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## CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY: A FRAMEWORK FOR WRITING CENTER ANALYSES

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CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR WRITING CENTER ANALYSES

by

Donald Ray Moore

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English Composition Studies

The University of Memphis

May 2021

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To Mom, Dad, and Ron

## **Acknowledgments**

As this project demonstrates, everything is done in collaboration. For this reason, I would like to thank the following for their time and commitment to seeing this project through:

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I would also like to thank all of my family members especially my aunt Rena who has supported me through every phase of my education. Thank you all.

## Abstract

From the recognized beginning of the “laboratory” movement in composition instruction, teachers have sought to employ new and more practical methods useful in developing student writing. Such trends continue today as new generations of students enter the academy and new challenges emerge. From such conditions, we might see how components within a system of activity work together to meet objectives and develop outcomes within the shared dialectic of an activity system. Individuals and groups increase the potential for contradiction identification, thus, opportunities for solutions increase through mediational activities. With this idea in mind, this dissertation reviews writing center-related scholarship from 1887 through today to trace emerging contradictions in laboratory teaching’s epochal movements. The end goal, then, is to define how resolutions to those contradictions have given rise to our modern conceptualization of the writing center.

Using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), this dissertation interprets the development of writing centers from their earliest beginnings. Through the evaluation of textual artifacts, I present the development of current writing center praxes in stages: a Formative Period; an Interim or Clinical Period; a Modern period; a Theoretical Period, and an emerging Activist Period. As a result, I look to provide modern writing center practitioners with a thorough history of writing center practices: what shaped them, through what contradictions they arose, what precipitated those contradictions, what resolved them, and what lies ahead. As communities like writing centers re-create themselves—through pushing and pulling, conflict and resolution, tension and release—they birth new conceptualizations of realities.

In the end, this dissertation uses CHAT to present a narrative about the development of writing center work that continues to unfold in new and dynamic ways. As a result, what may be most useful through this historical analysis is the way in which writing center practitioners may

use CHAT to chart a way forward using the very framework used as the basis of this project's analysis. Today, writing centers may offer new ways to address a pedagogical order designed to challenge racism, homophobia, and other injustices through ongoing reading groups, curricular revision, and other faculty development efforts. Through learning our history, I believe we may more adequately position ourselves to shape our futures.

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## Chapter One:

### Introduction

As the title of this work suggests, this project begins with the premise of analysis. By examining the activities, through which writing centers have developed over the last 120 hundred years or so, I look to chart a way forward using CHAT as a basis for analysis that may assist writing center practitioners in developing their writing center assessments, evaluations, and organizational structures. Certainly, writing centers did not pop out of thin air, so to demonstrate how they have developed, I offer a methodical look at the last one hundred-plus years of writing center work through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). First, I believe CHAT Analysis offers a way to consider how writing center work has developed, but it may also lead to new analyses as we continue moving forward into the next era of writing center work.

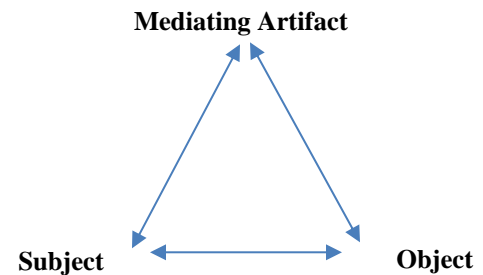
As I say, this strategy of analysis, first, pinpoints developments that have shaped current writing center praxes since its inception at the end of the nineteenth-century; then, through this episodic analysis, the strategy of employing CHAT for programmatic analysis represents a tool for practitioners today and how they may use CHAT in similar ways in their writing centers i.e. disclosing disharmonious practices and mediating them. Thus, I look to interpret history—through the lens of CHAT—to present a depiction of how writing centers have advanced, and at times regressed, with a system of interconnected activity correcting itself along the way. Through a detailed survey of scholarship related to, or focused on the work of writing centers, I hope to demonstrate how writing centers are continually evolving activity systems. This analysis of scholarship—to determine where growth occurs throughout the history of writing centers—also demonstrates an activity through which modern-day writing center practitioners may recognize their centers as thriving and developing activity systems. It is through such CHAT

analysis that practitioners may identify opportunities for their local writing centers' development. Thus, this project aims to illustrate what might make for effective—and ineffective—writing center work suggesting CHAT operate as a frame for analysis as the field continues building sustainable praxes.

### **Methodological Frame: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)**

Rooted in Vygotsky's original conceptualization of activity as a mode of development, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) acts as the interpretive agent for this project. Specifically, I employ Yrjo Engeström's framework of nested triangles to conduct a robust inquiry of writing center practices. In order to uncover trends and situate the development of writing center work as organically active, creative, and mediational work, I explore what Vassily Davydov argues in his article "The Content and Unsolved Problems of Activity Theory" in *Perspectives on Activity Theory* are "the historical conditions for activity that transforms reality according to the laws of its own perfection" (Davydov 43). Thus, I view the writing center as an activity that, over time, has developed methods born of self-reflection, debate, improvement, and evaluation. Each generation's methods inform burgeoning practices that follow, and as they expand, practitioners share strategies, create connections, and craft a lasting blueprint for the future.

In order to uncover trends and situate the development of writing center work as organically active, creative, and mediational work, I see the writing center as an activity that, in the beginning, develops methods of practice from within; thus, it is one born of self-reflection, debate, improvement, and self-evaluation. These self-



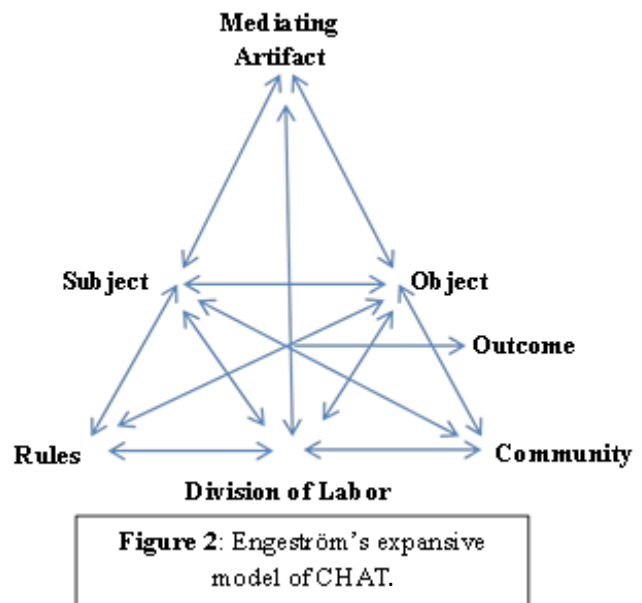
**Figure 1:** Vygotsky's triad of development.

regulated activities occur organically through Vygotsky's subject-object-mediating artifact triad (see Figure 1). Using a simple explanation for applying this triad, a child operates as the subject with a cookie, the object, which the child cannot reach, on the countertop. The child's development occurs when, upon finding a yard stick behind the refrigerator, they knock the cookie off the counter or bring it closer to the edge so they can reach it. The child has now developed their mediational activity, and they have a new tool, or artifact, which they can use for other tasks (Russell "Activity Theory" 4). Interestingly, while this triad focuses on the individual's development, now recognized as first generation Activity Theory, Vygotsky frames activity with the implication of sociality existent in the triad: If the child has seen the yard stick in use before, social implications dictate the child's development.

For example, in his original conceptualizations of activity, Vygotsky expresses the development of man and his consciousness through his subject-object-mediating artifact triad: "It is a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over, nature" (55). Though social aspects of cultural influence on the individual appear to be absent in Vygotsky's original triad, Andy Blunden, leading activity theorist and critic, in his 2010 book *An Interdisciplinary Theory of Activity* argues the implication of sociality exists in Vygotsky's original triad, for "social entities and individual personalities mutually constitute and form one another . . ." (171). Further, suggesting social constructs cannot be removed from the individual's objective, second-generation activity theorists including Vygotsky's contemporary psychologists Alexei Leont'ev and Alexander Luria believe "the distinction between individual goal-directed action and collective object-oriented activity is of central importance. . . The motive is formed when a collective need meets an object that has the potential to fulfill the need" (Engeström "Expansive Visibilization" 65). For Engeström, then, Leont'ev and Luria build on to

Vygotsky’s original frame by broadening the framework to establish one for collective activity. For second-generation activity researchers like Leont’ev and Luria, a shared dialectic between individuals and groups exists, thus, they add community, a division of labor, and rules to their framework, thereby, increasing the potential for contradiction identification and a need for mediation.

Today, third generation activity theorists such as Yrjo Engeström apply the expanded CHAT model of Luria and Leont’ev to the workplace to “distinguish between short-lived and goal-directed actions and durable, object-oriented activity systems” (“Activity Theory as a Framework” 960). Illustrated in Figure 2,



with seven distinct concepts, the subject is the central figure in the system activity. For example, in a writing center activity system, the student or the consultant may be the subject of the activity while for another point of analysis, the writing center itself may be the subject. Hence, the object or objective is what system activity aims to accomplish. For the student, the activity is to develop their writing proficiency, the consultant looks to assist the student, and with the writing center as the subject, the objective may be to assist students, faculty, and administrators in fulfilling the university’s mission statement. Mediating artifacts are those tools which the system employs to help the subject meet its goals with rules helping to guide the activity. Finally, those in the community i.e. students, consultants, faculty, and administrators all have a role to play as a division of labor among

members coalesce as the subject looks to meet the outcome of the activity. Each of these concepts within Engeström's model is derivative of the concept of activity: "The whole . . . [is] perceptible in every part" (Blunden 27). With this frame of workplace development in mind, I subsequently use Engeström's CHAT framework of nested triangles as a tool for studying the various models from which modern-day conceptualizations of writing centers have emerged.

In this, it is Blunden who makes clear the implications of activity theory as a framework for organismal analysis or a theoretical tool for analysis, for the subject of analysis "is not an individual person but a concept, a unit of consciousness connected to social practices implicating the whole community, reflected in language, the whole social division of labor and so on" (Blunden 63). Thus, this assertion supports Engeström's applications of Activity Theory as a framework for analysis and adds another dimension to Vygotsky's original work: the collective activity of a society (or for a theory) that continually recreates itself. Therefore, I use Engeström by viewing CHAT as a 'whole' with a complex web of interrelated parts developed and detailed over time. Engeström explains: "Goal-directed individual and group actions, as well as automatic operations, are relatively independent but subordinate units of analysis, eventually understandable only when interpreted against the background of entire activity systems" ("Expansive Learning" 136). Henceforth, Engeström's conceptualization of CHAT proves useful in arguing that writing centers function as a gestalt with new forms of activity replacing the old. Engeström's model and application of CHAT proves useful, then, as I trace new forms of activity emerging through writing center system contradictions from the very beginning of the movement. This model of analysis proves especially useful, then, when applied to individual endeavors within the community of writing center work, the approaches of writing center community members, and their use of mediating artifacts when engaging an action.

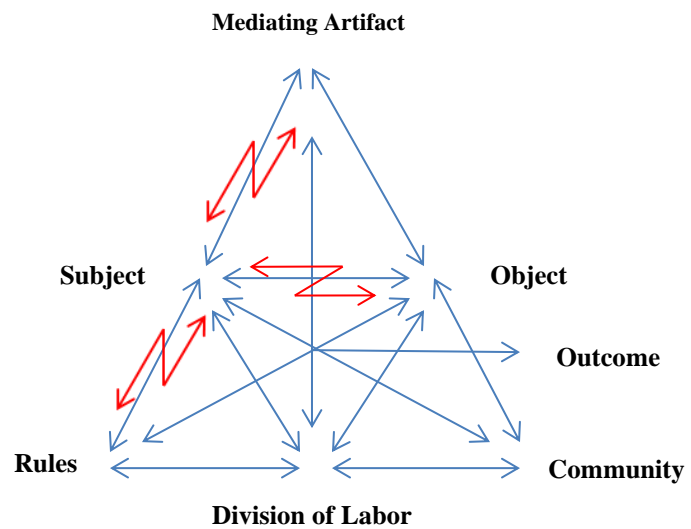
In Heather Trahan's 2012 article, "Queers, Cupid's Arrow, and Contradictions in the Classroom" in the *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, she finds through her analysis of classroom interaction that "when humans come together in a single activity system to 'do' an activity, some of these folks will necessarily interpret and/or carry out the activity in a multitude of assorted, often contradictory ways" (57). Thus, when I apply CHAT to activities stretched across generations, I see apparent contradictions not only among participants in the activity in period-specific ways, but also in ways that new generations adjust or modify practices from an earlier period as they adjust to new social conditions. To this end, in his address to the International Writing Centers Association in Pittsburgh in 2015, Ben Raforth believes generational growth is inherent to writing center scholarship: "Venturing into new territories sends out shoots on the family tree and expands its crown. It makes us more diverse and ultimately more adaptable because it engages new talents and tools to create things of value. To explore such possibilities, we should immerse ourselves in creative works and let them provoke our imaginations" (28). Such work enables us to recognize contradictions and think creatively to mediate those contradictions. In doing so, the interconnectedness of our branches of generational writing center work becomes apparent as new generations continue to build onto and develop the writing center organismal development process. This is evident, to me, through the arc of writing center history.

For my work, Engeström's model of CHAT may have broader applications for writing center work as researchers look to identify contradictions in and provide solutions for writing center work: "The identification of contradictions in an activity system helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems" (Engeström "Activity Theory" 966). In other words, understanding our past contradictions, solutions, and foibles,



might lead to new, more flexible pathways for consultants, instructors, or administrators associated with writing center work: “Humans not only internalize ready-made standards and rules of activity but externalize themselves as well, creating new standards and rules” (Lektorsky 66). For example, I review the beginnings of laboratory writing during the 1880's by evaluating composition and laboratory related scholarship to reveal strategies employed by administrators as they attempt to engage a new student population. A similar situation occurred in the 1970's with Ken Bruffee and others' work demonstrating similar conflict/resolution and creative work to mediate new constraints. This analysis demonstrates how society—the writing center community in particular—recreates itself through the mediated actions of its activists. Thus, through the natural order of self-regulated learning activities and communities' self-reflective actions, tools get developed to resolve contradictions and new contradictions arise further illustrating the gestalt of writing center dialectic.

Contradictions, as explained by Trahan and Engeström and represented in Figure 3 as they “manifest themselves through disturbances, ruptures and small unremarkable innovations in practitioners' everyday work actions” (Engeström “Expansive Visibilization” 68). Here, Engeström's model serves as an analytical tool that may show where needs exist in writing



**Figure 3:** Engeström's expansive model indicating where contradictions may exist in a system.

center activity systems, reveal existent disturbances, and in turn, prepare practitioners to mediate

activity as they seek solutions to the contradictions. For example, in the model presented here, rules or the use of mediating artifacts (tools) may not be clear to the subject; therefore, the object goes unrealized. In the shared dialectic of an activity system, individuals and groups increase the potential for contradiction identification, thereby, increasing opportunities for solutions through mediational activities.

In fact, the work by Mark Hall in his 2017 book *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*, demonstrates exactly how CHAT may help consultants identify contradictions in writing consultation transcripts as they develop new practices for engaging students in tutorials. Such "activity of tutoring suggest implications for tutor education" (57). Additionally, Cameron Mozafari applies CHAT to his research in finding a way to understand the difficulties of tutoring English as a Second language (ESL) students: "Using CHAT to analyze culturally situated activity systems and the conflict between these activity systems . . . can be a helpful tool in strategizing ways for tutors and tutees to transcend their social and material circumstances" (457). Hall and Mozafari provide compelling reasons and a strong rationale for exploring applications of CHAT to writing center studies in a holistic fashion whereby researchers not only analyze NES and ESL issues, but the myriad issues involved with a fully functioning activity system. Through the identification of contradictions inherent in the evolving writing center activity system, this project, henceforth, demonstrates the development of durable and long-term goals found in writing centers today i.e. student development, teacher development, community engagement, and praxis development.

With the dialectic of a system driven by objective-related motives, the activity of writing center development should remain in constant flux as the whole continues its evolution. As Andy Blunden explains "the whole point [of Activity Theory is] to bring out the contradictions and

show how they are resolved in actuality” (Blunden 173). Furthering the conceptualization of Activity Theory as a tool useful in analysis of system activity, Yrjo Engeström’s CHAT framework of nested triangles acts as a mechanism through which the development of the ‘whole’—with a complex web of interrelated parts—is viewed and detailed over time. Thus, through this project, then, I aim to show how Engeström’s conceptualization of CHAT is useful in analyzing writing center contradictions to expose new, emerging forms of activity through the mediation of the old.

Just as Caitlin C. Leibman argues in her 2019 dissertation “Is this What you Wanted?” when she "analyzes classroom data [through CHAT] including drafts, author’s notes and peer response materials as well as student interview data and writing center consultation transcripts", this project analyzes previous writing center scholarship to reveal contradictions that may exist in previous systems of development and to also set in place a model that may be applied to current writing center practices. For Leibman, such a "dynamic approach [of analysis] allows for an exploration of the messiness of the process . . .” (1). Similarly, this project analyzes the messiness of writing center development since its beginnings at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, I use CHAT analysis as a writing center history building exercise, for “Activity Theory creates space to analyze a dynamic process of co-creation” (Leibman 21). Inherent through my work is the dynamic process of co-creation which manifests through generational transfer . . . each generation informing the emerging praxes of the next. In order to fully realize my goals of analysis, I have closely reviewed scholarship from 1887 through today to reveal how laboratory writing has been adopted by the field of composition and modified through the last 100-plus years, for in its applications, it responds to contradictions that arise in each new era. Hence, Engeström’s model of CHAT assists me as I analyze generational forms of activity in

writing center development to ultimately provide a pathway forward for an evolving praxis. As communities like writing centers re-create themselves—through pushing and pulling, conflict and resolution, tension and release—they birth new conceptualizations of realities. While historical movements and adjustments to the system are incredibly fruitful and interesting, what is most useful through my historical analysis is the development of a way forward using the very framework of the project’s analysis. Using CHAT to track epochal shifts, this project begins and ends with the analysis and evaluation of systems.

Through the collection and dissemination of textual artifacts from eras of writing center development, I view the development of current writing center praxes in stages: a Formative Period; an Interim or Clinical Period; a Modern period; and a Theoretical Period. As a result, I look to provide modern writing center practitioners with an interpretive history of writing center practices; what shaped them; through what contradictions they arose; what precipitated those contradictions; what resolved them; and what lies ahead. I use CHAT, then, to chart actions. Of interest, for example, an analysis of the beginning period of writing center development reveals practical aspects of implementing writing center work precede the theoretical. This assertion then aligns with the Vygotskian notion that “the operations that form its structure are put forward first” (Vygotsky 27). This is to suggest that in the beginning of writing center development, the laboratory writing movement cross-appropriated scientific laboratory approaches for the purposes of teaching composition. Today, however, after the application of operational laboratory work have been established, theoretical applications from philosophy to psychology, education, rhetoric, and sociology support conceptualizations of early writing center development and influence the growing body of writing center scholarship. In order to advance my analysis of each period, I have evaluated scholarship from every major composition and

writing center related publication including journals, books, dissertations, and unpublished manuscripts, and I have chosen specific texts to represent what I have found through that review as representative texts of trends I find during the periods of development I identify. In sum, after applying CHAT to the breadth of available scholarship, I reveal how generations of laboratory and writing center practitioners have evolved to remedy contradictions and organize activities in writing center development. Thus, with my analysis as a sort of model, I argue that modern-day practitioners may employ CHAT as a framework for assessing and organizing our current writing center activities.

Mark Waldo argues for such a framework for writing center analysis when he suggests the “center needs a theoretical frame independent of discipline for its practice, a frame that gives tutoring, workshop, and consulting activities research legitimacy” (24). This assertion seems to address a legitimacy issue faced by writing centers, for much like issues the field of composition faces, an issue of legitimacy also exists for writing centers. In fact, John Nordlof also argues in his 2014 *Writing Center Journal* article for “the importance of developing a theoretical perspective on our work . . .” (46). Through the application of CHAT to assess and evaluate writing center work, scholars may better demonstrate how writing labs bridge theory and practice for students, consultants, future teachers of writing and administrators, and more deliberately, respond to writing center criticisms. As Nancy Grimm argues in her 1996 book *Good Intentions*, adopting “a social action model of research that involves students as participants, writing centers will be less connected with the need to serve and to please and more connected with the desire to understand, to articulate, and to interpret” (Grimm 88). Hence, demonstrating the possibilities of CHAT within writing center scholarship—a conceptual framework for an analysis of past, current, and future writing center practices—I look to connect the history of writing center work

to serve the interests of the field while simultaneously envisioning its future possibilities.

Through in-depth inquiry, I enter the writing center dialectic and follow its development through the contradictions it has encountered. CHAT, and Engeström's model in particular, offers a way for me to bring forth the contradictions of writing center work and demonstrate how those contradictions have been resolved to advance new conceptualizations of writing center praxes through the organic nature of self-regulation, self-assessment, conflict/resolution and tension/release processes.

Reciprocally, I also aim to demonstrate how the CHAT framework may offer a way for practitioners to analyze and organize their activities. Thus, using activity as a lens through which a view of writing center development emerges, CHAT may act as a complementary framework for analyzing and organizing our current system activities. Reconstructing the external operations of teaching composition, which began internally with the identification of contradictions found in late nineteenth-century composition classrooms, this historiographical analysis demonstrates how the cornerstones of progress (conflict/resolution, tension/release, contradiction/mediation) enable new realities for writing centers. Exemplifying the interconnectedness of components working together to meet objectives and outcomes within the system, my use of CHAT operates to not only map the past but chart a course for the future. Through learning our history, we more adequately position ourselves to shape our futures. This project, then, views CHAT as a tool useful in various applications of writing center evaluation from the use of laboratory instruction as the crux of writing center work to the development of staff and how current scholarship informs persistent writing center development.

## Literature Review

With a few exceptions, most of the notable contributions to the history of writing center development have appeared in composition and writing center journals, which, after initial publication, have found their way into anthologies focused on writing center scholarship. These articles are discussed here in chronological order for ease of purpose as I also aim to demonstrate how this project differs from previous studies of writing center history. Currently, outside of the work of Neal Lerner perhaps, there is a vacuum where the history of writing center scholarship analysis is concerned. In fact, Lerner recognizes this reality: “For some, writing center history simply doesn’t exist” (“Punishment” 53). Nonetheless, this section offers a view of related scholarship including some of that which has made the rounds in writing center anthologies throughout the years. However, this section also looks to provide recent scholarship to demonstrate how CHAT has been applied to writing center work.

Most of us who are involved in writing center work or composition studies are familiar with Robert Moore’s “The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory.” While this is an important work for writing center practitioners, it only delineates attributes of the writing lab and the clinic. Moore’s analysis of clinics and laboratories certainly does not discuss why the clinic exists or where it comes from, nor does it approach a historical analysis for the writing laboratory. I do not contend that it should either. In fact, Moore’s piece serves this project well, helping demarcate specific attributes to which writing centers today adhere i.e. offering flexible, student-centered, and collaborative approaches in welcoming environments to assist students with their writing. Moore’s objective is not to determine where writing centers originated or why they exist. Instead, he looks to offer an analysis of clinics and laboratories so that practitioners may determine which is most useful in their environments. Therefore, rather than using Moore’s

article as a representation for writing center analysis, it is more useful as a piece of scholarship to be reviewed for its historical contributions to writing center development. Thus, Moore's contributions will be discussed in full; however, at the moment, with the center still developing at the time of Moore's article, it is not surprising there is a lack of scholarship review to determine the origins of writing centers, or at the time, labs or clinics. To find scholarship that mirrors the work of this project, it is necessary to jump ahead to the burgeoning 1970's. This is the period that many practitioners view as the center coming into its own; thus, historical reflections begin emerging post-writing center expansion.

And as writing centers began to flourish after the 1970's and 80's, attempts to determine their origins began to emerge. For example, in his well-known 1995 article "Early Writing centers: Toward a History," Peter Carino surveys the landscape of writing center history to "demonstrate how early centers conducted practice in ways which both deviate from and foreshadow writing center practice and theory today" (11). However, Carino's limited diachronic study only covers "laboratory method" and "writing labs and clinics" in an otherwise surface manner. This is an important peculiarity, for in their article "Makers of Knowledge in Writing Centers," Liggett, Jordan, and Price identify "winning" articles as their canon toward identifying author's modes of inquiry per North's Philosophers, Historians, and Critics classifications. In their analysis, these authors argue that Carino's research (including, but also beyond his 1995 article noted here) "seems more interested in in-depth reading of selected texts rather than in pattern seeking . . . (110). Carino's offering of general comparisons between past and present writing center characteristics (clientele, staffing, and institutional identity) exposes his article as one that does not provide a comprehensive or pattern-identifying cultural-historical study of



writing center development. Thus, he provides an impetus for further definition in writing center analysis, which I aim to undertake here.

Further, in his 1992 *Writing Center Journal* article “What do We Talk About When We Talk About Metaphors: A Cultural Critique of Clinic, Lab, and Center”, Carino’s continued focus on the historical dimensions and ramifications of writing center work lead him to demonstrate that, as writing centers have come into their own, practitioner’s definitions of a writing center have become a mixture of clinic, lab, and/or center. In defining attributes of each, Carino suggests the array of definitions may leave a dizzying residue on practitioners as they look to define their work. Once again, however, Carino, though his article is a thoughtful anecdote of writing center lore, only marginally touches on the historical scholarship of writing center practitioners, who have preceded him. Nonetheless, after this article, Carino seems to build onto his work in historical analysis.

In “Open Admissions and the construction of Writing center History: A Tale of Three Models”, Carino argues in 1996 for a “need to construct an elaborately detailed and historiographically sophisticated model that would more effectively account for the complexity of writing center development than has previous historical work” (30). Suggesting a cultural model would best serve the historicity of writing center work, Carino compares the evolutionary and dialectic models of writing center work up to this point. He argues the evolutionary model typically “cites the open admissions initiatives of [the 1960’s and 70s] as a watershed moment when centers proliferated as remedial clinics and labs and then evolved into the full-service centers of today” (31). Nonetheless, what this description of writing center history leaves out, and which is endemic to historical disclosing in writing center work, is the robust research into writing center history *before* 1960. Certainly, the writing center boom of the 1970’s is an

important and significant era of development in the lore of writing center history. However, with little to no mention of what came before the 1960's, readers may be left to question what precipitated the open enrollment period of writing center proliferation.

