed both the

transcripts and the literature in search of such activities. With this information, I will give

recommendations for practice.

Analysis

To analyze the transcripts, which are qualitative data, I utilized the qualitative content

analysis method to group together responses with similar themes related to resilience. This

involved segmenting data and taking the data apart as well as putting it back together (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018). For instance, I grouped together responses that mentioned buzzwords like

"community" and others that discussed differing schedules. Once I had these groupings, I put the

transcripts aside while I turned to the consultant training literature to locate similar themes. Upon

this analysis of the transcripts and literature, I found that there were many parallels between what

consultants believe will be beneficial for consultant training exercises post pandemic and what

writing center administrators are already implementing. For instance, Consultant #1 discussed

the importance of engaging activities that will encourage community among consultants. An

example engaging activity could be the implementation of a systemic self-reflection activity like

the one discussed by Bonnie Devet (2020), where she used a theoretical model in a group

training session. Though given in the in-person format, this activity's emphasis on reflection and

dialogue makes it ideal for the virtual format, as well. Consultant #2 argued that writing center

administrators should always maximize such community-building opportunities, whether that be

through training, staff meetings, or other activities. If writing centers are forced to drastically

rethink our practice in the future, such a robust community could make navigating the changes

together much easier. Administrator #2 also recognized the value of community building, noting

that there are many modalities in which community building can be realized. But this community

need not be limited to a single writing center. Using Holly Ryan's (2018) example as a guide,

writing centers could partner with multiple institutions to create multi-institutional blogs. Not

only would these blogs facilitate the formation of larger writing center communities, but they

would also allow writing center practitioners to explore broader relationships between

consultants.

The presentation attendees also felt that writing center administrators should maximize

all opportunities to be flexible in their training approaches. For Consultant #1, the fact that

writing centers consultations can be realized in face-to-face, synchronous, and asynchronous

formats warrants that consultant training pedagogy, too, should reflect those various formats.

Consultant #4 agreed that writing centers should take advantage of all modalities, but they also

shared a sentiment with Sharon Estes and Alexis Martina (2010) when they noted that though in-

person activities are great for connecting, many consultants commute and may miss out on solely

in-person activities. Thus, combining virtual and in-person opportunities could strengthen

writing center team building. Consultant #2, though recognizing the possibilities of the virtual

environment, suggests that writing centers capitalize on any opportunities to interact face-to-

face.

Some attendees also suggested that we locate the similarities between the virtual and

face-to-face environments when designing resilient training and collaborative exercise.

Excitingly, writing center administrators have already been drawing such similarities between

both these formats. Partnering with their colleagues from the Academic Technology group from

the Division of Information Technology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Bradley

Hughes and Melissa Tedrowe (2013) developed a web-based tool called CS/CR Builder (for

Case Scenario and Critical Reader) that offered consultants an immersive consulting experience. Yet writing centers without such technological partnerships should not be discouraged, as Consultant #3 claimed that consulting in the virtual environment is more similar to the in-person format than we often recognize, suggesting that virtual breaks in the chat room can mirror the silence in a face-to-face session. Consultant #4 agreed, sharing that their writing center used virtual appointment transcripts to train their consultants. Though we have not seen such a training activity discussed in the literature, Consultant #4 argued that the transcripts helped to inform their virtual consulting pedagogy in synchronous and asynchronous formats.

Though writing center administrators have often used blogs in their training programs, as in the case of the multi-institutional blog that Ryan (2018) discusses, many attendees advocated for more synchronous training activities, like the use of chat rooms. Administrator #1 suggested a method for sharing ideas, building resilience, and staying connected, which they coined the "Zoom Water Cooler." The idea is that consultants with similar schedules are put into a Zoom meeting for around thirty minutes so that they can share their ideas. Yet any virtual meeting format could reach this desired effect. Administrator #1 also suggested that we use this space to mirror the common training practice of pairing an experienced consultant with an inexperienced one, further highlighting the importance of locating the similarities between modalities.

Though consultant led training programs can be beneficial to the formation of consulting strategies, the literature and feedback from the presentation point to writing center administrators playing a foundational role in any training program utilized. Administrator #2 deliberated that administrators rather than consultants should create those spaces and encourage their use. Though not stated explicitly, this is completely in line with available literature, as all of the authors discussed in the consultant training section earlier were writing center administrators.