In his article, Carino, despite the profound suggestion of applying a cultural model for an historical interpretation of writing center development, nonetheless, adheres to a relatively short period of writing center development: 1968-1983. At the same time, however, Carino paints a broad picture of what may come of his venture into adopting a cultural model for interpretation. He argues "there is some historical validity to both the evolutionary and dialectic models that each has served and continues to influence writing center identity, but that neither, by itself, adequately represents center history" (32). Thus, what I aim to accomplish with this project may begin to take over where Carino leaves off. The history of the writing center through the lens of CHAT resolves Carino's dilemma of an either/or dichotomy, for CHAT represents both the evolutionary model and the dialectic model. This project posits that a cultural model like that for which Carino advocates will "begin to elaborate, more than previous models have, a history accounting for the multiple forces at play at various moments" in writing center history (39). Reviewing scholarship as archival and historical documents reveals a record of history in progress, which begins well-before the open admissions era of the 60's and 70's. Nonetheless, the history entombed herein is, like others before it, a construction and interpretation of history. Therefore, it is not the intention of this work to end the debate of how to define the work of writing centers. It is, rather, opening a fuller history of writing center work from which practitioners may more fully encounter the nuance, struggle, contradictions, and mediation from which their current work originates.

Further, as Carino's work offers a starting point for my review of scholarship to chart our past and a way forward in writing center praxes and scholarship, Elizabeth Boquet's 1999 *College Composition and Communication* article "'Our Little Secret': A History of Writing Centers, Pre- to Post-Open Admissions," also operates as a vehicle for this project as she raises questions concerning how applications from the social sciences may relate to the gestalt of writing center ontology. For example, discussing "The Emergence of the Laboratory Writing Method," Boquet argues that early writing laboratory scholars "framed the work of the writing lab as encouraging dialogue, even dialectic, much as we in the writing centers do today" (45). This is largely true; however, consultations during the earliest days of classroom laboratory work focused on that which occurred between students and teachers, not peers or tutors. For example, student-teacher conferences, either in the classroom or in the instructor's office, result in directed advice as opposed to peer-to-student conferences, which may offer more properties of conversational customs. Nonetheless, Boquet's recognition of the "dialectic" is important, for it situates her work in the frame of Fred Newton Scott vis-à-vis James Berlin. For Berlin, Scott's work, in part, represents the "Transactional Rhetoric" movement, which at the time of its use "was the most complete embodiment of John Dewey's notion of progressive education . . . ." (*Rhetoric and Reality* 46). With the dialectic present in writing center praxis, Bouquet recognizes what Berlin describes as "social construction, a communal creation emerging from the dialectical interplay of individuals" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 47). It is within this frame that I also find inspiration, for the frame of Activity Theory explicitly relies on the dialectic of the community to engage in growth and development as it meets determined objectives for that growth. Though Boquet's work reflects Carino's—in that she provides a backdrop for future research—she simultaneously ties philosophical (Foucault) and psychological concepts (Rogerian non-directive

model) to writing center scholarship (43; 47). In doing so, she expands the dialectic to reach outside of the writing center to assist in further defining writing center lexis through larger contexts and fields of study. What I aim to do, on the other hand, is review these occurrences throughout the development of the writing center praxis and provide a trajectory that rationalizes and situates moves like those Bouquet recognizes. Thus, this project, through a CHAT analysis of writing center and writing center-related scholarship aims to inform current practitioners how they may make similar organizational moves.

Like these most recognizable scholarship artifacts, Neal Lerner, too, provides an impetus for this project's research. In his 2009 book *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, Lerner focuses on late eighteenth-century composition instructors employing writing labs: "In science, hands-on learning was meant to overcome the problem that Louis Agassiz of Harvard described in the mid-nineteenth century: 'The pupil studies nature in the classroom, and when he goes out of doors he can not [*sic*] find her'" (3). Lerner's book focuses on "laboratory methods" (or the hands-on approach) in writing classrooms as it began to take shape at the end of the nineteenth century. Therein, he demonstrates how laboratory practices in the science curriculum such as the drawing and labeling of animals—aimed at constructing meaningful knowledge—is cross-appropriated into the context of writing: "Key to this meaning was not merely observing, drawing, or recording, however, but making inferences from those observations" (130). This method of instruction encourages students to transfer knowledge and apply what they already know to a new construct: writing. Yet like Carino, Lerner's work does not place laboratory teaching methods within a framework disclosing how the lineage of laboratory methods promotes other advances in continually developing writing center praxes. Instead, Lerner provides a robust analysis of laboratory teaching's promise in writing curricula. Nonetheless, it

does not offer a framework of analysis from which practitioners or historians may determine which mechanisms inform the next moves writing center work took and why.

Certainly, however, Lerner's book, *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, begins the process of making connections, for Lerner identifies Preston W. Search, one of the most instrumental figures in the writing laboratory (later the writing center movement):

I first came across Search's concept of "laboratory methods" in my quest to find the first college-level writing center. It struck me then and now that Search's description of the ideal teaching conditions—one-on-one instruction tailored to students' particular needs—echoes the rationale for writing centers as ideal places for learning and teaching writing.

(5)

In fact, through the process of my writing this project and through corresponding with Lerner through e-mail, I was provided an unpublished chapter for his upcoming book: "Chapter 5: Preston W. Search and the Politics of Educational Reform." In this chapter, Lerner provides a thorough look at Search's life and posits that Search was a pioneer in educational reform whose genius may still not be fully recognized. What Lerner discovers is that Search's most contributable efforts were aimed at reforming the "tensions between pedagogy and curriculum" (4). Lerner's chapter on Search is certainly useful for he identifies "tensions between pedagogy and curriculum through the experiences of one late 19th century educational reformer, Preston W. Search" (4). However, the chapter Lerner provides only covers Search. While Lerner's chapter demonstrates how Search became one of the leading practitioners of laboratory teaching and provides a specific view of the beginnings of laboratory instruction (the roots of writing center work), it does not continue a trajectory of writing laboratory development through what this project identifies as the Formative Period or beyond.

With Carino, Boquet, and Lerner, the three most notable contributors of writing center history, serving as precursors to my course of analysis, each serves to provide elaborative artifacts. Carino offers the view that a cultural frame for analysis may be most appropriate as we look to analyze a totality of writing center history. Similarly, Boquet opens the door for my project by not only recognizing the social construction and dialectic inherent in activity, but she creates an opportunity to apply a framework for analyzing how the dialectic has informed the development of writing center activity. And finally, Lerner's rich historical work also invites a holistic approach to trace the lineage of writing center history. Providing a starting point with Search, Lerner's work situates writing center activity in the specific context of the laboratory and laboratory writing, thus, instigating my search for a complete lineage of writing center development from Search onward.

Today, writing center history continues to unfold and develop in predictable and unpredictable ways. Perhaps this growth is best described in an analogy from Alice M. Gillam at the beginning of her 1991 *Writing Center Journal* article "Writing Center Ecology": "Like a fertile, overgrown garden, the writing center breeds conversations between writer and tutor which grow and spread in directions neither consciously intends" (127). In this setting, the writing center serves as an incubator for ideas as each new generation continues learning and shaping their scholarship from the previous occupants of the laboratory or writing center space. For the continuation of a literature review, this section provides a discussion of some of the most recent work of writing center analysis. I do not include research concerning the historicity of writing centers, however; rather, I look at the ways in which writing center scholarship has adopted CHAT as an analytical tool, how such research presented contributes to this project, and how—through a cultural framework such as CHAT—modern-day practitioners may use CHAT

to interpret their current practices, identify tensions in their systems, organize activities through conflict mediation, and ultimately seek organizational revision and mediation through the application of CHAT.

In his 2017 book *Around the Texts of Writing Center Work*, Mark Hall provides theoretical best practices for developing writing center consultants. Specifically, however, his third chapter uses CHAT as a way for consultants to analyze and evaluate their sessions with students. In this way, CHAT “provides a framework for consultants to determine what a writer understands about a specific situation for writing, and what more she needs to learn in order to accomplish her writing objectives” (47). After recording their sessions, Hall’s consultants transcribe and evaluate those transcripts, thus, allowing consultants to “consider the tutorial as an activity system” (47). In one way, this evaluation aids in developing the consultant’s expertise as they learn more about the writing process, and the dialectic that makes an effective or useful writing consultation. This work also enables consultants to reflect on their work post-session, but it also prepares them for engaging work in-session as well.

For example, Hall provides, in one instance, how CHAT analysis may help consultants combat the notion of prior knowledge in writing consultations. The example provided below demonstrates how the writer and the consultant can see the same prompt for a writing assignment differently based on experience. Each sees the rhetorical situation differently: “on the one hand, Denise [the student] has in her mind the tool, or genre, of the narrative. By contrast, Vince [the consultant] has in mind the tool, or genre, of the persuasive essay” (61). Noticing this contradiction through the lens of CHAT, Vince begins to develop questions for Denise that might allow her to see the rhetorical situation as he does. Thus, he turns his attention away from the activity of writing to the activity of tutoring when he begins “discovering what Denise

understands and what she doesn't yet know" (63). For Hall, this application of reflection in-session is particularly useful for developing consultants. Contradictions naturally arise in the inherent dialectic of an activity system; therefore, providing the tool of applying CHAT analysis allows consultants to not only reflect and evaluate conferences post-session, but as consultants become more adept in the analysis of situations and contradictions, they may begin reflecting on consultations in-session to respond to contradictions more expediently.

Hall's use of transcript evaluations illustrates CHAT as a problem-solving tool for consultants with his arguments suggesting a usefulness for my project. For example, while developing critical habits of the mind over time is instrumental in developing consultants and the writers with whom they work, developing critical habits over time is also relative to the writing center, as a whole. In other words, using CHAT to identify where contradictions exist in writing center systems allows me to reflect on and evaluate how contradictions have been mediated to develop new strategies throughout the history of writing center work. Hall notes that consultants "have found Activity Theory especially illuminating for examining transcripts of recorded tutorials" (46). Thus, for me, the question arises: How can CHAT be useful in examining the artifacts of writing center scholarship as we reflect on the past and chart a way forward for writing center best practices? Hall argues that CHAT can be useful to "explicate the activity of tutoring" and "suggests implications for writing center work" (46). Indeed, these are key ideas for which my project may build upon. If, in fact, CHAT can be used to explicate the activity of tutoring, then why could CHAT not also be useful in explicating the activity of writing center development through the interrogation of writing center scholarship's artifacts? Similarly, as I contend, CHAT may also provide use as we chart pathways forward for writing center practitioners of all shapes and sizes.



With the notion of reflection and holistic applications of CHAT in mind, Samuel Alexander Van Horne writes in his 2011 University of Iowa dissertation “An Activity-Theory Analysis of How College Students Revise After Writing Center Conferences” that he uses “the conceptual framework of Activity Theory to analyze the entire system of student revision” (v). In doing so, Van Horne also stimulates the activity I undertake to analyze the history, thus, in a holistic sense, the entire system of writing center development. While Van Horne’s research and application are not historical, he nonetheless uses CHAT to analyze specific activity in writing centers. Specifically, Van Horne uses CHAT as he “extends the Vygotskian model of mediated activity to account for how social structures can also mediate a person’s activity” (26). Such an assertion, then, reckons how CHAT may also contribute to an examination of writing center practitioners’ scholarship to reveal contradictions in historical activities and how those contradictions have been mediated to create the social structures we now find in modern-day writing centers.

Further, Van Horne provides another rationale for applying CHAT as a mechanism toward disclosing the historicity of writing center development. He argues: “Activity systems can be situated in networks of other activity systems, so this framework is helpful for analyzing how different contexts of activity can interact and influence each other” (27). With different eras of writing center development in mind, I view each era as a contextual element, or part of the whole, of writing center development. Each era acts as an activity system in and of itself to inform the next generation as new practitioners reflect on the scholarship previous generations have left behind. Though the dialectic is almost virtual—as each new generation interacts with the old by engaging the previous generation's scholarship—each new system becomes imbued with the old as they push new agendas forward through a mediation of activities left behind.

This is a point that Subrata Kumar Bhowmik makes in his 2012 Arizona State University dissertation titled “A Sociocultural Approach to the Study of L2 Writing: Activity System Analyses of the Writing Processes of ESL Learners” when he claims that a “primary concern of sociocultural theory is the relationship between human mental processes in their historical, institutional and cultural setting” (6). For Bhowmik, who looks to determine how L2 writers’ mediated activities help develop their writing practices, human action takes place in a specific context and that action cannot be separated from its historical context. Though his work is not related to writing centers or the history therein, Bhowmik sees that actions situated in historical contexts can cross-over to new historical contexts; thus, such activity becomes socio-historic, heterogeneous processes. Such activity is exactly what I aim to explore. A question, then, arises: How does one era influence the next through mediated activity to realize new forms of writing center activity? While Bhowmik looks specifically at “human mental development over time” (7), I look to examine how writing center development has been mediated over time. In other words, I look to understand how intrapersonal (individual) and interpersonal (sociality) activities have influenced the development of writing center activities over time.

In addition, Bhowmik posits an activity system analysis “can illustrate the L2 writing processes from an alternative perspective, incorporating various social, historical, developmental, personal, ideological, and cultural phenomena as they play out in the course of the completion of a writing task” (12). Considering how activities—both inter- and intrapersonal—play out over time, Bhowmik’s assertion also applies to the context of the project I present here. The difference is that my project looks at the development of activities over extended periods of time, or decades, as opposed to shorter periods of time for personal development. The project I offer spans generations; however, the same social, historical,

developmental, personal, ideological, and cultural phenomena are comparative as they cross over to influence emerging periods of writing center development. In the context of writing center development analyses then, phenomena influence how the production of artifacts are viewed and applied to emerging contexts. For Bhowmik, a central idea is that an activity system is a “framework that brings together local human activity and larger socio-cultural-historical structures” (qtd. in Bhowmik 55). Thus, the basis for the project I offer is again influenced by previous studies that use CHAT as a measure for analysis. In order to determine the *where*’s and *how*’s of writing center development, CHAT may be a useful tool that will help explain the development of writing center activity as it has been mediated over the last 100-plus years.

Finally, in Caitlin Leibman’s University of Nebraska 2019 dissertation “Is this What You Wanted?: Expectations, Choice, and Rhetorical Agency in Composition”, Leibman uses CHAT to determine how her students develop a relationship between expectations and rhetorical agency. While this is another piece of scholarship that also reflects Lerner’s observation about a lack of historical accounts in writing center studies, Leibman, nonetheless, presents CHAT as a useful tool for writing center-related analyses.

Building on the previous examples of CHAT used in writing and writing center analysis, I see a rationale for my project in Leibman’s work as, “Activity Theory creates a space to analyze a dynamic process of co-creation. . . a space where each step of interpretation, application, or discussion may contribute to the construction of a product” (21). While Leibman uses Activity Theory to evaluate how writers and consultants work together in the development of a piece of written discourse, I find a just as suitable relationship with Leibman’s work. When the work of the developing writing center is considered collaborative over time, a dynamic process of co-creation is manifest through the ages of writing center development. Further, an

interpretation, application, or discussion of scholarly artifacts attributable to the development of the writing center diaspora leads to the continual construction and re-construction of the writing center as a product.

For Leibman, the “environment of an activity is a constructed context: it influences and is influenced by those actors within it” (22). When viewed through a historical lens, this claim reaches across periods of development enabling historical researchers to identify actions by actors within the ever-changing context of writing center development. Viewing the action of writing center development as a collection of “multiple simultaneous tasks” (qtd. in Leibman 22) allows researchers to historicize actions as period-specific artifacts (i.e. scholarship) generated through social, historical, developmental, personal, ideological, and cultural phenomena. In turn, these artifacts may be replaceable, adoptable, modifiable, or recyclable actions in new cultural contexts. Hence, “multiple, simultaneous tasks” are tantamount to embedded systems of previous activity within emerging systems of activity that have adopted, modified, or recycled those previous actions. Such cross-over of activity “provide constraints . . . and affordances that channel, limit, and support learner’s efforts to adopt the prevailing social practices” (Grossman et al. 6). Hence, constraints from location to location or generation to generation provide rich opportunities for CHAT analyses to uncover or disclose how actions have been mediated, handed down, and modified in the continuing landscape of writing center artifacts.

Until now, writing center scholarship has not evaluated how contradictions may have arisen or how they have been mediated, or where inquiry begins and ends or between problems and the solutions that manifest. Akin to the literature reviewed here, this project looks to build onto the previous research as a robust contribution to the field of writing center research. A socio-historical approach to writing center development through the lens of CHAT reveals how

specific embedded activity in one context crosses over to the next era of development, which, in turn, responds to the social, historical, developmental, personal, ideological, and cultural phenomena of the period.

For the work I offer, attention is given to tensions in the system of writing center activity once identified through the lens of CHAT. From an analysis of the system in which they perform their activities, practitioners become models for that which they teach: reflection and revision. To this end, writing centers and practitioners have undergone what Warnock and Warnock refer to as a “revision of the self . . . revision of the language by which the self comes to terms with the universe, revision of the methods which put these terms into action, and finally revision of the world which in turn defines the self” (17). Exploring the history of writing center development situated within the frame of an activity system means that CHAT helps identify how activity within the scholarship of writing center development has been modified, adopted, or recycled, and CHAT provides a way to envision a way forward as practitioners continually evaluate their activities.

### **How Might CHAT Assist Writing Center Practitioners?**

With every new development throughout the course of writing center development, new questions arise concerning how labs or centers might better serve students of composition. These questions disclose a practice of self-regulation occurring at the beginning stages of writing laboratory praxis. Today, writing center history continues to unfold and develop in new and dynamic ways. With the writing center as a fertile garden, the writing center acts as an incubator for ideas for each new generation who continues to learn and shape their scholarship through the previous generation’s developing laboratory or writing center space. Thus, further establishing how a model of self-assessment operates toward the development of writing center praxis, such

incubators demonstrate how individuals—uncertain about outcomes of a task they have developed—perform better at those tasks (Trope 202-3). As a leader in self-assessment models, Yaacov Trope argues that “as effort increases, the person’s ability becomes more accurately expressed in his or her performance, and the various ability levels are likely to become associated with more distinct performances” (212). Acting as models who have experimented with the pedagogy, writing center practitioners test their theories before they apply the practices in real-world situations. Explored through the framework of CHAT, these projects highlight how practitioners might identify, approach, and mediate contradictions in their laboratory spaces. Until now, writing center scholarship has neglected evaluating how contradictions get mediated, and where inquiry begins, between problem and solution.

Through this inquiry, the practitioner is able and/or encouraged to try new solutions. Needs get mediated through exploring the laboratory work introduced in this chapter and which has come to define the work of writing centers. Similarly, for scholars who engage writing center pedagogy and practices, a way forward means revising writing center lexicon and approaches through an adoption of new practices with each new configuration situated for further evaluation by the succeeding generations. Adopting practices, such as the CHAT framework, adds to the already fruitful work gleaned from the multi-disciplinary milieu. With questions continually swirling around writing center praxis and best practices, CHAT offers a complementary framework for evaluation that comes directly out of the analysis I offer, and which can contribute to the theoretical frame of writing center work. Though the term ‘laboratory instruction’ is not found in most contemporary pedagogical discussions, many of the practices associated with laboratory instruction persist i.e. non-directive questioning, one-on-one conferencing, collaborative discussions on writing. Therefore, as a cornerstone of writing center praxis,

scholars in the field may find the application of CHAT useful in their evaluation of such practices, identifying new solutions to build onto the old, and continuing the center's forward movement.

## **Chapter Two Overview: The Formative Period**

Chapter Two presents laboratory writing's origins and discusses the evolution of laboratory writing through an analysis of scholarly artifacts between the period 1887 to the early 1940's. Using a key component of Engeström's framework of CHAT, which discloses contradictions in systems of activity, at the start, these texts demonstrate where contradictions exist, and more significantly, they represent the experimental nature of laboratory writing as the praxis begins to develop guiding principles.

Beginning with contradictions presented by Current-Traditional method in teaching composition, examples from this era include early experiments from Genung and Scott's introduction of laboratory methods in the composition classroom to Preston W. Search's work in the Pueblo schools where the work of discerning guiding principles begin to unfold: "Search's description of the ideal teaching conditions—one-to-one instruction tailored to students' particular needs—echoes the rationale for writing centers as ideal places for learning and teaching writing" (Lerner "Preston" 5). Guiding principles that emerge out of early laboratory work exemplify Search's work in utilizing laboratory instruction: The work is student-centered; that work is continually developing, flexible teachers offer direction; collaboration is at the helm of the teacher-student engagement; welcoming environments conducive to student learning are offered; and technology plays a central role in the development of a laboratory praxis. These are not articulated or approved guiding principles of writing center scholarship; however, in my efforts to identify best practices of writing center work, the principles consistently appear

throughout the scholarship reviewed as those which lie at the center of laboratory and writing center work. Nonetheless, the applications of CHAT in this chapter help reveal how guiding principles, practices, and features of the laboratory system develop, get defined, and gain structural integrity.

Through these early experiments, the qualifications of the writing laboratory's teacher offer an alternative to current-traditional classroom with classes offering a student-centered and collaborative approach directed by knowledgeable teachers. Thus, this era ultimately rounds out the five guiding principles I recognize by establishing the use of technology in the laboratory i.e. ink wells, proper lighting, and student records as resources. Similarly, this era considers the physical settings found in laboratory writing spaces as important to student learning. And with the development of the NCTE during this period, this national forum increases interconnectedness throughout the emerging laboratory writing system's practitioners.

This period of exploration begins defining the practice of laboratory writing and exhibits the most robust experiments to inform the burgeoning practice. Beginning and ending with laboratory writing experiments, this chapter ultimately ends with Francis Appel's version of the writing laboratory that embodies and applies the five guiding principles established during the era. Through the application of a core CHAT component, that of identifying contradictions and resolving them, this chapter illustrates how contradictions in the current-traditional system of teaching writing create a catalyst through which new, developing assumptions get challenged and from which new forms of teaching composition develop. Thus, the gestalt of writing center praxis begins here.



### **Chapter Three Overview: An Interim Period of Clinics**

Chapter Three surveys literature from the 1940's and 1950's to reveal contradictions that arise and result in a shift in direction with clinics as opposed to laboratories. New objects and tools develop during this period; however, they vary in success and generate an air of uncertainty for the writing laboratory. In applying CHAT to this era's practices, my analysis brings to the surface moments of conflict/resolution or tension/release that result in outcomes that dramatically change the direction of laboratory practices during this era and beyond.

This chapter discloses how the progression of laboratory practices appears overlooked by the clinicians. Using Engeström's maxim that new forms may disrupt the old, this chapter's analysis looks to demonstrate how moves made by the clinic all but obliterate a student-centered and collaborative model from its lexicon, and in its place advances a teacher-centered, lecture-oriented praxis. Minus the sociality linking abstract problem-solving to concrete instruction, students exit the clinic further marginalized and isolated. Illustrating contradictions that exist between the old and new schools of laboratory vs clinic, in this chapter, I employ Engeström's model of CHAT to disclose how practices of this period create dissonance surrounding the concepts of the Formative Period's nurturing and flexible environments advocated in the laboratory.

Nevertheless, while tension exists between the new and old schools of thought during this period, the mainstays of flexibility and collaboration exist on the periphery. In some cases, the actions within the laboratory frame continue to get refined through the 1950's as Millet and Morton point out in their 1956 *College English* article "The Writing Laboratory at Indiana University": "it is possible to make suggestions, have the student follow those suggestions, and check on the effectiveness of the revision . . ." (39). With vestiges of the laboratory praxis

remaining, it is during this period that the CCCC's reports on laboratory work encourage many teachers to reflect on what might constitute best practices for the laboratory instruction. By extension, William Peery, in his 1955 article "Freshman English and the Enrollment Bulge", describes his actions of developing a writing lab that also functions as a teaching lab. This work ultimately serves to segue into the next era where the Formative Period originally concluded.

While this era provides relics that accentuate the lore of writing center scholarship, the noise and residue of the 1940's and 1950's results in a "lab versus clinic" dichotomy that has influenced perceptions of writing centers for the last seventy years. Fortunately, this foray into the clinic will lead to robust collaborations among "a new generation of composition teachers" (Tibbetts 90). Through this chapter, the contradictions that emerge ultimately lead to new and innovative ways of reconceptualizing a laboratory praxis activity. Thus, though this era creates more contradictions than it resolves, the efforts are not in vain, for they create impactful reconsiderations of the past to chart an indelible way forward.

#### **Chapter Four Overview: The Modern Period**

Chapter Four marks the period when contradictions of the Clinical Period get mediated with the re-articulation of laboratory practices first recognized during the Formative Period. Reverting to earlier Formative Period thinking, the development of peers as tutors begins anew. Further, considerations of the laboratory space as a teaching lab at the end of the 1950's begin a more thoughtful consideration of these practices during this era. With this in mind, reviewing scholarship between the late 1960's through the late 1980's, The Modern Period emblemizes how contradictions that disrupt the system of the Formative Period are corrected, and in doing so, a vision of the writing center activity system we recognize today is established.

To describe the movement occurring during the Modern Period, two maxims are applied. First, one relies on Engeström's notion that "the object and the motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity" ("Expansive" 137). While this idea can be applied to laboratory work since its origins in teaching composition, it is applied here to specifically show how the contradictions from the Clinical Period lead into a reconceptualized history of laboratory practices. The second adage employed in this chapter dovetails with Engeström, for the reconceptualization of our history relies on historical disclosing. Thus, Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus' conceptualization of history-makers from their book *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity* provides a seamless tool for Engeström's tenet of reconceptualization.

Using distinct skills i.e. articulation and reconfiguration, this chapter provides a contemporary theoretical foundation for the moves Modern Period laboratory practitioners engage. For Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus, "articulating makes what is implicit explicit. If what is implicit is vague or confused, then we speak of gathering from dispersion. If it was once important and has been lost, then we have the special kind of articulation we call retrieval" (25). The Modern Period looks to articulate and make specific the implicit implications of early laboratory methods i.e. peer tutoring developing the center as a writing lab as well as a teaching lab. More importantly, the practitioners of this period retrieve the ways of the laboratory movement that have been lost or forgotten during the Clinical Period. They re-articulate guiding principles brought forth by the Formative Period that will set the field on a trajectory forward and continue the work of their earliest predecessors. Thus, this era reconfigures the laboratory movement into a movement with a style.

In addition to others, at Brooklyn College, Ken Bruffee's work recognizes students "learned to write better if they were helping each other than if they worked singly or in contact only with the teacher" (Dugger 30). Bruffee, identifying contradictions between the pressures of writing in academic contexts to what might otherwise be considered a therapeutic or individual act, urged student collaboration in the writing center. This solution, an act of retrieval from previous practitioners, looks to bridge contradictions between writing as a solitary act and writing as a social act. Through this work, however, Bruffee must also contend with the contradiction of developing peer tutors and what that means for the designs of programmatic growth that continue today.

However, the Modern Period ends with a contradiction. At the end of this period, the field is maturing and cannot solely rely on its own internal deliberations to ground its work. In other words, it must start grounding its work in the theoretical milieu available across the multidisciplinary field in which it works: the academy. With critics present to identify contradictions, this era faces new identity and credibility issues. As such, practitioners during this period not only resolve contradictions left over from the previous period, but they approach new contradictions head-on providing another new pathway for the next era of development: the application of multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives.

### **Chapter Five Overview: The Theoretical Period**

At the end of the Modern period, a fully functioning writing center operates with tutoring services available to undergraduate as well as graduate students. Simultaneously, the center works to develop future teachers of composition with consultants engaged in rigorous localized programs for developing their teaching personae. However, with isolated research done in-house, I employ in this chapter the Engeström maxim that an "activity system is by definition a

multivoiced formation . . . [and] a reorchestration of those voices, [including] the different viewpoints and approaches of the various participants” (“Activity Theory and Individual” 35). Thus, Chapter 5 reviews scholarship from the late 1980’s to present to demonstrate how practitioners in the Theoretical Period build a multivoiced system through their applications of multi-disciplinary theoretical approaches to writing center work.

In the previous period, the writing center fails to fully engage the community at-large so that the center may relate, to the whole community, how those practices which writing centers employ may be relevant or recognizable to the larger academic community. In other words, reaching out and convincing departments of the value writing centers might offer is largely absent during the Modern Period. On the other hand, practitioners during the Theoretical Period mediate the contradiction that without theoretical applications as a rule to support the work of the writing center, opportunities for fully engaging the university community may be diminished. Similarly, Theoretical Period practitioners recognize that relying on in-house research as a rule and tool to justify or support the work of the writing center falls short in reaching across real or imagined disciplinary boundaries. Thus, a new outcome for the writing center emerges to reorchestrate a multi-voiced academic community. Hence, during the Theoretical Period, polyphony of voices will help the writing center further develop and share its organic ethos of collaboration.

By advocating practitioners “place our work in a rich theoretical context” (5), Lisa Ede, in 1989 encourages her colleagues to engage the community at-large by bringing them into the fold of writing center activity. Yet, while Ede may have been one of the first to advocate for defining writing center work through a theoretical lens, there were others prior to her who had already begun applying theoretical principles to writing center work. As such, in this chapter, I

devote attention to Robert Brooke, who embodies the presence of a pioneering community member at the forefront of the Theoretical Period, and Christina Murphy, who also positions herself at the forefront of writing and writing center pedagogy by grounding her work in theoretical perspectives from across the disciplines. Through their work, Brooke and Murphy reflect Engeström's reorchestration of voices as the field begins developing a new writing center ethos to engage what Ede advocates. Further, as theoretical research continues to enhance the field's praxis, I also modestly cover a new generation of scholars who begin bringing far-reaching theoretical perspectives into the Burkean Parlor of writing center discourse as they look to develop tutors and engage a wider swath of the community which they serve.

With the continued development of social construction in the writing center and with the adoption of a Vygotskian frame, Nancy Grimm, Nancy Welch, and Muriel Harris begin engaging the representative dialectic of CHAT. Such sociality offers CHAT as a frame through which writing center work may be viewed, shaped, and organized. As such, CHAT as a frame may also be situated within the field of writing center studies as a theoretical perspective useful in moving the field forward. All of this is to demonstrate the continued evolution of the writing center. At this point, from its beginnings as an appendage of teaching composition by adopting laboratory methods, the writing center, through years of organic development, has come full circle to now act as a hub of activity for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) activities.

In the end, Chapter 5 culminates with a discussion of how activist pedagogical approaches may be taking shape at the end of the Theoretical Period. With Liliana M. Naydan's 2017 article "Toward a Rhetoric of Labor" in *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, the multi-disciplinary work found in the writing center provides practitioners opportunities to reconfigure perceptions of equity on campus. Occupying an activist space, Naydan argues "writing center

practitioners are well positioned by way of the attention that they inherently pay to language to reconstitute their identities: to re-envision themselves and their colleagues as poised to engage in activist rhetoric and live lives as academic activists” (29). Thus, as a new era in writing center development begins to emerge, practitioners are reminded the work found in modern-day writing centers has always been activist work. This activity has only continued throughout the ages beginning with the Formative Period and the development of guiding principles; the Clinical Period’s efforts at redefining the working praxis; the Modern Period, which solidified the center as neutral space on campus; and the Theoretical Period, which grounds writing center work in rich theoretical contexts, thus, ushering in an era of cross- and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

### **Chapter Six Overview: An Emerging Activist Space**

Today, activist standpoints in the writing center continue to unfold in new and dynamic ways. Thus, as writing center practitioners have become part of the academic culture through sheer tenacity and sustainable, collaborative efforts, modern-day practitioners are those who may be equally qualified to engage conversations about equity in the writing center and across campuses. In Chapter Six, I recognize such expansive initiatives may include WAC programs, assessment facilitation, or committees to address labor or racial inequities on campus. Recognizing the writing center as an active and activist space through the lens of CHAT leads this chapter’s modest analysis of current scholarship to identify how those activist traditions found in the original structure of laboratory teaching’s beginnings continue today.

As literacy sponsors, writing centers can reach across disciplinary boundaries to engage the campus community, as well as the larger surrounding community, in developing and promoting literacy initiatives. As such, working within an activist frame, the writing center may be situated to address extra-curricular initiatives including equity or race issues found in

university settings and which may affect surrounding communities of the university. As Lori Salem argues, however, in her 2014 *Writing Center Journal* article, “Opportunity and Transformation: How Writing Centers are Positioned in the Political Landscape of Higher Education”, the writing center must first “find ways to re-think and re-imagine ways our pedagogies” (Salem 38). As Chapter Six discloses, this may mean specifically addressing how our bodies may create or exhibit power dynamics between consultants and students in the writing center.

For example, as Beth Godbee, Moira Ozias, and Jasmine Kar Tang argue in their 2015 article, “Body + Power + Justice: Movement-Based Workshops for Critical Tutor Education”, the body houses and exposes our histories, and to address the histories imbued in and displayed by those bodies, we must routinely address and be aware of those histories to engage in and re-direct our engagement with diverse campus communities: “Centering the body can help us re-examine, re-envision, and rehearse interventions into educational inequities . . . This requires that tutor education engage with issues of identity and power, as well as the material conditions of language, learning, and writing” (62). With such critical development of writing consultants at the forefront of writing center professional development initiatives, activities promoted by Godbee et al. reflect the framework and language of Naydan’s charge that writing center practitioners can “shape education and professionalism in their most influential and inspiring forms as always already activist enterprises that seek to change the status quo” (35). Thus, to augment this charge, I look to Nancy Grimm’s 2011 contribution to *Writing Centers and the New Racism* to illustrate how she re-theorizes her work and articulates a pathway forward.

Specifically, using Grimm’s article, this project continues to demonstrate how CHAT may be applied to writing center and writing center related scholarship to reveal contradictions



within a writing center context or frame. In doing so, this project advocates for the identification and isolation of activities which disturb writing center activity systems as a way for practitioners to more easily identify and mediate those contradictions and change the center's everyday workplace actions. For Grimm, the goal is to move away from an academic elitist model of privilege, which may have become part of the writing center as it has gained a more integral status in the university's mission. Thus, it with an activist spirit that Grimm's activities take a prominent role as a model which practitioners may follow as they continue developing the writing center ethos as a collaborative and activist space.

Chapter Two:  
The Formative Period

**Introduction**

When Genung and Scott identified contradictions of the current-traditional composition classrooms, they also brought forth a movement in need of definition and refinement. Improvising applications in various contexts during the Formative Period, the laboratory movement in composition began to develop definitive and lasting characteristics that would continue to find more specificity over the next 100 years. From each of the different contexts i.e. middle school, secondary, and post-secondary schools, the burgeoning laboratory praxis takes shape during the Formative Period as it builds a foundation upon which the groundwork of writing center praxis exists.

For example, during the Formative Period, the teacher begins to act as a collaborator. They nurture student's intellectual growth through a student-centered, yet instructor facilitated composition pedagogy with practitioners maintaining flexibility in their approaches. Today, Ben Raforth believes flexibility to be a central tenet of writing center work: "Flexibility, adaptability, innovation, and risk-taking are human qualities that disorganize the status quo and will give rise to writing centers of one sort or another in the next decade" (25). Quite frankly, Raforth could have written this in 1894 and every decade or so thereafter, for each generation after the beginning of the writing laboratory movement has exhibited the flexibility, adaptability, innovation, and risk-taking he mentions. Nonetheless, with the objective of developing students' self-regulatory skills, each element of the laboratory praxis developed during this Formative Period aims to respond to contradictions noted by Genung, Scott and others. This, of course, means teachers not only provide students opportunities to develop their work, but teachers,

indirectly acting as models for their students, flex their own self-regulatory skills. The Formative Period, then, places the teacher as a central figure in the developing composition laboratory praxis.

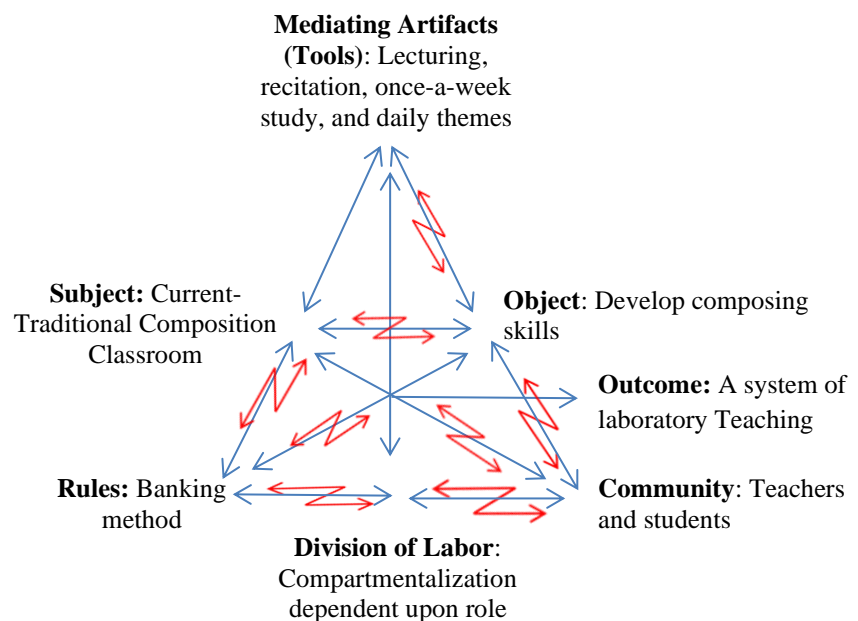
However, in the background of an otherwise student-centered practicum, the teacher as a central figure looks to bring out the best in her students. They do so by engaging their students and by developing practices in the laboratory classroom that will ultimately define the curriculum for generations. Hence, in this chapter I identify some of those attributes of laboratory writing classrooms that began developing during the Formative Period. Examining scholarly artifacts that span the educational spectrum during the late 1800's to the mid-1900's, I aim to reveal, through the lens of CHAT, features of the laboratory praxis that have put shape to the writing center work we view today as strongholds in the system. By offering individualized instruction in continually cultivated nurturing and flexible learning environments, practitioners during what I call the Formative Period begin to resolve contradictions found in standard current-traditional composition classrooms where theme and recitation work dominate the curricula. Through the framework of CHAT, I track the development of guiding principles specific to the laboratory writing classroom; thus, the Formative Period helps define the laboratory praxis. It is from this framework, then, that the most fundamental aspects of writing center pedagogy emerge.

### **A Model for Evaluation**

For my analysis, I apply Engeström's CHAT schema to reveal the progress of laboratory teaching as it unfolds through a succession of interconnected events. Achieving new forms through mediational acts, laboratory practices evolve through moments of self-evaluation, and reflection to break down old orders and old forms creating new spaces with new orders and new

forms. In charting dialectical exchanges, beginning with the Formative Period, the framework of CHAT helps illuminate contradictions in the emerging laboratory movement, and in the end, CHAT becomes useful as a tool for modern-day programmatic evaluation. Thus, using CHAT to identify contradictions in emerging writing laboratory operations ultimately demonstrates how modern-day writing center directors may employ CHAT as a tool for their modern centers' continued growth and operation. In line with Nancy Grimm's address to the International Writing Centers Association Conference in Las Vegas in 2010, a framework that interrogates the movement of history has the "potential to bring divergent perspectives into contact with one another for the possibilities of transforming perspectives and generating new understandings" ("New" 26). Thus, through charting internal and external discursive exchanges, CHAT may help illustrate contradictions and resolutions that lead to a continually burgeoning laboratory writing praxis.

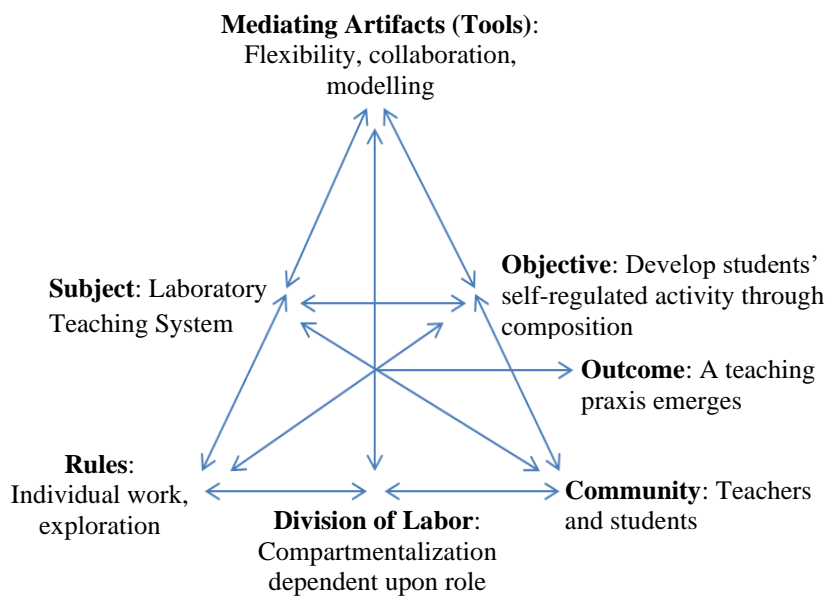
Presenting Engeström's CHAT as a framework also assists my analysis by disclosing a trajectory nascent laboratory workshop instruction ventures into as it begins to take shape at the end of the nineteenth century. For example, in Figure 4, there is an



**Figure 4:** Contradictions in the Current-Traditional system are noted by lightning bolts.

application of specific criteria to the general format presented earlier in Figure 2. While the Current-Traditional classroom certainly uses its tools, specifically, the lecture, some, if not all of them, disrupt how objectives are achieved, for such a curricula fails to engage students, and a breakdown of the system ensues. With lecturing as a tool, students do not engage writing in any real-world sense. The lecture, as opposed to a hands-on approach to composition instruction, fails to develop students' composing skills with its impractical application in large, heterogeneous classrooms. Similarly, recitation and theme work fail to stimulate or challenge students' individual growth. This, in turn, generates ambiguous rules for the composition classroom. Vague or misunderstood, these rules promote a lopsided division of labor. Certainly, instructors employ the banking model with ease, but as Freire's work suggests, this does not necessarily help students' understanding of writing concepts. Outside of coming to class prepared to have information provided to them, this leaves students unclear about their role in the classroom. If they do not

understand the rules, they will certainly have difficulty defining their role in the classroom. While the lecture model may work for instructors, it leaves students looking for assistance outside of the classroom i.e. extracurricular literary societies. The solution, articulated through the analysis



**Figure 5:** An Emerging Laboratory Teaching System after Current-Traditional contradiction mediation.

of a contradictory system, however, may be found in the outcome of a CHAT frame: a system of laboratory teaching. Thus, with the introduction of laboratory practices in the composition classroom, a multi-disciplinary approach begins to take shape.

As Figure 5 indicates, emerging laboratory practices in the composition classroom create new tools and opportunities for the student and instructor to work together. With the objective of developing students' self-regulated learning, the student/teacher collaboration that occurs helps the student see their instructor not only as a collaborative partner, but they also see the instructor modelling behaviors as they experiment and develop their praxis through collaboration with the student. Thus, practitioners and students begin "to understand other languages, other views, other narratives" as they both move toward a shared model of teaching and learning (Grimm "New" 26). Reviewing artifacts from the Formative Period through the lens of CHAT, I hope to present a clear picture of the flexibility instructors navigate as they aim to provide individual student instruction. Further, I look to demonstrate how the breadth of the instructor's knowledge is developed and honed, thus resulting in a more defined teaching praxis. While this model begins with the flexible instructor as a tool for the student, the research will show how the implementation of additional tools and rules will ultimately enhance and shape student learning in laboratory settings.

By the end of this period then, what I hope to demonstrate is the promulgation of guiding principles that will direct laboratory work and ultimately writing center work. Such guiding principles include the following: The work is student-centered and continually developing; flexible teachers offer direction; collaboration is at the forefront of teacher-student engagement; welcoming environments conducive to student learning are offered; and technology plays a central role in the development of the laboratory praxis. The most prominent of these five

guiding principles during the Formative Period is that of the teacher, who is also an experimental apprentice; therefore, students not only see their instructor as a model that learns through the process of experimentation, but the student also sees the instructor as one who engages the very object which they seek: self-regulated activity. As Mark Hall, Director of the University Writing Center at the University of Central Florida, explains in his 2011 article “Theory In/To Practice”, “expertise is not possessed by individuals; rather, it is emergent within their transactions” (103). Developing the laboratory system through dialectical activity—internal and external—laboratory experimentalists at the outset of the laboratory movement realize the core of laboratory work resides in the individual student’s personal and academic growth with the work between student and teacher interdependent. Therefore, in order to facilitate such learning, teachers of repute need placement within the system. Thus, the laboratory system in composition instruction begins its development with this criterion in mind, for this starting point yields all other developments.

### **Laboratory Teaching**

To begin describing laboratory teaching, I turn to Neal Lerner and his 2009 book *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* in which Lerner focuses on the practicality and will behind employing writing labs. “In [nineteenth century] science,” he argues, “hands-on learning was meant to overcome the problem that Louis Agassiz of Harvard described in the mid-nineteenth century: ‘The pupil studies nature in the classroom, and when he goes out of doors he can not [sic] find her’” (3). In helping to define a laboratory teaching approach, Lerner demonstrates how laboratory practices in the science curriculum such as the drawing and labeling of animals—aimed at constructing meaningful knowledge—were cross-appropriated into the context of writing: “Key to this meaning was not merely observing, drawing, or recording, however, but making inferences from those observations” (130). This adoption of science classroom

approaches of the day brings “laboratory methods” (or the hands-on approach) into writing classrooms taking shape at the end of the nineteenth century. This method of instruction encourages students to transfer knowledge and apply what they already know to a new construct: writing.

Further, David Russell, in his book, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines*, expands and further defines the role of laboratory methods in the composition classroom at the end of the nineteenth century referring to laboratory methods as a “master-apprenticeship relationship” (71). Russell argues that laboratory work functioned in an ancillary way to large lectures with the lab “an ideal site for passing on the rhetorical conventions of a discipline: students are directly engaged in the activities of the discipline, manipulating apparatus, making observations, working with one another under the tutelage of an expert” (93). For composition students, this meant attending a lecture where theory was dispensed and then working in the lab to develop their writing. Russell discloses the practice was institutionalized as part of the curriculum with an instructor present to guide the student’s observations and inquiry. Therefore, when used as a cornerstone of writing center praxis, “the practice of recitation could get transformed through the support and collaboration of teachers” (Lerner *The Idea* 23). Through this, we may recognize where modern-day observations of clientele, staffing, and a writing center ethos with a continually evolving dialectic originates.

In his book, Lerner cites the difficulty in defining laboratory writing as the idea is typically personified, today, by the needs of local contexts, hence, creating varying definitions of the laboratory. One key component of the laboratory, however, is experimentation: “The idea of a writing laboratory is an idea of teaching and learning as a continuous experiment towards what really works, towards the best practices and the search for new practices not yet imagined” (*The*



*Idea 12*). Using science labs of the day, (around 1887), largely represented by Louis Agassiz, the earliest laboratory practitioners in composition frame their exploration toward creating nurturing and flexible environments in composition curricula. When first introduced by John Franklin Genung, and later Fred Newton Scott, the idea of laboratory work follows closely with what one might see in Agassiz's classrooms: "facts were not primary; the key was the connections, inferences, and thinking associated with those facts" (Lerner *The Idea* 39). For example, should one walk into a laboratory writing classroom today, observers may see students at their desks engaged in the composing process with a teacher nearby ready to offer consultations regarding questions individual students have on their papers. Observers of a laboratory setting today may also see students engaged in library database research with a teacher or consultant nearby waiting to assist. Additionally, students may work in small groups developing their writing or research practices, developing key words for searching, or discussing how to annotate a text with a teacher circulating the classroom facilitating discussions. Students work at their own pace with each student or group of students completing specific tasks during the class period. Class time is managed and focused.

Thus, the experimentation Lerner notes is alive and well in laboratory writing classrooms today as they embody collaboration, reflective thought, and organic, natural discourse between students and teachers. However, the development of teachers as practitioners of laboratory writing experiments did not occur overnight. As the field of composition began departing from a one-size-fits-all curricular model, laboratory practitioners started mediating individual student needs through one-on-one consultations or through students working together with an instructor nearby. This is where the continuous experiment toward identifying contradictions begins.

## **An Emerging Practice**

From Genung's implementation of the "laboratory method" or "laboratory system" forward, this practice has brought teachers new and more practical methods in developing student writing. Employing what we now think of as self-regulated activity such as setting goals and developing task strategies, composition teachers in the latter part of the nineteenth century began experimenting with a multi-disciplinary approach in education. Ultimately, identifying useful approaches from other disciplines helped re-build a system that had suffered under the pressures of developing individual student growth through the impractical nature of composition work (Search 155; Walker 445; Grandy 375; Buck 506). And as practitioners began identifying contradictions and seeking responses to those system tensions, the available literature provides a striking sense, that during this period and into the early twentieth-century, teachers of composition began modelling and experimenting widely with laboratory methods.

As the practice of laboratory teaching—itsself based on the attitude of patience—unfolds, the intrapersonal becomes interpersonal with systems of communication developing among participants. For example, the earliest collaborative efforts between practitioners occur between Genung and Scott. At the University of Michigan, Scott argues: "We hardly learn the names and faces of our hundreds of students before they break ranks and go their ways, and then we must resume our Sisyphaean labors" (106). Genung's and Scott's criticisms offer a view of how Engeström's philosophies of CHAT may be applied where the "identification of contradictions in an activity system helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems" (Engeström "Activity Theory" 966). Through their identification of root problems, these early practitioners ultimately provide a pathway forward for what will become the burgeoning practice writing laboratories.

What occurs then is that laboratory approaches to composition instruction are applied across multiple contexts: middle school, secondary, and post-secondary institutions. Though such approaches occurred in varying contexts, they ultimately take root in higher education to form what we know today as the writing center. In their approaches, however, laboratory practitioners aim to develop student's self-regulatory pursuits through acts of composing, which in modern ways, promote the use of specific attributes such as forethought, performance, and reflection. Thus, when the field begins adopting what become laboratory practices, not surprisingly, the explorers of this new territory confronted many of the same issues we face today: How might we best engage students in their own learning? How can self-regulation or self-assessment transfer to other disciplines? How do writing centers participate in advancing these universal concepts through writing? Here, looking upon the earliest days of writing center scholarship provides a wealth of information from which we can develop our local practices in the writing center and beyond.

For example, with Genung's and Fred Newton Scott's early critique of nineteenth century composition classrooms, into which, begrudgingly, students entered, laboratory advocates and practitioners like Genung and Scott begin identifying contradictions in the system. First, in John Franklin Genung's 1887 description of "The Study of Rhetoric in the College Course", he believes instituting laboratory methods may resolve contradictions he identifies in the system. He writes:

English is at a disadvantage; the very fact that it is compulsory weights it with an odium which in many colleges makes it the bugbear of the course. This ill repute was increased in the old-fashioned college course by the makeshift way in which time was grudged out to it in the curriculum. . . Now every teacher knows a once-a-week study cannot be

carried on with much profit or interest; it cannot but be a weariness to student and instructor alike. (173)

Noting the marginal treatment and the poor results of composition curricula, Genung sees the whole of composition curricula in need of reform. In resolve, he argues that “laboratory work” best defines his approach at Amherst as “each of these courses is a veritable workshop . . . each professor being supreme in his sphere, to plan, carry out, and complete according to his own ideas—a trio in which the members work side-by-side, in co-operation rather than in subordination” (174). In his approach to using laboratory writing praxis, Genung exemplifies the collaborative and reciprocal nature of education. As he suggests, students work side-by-side with their instructors in cooperation. In his leading essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” Stephen North makes a claim that resonates with the past and the future of writing center work: “What we want to do in a writing center is fit into—observe and participate in—this ordinarily solo ritual of writing” (70). Observing and participating in the solo act of writing further demonstrates how laboratory practices function in varying individual and collaborative learning contexts. In fact, Genung, in his advancement of laboratory teaching, provides a model for his students. With teachers of early laboratory writing classrooms acting as students who explore new territory, their experiments go through the phases of forethought, performance, and self-reflection. In other words, as practitioners aim to resolve contradictions found in the current-traditional method of teaching composition, they employ the very same practices they use to develop self-reliant, self-motivated, and self-evaluative students. This work purports that those teachers in charge of instituting such curricula must also master that curricula.