Recommendations for Practice

As noted through the literature, the forms that collaborative team building can take in writing centers are vast, yet that does not mean that we cannot find concrete ways to guide our future practices. Using the information gathered from my presentation transcripts and the literature, I have devised a set of recommendations for the formation and evaluation of collaborative team building exercises post pandemic. The recommendations are as follows:

- The exercise **engages** consultants in writing center practice.

- The exercise is **community focused**.

- The exercise **reflects the various formats that consultations can take**, like synchronous and asynchronous formats.

- The exercise **draws on similarities between the virtual and face-to-face environments.**

- The exercise is **created by writing center administrators**, and these individuals encourage its use, though writing consultants play an integral part in its formation.

Recommendations for Future Research

As noted in earlier sections, both resilient pedagogy and writing center practice are young fields, so for writing center practitioners to continue locating ways that resilient pedagogy can be incorporated in writing center practice, both fields of research should be further developed. In addition, though I was able to gain valuable insight from my presentation, it was a small study, centered around a few consultants and administrators in the Southeastern United States. Thus, a future study seeking to understand the effects of disorientation on writing center practice may take a multi-regional, multi-institutional approach to gain a broader understanding of the issues.

References

About universal design for learning. (2022). Retrieved February 27, 2022,

> https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl

Adams, B., & Wilson, N. S. (2020). Building community in asynchronous online higher

> education courses through collaborative annotation. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(2), 250-261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520946422

Bowman, C.L., McCormick, S. (2000). Comparison of peer coaching versus traditional

> supervision effects. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93, 256-261.

Boquet, E. H. (2002;2003;). *Noise from the writing center*. Utah State University

> Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nwjt

Brooks, J. (1991). Minimalist consulting: Making the student do all the work. In B.W. Barnett &

> J.S. Blumner (Eds.), *The Longman guide to writing center theory and practice* (pp. 219-224). New York,NY: Pearson.

Bruffee, K.A. (1984). Peer consulting and the "conversation of mankind". In B.W. Barnett & J.S.

> Blumner (Eds.), *The Longman guide to writing center theory and practice* (pp. 207-218). New York,NY: Pearson.

Carino, P. (2003). Power and authority in peer tutoring. In M. A. Pemberton & J. Kinkead (Eds.),

> *Center will hold* (pp. 96–113). University Press of Colorado.
> https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nxnq.9

Chen, Y. (2018). Perceptions of EFL college students toward collaborative learning. *English

> Language Teaching*, 11(2), 1–4. Retrieved from

http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1164588&site=eds-live

Choate, K., Goldhaber, D., & Theobald, R. (2021). The effects of COVID-19 on teacher preparation. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 102(7), 52-57. https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217211007340

Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). *Thousand Oaks*, CA: Sage Publications.

Devet, B. (2020). Gibbs' reflective cycle for writing center training. Writing Lab Newsletter, 44(9-10).

Dintz, S. and Diedaisch, J. (2003). Creating theory: Moving consultants to the center. Writing Center Journal, 23(2), 63-76.

Estes, S., & Martina, A. (2010). Taking consultant training online. Writing Lab Newsletter, 35(3-4), 1.

Fornauf, B.S. & Erickson, J.D. (2020). Toward an inclusive pedagogy through universal design for learning in higher education: A review of the literature. Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 33(2), 183-199. https://www.ahead.org/professional-resources/publications/jped

Gardiner, E. (2020, June 25). Resilient Pedagogy for the Age of Disruption: A Conversation with Josh Eyler. Top Hat. https://tophat.com/blog/resilient-pedagogy-for-the-age-of-disruption-a-conversation-with-josh-eyler/

George, M. L. (2020). Effective teaching and examination strategies for undergraduate learning

   during COVID-19 school restrictions. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1),

   23-48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934017

Gill, J. (2011). In-house consultant handbooks and the problem of negative rhetoric. *Writing Lab

   Newsletter*, 35(5-6), 11.