Modeling the collaborative approach, we see Genung and Scott share strategies to create connections, resolve contradictions, and craft a lasting blueprint for the future. In his description

of the English program at the University of Michigan, Scott recognizes the contributions of Genung: “As professor Genung has well said, the teaching of composition is properly laboratory work” (*Norton* 106). Scott also argues that engaging “the student as an individual is, for successful composition work, simply indispensable” (“Michigan” 179). While Genung and Scott only provide cursory definitions of laboratory teaching, their reflective thought in promoting the praxis present the beginnings of a writing center gestalt. Throughout the development of writing centers, the practitioner’s ability to recreate the world comes through their self-regulated work, inter-individual communication, and discursive activity.

### **Defining a Practice**

In an 1894 article titled “Individual Teaching: The Pueblo Plan,” Preston W. Search, Superintendent of Schools in Pueblo, Colorado, argues that laboratory teaching should not aim to “consume time by entertainment, lecturing, and development of subjects; but to pass from desk to desk as the inspiring director and pupil’s assistant, with but one intent and that the development of the self-reliant and independent worker” (158). With increased student enrollment and large classrooms creating increasingly heterogeneous environments, laboratory instructional methods during the early part of the Formative Period present a new pathway as instructors look to provide individual instruction in composition. Here, nurturing and flexible environments—in which they could conduct their composition work—function as tools in the new system of teaching: “Teachers are instructed to provide carefully for the discouraged pupil and to give more time to the lower half of the school, remembering that the bright ones may always be cared for by supplemental or advanced assignments of work” (Search 161). The crux of laboratory work focuses on the individual student’s personal and academic growth. As a part of the whole of writing center praxis, this philosophy is evidenced through some of the earliest

laboratory work (Walker 1917; Horner 1929; “Organization” 1951) and remains a focus of writing center work. Writing instruction departs from a one-size-fits-all curricular model to one with laboratory practitioners developing students through one-on-one consultations or through students engaging in the work together; thus, the laboratory system in composition works against the homogeneity the lecture model in composition seems to enforce.

### **A Central Figure: The Laboratory Teacher**

Demonstrated through Preston W. Search’s work in the Pueblo School district in Pueblo, CO in the 1890’s, a central component of the new order of laboratory teaching in composition characterizes the teacher not as a passive facilitator of instructional methods, but as one who engages each student on an individual basis: “Bright, attractive, and carefully prepared work and a warm-hearted, enthusiastic, co-operative teacher will always make the willing and energetic pupil” (Search159). Named for the exercise demonstrated in the Pueblo Industrial Public Schools—containing lower grades as well as high school students—the Pueblo Plan establishes an enduring point, for the success of laboratory methods largely depends on dynamic and well-qualified teachers to continue the expansion of laboratory teaching at the turn of the century. Accordingly, Search makes it known that “this method of work calls for strong teachers . . . The teacher cannot rely merely upon the preparation of the previous evening to meet the demands of the day. She must be equally ready on a hundred points” (169).

Further, from Los Angeles, California, Frances W. Lewis’ 1902 article “The Qualifications of the English Teacher” echoes this attention on the developed teacher. She believes that “while the scientist must specialize, the English student who hopes to teach her specialty, must as far as possible make all knowledge her province” (19). If the object of the initial laboratory system is the development of a practical curriculum, then it reasons that the

developing teacher becomes phenomenological as an outcome of the laboratory system's activity. With laboratory teaching gaining momentum at the turn of the century, teachers and their abilities lie at the center of laboratory work with Lewis further arguing that the teacher "should also be a mistress of the art of questioning. . . There is a fine art of the classroom which depends largely on this one characteristic. . . The wisest and most successful teachers from Socrates down, have taught largely by the use of questions, and the art is well worth studying" (23). As a defining tool within the schema of laboratory teaching, this practice is still engrained in writing center practices today through the many articles published on the subject.

Through the lens of CHAT, revealing contradictions, i.e. a lack of student engagement that exist in the lecture and recitation classroom, "give[s] rise to those failures and innovations as if 'behind the backs' of the conscious actors" (Engeström "Activity Theory and Individual" 32). In other words, the emerging system not only corrects itself resulting in a new tool (laboratory teaching) to help subjects meet objectives of the system, but it simultaneously recognizes the teacher (the conscious actor) as a dynamic cultural personality in the system of composition teaching. In this role, the dynamic teacher passes "from desk to desk, assisting, quizzing, testing and qualifying students" (Search 158). In fact, this process is still at work today in many writing center contexts. For example, Emeritus Professor Isabelle Thompson and Associate Professor Jo Mackiewicz of Auburn University discuss the roles of the question in their 2014 article "Questioning in Writing center Conferences":

. . . questions in writing center conferences serve a number of instructional and conversational functions. They allow tutors and students to fill in their knowledge deficits and check each other's understanding. They also allow tutors (and occasionally students)

to facilitate the dialogue of writing center conferences and attend to students' active participation and engagement. (61)

In other words, effective tutors and teachers exhibit that which assessment expert Roberta Camp argues is a "dialogue among the citizens of the community" ("Response" 98). Furthering the student-centered principle to which writing centers adhere to today, the earliest incarnations of laboratory writing's teachers like Search and Lewis play a central role as they inform today's practices through their identification of student needs.

To this end, at the National Education Association (NEA) conference in 1904, Philo Buck, Head of the English Department at William McKinley High School in St. Louis, Missouri, addresses attributes of the nurturing teacher. He begins his article, "Laboratory Method in English Composition" from the *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-Third Annual Meeting*, with a charge for the teacher: "Speak as one with authority, but also as one who knows the heart and feelings of those he has in charge" (507). Mirroring earlier references to teachers as "inspiring directors" and "pupil's assistants," Buck's language represents a direct indictment against faculty who resign to lecturing in large halls, engaging the uninspiring work of recitation, or combatting the "unmitigated bore" of theme work (Buck 507). Uninspired themselves, these teachers' interests may lie more in research than teaching, or they may be underprepared teachers or graduate students. While Buck strengthens his support for teachers, his assessment of faculty simultaneously advocates peer work as a flexible strategy for the laboratory classroom in composition. He argues that themes should get "passed around the class by the pupils, and let the class criticize and correct each other's work" (507). By no means are these revolutionary ideas today, but at the turn of the century, they represented a major shift toward adopting flexible, self-evaluative and collaborative strategies to mediate contradictions in the current-traditional



composition classroom. In the end, these flexible and nurturing environments become mainstays of the evolving laboratory system of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Additionally, with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) providing more opportunities for collaboration after its development in 1911, Francis Ingold Walker, from the New Trier Township High School in Kenilworth, Illinois demonstrates in her 1917 *English Journal* article, “The Laboratory System in English” how such practices might unfold in a flexible environment. Elaborating on Buck’s collaborative peer work, Walker engages a similar practice through small group work of 6 to 10 students while she facilitates discussions in each group. With her experiments in testing the waters of laboratory writing’s praxis, Walker’s work represents the earliest laboratory practices which note the sympathetic teacher administering flexible strategies to reach each student in her classroom.

Through the continual development of the teacher, and the extension of guiding principles established at the end of the nineteenth-century, interpersonal communication, especially with the inclusion of the NCTE, enables a move toward a “concept of collective activity” within the laboratory system (Engeström and Miettinen 7). In other words, the developing activity system of laboratory teaching has morphed through a process of internalization/externalization. Actions, first realized as external contradictions, are internalized through the process of self-evaluation, reflection, assessment, and improvement and reciprocally externalized. The developed, dynamic teacher, as the central component of laboratory work, continually assesses and develops their repertoire of tools that will help engage students as teachers aim to collaboratively achieve the goal of developing the student’s critical thinking and composing skills. This dialectical—and reciprocal—relationship, inherent in an activity system, also creates rich possibilities for transfer:

An activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions and interests. The division of labor in an activity creates different positions for the participants, the participants carry their own histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in artifacts, rules and conventions. (Engeström “Expansive Learning at Work” 136)

If teachers’ tasks include developing self-assessment in their students, they must know how this practice operates. They must also possess the ability to assess how they transfer that knowledge, thus, developing their expertise in self-assessment and their ability to teach such practices. For James Porter, “the principle that all writing and speech—indeed, all signs—arise from a single network” underlies intertextuality (34). What we share with others has the potential to become part of our larger discourse, thus, informing practices especially in the culture of the laboratory writing classroom. Experimentation and interpersonal communication operate as conduits for the spread of information.

Search, Lewis, Buck, and Walker’s later work demonstrates this trend particularly when the latter notes the qualifications of the teacher: “The resourceful teacher possesses tact, sound judgement, a thorough knowledge of the individual needs of his pupils, and the ability to minister to those needs quickly and efficiently” (449). Thus, a teacher’s tools, and consequently, their praxis, mature. Similarly, with this presentation of scholarship from the beginning of the laboratory movement, I look to reveal how the flexible and nurturing teacher is at the ship’s helm steering and directing student-centered and collaborative work, thus, resolving contradictions from the lecture-recitation model. Also, with this evolving praxis, three of the five guiding principles begin to take shape at the beginning of the laboratory movement’s experimentation. From here, more focus on the development of the teacher will continue with additional

advancements shaping the praxis and leading to the development of similarly significant guiding principles.

### **Toward a Laboratory Model**

As the science of a fuller laboratory system unfolds during the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the realization of a more defined and formulated system of activity manifests throughout educational settings in the U.S. In a relatively short time, the system expands to include a much broader community of teachers, administrators, students, and businesses that will inherit students from the earliest laboratory schools, for the laboratory “student is more active than his fellow of less favored locality and can do more work in a given time” (Search 156). And though a division of labor and rules remain loose, the system requires exchanges from each community member. Also, the tools, which accompany the new system, have only manifest through the mediation of contradictions in the previous system. Through mediation, “humans can control their own behavior—not ‘from the inside,’ on the basis of biological urges, but ‘from the outside,’ using and creating artifacts” (Engeström “Activity Theory and Individual” 29). Thus, laboratory writing in composition organically finds solutions within itself through an underlying need to assess attributes, thereby, resulting in the emergence of new and dynamic artifacts or tools that represent a cultural mediation of actions. This section, then, uses Preston W. search’s Pueblo Plan and George McLean’s work at the University of Minnesota to identify practices that emerge from the assessment of student needs to further demonstrate how mediation of external tensions in the system leads to the development of new principles such as technology and providing welcoming, practical environmental factors for a more refined definition of laboratory practices in the writing classroom.

## The Pueblo Plan and the University of Minnesota

Developing a laboratory praxis does not end with the development of the teacher. In fact, this is only the beginning, for the teachers' focus is on establishing a student-centered classroom. Developing the laboratory writing classroom, therefore, largely relies on providing individual instruction. Doing so, however, requires teachers to develop strategies that will help them achieve the objective of developing each student's self-regulatory activity. Some of this occurs through a couple of specific examples from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the development of tools such as individual and peer work and record keeping. In these practices, teachers begin employing practicality and resourcefulness as their approaches to teaching in a laboratory setting take shape. To this end, the space in which teachers conduct their laboratory work also develops. The large lecture halls become relics as teachers face new realities in teaching. In order to teach the individual student, adequate space and accommodations become a central consideration. And with contradictions found in lecture and recitation work, an analysis of activity notes a beginning for laboratory instruction in varying contexts.

Perhaps one of the earliest examples of an emerging laboratory setting occurs with The Pueblo Plan. Search's program predominantly furthers a laboratory teaching model by engaging a *practical and active approach to learning focusing on the individual student*: "The fundamental characteristic of the plan on which the schools are organized is its conservation of the individual" (Search 154). Motivated to educate each student for local business and industry, the Pueblo schools find employing a model like Agassiz's learning-by-doing methodology creates an flexible working environment for the student:

Every room is a true studio or workshop, in which the pupils work as individuals. The province of the teacher is not to line up the pupils and to consume time by entertainment,

lecturing, and development of subjects; but to pass from desk to desk as the inspiring director and pupil's assistant, with but one intent and that the development of the self-reliant and independent worker. (Search158)

Making note of the basic structure of the laboratory setting, Search first reveals contradictions existent in the system where the “deeply communal motive” (Engeström “Activity Theory as a Framework” 964) of developing students' composing skills loses coherence and meaning, for, in Genung's words, the course becomes a “bugbear” and drudgery (173). Identifying contradictions such as these generates opportunities for the new, experimental laboratory approaches.

For example, work in the Pueblo schools—an institution that focuses on the “love of work”—is not graded, or at least there are no marks given to the student, and students only gain promotion on their ability “to do.” Search notes that sometimes it is a “system of grading that compels the pupil who is behind his class to drop out of school” (160). Therefore, in using laboratory classrooms as an operation to motivate students, the Pueblo schools also engage the collaborative work of students. They work together in pairs or individually, largely uninterrupted except during conferences with the instructor when guidance is needed. Finally, students engage subjects at their own pace with “no assignment to-day [*sic*] of what shall be done to-morrow [*sic*]; if the teacher has any general working directions, they are given at the beginning of the working period” (Search 158). With the school's focus on students as individuals, their practices focus on *motivating* the student through the *practicality of the classroom* and provide “no recitation as generally conducted in schools” (Search157). Similarly, this practice is reflected in today's writing center scholarship as Mackiewicz and Thompson argue “motivation is both reflected in and enhanced by students' active participation and engagement in learning and is

particularly well supported in collaborative environments such as writing center conferences” (“Motivational” 39). Thus, we see these practices beginning to take shape at the end of the nineteenth century, and today, as a cornerstone of laboratory teaching, *experimentation*, *flexibility* and *ingenuity* work to accommodate student-centered, collaborative learning.

To this end, the Pueblo Plan identifies technology as another enduring principle for the future of individual and consequently, writing center work. In the Pueblo program, students may work through their Latin exercises and move on to a chapter in Caesar during their next work section, for “the individual work is systematized, and a carefully kept record shows the advancement of the various pupils” (Search159). While the work is flexible and individualized, these records become a form of technology operating as references or a collection of practices documenting student work. Such documentation enhances the structure of the school’s laboratory plan as such records are essential in meeting the larger objective of developing students’ self-regulated work. Through the teacher’s careful instruction during one-on-one conferencing, each record keeps track of students’ successful completion of a work section and demonstrates the collaboration each student has engaged through their completed work. It is, thus, this flexible and ingenious work that leads to record keeping and which are also embodied in Lerner’s *Idea of a Writing Laboratory*, for the practice of teachers and students engaged in a dialectical, reciprocal, and experimental approach continue to contribute to the developing laboratory pedagogy.

### **A Burgeoning System**

Adopting a laboratory methodology, the Pueblo schools cultivate the most formulated system of activity at the turn of the century representing a course of curriculum exploration but also one of program analysis. The continual work of self-evaluation, assessment, and improvement of processes applied to teaching writing lead to a refined one-on-one approach with

*a focus on process* rather than recitation and daily themes. With the student as the central subject, the aim is to provide them with practical composition work that engages them as individuals; teachers' internalization and students' interact with the rules of invention; experimentation and collaboration represent the external activity as each student strives to develop practices and self-reliance with the help of their personal assistant, the teacher. Search's article demonstrates the internal, self-assessment of the program by the practitioner(s), for there is a clear forethought, performance, and self-reflection sequence at play. According to leading Self-Regulated Learning psychologists Barry J. Zimmerman and Anastasia Kitsantas, these self-regulated processes develop the "self-beliefs about personal competence in using processes, such as goal setting, strategy use, and self-monitoring, to learn" (513). Using these processes to learn, then, the earliest practitioners such as Search have a clear understanding of their work. Hence, they develop their self-efficacy toward correcting contradictions they identify in their systems. Yet while the Pueblo Plan roundly represents the rising movement of laboratory teaching in the public-school system of Colorado in 1894, the movement contemporaneously gains prominence in higher education.

Noting a continued boom in enrollment in his 1895 article titled "English at the University of Minnesota", Professor George E. MacLean declares how "institutions of the New West . . . 'stand for experiment, fertility of invention, and the broadening of standards'" (155). With ongoing movement away from a method of teaching aimed at satisfying a diverse student body with recitation and daily themes, part of the experimentation at the University of Minnesota includes developing instructional plans focusing on the interests of individual students. In one example, the English department at the University of Minnesota provides support to the extracurricular literary group "'The Knights of English Learning,' a voluntary society auxiliary

to the department . . . [where] instruction is broadened by the hearing and discussion of the results of special work by the students. The society [also] has sections for specific work, making miniature journal clubs, dialect societies, etc.” (MacLean 157-158). The presence of the Knights of English Learning demonstrates the roles these societies play in the development of individual interests and enculturation of the student body. More specifically, however, this auxiliary group makes clear the University of Minnesota’s adherence to an eclectic instructional regimen. The specific work to which this group and the English department strives, similarly, adds to the university’s method of operations rooted in self-evaluation:

If one term had to be used, the ‘laboratory method’ would describe ours. Indeed, the method has grown to such proportions that we have just been equipped with a literary laboratory. The English department is housed in an extensive suite of rooms in which are offices, seminary rooms, graduate workroom, and recitation rooms. These rooms are in the large new central library building just completed. The Departmental Library, especially classified to suit the work of the Department, will be distributed through these rooms. (MacLean 158)

This passage not only reinforces the developing laboratory teaching praxis in writing, but as a site for experimentation and fertility, the University of Minnesota initiates new criteria for the future of laboratory teaching practices and writing center development by examining their students’ needs. The university creates rooms for the specific purposes of laboratory work—as they claim “are virtually seminaries” (158), but they also become the first example of laboratories placed in the campus library, thus, enhancing the environmental attributes of the classroom and broadening the community and tools available for instruction. Further abandoning the old model of the recitation hall, students now have immediate access to librarians for



additional assistance, and with laboratory instruction at the University of Minnesota still functioning as a class with laboratory-designed curricula, students engage specific work under the tutelage of a roaming instructor in the seminary rooms.

For freshmen, the instructor engages students as they undergo “constant practice in writing, constant attention to correct grammatical and rhetorical forms in speech, and thorough drill in the text-book” (MacLean 159). Additionally, for sophomore students, the focus on process continues with “the criticism of the student’s own work. To secure brevity, for instance, the class is required for five successive weeks to handle different topics effectively upon a single page of script” (MacLean 160). During this period of the students’ development, they begin assessing their own work while also “exercising [their] own invention in the selection of subject and occasion” (MacLean 160). Students do not have daily themes thrust upon them here; they begin choosing their own topics. While this may seem commonplace in today’s schools, in 1895 it is surely a novelty. In addition, for the juniors and seniors in MacLean’s English Department at the University of Minnesota, this practice, coupled with “the helpful criticism given by students to each other, applying general principles and noting progress in correcting faults” helps develop student’s self-assessment (161). It is precisely this type of instruction we see advocated today by such writing center scholars as Sarah Blazer, for in her 2015 *Writing Center Journal* article “Twenty-First century Writing Center Staff Education” she argues that “seeing students as ‘designing’ participants in their social features . . . would shift our ways of framing what is possible when we talk with students about how they shape their writing and learning” (18). Through a continual hands-on approach in the earliest laboratory settings—and that still informs our practices today—students begin transferring their instructor’s influence through laboratory instruction.

Adopting the apprentice/teacher relationship laboratory teaching offers, students have acquired skills necessary for assessing their work as well as their peers'. Such peer collaboration finds a more formal resurgence in the classroom during this period of laboratory development, for in the Pueblo schools, it is also noted that "several students may be seen working together in a section because of present convenience, but the section is a temporary thing and may not designate the working place of the pupil to-morrow [*sic*]" (Search158). This practice of students working together—either through literary societies or in the classroom (or for Blazer's writing center staff education)—demonstrates how they emerge as tools in Engeström's CHAT schema. The roles teachers and students play—through teacher/student and peer collaborations—respond to contradictions in systems where no collaboration exists, thus, furthering the story of self-assessment in laboratory instruction's growth. The sociality and collaboration of and in the classroom becomes a key component and response to earlier system contradictions.

Though educational contexts differ, like the Pueblo schools, the setting at the University of Minnesota functions as an environment where tools and subjects interact to engage the object laboratory teaching pursues: the development of self-regulated activity. With the addition of the flexible and nurturing teaching at the helm of the program, strategies established early in the developing laboratory praxis create an environment focused on developing self-reliant "students of investigation, thought, originality, and power" (Search162). Additionally, the laboratory practices/experiments underway at the University of Minnesota, as described by George MacLean in 1895, demonstrate how laboratory practices—through hands-on, student-centered learning—begin developing and gaining definition. In support of assisting individual students' writing development, these actions situate writing laboratory teachers to "neither drive at the wheel nor from the back seat, but to teach the pupil how to do it" (Douglas 340). This truism sits

at the heart of developing laboratory teaching's guiding principles, and as the system builds momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century, the contributions of Search's record-keeping and MacLean's space considerations continue to develop and morph alongside the other guiding principles and new advents to the robust growth laboratory writing experiences.

### **Cultivating the Movement**

During the latter part of the early twentieth century, 1919-1930, for example, laboratory practices continue to get honed sometimes beginning with practitioners' claims and other times through the advancement and incorporation of technology in the classroom. These advancements demonstrate how writing laboratories continue developing with each site providing the latest technology and environmental factors simultaneously allowing students amenable space in which to write.

For example, in 1919, Scranton, Pennsylvania Central High School teacher, Carl Zeigler, articulates work that furthers the practice of writing in-session. This is a practice first mentioned by University of Kansas Professor, Edwin Hopkins when, in his 1912 article, "Can Good Composition Teaching be done Under Present Conditions?" he argues that "pupils should learn to write by writing" (2). For practitioners such as Zeigler, classrooms begin to adopt specific environmental and technological characteristics that augment students' laboratory space in which they may best conduct their individualized work. For instance, features in many of the early writing labs such as Zeigler's range from time-specific attributes such as "the most up-to-date pamphlets and volumes on social conditions, on democracy, and on the present war" to the décor of "comfortable chairs . . . arranged in a hollow-square formation . . ." (Zeigler 144-5). In early writing labs, students also had access to reflectoscopes, Victrola cabinets and moving picture machines all for use "under the wise guidance of the quiet, active teacher in charge" (Zeigler

145; Peck 753). Additionally, with the development of the NCTE in 1911, the dissemination of information continues to spread and assist in developing practices such as these for laboratory writing classrooms that continue to adapt to a changing student population.

While Zeigler's work demonstrates early incarnations of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), for each class "is an English class" (Zeigler 145), the contradiction of lectures versus engaging students individually in laboratory settings and providing them time to write is mediated with writing in-session. This continues the student-centered, collaborative work established by Search et al., but like Search and his use of records, writing in-session defines what students do during their time in class. With technology and environmental concerns, the classroom becomes a place where students *work*. They do not passively receive information from a lecture; instead, they are actively engaged in their own learning through engaging in consultation with the teacher. These early laboratory systems in composition offered more than just a room where students could work individually. They also offered an environment that implemented current technology and an atmosphere aimed at information sharing. Such practicality and experimentation also continue today as noted by *Writing Center Journal* contributors Emily Isaacs and Ellen Kolba in their 2009 article "Mutual Benefits." With information sharing the focus of their work, they find that "writing center work enables tutors to observe close up how invention, revision, and editing are facilitated by a supportive reader, and how teachers' success with developing students' writing abilities is very much dependent on the extent to which they enable—or disable—the advancement of these processes" (54). Thus, further defining these expanding learning environments early-on, the broader community of the NCTE—at the turn of the century and now—helps inform teachers of others' practices which, in

turn, helps define the practice of laboratory teaching even further by making conference presentations and publications—and the information therein—more accessible.

Through Hopkin's claim and Ziegler's classrooms, the writing laboratory is advancing through implementing a WAC approach, and such approaches demonstrate how information sharing continues to inform our work today. For Hopkins and Zeigler, writing in-session is seen as compulsory and technology and environmental factors continue building onto previous models offered by Search and MacLean—where the classroom is a workplace, student work is monitored, and the library setting is conducive to aiding student success. And by the end of the 1920's, formal assessment of these practices and inquiry into how laboratory practices are working begins to unfold.

### **Calibrating the Paradigm: Testing Assumptions**

Now in practice for roughly 40 years, the laboratory classroom in composition encounters a contradiction of its own making as questions about its reliability and validity begin to circulate. As such, implementing an early model of empirical research begins the final third of this era's exploration.

In 1929, Warren B. Horner, identifying the absence of robust qualitative research of the laboratory practicum, carries out an experiment to assess the viability of laboratory teaching versus recitation methods. In doing so, Horner's work takes aim at the contradiction where research should exist. Creating a situation where a recitation group exists as the control group and a laboratory group as an experimental group, Horner identifies a clear objective of the laboratory method. He finds, for example, "errors were located by paragraph or sentence, and the pupil directed to look for them with the idea of training him in self-criticism" (217). Through a student-centered, collaborative approach, relationships between teachers and students acquire

greater significance with conversations between them guiding the work toward developing self-directed students. With self-assessment processes on display and self-efficacy already high in the teachers of laboratory writing, they aim to instill these qualities into their students.

Also, identifying writing in-session and individual student records as central components of laboratory teaching methods, Horner's assessment and empirical research advocates the continuation of previous practitioners' durable practices. The practices Horner notes in his explanation of the laboratory movement demonstrate the practicality of the laboratory method as opposed to that of the recitation method. Laboratory writing as a gestalt continues to unfold, and as it does, it gains more definition and strength through its imminent critique. Coexisting with Horner's analysis determining benefits of laboratory teaching's practices, the experimental nature of the pedagogy and the development of tools continues laboratory teaching's development through the 1930's.

For example, Johns Hopkins University Professor, Paul Mowbray Wheeler advances experimentation as laboratory work continues. In his 1930 article "Advanced English Composition: A Laboratory Course" Wheeler begins introducing student volunteers into the community framework through his advanced course of English composition: "A member [of the class] should volunteer to act as a secretary for each meeting. He jots down what transpires and the most important criticisms which are brought out. Then these 'minutes' are filed and are available to any student who is forced to be absent or late" (558). As an early concept, these practices of note taking have not changed that drastically over the years. Today, tutors take notes to record what transpires during a tutorial. Enhancing the technological resolve record keeping holds, these records by current practitioners, just as in Wheeler's case, get filed so other tutors can see the students' progress or assess a student's areas of concern as each gets noted during

conference. Further, today, a student secretary (desk clerk) directs students to the conference, records the conference, files student records, and maintains the files for review. With the introduction of staff as part of the growing community, Wheeler's system promotes the idea that, through laboratory methods (the five guiding principles: student-centered, flexible teachers, collaboration, environmental factors, and technology), the possibility exists for learning to occur through various moments of action, for the volunteer functions as a tool as well as a learner in the laboratory system, or subject in Engeström's CHAT model. The volunteer, de-facto staff member begins to identify processes, practices, and procedures specific to education's praxis, thus, further developing the vocabulary and knowledge base of the system to also further prepare staff for specializations in the field of education.

Wheeler's course also establishes a committee—to “[encourage] the feeling of responsibility”—to select some of the best papers of the course which then get added to the archive: “These are edited, retype-written if necessary, signed, indexed, bound, and presented to the library for future reference” (559). This work further establishes a self-assessment/self-regulatory presence in early laboratory curricula through *environmental structuring*: “selecting or creating effective physical settings for learning” (Zimmerman and Kitsantas 511). Additionally, the record keeping of Search is now enhanced and the material application of student work continues the development of a system that MacLean began at the University of Minnesota. And when peer staff members are brought in to administer the process and the practice of selecting and procuring samples for future reference, the peer becomes an integral component of the laboratory setting. Along with Horner's testing, though relatively inconclusive, this work leads to the prominence of laboratory practices during the final moments of the Formative Period. The testing and accentuating, or enhancement of practices, as well as the durability of practices

already fomented as part of the laboratory method leads to Wheeler's experimental application of student volunteers/staff. This leads to the notion that the writing lab is simultaneously a place for continuing education and staff development. Here, the development or modification of practices leads to the conceptualization of the laboratory as an independent body.

From Horner's and Wheeler's experimentations, the development of the laboratory classroom's five guiding principles become further discernible. The praxis must be student-centered; teachers possess flexible, nurturing qualities with a penchant for self-evaluation and development; collaboration is at the center of a student-centered and teacher enhanced praxis; and technology and environmental factors play central roles in providing an atmosphere where work can flourish. Now, the system itself will need to ensure growth and solidification of these principles in order to prosper.

### **Expanding the System: A Model Writing Laboratory**

With guiding principles in place and the advancement of the laboratory spreading, the reconfiguration of the laboratory classroom begins to make way for the writing laboratory—an independent system operating with the sole purpose of developing individual students' self-regulatory, self-assessment, and critical thinking skills. With a student-centered pedagogy encouraging students find their own explanations to problems in writing and education, the end of the Formative Period begins a progressive period with revision filling a specific role in an early variation of the process movement. Parts of the writing process are recognized, and with an ever-developing role for the instructor in helping students develop their process, in-session writing continues to advance with more student records to aid in the process. Further, with students more and more involved in the writing laboratory system, room for offering students



continuing education opportunities and pre-teacher development become part and parcel to Francis Appel's writing laboratory model at the University of Minnesota.

### **Francis Appel and the Writing Laboratory**

In 1936, the laboratory, as it has been conceived for nearly 50 years, gets described as a new and independent venture by the University of Minnesota General College's Writing Laboratory's first director, Francis S. Appel. As part of the General College, the Writing Laboratory at the University of Minnesota began as a voluntary course where students studied for an hour or two per week: "Composition as a subject is studied in the laboratory only when the student runs into difficulty writing things which he wishes to write in answer to natural demands" (Appel 71). Though Appel's course is still a "course," it is not an addendum to the composition course. In fact, with his method for administering myriad activities, Appel carries forth the tradition of confronting contradictions originating from a lack of student interest in their writing, and his course embodies the guiding principles culminated from the past 50 years of laboratory experiments.

Identifying contradictions in the previous current-traditional methods, Appel's analysis of assignments demonstrates how some disrupt the system of activity in a writing classroom. In fact, Appel has such disdain for formulaic writing he argues "artificial assignments" generate "vague generalities" (73). Appel's Writing Laboratory is one of the first to debunk the theme essay or what we might call "the 5-paragraph essay" today. With Appel claiming the stultifying assignments and instruction students receive have numbed them to reality, his work exemplifies how this paradox disrupts student interest, and in turn, the successful completion of developed themes.

On the other hand, Appel claims that when students enter his lab, they “are told at the first meeting that they are to write anything they wish to, [and] the sudden freedom confuses them” (72). Under Appel’s direction, the laboratory adheres to a student-centered approach as he encourages them to write about real situations that appeal to them. For example, in one student’s paper, Appel claims she wrote “I helped to decorate the sorority house for the dance last weekend. It looked swell.” In response to her vague generality of “swell,” he asks a simple question: “But where is the picture? . . . could she not, in a word, be concrete?” (73). Here, individual conferencing and, as referenced earlier, the teacher’s use of the question plays a paramount role in developing the student’s awareness of details.

Appel’s approach is like starting over; he has to de-program students, and he does so with simple, yet effective tactics further adding to the already growing resourcefulness and flexibility of the laboratory teacher. With efficacy and self-regulation intertwined, Appel’s model of questioner/collaborator provides a model of teachers employing strategies that, according to Tim Urdan and Julianne C. Turner, psychologists and contributors to the *Handbook of Competence and Motivation*, “enhance their students’ feelings of self-efficacy . . . offering students feedback about their performance that focuses on the students’ use of specific strategies” (302). Appel’s laboratory work, thus, reflects the research of today and continues to develop and apply the lineage of self-regulated activity from practitioners before him. Appel’s schema also illustrates the intimacy offered in his lab, thus, allowing the teacher to act as a model to transfer skills to his students. The flexibility and collaboration Appel offers in his lab engages students so they may more fully develop a genuine concern for their writing, and engage in self-reflective and self-assessment work, thus, encouraging the continual development of the self-reliant student.

Appel also continues his reconstruction of the theme-based composition curriculum when he assesses the value of handbooks. When read by students, he argues, they present “many things in the magazines [students read] to be wrong” (73); therefore, he recognizes the artifact, or tool, of the handbook existing as a contradiction in the system. Instead of simply referencing a handbook, though, Appel encourages students to write following the rule of using their own idioms. Carrying forth another tenet from Search’s earlier model, the freedom that students experience in Appel’s laboratory enables them to become self-sufficient students who no longer worry about grades: “So engrossed had the girl been in the criticism of her own work while she was writing . . . she rushed eagerly into re-writing her letter and had not even thought of asking her mark” (73). This marks a continuance of the laboratory as an environment free from the rigors of standard academic practices i.e. grading student papers, evidenced as early as 1894, and more toward an independently functioning apparatus. Further, in this workplace, students’ self-sufficiency is evidenced through their conscientious revision work:

On this crumpled sheet whole sentences were crossed out; paragraphs were numbered for a rearrangement; new words were written in between the lines or put in the margin and their positions indicated by long lines terminating in arrow points. The boy had written, revised, and copied without any aid from the instructor. (Appel 74)

Not only does this work demonstrate how freedom and a little guidance from the instructor aid in student learning, self-regulation, and self-assessment, it also carries forth the use of new tools in mediating the contradictions of student involvement in their writing. With Appel’s resolutions, the laboratory begins moving away from a model that functions as part of a curriculum and more toward a model for independent discovery for a campus-wide community.

Student revision, as a staple practice in Appel's laboratory, really solidifies writing in-session as a useful tool to engage students:

The only interruptions in his work are those caused by his going to the bookshelves for a reference book or by the instructor's sitting down with him for a brief conference about the work he is doing. And that is the time for a conference! More than half of the achievement of the writing laboratory, I am sure, can be attributed to the fact that conferences with the student take place when the student is writing. (75)

The practice of writing in-session, now recognizably a practice in circulation for over 20 years at the time of Appel's article, helps define how "learning needs to occur in a changing mosaic of interconnected activity systems" (Engeström "Expansive Learning" 140). First realized in 1912, the activity system that first introduces writing in-session now overlaps with the system of Appel's Writing Laboratory. Moreover, in this work-place environment where revision is key, Appel continues to enhance the presence of technology in the lab as he adds student files (as records) to the archive and multiple drafts get collected for the student's file, thereby constituting an early conceptualization of the portfolio, for "throwing away rough drafts constituted a major crime . . . Our files now contain, fortunately, many examples of careful, independent revision" (74). What started in 1887 as a collection of individual student work for the purposes of keeping track of student progress has now evolved into archival work allowing students to see their development through a portfolio-type file. Much like Wheeler's work, this exercise also provides future students and teachers multiple opportunities to view examples at multiple points through which learning might occur.

As a final point, Appel's evaluation of the system also notes the multiple roles instructors play in the laboratory: "instructors in the laboratory try to tie in with the counseling system of the

college” (75). In 1980, Muriel Harris discusses, in her article “The Roles a Tutor Plays”, the tutor as a coach, commentator, and a counselor. However, as the unfolding laboratory gestalt precedes Muriel Harris’ profound direction of writing center practices by roughly 50 years, the roles noted by Appel are not in the context of a tutor. Instead, for Appel, it’s the instructor who plays the different roles:

Whenever in the papers there appear evidences of maladjustment, then notes are taken and added to the student’s file in the General College office. Because one student wrote a pitiful paper concerning his poverty, the instructor sent a note to the office suggesting that the student be given Federal aid. Investigation revealed the fact that the boy was suffering from *petit mal*, and therefore other recommendations were made concerning the student. On the other hand, the work of one student was so poor that the instructor consulted the file to seek a clue and found there that the student, a girl, suffered from a serious pituitary disturbance and severe headaches. (75)

Operating as tensions in students’ writing development, each of these occurrences demonstrates the changing nature of the laboratory. Specialists assess their practices while simultaneously cultivating the nurturing and flexible environments established earlier in the gestalt of laboratory writing classrooms. Instructors in the laboratory must be able to determine how to engage each student, and they must be equipped to handle multiple situations as they arise. They become coaches, collaborators, and counselors, and they must be amenable to the work: “It is not . . . a method to be forced upon a staff, for the laboratory method requires enthusiastic and not mere perfunctory teaching by the instructors” (Appel 77). This has been noted consistently as the early epoch of the writing laboratory movement has unfolded with these instances noting the changing roles instructors play in the evolving writing center whole. Similarly, such examples

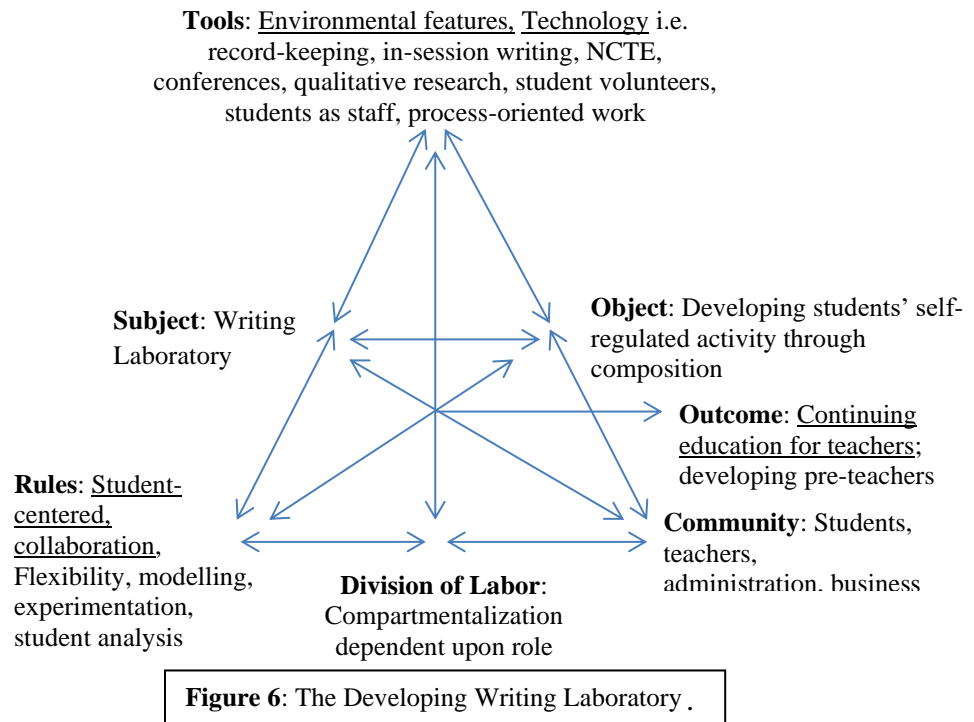
demonstrate how instructor's roles gain complexity and aesthetic nuanced with a readiness toward creating a nurturing and flexible environment.

## **Conclusion**

The work discussed thus far looks to demonstrates how practitioners' evaluations and the morphological nature of laboratory teaching in composition classrooms leads to the inevitable development of independent writing laboratories with other recognized writing laboratories coming into existence at George Washington University (GWU) in 1940 ("Writing Laboratory Set Up For Students"). With GWU Professor Elbridge Colby's article "'Laboratory Work' in English", the university adheres to the fundamental guiding principle of providing environmentally adequate space in the new library to house the writing laboratory with "the improvement of formal composition-writing in Freshman English" the main priority (67). This "improvement" sees the development of a system with vestiges of its predecessor's best laid plans. The environmental characteristics of the library, with technology readily available, as a setting suitable for a writing laboratory are not coincidental. In such a setting, directed by knowledgeable teachers, in-session writing, collaboration, and a student-centered approach to developing self-sufficient writers opens the door to all university students. GWU's expansion is an effort to build "close co-operation between the English and other departments of the university" (Colby 68-69). It is this interconnection of activity systems within the university that continues to develop and demonstrate a growing community of scholars looking to further develop laboratory practices at their institutions.

While variations exist in how laboratories function, Figure 6 exhibits the theoretical and environmental structuring of the writing laboratory. With the guiding principles underlined,

mediating artifacts, or tools, have developed extensively over the last 60 years with environmental factors such as tables and chairs in a well-lit room continuing to



provide a relaxed environment where students can focus on the work at hand. Additionally, technology, a resource library, student files, empirical research, and the NCTE acting as important information sharing advancements have all added to the burgeoning laboratory system of tools. Further, a student-centered approach and collaboration operate as rules for the system, and while this figure includes the continually developing teacher in the outcome, it is viable that teachers and their flexibility also get situated as rules for the system as well as tools in the system. Laboratories have the same goals of developing self-sufficient students in flexible and nurturing environments with “instructors [taking] a positive rather than a negative attitude, attempting not to be mere proofreaders” (165). However, with the addition of student workers

and the view that the lab may also act as a teaching lab for pre-teachers, the developing teacher becomes an outcome of the activity system developed by the end of the Formative Period.

In this setting, the practices of self-reflection, self-assessment, and improvement become mainstays of the laboratory and ultimately create a lineage of self-regulatory work that will continue into the next era; however, the new rationale of the next generation will threaten the existence of the model so fortuitously and organically developed during this initial period. While the model ending the Formative Period is seen as progressive and fruitful, the next era views it as a bastardization of educational principles: students are being spoon-fed information, and they rely on the instructor relinquishing independent discoveries. As a result, new contradictions emerge in the next generation to throw the 1940's writing laboratory archetype into a regressive condition.



## Chapter Three:

### An Interim Period of Clinics

#### **Introduction**

During the next period of writing center development, which I call the Clinical Period, the rich experimentation found in original conceptualizations of laboratory practices continues; however, a limiting or constraining motive exists within the clinical movement that marginalizes much of the work of the Formative Period. The Clinical Period does not look to broaden the definition of the evolving praxis; instead, the guiding principle of collaboration is nixed with lecture-based instruction returning, and in turn, degenerating the student-centered laboratory into a teacher-centered clinic. It seems the efficacy of this era's practitioners may be so high it borders on egocentric, thus, representing a 180° turn from the previous generations' progress. Interestingly, during this time, no new contradictions exist for the development of the new "remediation" tools that will crop up during this period, for the same issues with underprepared students' writing persist. While the period looks to resolve the contradiction of a 'spoon feeding mentality' behind the original laboratory praxis, this era's efforts to modify the existing framework of laboratory work end up creating more contradictions than resolutions. Unfortunately, some of these continue to act as a residue for modern-day writing centers. Case in point, with the application of "remediation" to the clinic, this era's practitioners create an enduring distortion of the writing lab.

In this chapter then, my story of writing center development continues by showing how the operation of the clinic turns around on itself. Nonetheless, the positive outcomes that result in this failed experiment (hence the term 'Interim') far outweigh the negatives as the Clinical Period's contradictions open the door for the future of writing center praxes. For example, in the

case of the clinic, practitioners aim to narrow the activity from the previous laboratory experiments by offering students less one-on-one time and creating more rigid, sterile programs in environments bereft of collaboration. Yet, the adverse nature of the Clinical Period begets the reconceptualization and solidification of the writing lab during the period that will follow. To preface the next movement, I aim for this this chapter to demonstrate how the advent of the clinic—in search of methods that will narrow the scope of the praxis—also brings forth wider and broader possibilities for the burgeoning writing laboratory and ultimately, the writing center.

James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* may point to the crossroads for this period. For example, in "The Communication's Emphasis" Berlin covers the change that the communications course underwent largely due to the "number of veterans returning to school" after the Second World War (96). Berlin argues: "The communications course was obviously an effective way to deal with the special problems of many of these students, including as it did the use of writing clinics . . . since the use of an interdepartmental staff could result in a more economical use of faculty" (96). While Berlin points out the economical aspect of the clinic, other claims by Berlin suggest the clinic was an effort to respond to needs of the new student population. With the military nuanced with efficiency and stratification, we may also conclude from Berlin's descriptions that the adoption of the clinic merely responds to the needs of their audience. For instance, describing The State university of Iowa's Communication Skills Program, Berlin notes that "95% [of students were] put in one of three tracks . . . and students who were found to need more assistance than was provided by any of these courses were sent for additional help to one of three 'clinics' in reading, speaking, or writing" (98). Thus, the classification of students begins with an aim toward efficiency that, again, may reflect military cultures. As such, it may be concluded that the Clinical period originates with military precepts

in mind, for Berlin also notes that Iowa's program was typical in encouraging "conformity and conservative values" (99). Nonetheless, while it may seem like an unnecessary foray into systems creation, the work of this generation offers a point of clarity for the field of laboratory work, and it plays an instrumental role in showcasing *what not to do* as the design of modern-day writing centers continues to evolve.

### **Days Between**

By 1941, writing laboratories across the United States were highly individualized with teachers systematically unbridled. They were free to assess their own unique circumstances to develop a curriculum for their laboratories where such facilities were adopted in place of a freshman English course. Laboratories provided well-lit rooms with tables, dictionaries, and other reference books, and teachers facilitated discussions in the laboratory with upper class assistants nearby to help. These standard practices provided uniformity to an otherwise malleable, unconstrained laboratory framework. Perhaps, however, as suggested earlier, the winds of change began to shift around 1940. Here, in the days between the progressive laboratory experiments of the Formative Period and the later Modern Period, descriptors begin to categorize students and the schools which they attend. During this Interim Clinical Period, approaches and the specific language used (i.e. "diagnosis," "treatment," or "remedy,") leads the laboratory movement in a new, unhealthy, and unnatural direction from that which was established over the previous fifty years.

The use of descriptors such as those mentioned, operate as *variant tools*, which drive a wedge between the laboratory of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Clinical Period. In the case of the clinic, variant tools operate in a way that pollutes the laboratory movement's congenial and amiable ethos. Notably, for Engeström, the advent of new descriptors within an

existing framework function as part of the process of development: “When an activity system adopts a new element from outside . . . it often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction where some old element . . . collides with the new one. Such contradictions generate disturbances and conflicts, but also innovate attempts to change the activity” (“Expansive Learning at Work” 137). This phenomenon occurs during the Clinical Period, for it appears practitioners have envisioned a way to modernize or economize the laboratory and create systems of remediation, thus, relegating the laboratory only as a model for something better: The Clinic. Instead, however, the clinic is less efficient—offering fewer effective programs of development for student writers—with stratification and categorization at the root of the program’s attentions. With the lexical choices of the Clinical Period, the program of the clinic seems to come from an instructor-centered point of view, thereby, disposing of the student-centered focus of the Formative Period. However, as Engeström suggests, such conditions will inevitably lead to a system that looks to evaluate and correct itself after the clinical experiment has run its course.

Certainly, the clinic aims to direct students toward self-correction, but the work in a clinic relies largely on impersonal feedback from “counselors” who analyze students’ writings and narrate, per Freire’s banking philosophy. Ultimately, this mirrors what Nancy Grimm outlines as a closed system in her article “Rethorizing Writing center Work.” She argues that a closed system “becomes defensive and creates structures that lead to stratification, disconnectedness, dogmatism, narcissism, marginality, factionalism, and imperialism” (91). In such a system, instructions become strategies students should follow once they leave the clinic. Counselors do not monitor students’ comprehension in real-time collaborative work; therefore, any further

feedback or engagement with the student only occurs through more error, correction, and explanation lecturing.

Fortunately, however, not all the tools developed during the period of the clinic hobble the laboratory movement. With the circulation of the “Workshop No. 9” reports from the College of Composition and Communication beginning in 1950 to outline programmatic descriptions of the clinic and laboratory, each report offers a view of the contradictions between the two programs. Possibly precipitated by George Wykoff, director of English at Purdue, and his impassioned speech concerning the state of composition at 1948’s NCTE meeting in Chicago, which spawned the creation of the Conference on College composition and Communication (Berlin 105), the first report compiled by the secretary of the workshop, Andrew K. Kafka from Wisconsin State Teacher’s College in Eau Claire, illustrates the differences between the laboratory as an ‘open system’ with the clinic reflecting a more rigid and ‘closed system.’ By revealing tensions or contradictions associated with the development of the clinic, the CCCC’s reports may highlight how the clinic ultimately operates as a tool in the eventual re-birth of the laboratory.

Moreover, these reports also function as a shot in the arm for the writing laboratory. Operating as a tool through which practitioners may reflect, assess, evaluate, and improve upon their labs, practitioners may ultimately, “innovate attempts to change the activity” (Engeström “Expansive Learning at Work” 137). By demonstrating the lab as a science complete with critical reflection on the part of its practitioners, I offer this chapter to help disclose how the CCCC’s reports act as guiding mechanisms for reflections, and at the end of the era, they inform teachers of the potential and latent promise of the laboratory as a teaching lab—reestablished from Wheeler’s work during the Formative Period.

From the development of the clinic to the re-articulation of the laboratory as the dominant model of student development, I believe my analysis of the Clinical Period offers current writing center practitioners a view of history that begins with the clinic's stratification of a generation, thus upsetting the trajectory of the previous generation's laboratory work. Continuing to illustrate the evaluative properties of CHAT with Engeström's maxim of change in mind, my analysis of this period's historical scholarly artifacts also looks to illustrate how the teacher-centered focus of the clinic movement manifests as a contradiction that will inform the laboratory movement's re-articulation and revitalization at the end of the era. Revealing how components of the clinic's strategies directly contradict the foundations of the original laboratory work in the composition classroom, the CCCC's workshop reports, first enables the organization an opportunity to develop their ethos as they highlight their presence in the re-emergence of the laboratory. Second, with the CCCC's and their workshop reports operating as tools, the reports make clear that while the clinical experiment may seem unnecessary, ultimately, the clinic serves as an indispensable tool in the future of the writing laboratory. In the end, the laboratory largely takes the place of the clinic and its subsidiaries within the discouraging system of remediation. Thus, at the end of the Clinical Period, I argue the clinical venture becomes a useful foray into the future as practitioners during the next period will re-articulate previous laboratory experiments left unfinished and chart a clearer direction for laboratory work.

### **The Stratification of a Generation**

Alvin Fountain's ruminations in his 1940 College English article, "The Problem of the Poorly Prepared Student" demonstrate an attitude that may have helped usher in a new formula for the laboratory. He argues that "we have inevitably, perhaps unconsciously, lowered our secondary-school standards to those of the average, rather than to those of the superior student"

(318). It appears that Fountain offers a critique of what he believes are failed policies, and in doing so, suggests the universal right of upward mobility has limits, thus, prefacing the stratification and marginalization of students. Motivated by Fountain and others, the Clinical Period has many institutions marginalizing students. With this practice at the forefront of the clinical experiments, providing direction per a banking method of instruction becomes the preferred method of action. However, such a practice directly contradicts the collaborative model of the laboratory. Thus, with this methodology at the forefront of the movement, the stage is set for this generation's clinical experiments.

The egoistic nature of advancing an exclusionary environment of status and inequality in Fountain's study appears cloaked in resentment. He argues: "A generation ago only those with considerable energy, initiative, and vision finished high school at all, and many of those never attended college. Now . . . essentially the entire adolescent population is in high school, many of them for no particular reason" (318). Fountain's critique reaches into the practicality of the most progressive aspects of the previous generation's trending laboratory method and seems to directly mock Deweyian concepts of education arguing that "in our efforts to 'prepare the student for the community in which he is to live,' we have extended elective privileges to students too young to exercise them, and from homes not qualified to advise concerning them . . ." (Fountain 319). This tone of separation permeates Fountain's argument and sets a trajectory for the remediation experiment in the academy. Such stringent ideology toward rejuvenating exceptionality in the academy not only creates pedagogical contradictions with the laboratory movement, but the external, territorial contradictions exacerbate the problems of breaking down barriers of class and race during one of our countries' most tumultuous periods in the advancement of equality.