Harris, Muriel. (1992). Collaboration is not collaboration is not collaboration: Writing center

   consultantials vs. Peer response groups. In B.W. Barnett & J.S. Blumner (Eds.), *The

   Longman guide to writing center theory and practice* (pp. 272-286). New York,NY:

   Pearson.

Holshue, M. L., DeBolt, C., Lindquist, S., Lofy, K. H., Wiesman, J., Bruce, H., Spitters, C.,

   Ericson, K., Wilkerson, S., Tural, A., Diaz, G., Cohn, A., Fox, L., Patel, A., Gerber, S. I.,

   Kim, L., Tong, S., Lu, X., Lindstrom, S., . . . Washington State 2019-nCoV Case

   Investigation Team. (2020). First case of 2019 novel coronavirus in the united states. *The

   New England Journal of Medicine*, 382(10), 929-936.

Hughes, B., & Tedrowe, M. (2013). Introducing case scenario/critical reader builder: Creating

   computer simulations to use in consultant education. *Writing Lab Newsletter*, 38(1-2).

Jewett, P., & MacPhee, D. (2012). Adding collaborative peer coaching to our teaching identities.

   Reading Teacher, 66(2), 105–110. Retrieved from

   http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ982263&site=ehost

   -live

Kiedaisch, J., & Dinitz, S. (2007). Changing notions of difference in the writing center: The

   possibilities of universal design. *The Writing Center Journal, 27*(2), 39-59.

Mackiewicz, J., & Thompson, I. (2014). Instruction, cognitive scaffolding, and motivational

    scaffolding in writing center consulting. *Composition Studies*, 42(1), 54–78. Retrieved

    from

    http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1031910&site=eh

    ost-liv

Major, C. (2020). Innovations in teaching and learning during a time of crisis. *Innovative Higher

    Education*, 45(4), 265-266. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09514-w

Moore, J., SanGregory, E., Matney, S., & Morris, J. (2009). Designing consultant guides to

    enhance effectiveness across disciplines and with special demographics. *Writing Lab

    Newsletter*, 34(4-5), 1.

North, S. M. (1984). The idea of a writing center. In B.W. Barnett & J.S. Blumner (Eds.), *The

    Longman guide to writing center theory and practice* (pp. 63-78). New York,NY:

    Pearson.

Osman,N., Nayan, S., Mansor, M., Maesin A., Shafie, L. (2010). Spoken skills, communication

    apprehension and collaborative learning. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 6, 117-124.

    Retrieved from http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/issue/archive

Piotrowski, C., & King, C. (2020). Covid-19 pandemic: Challenges and implications for higher

    education. Education, 141(2), 61–66.

Robbins, P. (1991). *How to plan and implement a peer coaching program*. Association for

    Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Ryan, H. (2018). A multi-institutional blog as a site for understanding peer consultant discourse. *Writing Lab Newsletter*, 43(3-4).

Scott, L., Temple, P., & Marshall, D. (2015). UDL in online college coursework: Insights of infusion and educator preparedness. *Online Learning* (Newburyport, Mass.), 19(5)https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v19i5.623

Slater, C. L., & Simmons, D. L. (2001). The design and implementation of a peer coaching program. *American Secondary Education*, 29(3), 67–76. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ637005&site=ehost -live

Stewart, M. K. (2018). Cognitive presence in FYC: collaborative learning that supports individual authoring. *Composition Forum*, 38. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1176415&site=eds-live

Watermeyer, R., Crick, T., Knight, C., & Goodall, J. (2021). COVID-19 and digital disruption in UK universities: Afflictions and affordances of emergency online migration. *Higher Education*, 81(3), 623-641. http://dx.doi.org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00561-y

US covid-19 cases and deaths by state. (2022, February 25). Retrieved February 27, 2022, https://usafacts.org/visualizations/coronavirus-covid-19-spread-map/

Zhao, Y., & Watterston, J. (2021). The changes we need: Education post COVID-19. *Journal of Educational Change*, *22*(1), 3–12. https://doi-org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09417-

2017 Four-Year Institution Survey (2017). Retrieved May 5, 2022,

https://writingcensus.ucsd.edu/survey/4/year/2017

2017 Two-Year Institution Survey (2017). Retrieved May 5, 2022,

https://writingcensus.ucsd.edu/survey/2/year/2017