During the Clinical Period, it becomes clear how the administration of Fountain's (and others') new lexical choices—within the formulated laboratory activity system established during the previous period—adheres to Engeström's notion that “new element[s] . . . generate disturbances and conflicts” (“Expansive Learning at Work” 137). With his analysis of schools that provide “remedial” education, Fountain begins the stratification of students first by classifying the schools that provide specific solutions, or a “Remedy”, to the issue of poor student writing, which he describes as “The Disease.” Specifically, schools that offer no program for the poorly prepared student get categorized as a “Remedy: No Official Treatment” institution. Those schools that offer extra work fall under the category “Remedy: Extra Work without Extra Credit,” or “Remedy: Noncredit, Sub-Freshman Courses.”

Fountain's terminology here categorizes schools and simultaneously stigmatizes students as he engages in the stratification of a generation. He claims that students have a “disease” and suggests schools offer “remedies” and “diagnoses.” The use of this kind of language directly opposes earlier Deweyian concepts of democratic educational philosophies, for when “a society to which stratification into separate classes would be fatal, [we] must see to it that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equable and easy terms” (Dewey 87-88). Yet, moving into the 1940's these ideas seem to have been forgotten, or at the very least, misplaced. Fountain even notes that “by removing restrictions [in education] we have taken away from solid education one of its strongest motivations, exclusiveness (an ugly word in a democracy!)” (318). While it is remarkable to witness such varying degrees and interpretations of democratic actions (even by today's standards), it is difficult to determine how influential Fountain's article was in 1940. In practice, however, Fountain's article demonstrates an escalating stratification of classes underlying the clinical approach.



Further, in a report titled “A Writing Clinic at Iowa State College” in *School and Society* in January of 1943, Duncan Mallam exacerbates the lexical dilemma of the Clinical Period. With his article, the contradictions between labs and clinics progress with all the accoutrements of diagnostics, prescriptions, and remediation on hand to fuel the era’s categorization of students. Despite following enduring attributes of the laboratory (the clinic is also located in a large room with desks, reference books, and an attendant), the experimental writing clinic at Iowa State College demonstrates the perversion of transferring self-regulated processes to students through a regimented, lecture approach. For example, during the beginning of the quarter, each student completes a “diagnostic” essay exam similar to those used today: “A test consisting of a 500-word impromptu paper, written within a period of two hours, is given . . .” (“A Writing Clinic” 52). If a student fails the examination through the “defects” described by the reading committee, the paper then goes to the clinic where the student’s “writing is meticulously analyzed for him and his merits and defects are carefully explained” (“A Writing Clinic” 52). Students become marginalized with “defects” explained to them. One of the most problematic practices in the clinics, “explaining” relies solely on the praxis of lecturing. Thus, the clinical approach aligns itself with previous models of lecturing vis-à-vis Freire’s banking philosophy.

In fact, neglecting all of the previous work toward developing collaboration between the student and the teacher in laboratory writing settings, Mallam makes it known collaboration is a rarity: “It is understood that no students will be spoon-fed in the clinic, nor will they, except in rare instances, be tutored” (“A Writing Clinic” 52). Here, the description of being “spoon-fed” versus engaging in collaboration marks a dramatic turn in the development of a sociable and flexible environment where students work with the teacher through an exchange of self-regulated interchanges. Today, such a flexible writing center environment is exemplified by Beth Godbee,

Moira Ozias, and Jasmine Kar Tang in their 2015 Writing center Journal article “Body + Power + Justice: Movement-Based Workshops for Critical Tutor Education.” These practitioners argue “we have the mandate to explore how the embodied acts of our practice facilitate or frustrate learning; consolidate or share power; and open or close possibilities for learning, change, and revision” (63-64). In other words, the sociality experiments happening in writing centers lead to reinforcing best practices among students and the tutorial counterparts. The opposite is true in the Clinical Period, however, for students do not write in the clinic; therefore, reinforcements useful for transfer are absent.

Such practice is articulated by W. G. Johnson in his 1945 article reporting on the writing clinic at the University of Illinois. In “A Report on the University of Illinois Experimental Writing Clinic” Johnson demonstrates how the clinic continues to move away from a collaborative model claiming, “the clinic does not supervise writing or provide tutoring” (9). With collaboration and modelling largely absent, Johnson’s methodology generates further contradictions between the new and the old. The days of collaboration in the laboratory are not gone as clinics and laboratories exist simultaneously. However, with the clinic, a new ideology challenges the progressive work beginning after Genung’s call for reform to Appel’s conceptualization of collaborative, personal writing, and it sits in direct opposition to current Twenty-First Century practices.

The progression of laboratory practices appears overlooked by clinicians as they continually move further away from the cooperative environment espoused by the previous laboratory movement. In this setting, discerning how students gain self-sufficiency without direction in the clinic is a concern. Counselors do not engage students as they write, nor do they monitor students’ progress through collaborative efforts; therefore, rules remain abstract. Instead,

“counselors” analyze student writing, “suggest remedies,” and then they send students to “remedial agencies” (Johnson 11). Through this method, adaptability relies largely on the individual without the aid of sociality “as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 86). In the clinic, a student’s Zone of Proximal Development is neglected when they receive instruction with little guidance and no collaboration with peers. Minus the sociality linking abstract problem solving to concrete instruction, students exiting the clinic find themselves further marginalized and isolated. Despite the development of self-regulatory processes, still a focal point for the clinicians, categorization of individual students in the academy seems a necessary evil at institutions throughout the U.S in the early part of the 1940’s.

And when the marginalization and categorization of students had not gone far enough, in 1946, J. O. Bailey of the University of North Carolina describes a trend of exclusion that takes a turn for the worse. He writes that the University of North Carolina began “to single out all students in advanced courses who wrote poorly” (145). These students earn the “diagnosis” of having a “composition condition” or CC for short meaning students who have the CC must complete work in the “Composition Condition Laboratory.” Automatically stigmatizing a student, the diagnostic creates a contradiction in the original laboratory motive as the student enters the once welcoming and impartial laboratory. Now, students enter a hypercritical environment feeling separated from the rest of the university community. Rather than creating an adaptable or malleable environment—like that which we see in modern contexts i.e. Godbee, Ozias, and Tang’s example—the experiment at the University of North Carolina instead creates one of the most overt examples of a bridge too far. Students labelled with the made-up disorder of “composition condition” enter the lab instantly stigmatized for an application of the banking

method of instruction. Although the University of North Carolina demonstrates a practice taking place throughout the period—the crossover of clinics and labs—the modification of the “Composition Condition Laboratory” only results in the disintegration of a central, unified system of laboratory practice where students and teachers work in collaboration. The university may call their assistance program a laboratory, but they follow clinical trends: including practices that eventually get disclosed after Robert Moore begins his foray into the clinic vs. laboratory debate.

### **Enter Robert Moore**

Preceding, and possibly foreshadowing Robert Moore’s defining moment in outlining the laboratory and the clinic, in a pair of individual articles, Moore and his colleague at the University of Illinois, W. G. Johnson, discuss a model of remediation and offer suggestions toward developing courses that will operate as part of a remedial program. With stratification and marginalization of students at the forefront of the collaborative-vacant clinical/remediation experiment, Johnson argues (1945 “A Report”) that “if the Writing Clinic is to have any value, it must have remedial agencies to which it can send the students with problems” (11). As Johnson and Moore work toward building a clinical system of remediation, Johnson proposes creating short courses for grammar and spelling (Rhetoric 0 for non-freshmen), a year course in the elements of English, and a remedial course designed for the upperclassmen (Rhetoric 5).

A thorough discussion of Rhetoric 5 appears in Moore’s 1945 article “The Upperclass Remedial English Course at the University of Illinois.” With his Rhetoric 5 course designed for the upperclass student who writes “a semiliterate gibberish” (Moore “The Upperclass” 5) near the end of his time at the university, Moore’s (and Johnson’s) description of the program at the University of Illinois, defines the shape of the remedial system underway. Yet, with a move

away from practicality, Moore's "gibberish" remark demonstrates how the growing trend of stratification has permeated the clinical approach. Understandably, a need for students to succeed at written English is paramount to success outside of the University. However, this form of student criticism in professional publications only promotes a less-than-welcoming and less flexible faculty. In this setting, courses work in tandem with "clinics" which become places where faculty send students and "counselors" explain rules. Instead of the collaborative and practical spirit witnessed during the Formative Period, the program only creates more division in the name of progress and efficiency.

Nonetheless, demonstrating the evolution of the clinic in 1948, Moore describes how the diagnostic gets modified, and a "preliminary interview usually uncovers the principal source of difficulty" ("The University" 9). In his 1948 article "The University of Illinois Writing Clinic", Moore shares how the clinic at the University of Illinois has undergone changes since its inception in 1944. While more tests may follow an initial interview, the clinic has become voluntary for students, and an emphasis on alleviating the development of any stigma appears to take shape: "To allow the student to feel stupid or unwelcome or badgered is fatal to the securing of the voluntary and persistent effort which he must expend if his deficiencies are to be corrected" (Moore "The University" 11). It appears the movement of this period has begun to realize the errors of its ways, and at this point, aspects of the original Formative Period laboratory movement begin to get maneuvered back into the fold. Clinics and labs begin to coalesce; thus, more crossovers occur between the lab and the clinic. Although this is promising, Moore continues to revert to some of the very language that hurts the process when he suggests students "expecting quick and painless therapy" will likely never succeed in their efforts ("The

University” 11). Fair enough, but the suggestion that work done in a writing laboratory setting relates to any kind of therapy creates a contradiction in practice.

In 1950, however, Moore recognizes contradictions between the lab and the clinic and confirms in his landmark article, “The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory,” that the flexibility once appreciated and encouraged in laboratory instructors has given way to a stringent, clinician’s method of telling students where their deficiencies lie. “Counsellors” no longer adapt to situations, and flexibility suffers in the clinic. Students follow prescribed notions of correction without demonstrations corroborating how those prescriptions apply to their unique situation; heretofore, typically demonstrated through the laboratory’s in-session writing efforts. On the other hand, Moore states: “remedial treatment used in the laboratory varies widely . . . with roving instructors constantly available to answer questions, advise on organizational problems, and check on progress” (“The Writing” 392). Additionally, Moore notes that counsellors do not concern themselves “with the direct supervision of remedial efforts” (390). Conversely, “the [laboratory] instructor makes use of all the teaching devices at his command to clarify the basic principles involved and to stimulate the student to apply them in his own practice” (392). In his article, Moore paints a clear picture of the differences between the clinic and the lab. He outlines the characteristics of each program—in similar settings, the clinic is regimented while the lab is flexible—making it clear how the two overlap in organization; yet, they retain significant instructional differences.

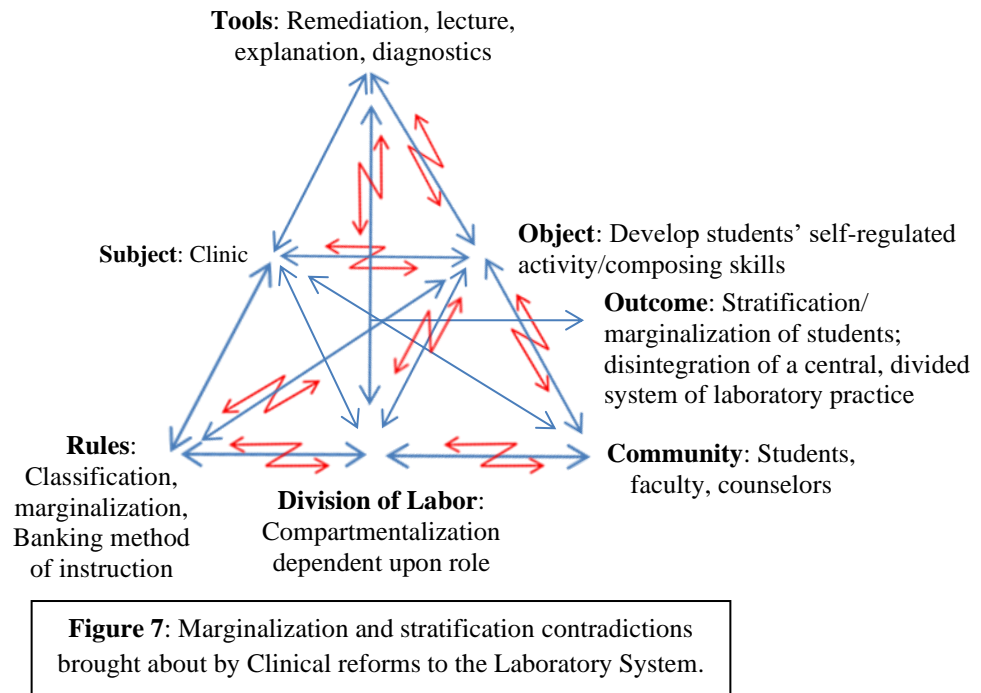
Moore’s well-documented observations in “The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory” observe that in the clinic, the “clinicians” are most concerned with “diagnosis and prescription” while the laboratory “is primarily concerned with the direct and continuing supervision of the remedial efforts of the individual student” (389). For the development of the

laboratory method, Moore's work establishes the laboratories' significance in the academy. He suggests the clinic operates as part of a system: "most satisfactory as a supplement to a wider remedial program . . ." (Moore "The Writing Clinic" 390). Yet noting that the writing laboratory may function as the entire remedial program, Moore engages, most profoundly, his self-assessment and reflection of the past ten years of his clinical and laboratory work: "the laboratory can be used as the sole remedial agency, if the institution is willing to provide only one" (391). Moore recognizes, in its formulated system, the expediency and economical attributes of the lab versus the clinic, and he notices the clinic loses a lot of the intimacy and collaboration of the individualized curricula offered by laboratories. Yet, curiously, most of his work resides in the realm of clinics and remediation. Nonetheless, Moore demonstrates how crossover occurs between the clinic and the lab with environmental factors in place including the facilities offered for each space. Further, providing the diagnosis of student work is, in 1950, often accomplished through an interview, he invariably demonstrates practices of earlier laboratory experiments. Though the interview becomes specifically defined as a "diagnostic" in the clinic, discussions occurred between students and their lab instructors in the earliest stages of writing laboratories. Earlier laboratory practitioners may not have necessarily felt a need to define the process of the initial conversation as a "diagnostic," but it was, nonetheless, part of the process in working with a student at the beginning stages of engagement.

## Exeunt Moore . . . and the Clinic

Through the implementation of the clinic, less collaboration and more lecturing foment contradictions. The clinic generates more stratification, marginalization, and classification of students with less community engagement and collaboration available, and instruction is limited, resulting in a direct contradiction of the laboratory setting where student engagement flourished. Though the clinical system of remediation aims to provide supplemental instruction to struggling

student writers,  
the banking  
method of  
instruction places  
direction squarely  
in the hands of the  
“counselor” not  
the student. Thus,  
it soon becomes  
clear how this



system pales in comparison to the supplemental, collaborative practices found in the extracurricular literary groups and laboratory writing classrooms of the previous generation.

As illustrated in Figure 7, contradictions found in the clinic disrupt the system of activity originally found in the earlier Formative Period's experiments. For example, replacing in-session writing and collaboration, explanation and diagnosis fail in meeting self-regulatory objectives of the system. Instead of following the guiding principles established during the Formative Period such as flexibility and a student-centered approach, the banking method foment confusion



through the absence of writing in-session and the natural collaborative reinforcement that follows such instruction. Additionally, while a community of students, faculty, and counselors engage the clinic through a division of labor, the tools of the labor are unevenly applied among the system's members. Thus, the stratification and marginalization of students continues through variations of the clinic.

In the clinic, students receive instruction with little guidance and no collaboration with peers or instructors. And while faculty and counselors work well with the tools of lecture and explanation, student engagement with the tools does not make possible opportunities for reinforcement from the instructor. Thus, the result creates disturbances between the division of labor, object, and rules of the clinical system, for “if a community of practice wants to encourage learning, it must focus on ways to increase opportunities for participation, and in doing so, it must change itself” (Grimm “Rethorizing” 96). Ultimately, as Figure 7 illustrates, the regressive nature of the system's move in replacing collaboration with a banking method of instruction makes for a one-way street with the conflation of clinical discourse in a laboratory writing environment tarnishing tools of the trade first established during the Formative Period. In the end, the CCCC's reports will show how the clinic ultimately functions as a tool in the evolution and gestalt of the laboratory and writing center to follow.

### **The Reports of Workshop No. 9**

Introduced after Moore's “The Writing Clinic and the Writing Laboratory” in 1950, and a year after the founding of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), reports from the conference begin to inform the evolving laboratory praxis. Titled “The Organization and Use of the Writing Laboratory: The Report of Workshop No. 9”, over the next several years, these reports underscore Engeström's maxim that contradictions will provide

practitioner's opportunities for innovation. In fact, the reports provide a way for practitioners to envision how attributes of the laboratory might get modified and implemented in their particular instructional settings.

In 1950, the reports begin with a simple numbered list of talking points participants discussed, and as the reports continue, they provide broader explanations of writing laboratories, their attributes, their purposes, and their possibilities. For example, the 1950 talking points included five "types" of laboratories, advantages of the laboratory, and considerations practitioners may consider when implementing a lab on their campus. These reports bolster the instructor-centered approach noted throughout the tenure of clinics, and they continue to advocate further testing of students. Even reports on the clinic appear to offer more credibility to the laboratory movement by the sheer volume of talking points. These are important contributions to the laboratory discussion because they offer the praxis a credible tool and a platform from which other practitioners may gain insight into the movement.

### **Reports in Practice**

After the Conference on College Composition and Communication's first meeting in 1949, the organization released the first of its workshop reports on the laboratory in 1950. These workshops, over the next several years, are well-represented with faculty from Wisconsin, West Virginia, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Indiana, Kansas, and Alabama playing roles in the conversation. The conversations also offer symmetry to the shape of the writing laboratory at a time when it is an emerging workspace for students. The first report in 1950 serves to jumpstart the discussion by discussing the types of laboratories that exist and who attends the labs; considering by which means students attend (compulsory or voluntary); and providing considerations for practitioners who might instigate a laboratory at their institution. These talking

points bring out a central tenet of the laboratory space: “individual attention” is given to students (“The Organization and Use of the” 31). What takes place in the first report results in a basic brain-storming session where participants get together to share their laboratory experiments. Here, the dialectic of the activity system is at work re-articulating the Formative Period’s guiding principles beginning with administering a student-centered approach. This work not only establishes a voice for the writing laboratory movement in the national spotlight, but the successful efforts of the first conference lead to a second report in 1951 with more specificity and furtherance of re-establishing original guiding principles of the Formative Period.

In the second report of Workshop No. 9, for example, specific attributes of the laboratory space are provided with well-defined attributes of the physical space including the set-up of the space and the technology and materials that can be provided:

The room should be equipped with tables or desks and with shades or blinds which permit complete darkening, and with plenty of blackboard space. The laboratory should have an opaque projector and screen . . . and constant use should be made of such equipment. There should be a reference library of dictionaries, handbooks, usage guides, current periodicals, and other pertinent material . . . (“The Organization and Use of a” 17)

Describing the physical properties of laboratory space adheres to other guiding principles including environmental space and technology of the Formative Period where a well-lit room and a space specifically designed for writing activities provides for the work engaged in the laboratory. Additionally, the 1951 report adds “none of the activity of the laboratory should be fixed or rigid . . . The writing laboratory should be what the classroom often is not—natural, realistic, and friendly” (18). As a first contradictory note, this is everything the clinic is not. Opposing rigid forms of instruction, the CCCC’s reports offer a counter to the era’s clinics, and a

voice for the laboratory movement. With their descriptions of the teacher who works in the laboratory, these reports further the guiding principle of a developed and flexible teacher, and they enforce the notion that those who teach in the lab should have a desire for the work and should not be assigned there for expediency or convenience. They should teach in the lab because they have a wide range of expertise in writing, and they have demonstrated, in that ability, the talent for flexibility and competence in determining how the lab may accommodate individual students.

Further, the report in 1951 notes how records kept in a writing lab benefit the student: “Space should be provided for the filing of student papers, so that students may have all their writing in one place for handy comparison and reference” (“The Organization and Use of a ” 17). The technology of housing student materials begins to resurface from the Formative Period, and in an instant, attributes of the laboratory space continue to reflect those properties offered during the previous period of practice.

However, in her 1950 article, “A Laboratory Method for English” Ina Marmon provides proof that the laboratory workspace still operates and using the original guiding principles developed during the Formative Period, Marmon offers a model for the content of the CCCC’s reports. Reporting on her laboratory classrooms from Stockton College, Marmon’s laboratory reflects the characteristics of those listed in the CCCC’s reports. First, she demonstrates how her laboratory reflects the accommodations suggested by the reports when she states “care was taken in the matter of the physical space of the rooms . . . books, magazines, and audio-visual devices can easily be shifted back and forth [and] . . . There are comfortable chairs and chrome tables in pastel shades of color . . .” (270). Marmon has carried on the tradition of the original guiding principle that provides a comfortable and inviting space for her students that highlights the

natural, realistic, and friendly nature of the laboratory space. Moreover, through her discussion of the students she encounters, the laboratory space, and of the work itself, Marmon expresses her enthusiasm for the work in which she is engrossed.

For Marmon, the professional quality of her work is revealed as she discusses providing for the individual student: “the approach, in any case, is that of sincere and friendly helpfulness, coupled with professional techniques proven to be successful through experience” (269-270). By recognizing the usefulness of a developed teacher, Marmon wholly reflects three more original principles—of a student-centered and collaborative workspace directed by a developed and flexible teacher—put forth by the CCCC’s reports on how one might organize and operate in a writing laboratory. Thus, Marmon demonstrates the reports’ usefulness as tools for other potential laboratories’ developments.

Highlighting these contradictions, in 1953, the CCCC’s reports move to define the clinic in “Clinical Aids to Freshman English: The Report of Workshop No. 14.” Outside of recommending the use of technology with nothing pointing specifically to the teaching of writing, the report offers little reporting on instruction offered to students. Listing Harvard films, a tachistoscope and an opaque projector, the report concludes: “the recommendation was made that each class assignment should include all three of the channels of communication, rather than just one” (103). Despite the obligatory reference to technology, instead of providing specifics on instruction, the report seems to quibble about who should staff the clinic without coming to any real answers. Suggesting “graduate assistants, the regular instructor, any instructor in the college, or any part-time help” might staff the clinic, they conclude: “None of these suggestions were found to be desirable” (“Clinical Aids” 102). It appears the college with a clinic wants the program, but they do not know how to go about staffing it without “a special staff member who

should be trained” (102). However, like the lack of specifics in teaching techniques offered, they do not offer any attributes to which the teacher should adhere, nor do they offer any suggestions on how one should be trained to do the work in the clinic. With this pass-the-buck mentality, the categorization of students and a misguided scientific approach continues to contradict laboratory methods and plague the clinic’s praxis.

For example, in 1955, the report “Writing Clinics: The Report on Workshop No. 2” classifies the clinic as a “sub-freshman course . . . for deficient students” (125). Despite the clinic offering “individual conferences as necessary”; “meetings of small groups”; and a “combination of the above programs” (125)—demonstrating a move more closely resembling services offered in the laboratory—the labels clinicians continue to apply to students only add to the already precarious stability of the clinic. In addition to categorizing students as “sub-freshman” and “deficient,” the clinic persists in their use of inert methods to get at the heart of student deficiencies. They report, “workshop participants proposed that psycho-medical examinations be given students to determine causes for letter reversals, faulty motor skills, or similar behavioral characteristics” (125). It is hard to imagine “psycho-medical examinations” as part of the earliest incarnations of the laboratory setting, but within the clinic, it seems to go along with the territory. One might question whether this serves students or simply the research agenda of a faculty member. Through their attempts to try to solve issues through a scientific approach, clinical practitioners follow a road that lends to their research or scholarship rather than their teaching, thus, underlying a self-serving agenda and promoting a damaging ethos for the clinic.

Consider, for example, this notice for the development of a “Composition Clinic at Wayne”:

A “Composition Clinic” that will offer its services to faculty members who are distressed at the ability of individual junior and senior students to express themselves intelligibly in their written work has been organized and put in operation by the college of liberal arts department of English at Wayne University.

Admission to the clinic is only upon assignment by a faculty member. Any teacher of a junior or senior who writes so poorly that reading his papers is “an unsettling and irritating experience” is invited to refer to the clinic. The faculty member sends one of the student’s papers, together with an explanatory note, to the composition clinic and tells the student to make an appointment with the clinic. Once the student is in the clinic, his writing is diagnosed, and he is given whatever treatment he needs. When he has a “clean bill of health,” notice is sent to his teacher. (23)

From the beginning, this notice reads like a piece directed at alleviating the “distressed” faculty unsettled and irritated after reading unintelligible student papers. Mirroring Grimm’s assessment of a closed community where narcissism, marginality, and imperialism dictate the motives, the report on Wayne University seems to come directly from the egoistic reflection witnessed at the beginning of this period. The notice certainly does not resemble a student-centered piece aimed at helping students. Rather, they are deemed sick and in need of “treatment.” Moreover, the student is not encouraged to attend the clinic; instead, the faculty member “tells the student to make an appointment.” This notice makes the contradiction clear: the clinic does not promote established guiding principles, nor do they resemble the flexible, natural, or friendly environments promoted by writing laboratories.

Painting very different conceptualizations of a lab and a clinic, the stark realities demonstrate differences in approach. The announcement from Wayne University does not

provide specifics, but the language it uses marks the contradictions present from the clinic's beginning. The lexical choices by the clinicians create tensions that directly counter those initiated by the laboratory movement. Consider, for example, the contents of the CCCC's 1950 Workshop Report describing services current laboratories offer: "individual attention" and "immediate attention can be given to individual writing difficulties" (31). This report makes it clear that writing labs serve students "who have been unusually neglected in their basic writing skills . . . [to] students who show some talent in creative writing" (31-32). This report's description reveals how wide the net of the laboratory is cast as it aims to reach all the students in diverse student bodies.

### **So Many Roads**

Further demonstrating how influential the CCCC's reports are, as early as 1950, the CCCC's report addresses staffing issues. They question: "How shall the laboratory be staffed? How many students per teacher? What training and experience necessary for teacher?" (32). Unlike the reports from the clinic, the laboratory reports offer specifics—such as the physical attributes of the laboratory, administering and scheduling, and methods and procedures used in the laboratory—and serve as a heuristic for institutions looking to build a local laboratory for their students. Each of the CCCC's reports calls attention to the differences between labs and clinics, and in doing so, they inform the laboratory movement by providing practitioners areas on which they may focus should they decide to implement a laboratory philosophy or practicum. Thus, they reflect the maxim by Engeström that through contradictions, new innovations develop.

Part of the dramatic change about to occur during the next period, however, comes through one of the earlier CCCC's Reports. Workshop No. 9 in 1952 points to a key shift in



thinking for the laboratory in that “the laboratory is an excellent means of staff training since it compels the teacher to get down to the writing problem with a student rather than make wise-crack comments on his paper” (24). From this point forward, the lab will further distinguish itself from the clinic with the lab requiring knowledge, imagination, and ingenuity on the part of English teachers. Taken together with the co-operation and self-regulatory processes found in laboratory teaching, the next era in laboratory development follows the Freirean maxim that through dialogue, “the teacher is . . . one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (61). Thus, as the clinic begins to disintegrate at the end of the 1950’s, the development of the laboratory will find more focus as it maintains its status as an environment where the guiding principles of a developed teacher gain ground and multiple points of work progress proceed.

### **A Turn Toward the Teaching Lab**

Primarily, during the Interim Period of Clinics laboratories continue to focus on individualized student work and in-session writing. However, in order to most effectively staff a lab, attention must get placed on the qualifications of the teacher. This is certainly not a new agenda item, for developing their self-regulation is the currency which teachers wish to share with her students. However, as the laboratory movement has contended with—and learned from—a clinic counterpart, and with the assistance from the CCCC’s voice, it continues to stake its claim as the preeminent form of writing assistance open to all students . . . including pre-teachers.

In his article titled, “Forty Years of Composition Teaching” Herbert Creek covers a history of composition work stretching from Barret Wendell and his introduction of daily themes to the First World War. Noticing that during Wendell’s time “farm boys were coming to the state

universities” (6), and after the First World War, “tremendous increases in college enrollments” began (9), Creek argues enrollment booms are noteworthy for their impact on the teaching of composition. At the time of his article, however, Creek notes that the field, in 1955, is in what he calls an “Era of Conferences” (9). He says: “The fact that we have a Conference on College Composition and Communication means something” (9). As demonstrated herein, with the CCCC’s reports, it does, in fact, mean a lot for the continual development of the writing laboratory. The conference and its publications promote self-regulated activity among their participants and readers and continue to provide guidelines for the development of writing laboratories especially for developing the staff who occupy those labs.

In addition to Creek, coupled with guidelines from the CCCC’s and the well-documented understanding, that during enrollment booms, faculty need preparation, William Peery, Tulane University Professor of English and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 1955 writes an article focused around “Freshman English and the Enrollment Boom.” Peery questions, “In the face of rising enrollments, which will no doubt continue for some time to be heaviest in the freshman class, what are we to do for teachers?” (575). For Peery, developing a program that will provide “on-the-job-training” for inexperienced teachers via his laboratory system will assist in resolving the tensions of developing new teachers who will ultimately serve an influx of incoming students (579). After Wheeler’s work in the latter 1930’s, Peery’s program is one of the first of its kind demonstrating a trend that will continue throughout the continuing history of writing center work.

Much like the practices in the laboratory for students, who write, and tutors, who review student work, Peery works in a similar fashion during his work as director of the program: “I frequently attended laboratory sessions and reviewed the theme-grading of the laboratory

assistants” (579). With much of the composition instructors’ work revolving around grading themes, this is an opportunity for Peery to function as a mentor for the mentors: “I was able not only to standardize instruction among the various sections but to provide on-the-job training for teachers” (579). Thus, the process of modelling self-regulatory work for those who will instill those skills in their students begins in earnest after the rudderless Clinical Period. While using graduate assistants during the Formative Period functioned as a way to provide instructors help in the laboratory, Peery makes a strong case for a modified use of assistants:

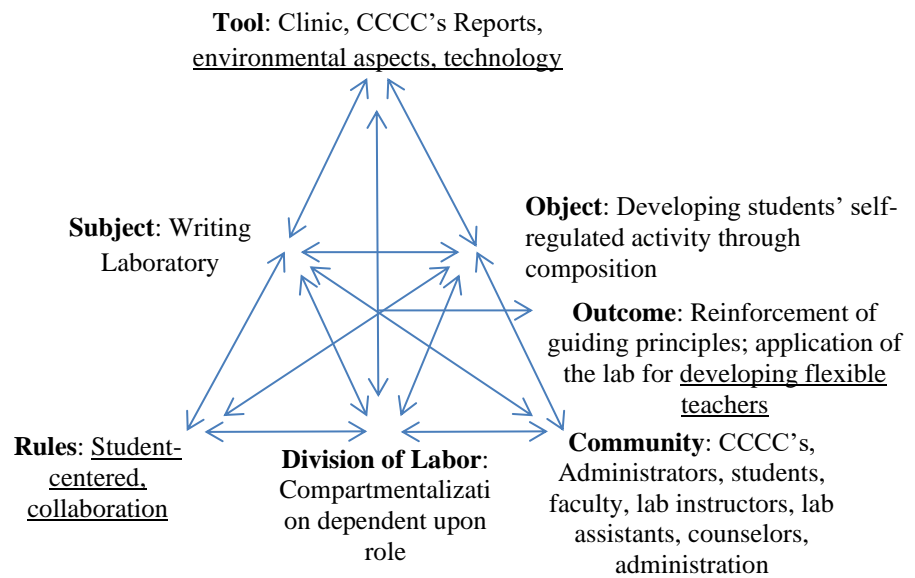
Laboratory assistants will accept it more readily if their assignment is different in its title from other teaching assignments given to student-teachers . . . A way out here would be to require service as a laboratory assistant of all inexperienced teachers before assignment to full responsibility for a conventional section. (581)

In this way, assistants do not just function as staff members. They have a stake in their future and in the future of the English department and laboratory. Their work in the lab provides them with valuable teaching experience which they can use as teaching assistants. Similarly, assistants act as mentors in tandem with Peery, who mentors his assistants. The development of the lab as a self-sustaining apparatus continues to unfold as the Clinical Period begins to come to an end.

Peery’s program is a progressive move in the development of laboratory work, for through his reflection he understands the implications of increased enrollments projected through the next decade. Peery “offers a plan for using—as we may all soon have to be using—a higher percentage of inexperienced teachers . . . And it can offer, what the graduate schools have thus far failed to offer, training in how to do what the beginning teacher is called upon to do” (582). This certainly comes into view as a viable option for developing future teaching staff, for developing self-regulated practices in his students means developing flexible teachers; however,

Peery also sees the danger in developing an over reliance on graduate students as a labor force: “I would hesitate to recommend this method of conducting a course in freshman composition and reading if I thought it might be widely adopted by ruthless administrators who by it would make slaves out of their freshman-English staffs” (583). Certainly, this poses risks, but the implications of abuse regarding graduate assistants or adjunct labor far exceeds the scope of my purposes here. The main concern is to demonstrate how teaching assistants and laboratory assistants regain traction after the Clinical Period and receive the self-regulation development they need in order to fulfill their

obligations to their students and their own professional development. To this point, the clinical era shows the CCCC’s providing a tool—in workshop reports—that plays an



**Figure 8:** The continual development of the writing laboratory through CCCC’s reports on laboratories and reflection on clinical experiments.

instrumental role in not only suggesting new roles for assistants in the lab, but the very act of a conference foments and models myriad discursive practices that ultimately form the groundwork for many of the new programs emerging in the field.

Specifically, Peery’s work defines the emerging system at the end of the Clinical Period. As Figure 8 illustrates, the clinic and the CCCC’s reports inform the laboratory praxis. Reverting to following guiding principles (underlined) from the Formative Period, the emerging system

nixes the rules of classification. Instead, the laboratory uses the clinic as a tool in ‘what not to do,’ and they use the CCCC’s reports to enhance their work as they take the laboratory into the future. With a turn toward following the Formative Period’s guiding principles, the laboratory follows a student-centered and collaborative approach, employs technology, provides a friendly environment, and uses the laboratory space to develop flexible teachers. The community has grown, however, with the inclusion of the CCCC’s community, and the outcome of a system informed by a broader community, the lab not only operates as a writing lab but also serves as a teaching lab.

### **Summer Flies and August Dies**

James Ruoff, in 1958, may hammer the final nail into the coffin of clinics with his satirical article “The English Clinic at Flounder University.” Ruoff paints a caricature of laboratory clinics, and in doing so, highlights many of the issues plaguing the experimentation of the writing clinic. For example, featuring the clinic as an “experiment” mainly useful in a teacher-centered framework, he describes the clinic as “a new concept designed to alleviate the three-fold stress of increased freshman enrollment, heavy teaching loads, and inadequate faculty salaries” (348). Obviously, clinics are designed to help students, but the stigma surrounding the clinic—as demonstrated in this chapter as an ego-centric, teacher-centered practicum—shapes a way out for faculty rather than exemplifying a setting where students have opportunities to learn. Similarly, whether it stigmatizes the student through the clinics hard-lined rhetoric or the faculty through the development of a less-than sympathetic lens, Ruoff’s article uses satire as tool to reveal contradictions inherent in the clinic. Taking a dig at the perceived medical associations the clinic portrays through the rhetoric used in its descriptions, Ruoff sarcastically claims “the therapeutic method has inspired in our staff such a tremendous enthusiasm for freshman

composition that every teacher in the Department insists on instructing as much of it as possible” (350). Ruoff undoubtedly understands how the rhetoric surrounding the clinic creates a perception of sterility and rigidity, but his discourse highlights the contradictions found in the clinic’s approach as opposed to that of the lab.

To this end, Ruoff also includes students to heighten his satire citing their admiration of the scientific approach: “They are attracted to a method which is empirical, objective, and—I do not blush to use the term—scientific. They find clinical procedure more natural than ordinary instruction, for in the Clinic their work is not evaluated on the basis of uniqueness or originality, but on its conformity to nature” (350). Though Ruoff’s article is satirical, it nonetheless, resembles points, albeit they contradictory, made early-on by Fountain as Ruoff regrets the formation of more ‘practical’ curricula. Certainly, a similar caricature of freewheeling liberal-minded faculty encouraging students to just write what comes to mind could be painted, but Ruoff’s article articulates the failed experiment of the clinic: a trend that emerged from the successes of the laboratory movement during the Formative Period. Despite attempts to legitimize the clinic, however, it never fully takes root in the academy lending itself to Ruoff’s use of satire. Regardless, the evidence exists to make the claim that the clinical movement, whether long-lasting or not, serves a purpose in helping the laboratory movement claim its turf and refine its work. And while the end of the 1950’s sees the disintegration of the clinic, it also ushers in the next decade which will prepare a new generation who explode the territory and recreate the laboratory space.

#### Chapter Four:

#### The Modern Period

#### **Introduction**

Creating more contradictions than solutions, the Interim Period of Clinics subjugate many of the guiding principles established during the Formative Period's laboratory writing experiments. With the clinical era establishing diagnoses, prescriptions, and classifications as part of their approach, clinicians challenge efforts of laboratory practitioners from Genung to Appel. Thus, the clinic experiment problematizes the progression of composition instruction by disrupting fundamental discursive activity between teachers and learners cultivated in earlier writing laboratories. The stigmatization found in the clinical era also profoundly aggravates the disintegration of a central, unified system of laboratory practice and teacher-learner unity. In fact, the clinical era unequivocally taints the ethos of the writing lab, which, in many cases, persists today. With less-than-desirable student writing during the Clinical Period ultimately creating an epochal movement advancing a teacher-centered writing environment, the Clinical Period's arguments for exclusion exacerbate the problems of breaking down barriers between class and race. Further, with such a teacher-centered ethos at the helm during this period, the clinic models a regressive move with practitioners relying on explaining, providing more lecturing, and discontinuing collaboration. The contradictions are clear: Freire's banking method in the clinic places direction squarely in the hands of the "counselor" or teacher not the student; thereby, disenfranchising the student-centered approach of the lab.

Applying two maxims, my aim for this chapter is to demonstrate how the laboratory movement corrects itself during the period after the clinical period. First, using a maxim by Engeström, the development of the laboratory praxis takes a definitive shape occurs once "the object and the motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity" ("Expansive" 137). With the help of the clinic, the ensuing Modern Period applies lessons they have learned. Laboratory practitioners

realize their methods of collaboration have teeth, so to speak. Therefore, all the attributes of the earliest laboratory movements were valid and credible with environmental factors, teacher flexibility, record-keeping, and technology at the forefront of their innovations. Hence, during The Modern Period, the re-conceptualization of the Formative Period's guiding principles in writing center work begins: the work is student-centered, teacher development and flexibility is critical, work is collaborative and dialectical in nature, environmental factors provide the necessary workplace atmosphere, and technology plays a fundamental role in the center's work.

In coordination with Engeström's notion of a reconceptualized activity, however, the Modern Period's practitioners also act as historical disclosers. In their book *Disclosing New Worlds: Democratic Action, Entrepreneurship, and the Cultivation of Solidarity* Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores, and Hubert L. Dreyfus identify historical disclosers as those engaged in a "life of intense engagement. The best way to explore disharmonies, in other words, is not by detached deliberation but by involved experimentation" (24). With involved experimentation at the center of the laboratory writing movement, historical disclosing embodies the program from its beginnings until now. For the new generation of the Modern Period, involved experimentation enables practitioners to reconceptualize what has been lost through the Clinical Period's disharmonious practices that disrupt the laboratory movement's original intentions of collaborative activity. However, Modern Period practitioners retrieve those earlier models and establish guiding principles as cornerstones of writing center work, we see today in centers worldwide.

To illustrate how Modern Period practitioners reconceptualize current writing center practices, Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus' view of world-disclosing operates as the chapter's second maxim. Specifically, their notion of articulation—wherein one articulates a



contradiction—represents the ontological work of writing center development and demonstrates how writing center practitioners use the field's history to inform its future. In other words, during this period, the field is still very much an isolated entity working through its own identity crises. Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus' conceptualization of articulation, however, operates as an illustrative model to demonstrate how the field changes its writing center style.

During the Modern Period, one form of articulation, *gathering from dispersion*, reflects practitioners' review of practices from which they keep the most accommodating attributes of the experiment for the emerging writing center activity system. For example, in developing the most recognizable style of the writing center, early Modern Period practitioners gathered specific attributes of the laboratory praxis so that they now dominate the frame through which we see writing center practices (i.e. the five guiding principles). By applying a *gathering through dispersion* motif, the emerging practice embodies the holistic nature of the writing center. In other words, the guiding principles provide the praxis a nucleus from which all other activities emerge.

Just as importantly, however, Modern Period practitioners also engage *retrieval articulation* by identifying what “was once important and has been lost” (Spinosa, et al 25). In this chapter, my analysis uses *retrieval articulation* to show how the individual acts of disclosing and resolving contradictions contribute to the holistic qualities of this chapter's epochal movement. For example, remedying the contradiction of less collaboration in the system, the Modern Period's generation re-articulates important attributes of the system prior to the clinics, and, in doing so they solidify the original guiding principles. In this environment, self-regulated work also operates as an underlying motivator stirring activities with experimental and participatory actions. Practitioners plan, monitor, and assess those actions as they manifest

organically in response to contradictions in the writing center activity system. For Modern Period practitioners, gathering from dispersion and retrieval articulation significantly contribute to their work in reconceptualizing the writing center bringing forth wider possibilities for the writing center movement.

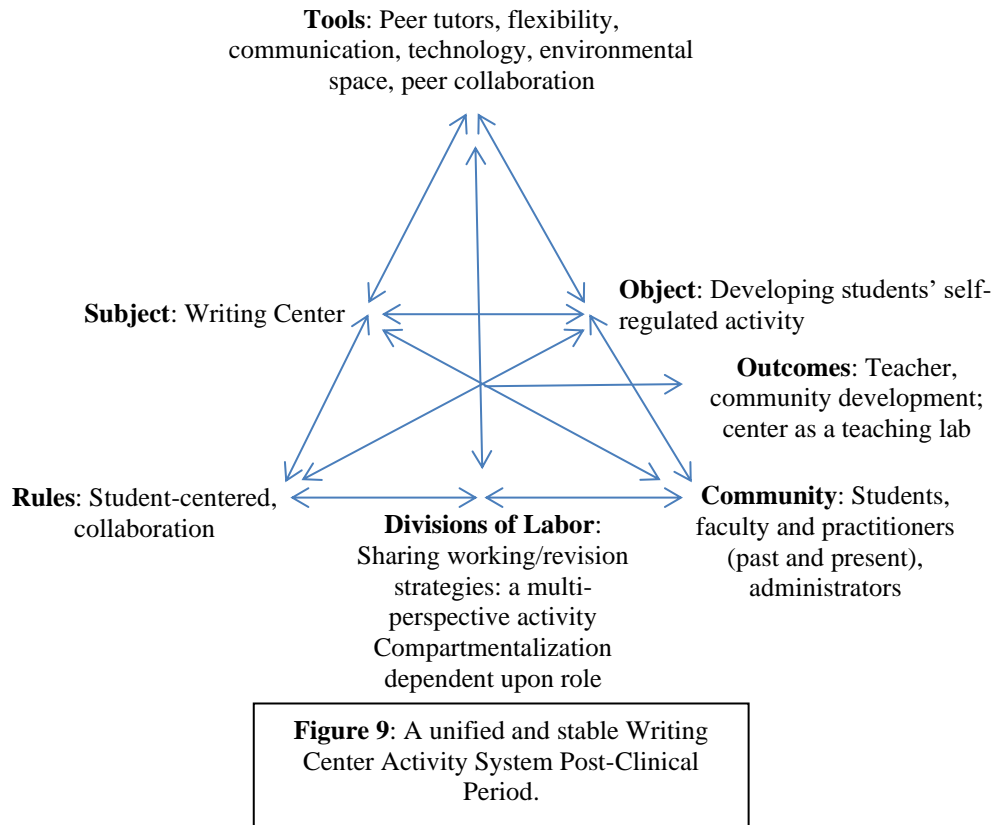
To demonstrate how this period responds to contradictions and engages acts of articulation within a closed circuit of practitioners within the field of writing laboratory praxis, I reference scholarship that best promotes the changing nature of the academy and how it relates to writing studies, and in turn, the writing laboratory. Providing thoughts by Kitzhaber and others assist in showcasing how the field is changing, thus, allowing for a new generation to enter the discussion. Members of this new generation are plentiful; however, a few of the more recognized names from Don Murray to Ken Bruffee and Muriel Harris prominently demonstrate how influential their work is to writing center studies. This chapter's recognition of their work also exhibits how they exemplify the concepts of Engeström's reconceptualized activity and Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus' concepts of articulation. Further, each has a significant role in shaping the writing center activity system. Specifically, Bruffee and Harris and many of their contemporaries illustrate how the growing writing center activity system not only affords the inclusion of peer tutors, but it also leads practitioners to recognize that the inclusion of peers creates new tensions for the system: How do we develop tutors? Artifacts from early to mid-1970 I examine in this chapter to demonstrate how the field adapts practices to bring peer tutors into the community. In turn, by analyzing scholarly artifacts from the latter part of the 1970's through the 1980's, I aim to show how the development of tutors gets underway, thus, adding to the community and developing a new system for tutor development.

Bruffee, Harris, and their contemporaries all operate as historical disclosers for the development of the evolving writing center praxis; however, Harris also adds a lasting legacy with the development of the Writing Lab Newsletter in 1976, and with her work still recognized today as one of the leading voices of the writing center praxis, her earliest work represents the robust engagement toward skillful disclosing. Thus, her work, as well as others, will illustrate how a writing center praxis continues to respond to emerging contradictions in a stable and unified activity system. Finally, with the addition of writing center-focused books in the discipline making the charge that, with this scholarship, the field morphs again as it heads into the next era of development. Books and articles in the latter part of the 1980's begin to respond to the contradiction that, at this point in the development of writing center work, operating and learning from within the field is no longer an option, for the field has matured significantly. Thus, I will demonstrate in this chapter how the emerging writing center model will recognize multi-disciplinary perspectives and begin to inform the praxis propelling the field into the next era.

Prefaced by the latter part of the 1960's, the 1970's and 80's dramatically re-shape the writing center structure into a unified student-centered facility largely run by students who provide collaborative writing assistance with their peers. Principally through re-articulating the work of previous laboratory writing practitioners and re-distributing talent, this new generation carves out the formula which now makes up the most salient conceptualization of writing center work. The first trend identified comes with the adoption of peer tutors in the laboratory space. Such an enhanced focus on developing and implementing peer collaboration as a cornerstone of the discipline, importantly, demonstrates how the discipline still uses its own history to build its future. Simultaneously, the articulation of writing center practices with the new generation at the

end of the 1960's through the 1970's, solidifies much broader disciplinary implications for the future.

As Figure 9 illustrates, with the writing center as the subject, a unified and stable, student-centered objective first arises during the Modern Period with tools operating to assist the student in the development of their own writing self-



assessment practices. As the object, self-regulation helps to balance the system with a community sharing work and contributing to the development of new tools. As balance in the system continues to build, new divisions of labor develop for community members with new subjects emerging organically from that process of engagement. With a focus on the system correcting itself, I will demonstrate in this chapter how the writing center activity system develops inherently and naturally with new objectives, tools, rules, subjects, and outcomes emerging from experimentation. Further, as illustrated in Figure 9, the outcome of developing the pre-teacher provides opportunities for the continued application of self-regulated activity to

drive the system of writing center work and its development. However, this period also brings about new contradictions practitioners must solve through the application of multi-disciplinary scholarship. As the Modern Period significantly builds the stature of laboratory writing, by including peer tutors as a dynamic player in the community of the writing center activity system, the new generation of laboratory writing practitioners must assess this work and begin considering the application of theoretical perspectives to their work. In doing so, I will articulate how the Modern Period will usher in a maturing field reaching to new heights as it unabashedly enters the multi-disciplinary milieu.

### **Where is the Dog Star? A New Generation**

By previous standards, the 1960's offers little information toward the development of laboratory work. However, Albert Kitzhaber's evaluations during the early 1960's may provide reasons for and outcomes of this development. In 1962, in his *College English* article, "Freshman English: A Prognosis" Kitzhaber suggests "writing clinics and laboratories are being abandoned" while remedial courses in English are declining and freshman English courses have chosen to use more rigorous texts (477). Likewise, Kitzhaber further suggests that the "proliferation of junior colleges throughout the nation . . . [is] siphoning off many of the weaker students" (478). Kitzhaber sees the nature of the freshman English curricula changing, therefore, proposes "abandon[ing] the service concept of the freshman course, but not the *goal* of consciously disciplining the student's thought and expression so that he may come to write not merely with competence, but with distinction" (482; emphasis added). Kitzhaber's goal is recognized here (italicized), as it may relate to the writing center movement or activity system; it encourages the system to employ a student-centered approach. This, in turn, causes writing laboratory practitioners to reconsider how to best develop teachers. As noted by Kitzhaber, this has already

undergone some revision, but the act of retrieving these concepts from the past will push the newly emerging writing center activity system forward. In fact, with the work during the Modern Period picking up, trends such as administering a student-centered methodology—and as a natural by-product, an organically evolving teaching praxis and developing teacher—reflects a re-distribution of talent that will ultimately change the structure of the writing lab movement.

For example, in Martha R Wright’s 1965 article “Assistance in Written English”, she discusses placing laboratory assistants at the University of Massachusetts in a new role: the student-instructor. Wright’s reconceptualization of curricula, now for developing teachers, reflects those initiated by Peery in 1955, and they build onto Kitzhaber’s suggestions by placing “carefully chosen” and “academically highly qualified” students in a course like Wright’s. Students are focused on analyzing the syllabus used in the composition course; developing practices that help them identify student errors and engage students in paragraph development; using correction symbols; and learning “how to analyze paragraphs for organization and logic” (Wright 165). This practicum advances Kitzhaber’s argument for more “work in language, rhetorical theory, English prose style, and advanced composition . . .”, thus the beginning of multiperspective activities emerge (“Freshman English” 482). Wright’s students develop their strategies in classroom management with purposes of helping “the poorly-prepared freshman in teaching himself writing discipline . . . and it gives experience to a limited number of undergraduate majors for the practice teaching in the secondary schools or possibly for future positions as teaching fellows in graduate schools” (165). With the student-centered and developing teacher working simultaneously, the collaborative lessons learned by Wright’s student-instructors lay the groundwork for the latter part of this era in writing center development: tutor development and teacher training.

Wright and, as I will offer, many others make up the new generation as A. M. Tibbetts (1965) voices when he claims the promise of the coming decade in his article “A Short History of Dogma and Nonsense in the Composition Course.” In his article, he claims that “a new generation of composition teachers is coming out of the graduate school. The old days are past, and the new generation is innocent and unwary” (90). Tibbetts predicts the new generation is unwavering, innovative, and wrapped in modernity. While the clinical era in writing center development moves away from, or at least puts on hold, the progress made during the Formative Period, Tibbett’s new generation will re-articulate the progressive agenda left behind during the 1940’s and early 1950’s and re-introduce collaboration, peer work, and the laboratory as a teaching lab which Peery envisions in 1955.

One of the first, and most notable of this generation is Don Murray, who, in 1968, emerges as a central figure and begins re-articulating practices from the Formative Period with the publication of his book *A Writer teaches Writing: A Practical Method of Teaching*. Gathered through thinning out much of the past seventy years of compositionists’ laboratory work, parts of Murray’s book create a visual representation of the laboratory movement and the Formative Period’s best practices (post Clinical Period). Specifically, for example, in chapter two, with *The Writing teacher’s Seven Skills*, Murray outlines the most salient attributes of the composition teacher—much of which is reflective of what we find in the Formative Period with teachers who listen and wait before they bombard students with more questions. Some of the earliest scholarship I include in this project offers that which aims to create such a student-centered environment. Murray argues that “a writing course belongs to the student, not to the teacher” (16) and he recommends the teacher “get out from behind the desk, to face students individually, to be encouraging to one and discouraging to another, to lead one student, drive another, support

a third” (17). Here, Murray’s recognition of the classroom as a student-centered environment places a requirement on the teacher and strengthens the message by Preston W. Search when he suggests composition teacher “must be equally ready on a hundred points” (169). Similarly, Murray’s suggestion for the composition teacher reflects those Frances W. Lewis provides in her 1902 article “The Qualifications of the English Teacher.” With the teacher as one who “should also be a mistress of the art of questioning. . .” (23), Lewis sets precedence for the future work of Don Murray, for listening and responding to students’ needs is the focus of these student-centered classrooms. Murray’s work ultimately embodies the prominent quality of the laboratory teacher: Flexibility.

Inherent in Search’s and Lewis’ passages, flexibility is also central for Murray. In fact, he specifically lists *flexibility* as a quality to which teachers should aspire. Murray argues the teacher should “diagnose the simple problems of the student and then be flexible enough so that he can prescribe a treatment which will cure” (21). Though Murray uses many of the painful reminders of the Clinical Period with his terminology, he nonetheless supports the earliest models of Search and Lewis. What we see with Search, Lewis, et al. is a classroom largely focused on the student with roaming teachers nearby to help. In this capacity, teachers become coaches, collaborators, and counselors, and they must be amenable to the work; thus, they build upon the collaborative nature of the student-centered laboratory writing classroom. Indeed, Murray sees the collaborative model as so central to the praxis that he suggests a teacher “writes with his students” (21). Harkening back to the earliest conceptualizations of in-session writing, Murray takes his “student into the process of writing” (21). By building onto the laboratory writing praxis here, Murray employs modelling to introduce the student to writing practices with which they may be unfamiliar. And though he is guilty of using clinical terminology, Murray is



also much more progressive in his approaches to teaching. He's flexible, not rigid, and he collaborates. He does not tell students what is wrong with their work. Instead, he offers his own work as an example which they may follow as they develop their own writing rituals.

Through this work, Murray further reflects the work of his predecessors suggesting the teacher of writing should be a coach to his students. Murray believes the teacher "must lead each student along week by week, so that he is developing his own talents at his own pace, never relaxing, never going stale, but always practicing and stretching, so that he is doing a little more than he did the week before but never faced with impossible goals" (18). In his description of the teacher here, Murray places the teacher in a role we see as far back as the late 1800's-early 1900's when students are encouraged to work at their own pace to finish their work. They typically return to work to build upon their successes and similarly respond to new difficulties they face with their work. It is this flexibility and collaborative nature of Murray's classroom that leads him to argue a "writing course is created as it is taught" (112). This idea furthers the notion that teachers need to be ready to respond to each student's needs, and in doing so, Murray begins re-articulating what the field has forgotten.

Knowledgeable, flexible teachers, collaboration, and a student-centered practicum must be central components of the laboratory. Proposing the writing classroom as a laboratory, Murray argues the "teacher must understand that he does not need a classroom; he needs a laboratory. His students must have a place where they can work, and where the teacher can also do his work, which is to encourage them individually" (109). As a synopsis of the earliest scholarship covered in this project's earlier chapters, Murray provides the field one of the first and most influential books that will inform and shape the future of the laboratory, and ultimately, the writing center movement. In fact, he ignites the future of writing center work, for he begins a

stretch over the next 20 years that follows the maxims Engeström declares with renewal and innovation as central tenets of activity and development, and that which Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus offer with retrieval articulation. Hence, the reconceptualization of laboratory work will undergo tremendous change and a new writing center style will emerge throughout the Modern Period.

For example, the influence of Murray and the continuation of retrieving aspects of laboratory work from the past begin in 1974 in Ronald H. Dow's article "The Writer's Laboratory—One Approach to Composition." Dow's article becomes one of the first to mention notable contributors to writing center lore when he discusses Donald Murray. Further solidifying the concept of writing in-session, Dow also recognizes Murray's position that "we learn to write by writing, not by talking about writing" (55). First referenced herein by University of Kansas Professor, Edwin Hopkins when he argues that "pupils should learn to write by writing" (2), this articulation becomes another moment when the field of laboratory writing has retrieved previous maxims that will stimulate the proverbial strength of writing centers. Having read Murray's book when he was doctoral student, Dow employs Murray's laboratory truism: "The students speak and the teacher listens" (56). In his first experiment as a doctoral student at the University of Maine at Presque Isle, Dow evaluates the success of the writing laboratory as espoused by Murray. And in doing so, Dow also provides his own evaluations through his dissertation work further demonstrating how the field continues to grow through the direct work of its practitioners. This time, however, the work enculturated into the praxis, though not new, is re-articulated.

We see this activity occurring in 1971, as well, when Sally Ihne from Muscatine Community College in Iowa argues that "writing ought to be taught on a one-to-one (student to

teacher) relationship” and that “the choice of instructors is crucial to the success of a writing lab. . . she felt the ability to be ‘warm’ and ‘real’ was most important” (“Experimental Writing Laboratories” 286). Representing a turn back to the basics, which the latter 1940’s through the 60’s largely neglected, these observations counter the rigid methods of the clinic, and revert to original concepts found at the turn of the century. Ihne also notes an “unusual thing” about the center at Muscatine Community College: “it does not deal only with students who are having difficulties with writing courses. Many students, even upperclassmen, come to the lab to get a response to their writing . . . (286). Moving further away from the idea of the clinic, which labelled and categorized students, Ihne’s lab does “not have an image of being punitive or simplistic” (286). Ihne’s center helps remedy the system’s contradictions of stratification and marginalization with her brief description of the Laboratory at Muscatine Community College. Simultaneously, she is in-line with Murray when she retrieves more of the Formative Period’s laboratory approaches through the application of a student-centered approach, which instigates the by-product of developing the flexible teacher.

Through Dow’s reflections on Murray’s work and its applicability, he further notes a key aspect—dating back to at least 1897 and the Pueblo Schools—of the pedagogy: “It requires a high degree of teacher commitment, personal involvement, and the willingness to adapt to change” (65). With Murray first re-articulating these ideas, they are further outlined in the article “To Like to Have Written: Learning the laboratory Way” by Professor of English and Director of the Writing Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Joyce S. Steward. In 1975 Steward knows “that the teacher’s approach at the [student’s] first visit is vitally important” (33). As an act of retrieval, Steward also recognizes her tutors need to “be open, friendly, and at the same time firm, a person who is perceptive but patient with shortcomings . . . the laboratory

teacher must be genuine, for students quickly detect lack of sincerity . . .” (37). These traits, traced back to the turn of the century, cite the flexible traits of a teacher inherent in a student-centered pedagogy, which Steward, like Murray, recognizes: “The laboratory teacher needs to be flexible, to be able to shift methods as the situation demands, to move from one problem to another” (37-8). Still gathering practices from laboratory writing’s culture, Steward’s approach responds to the CCCC’s reports that question who should staff the laboratory; in this case, student tutors. Her practice is one that also reflects the work of Peery, who looked for an “on-the-job” training formula in the laboratory.

In fact, Steward notes that “training is passed along through communal sharing as well as by what might be called an ‘on-the-job’ methods course” (38). For Steward, the laboratory is not just a writing lab; it is also a teaching lab (as noted in figure 9) with rich mentor-apprentice relationships between experienced staff members, instructors, and graduate assistants: “New staff members learn from experienced ones, and they learn from direct instruction . . . From observing, they learn various approaches to students and to problems; they learn through discussing methods with each other and with the lab instructor” (38). Building onto Murray’s foray into retrieval articulation, the practicality inherent in Steward’s laboratory exemplifies the most robust laboratory experiment thus far with a full-fledged curriculum to prepare staff members for the work they will encounter. The self-sustaining apparatus Steward embraces serves as a model for the future of developing tutors while it also adheres to or retrieves aspects of earlier models making up the most unwavering activities in the writing laboratory. It also reflects Murray’s use of modelling while simultaneously demonstrating how the culture of laboratory writing informs and learns from its own practices.

Points that Murray, Dow, Ihne, and Steward bring forward become new mainstays in the development of the writing center activity system. Beginning with Murray, these practitioners provide a glimpse at how retrieving activities from the past have impacted and re-shaped the formative practices with which the praxis began. Placing such stalwart activities into the re-established laboratory praxis aligns the activities of Murray et al. as historical disclosers in the sense that that they have begun to reclaim the style originally conceptualized for laboratory writing. They begin to reclaim the original intentions of the praxis when they recognize the environmental factors established in the earliest days of the laboratory movement are firmly in place. It is within this space that the development of the laboratory space can also be more fully viewed as an activity system as “Activity Theory creates space to analyze a dynamic process of co-creation” (Liebman 21). Co-creation occurs between Murray and Dow, but it also occurs between Murray, Ihne, steward, and Search and others from the beginning of the laboratory movement. Such retrieval is demonstrated with the Modern Period’s curricular models reaching into the past to create guiding principles for the pedagogy. For example, student records and the use of materials in the lab continues to inform staff well after those first kept in the Pueblo schools or those which MacLean began using in 1902 at the University of Minnesota. And from the earliest days of the laboratory praxis, students were encouraged to collaborate with one another, which, in the Modern Period, will become part of the holistic writing center effort. The student-centered curriculum is re-established, and from that comes the process of detailing laboratory teachings’ characteristics.

### **The Writing Center Activity System (WCAS): Developing the Community**

Before the Clinical Period, peripheral student roles began to gain traction; however, contradictions created during that era include a move away from creating roles for students

throughout the laboratory. During the Modern Period, however, this contradiction creates another opportunity for the new generation to resolve disruptions in the system. More and more, student tutors make up the laboratory's staff with their specialization taking shape, thus, the outcome of the writing center as a teaching lab continues to develop with tutors' activities and professionalization developed to meet the work they perform. Through the involved experimentation of this generation's practitioners, the development of the writing center becomes a space occupied by students for students focusing on teacher development as a central component of their mission.

Such reconfigurations of the writing center paradigm continue in 1974 with George W. Welch at Miami-Dade Community College. In his article, "Organizing a Reading and Writing Lab in which Students Teach", Welch presents the development of a group of writers ready to help one another: "The lab set out to convince the student that there is such a thing as an academic community of students and that the student himself makes that learning happen, rather than that learning is something given to him like a pill or a shove" (437). With registration for lab time voluntary (flexibility), the punitive nature of the clinic is further deconstructed with student tutors teaching while faculty acts as "resource persons" (438). Recalling Wheeler's student secretary of the early 1930's, Welch tasks a teacher's aide with "matching students with tutors . . . [providing] a cohesive element in the lab's day to day operation. Answering questions, distributing materials, registering students, relaying messages, and maintaining the several record-keeping activities of the lab were all part of the teacher's aide's role" (439). Welch's teacher's aides adapt to Wheeler's 1930 version of the secretary as Welch carries forth more actions from the past. Similarly, as a developed form of record-keeping, logs in Welch's labs "were the responsibility of both the tutor and the student" (439). Such collaboration between

students and tutors reinforces the activities each has engaged during the tutorial session. Though the tool of record-keeping has never been eradicated like collaboration, the practice is reconfigured and developed as the community of student-tutors grows. As a useful form of technology, students use the logs to reflect on the work they have completed with the tutor engaging and reinforcing practices they have employed in the session. This transformation of peer tutors, as well as the tools they use, gains strength and definition during The Modern Period.

For example, described in Ronnie Dugger's 1976 article "Cooperative Learning in a Writing Community", Ken Bruffee's use of peer tutors at the Brooklyn College of the City University of New York articulates the future of writing center praxis. As one of the first writing centers (defined as such) with peers working to help each other, Bruffee's writing center is also one of the first to combine peer tutors who "must also take a three-credit course in intermediate composition designed to improve both their writing and tutoring skills" (Dugger 30). Bruffee's center and his entire program embody the spirit of flexibility with the "course . . . as flexible as the center" (32). As a precursor to teaching, Bruffee's work provides opportunities for the student tutor "to learn some things that he was unable to learn, or at least hadn't learned, in the traditional situation because the pressure is off" (qtd. in Dugger 30). Similarly, the tutor "will learn to write better by trying to teach someone else how to write. Just by being aware, their standards go up" (Dugger 30). Interestingly, Bruffee selects his tutors by suitability and how they work with others as opposed to how well they do academically. In fact, he suggests that "some of the kids that come in with A's tend to be quite cocky. They're impatient with failure" (Dugger 31). While he looks for 'B' students to tutor in the center, Bruffee also accepts 'C' students with exceptional empathy. Thus, the retrieval and a return to implementing Lewis' qualifications, such as empathy, of English teachers from the turn of the century begins.

Bruffee's holistic student-centered program does not differentiate learning opportunities between all the participating students, for they all learn something about writing through their work. From Genung to Bruffee, the writing center's guiding principles are now set with environmental factors in place. Bruffee's center is situated in "an informal, amiable atmosphere" with "comfortable furniture" and located "across from the college library on a path most students travel each day" (Dugger 31). Technological procedures in use such as record-keeping have also endured and been modified to meet current student-tutor-center needs with records of students who seek help describing "an account of the problem, and what was done" (Dugger 31). And acting as the final frontier, a development course for tutors promotes attributes of tutors suggesting they "don't edit or rewrite, do rap, find the problem, read the paper over, [and] talk it out" (Dugger 33). The lingo of the 1970's may differ from earlier accounts, but the mission is the same: provide student-centered, one-on-one instruction to students who need help; provide flexible approaches to solving issues; and work collaboratively in an amiable environment. Thus, as we see through Welch's and Bruffee's work, peers as tutors add to the community of the laboratory space, and the inclusion of peers as tutors also ushers in a more pronounced attribute of the writing center activity system. It also operates as a teaching laboratory.

Mary K. Croft, an Assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point writes that her "students gain valuable practical experience in teaching writing, and inevitably their own skills improve in the process" (46). Croft's observation here coincides with Bruffee's in that each of their student-tutors learns while they teach. Likewise, Patricia Meier echoes the sentiment in her 1977 article "A System for Effective Composition Instruction": "Inherent in the Writing Lab system is valuable in-service training (tool) for the staff, which is largely composed of graduate teaching assistants" (50). In addition to her cross-over with Bruffee et al. Meier's use



of *system* in this passage reflects Van Horne's argument that the framework of CHAT is helpful for analyzing how "different contexts of activity can interact and influence each other" (27). Doing so also represents how Meier's work simultaneously promotes the constant evolution of the field through self-regulated activities, for "frequent staff meetings provide for a productive exchange of ideas about theme assignments, classroom and conference techniques, common problems and possible solutions to them . . . the staff contributes to the continual refinement and development of the system" (51). In addition to learning through their work of developing materials and resources for the center, student tutors also learn how to engage their colleagues in the development of writing center best practices. Not only do student-tutors enhance their self-regulated work as individuals, they also engage in think-tanks that employ the same planning, monitoring, and evaluation/assessment practices.

With one of her first articles in *College Composition and Communication* in 1977, Muriel Harris provides an anecdote which illustrates this self-regulation in action:

A writing lab stocked with materials for instruction in writing is one of those already existing sources of supply which can also be a resource for composition teachers, though this additional use of our writing lab wasn't particularly obvious to us in our first year of operation. When our lab staff began to write up explanation sheets, decorate them with visuals, type up accompanying exercises and worksheets, collect texts, and even (as our budget blossomed) purchase some audio-visual materials, we concentrated single-mindedly on helping those students coming in the door in need of individualized instruction. Several semesters passed before we realized that we had another natural constituency we could serve—the composition staff. ("Making" 376)

Like other's cross-over, interaction, or influence, the creation of a research archive for Harris expands the earlier use of cabinets and shelves in the writing laboratory classroom, and it enhances Meier's work of cultivating productive exchanges of ideas between her staff members. Additionally, considering attributes of the writing center that house materials as technological appendages to the center's success, the research archive has been in operation, up to this point, for over seventy years. Along with audio-visual materials, the writing laboratory philosophy has continuously added in the latest technology from ink wells, to reflectoscopes and Victrolas to the modern-day audio-visual equipment of the 1970s. Harris' development of the research archive has also further enhanced the self-sustaining concept of the writing laboratory as "the lab has also become a working library for the teaching of composition" (378). Harris' work continues the staff development trend found in this era as tutors learn through their work in developing materials found in the archive.

Through the work of the practitioners listed here, students earn credit for their work, and student professionalization initiatives begin to take shape with contracts "that [specify] the number of hours to be spent tutoring and attending tutor-training sessions, as well as the papers students must write" (Welch 438-9). Further reconfiguring the center as a student-centered initiative, which now includes a student-centered approach in developing student tutors, student-tutors take on roles that were once offered only peripherally. Through this collaboration, self-evaluation, self-assessment, and improvement, Harris' Research Archive is born with improvements originating from reflections upon the significance of the center's artifacts. They exist as supplemental sources of instruction for the tutor, but they get enhanced and improved upon by creating opportunities for a broader audience. With the artifacts of writing laboratories' histories helping create the model of a self-sustaining apparatus, attributes of the amiable teacher

get passed-down to future tutorial practitioners, for those who now work as tutors will teach, and those who were once tutored will become tutors.

### **A Reconfiguration of the System: Advancing Consultant Development Practices**

With peers firmly situated as a resource in writing laboratories, the writing center activity system continues to morph to further embody Engeström's adage of reconceptualized activity as well as another tenet of Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus as writing laboratory practitioners begin changing the style of their disclosive space. Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus explain that through the reconfiguration of practices "one has the sense of gaining wider horizons" (26). Reflecting Engeström's notions that change begets embracing radically wider horizons, this is certainly true with the development of writing center praxis to include peers as tutors. In fact, through the inclusion of peers, another contradiction or tension in the system is realized to which practitioners must respond with the response underscoring the assumption that tutors or pre-teachers require strong mentorships and practical skills. Thus, burgeoning research with development programs begin emerging during this period. Not surprisingly, adding to the outcome of the writing lab as a teaching lab, Ken Bruffee is at the helm of this research, and in 1978, he, along with several of his contemporaries collaborate to provide a snapshot of current practices administered.

In his introduction to the collected articles in "Training and Using Peer Tutors" Bruffee demonstrates how writing center historians today may view the reconfiguration of practices in 1978. He argues that "teachers and administrators are now aware of the fact that peer tutoring is a promising 'new' way of applying the principles of collaborative learning in organized programs of college instruction" (432). Knowing that the use of peer tutors is not necessarily new, but, in fact, retrieved from earlier writing laboratory practices, we can view Bruffee's

emphasized use of “new” as his recognition of an enhanced version of previous experiments with peers in the laboratory. In fact, Bruffee suggests that “we have recently discovered, or rediscovered that besides formal instruction, most students also need informal, unstructured relations with knowledgeable, interested, peers in order to profit most from formal instruction” (432-33). Here, his recognition of rediscovering the newness of peer tutors in the writing lab supports the assumption of Engeström and retrieval in action bringing about innovative designs throughout this period. Nonetheless, Bruffee also understands there is still much research needed in order to adequately develop peers and reconfigure the writing center space so that tutors can provide the supplemental instruction he advocates. Pointing to the contradiction or tension in the system, he concedes: “We do not know yet what kind of training is best, and the conditions prevailing at different colleges are likely to dictate different training procedures. But . . . any tutor training should try to help tutors develop both socially and academically” (433). What follows Bruffee’s introduction is a broad palette from which writing laboratory instructors can glean some of the most useful aspects as they develop their own writing center activity systems. Through this collaboration and proliferation of ideas, community engagement, looking for consensus and self-regulatory activity among the field’s practitioners continues as more writing centers look to develop or improve their local practices.

For instance, in Marcia Silver’s contribution to the project, “Using Peer Critiques to Train Peer Tutors” she provides an outline for a bridge concept where tutors first spend time in the classroom to gain a background of theoretical underpinnings for developing their writing practices. These concepts then get applied during a tutor’s time in the writing center as they observe those theories in practice. She argues: “Training is given in the classroom, and issues and ideas as well as problems arising out of on-the-job experience in the Center can be brought

back into the classroom for discussion” (434). Depending on the student body, what constitutes useful theory may depend on local contexts, but the guidance offered by Silver allows for transfer in myriad ways to satisfy just as many local contexts. What Silver makes clear is the need for a student collective in the lab. In other words, when students spend time in the lab as students in the same theory class, they share experiences and may likely spend time in the lab discussing how classroom instruction relates to what they witness in the Center. For Silver, the Center “is—a place to talk informally about writing” (434). As such, there is a cohesive unit of young scholars and practitioners deeply invested in learning and practicing what they learn in the Center.

In fact, developing collaboration and conversation among tutors is a key component of the early tutor development program. Silver notes: “The heart of this course is peer-criticism” (435). Much like the collaborative and student-centered approaches to which centers adhere, the classrooms for developing tutors operates under the same principles. For tutors in this course, they must first critique each other’s writing before they can critique Writing Center students’ work. Silver builds upon the empathy of her students through this collaborative and student-centered practice which places each tutor in the shoes of the tutee, so-to-speak. Similarly, Paula Beck from Nassau Community College also administers similar curricula.

Beck notes that her student tutors “write papers and critiques of each other’s writing; they analyze some professional writing; they keep logs of their tutorial and classroom experiences; they discuss tutoring problems and methods for dealing with them” (438). From these practices, new tutors develop their skills—by learning from their peers—before they apply those skills to their students in the Writing Center. Through Beck’s example, we see the application of a student-centered and collaborative approach while also applying the technology of logs into the

curriculum. Applying the same principles used in the center, her class mirrors lab work where “tutors gain through formal peer-critiques and informal tutoring something that is invaluable in writing—a critical objectivity towards their own work” (Silver 435). Silver’s and Beck’s courses for their students not only look to build cohesion between their tutors, but they have also developed courses that continue to build on to the legacy of the earliest writing laboratory work with focused student-tutor work on self-reflection to “sharpen their critical sense” (Beck 4438). Each of these instructor’s tutors learn from the tool of individual self-evaluation, but they also learn to improve their writing and tutorial skills through collaborative problem-solving. Not only is the center becoming one with social construction philosophies, but the same philosophies apply to student tutors as well. They all learn through collaboration and mentorships or apprenticeships.

Similarly, for Thom Hawkins, this practice is also reflected in the tutees: “While learning to write, tutees are also learning to ask questions, to reassess old assumptions, and to synthesize newly learned facts in a way which broadens their experience of the world” (443). At the University of California’s Student Learning Center, Hawkins’ philosophy coincides with Silver’s and Beck’s in that “tutors learn by doing” (441). However, unlike Beck (and Bruffee), whose tutors may not necessarily be the best writer in the class, Hawkins’ tutors go through a rather vigorous screening process. They must “write a 500 word essay in response to a typical tutoring session . . . declare their grade point average, and . . . obtain a faculty recommendation. . . [and] they must become thoroughly familiar with the contents of an introductory ten-page pamphlet describing their duties and responsibilities once they are in the program” (441). They also go through hour-long orientation sessions and have a personal interview with Hawkins (441). Instead of a structured curriculum, however, or one that operates as a bridge system, Hawkins

conducts weekly seminars. In this way, he relies on building an informal community of tutors who utilize his center's research archive as they "talk with the supervisor or other tutors, to browse through the library of books and articles, and to select handouts from the resource file" (441). Additionally, instead of developing a syllabus, Hawkins' seminars usually get organized around topics raised by his student tutors. He notes that many of his alumni "trace their beginnings as educators back to the training and experience provided by our course" (442). While his course only meets once a week as a seminar, Hawkins likely spends much more time with his tutors than most administrators:

Their tutoring sessions are observed frequently by myself as well as by other tutors and are recorded on audio or video tape. I meet with each tutor in a weekly conference to discuss the previous week's tutoring and to look over their journal entries. Tutors are evaluated by their tutees, both at mid and end quarter, and all tutors fill out a self-evaluation form. (442)

Hawkins' course may not have the structure of similar writing center ventures, but his loose structure also does not equate to a lack of specificity elsewhere. In fact, his attention to detail is what sets his curriculum apart from others'. Just as Silver and Beck administer the guiding principles of writing center work to the development of their tutors, Hawkins similarly applies logs or journals to his evaluation of tutors. However, his use of such records—as a way to record and work with his developing tutors—operates as another extension of technology in the center.

Including Silver, Beck, and Hawkins in his article, Bruffee exemplifies collaboration—both as a staple of writing center work but also as a mainstay in the collective work of an emerging and continually developing activity system—as a model for the development of the writing center's practices. He has reached out to three authors to contribute to his article so that

readers can get a better understanding of the developing writing center praxis and by proxy, the writing center as an activity system. Each of Bruffee's collaborators demonstrate a fundamental understanding that while the work of using peer tutors certainly enhances the experience of the center, tutors, likewise, need a similar learning experience. Modelling, as a response to the system's tensions, offered by Bruffee et al. get transferred to other practitioners through the dissemination of information; thus, illustrating CHAT as "sociohistoric, developmental, and heterogeneous processes" (Bhowmik 12) with practices first getting passed from the practitioner to the student-tutor and then from the student-tutor to the student. In this way practitioners and tutors act as purveyors of a methodology. All take part in the dialectical interchanges inherent in an activity system and its development so that students may also take part in the development of the center as well as their own learning. Not only does this work mark the development of a self-sustaining apparatus, but it also begins a trajectory toward a more robust exploration of tutor development experimentation.

### **A System on the Move**

At the end of the 1970's, Bruffee et al. highlight what is to come throughout the 1980's. Practitioners' original acts of retrieval from previous eras bring back the essence of the writing laboratory i.e. guiding principles of a student-centered focus, a focus on collaboration, and employing and developing peer tutors, providing environmental factors, and technology. Thus, operating as new tools in the system, these principles lead to a new area of research in the field of writing center work further developing the style of the writing center. The practices of learning and sharing from the community of practitioners continue; however, professionalization of tutors gains more ground as the system continues to expand.



Resolving peers as a new and valuable source of collaboration and learning opportunities for the writing center, Bruffee, in his article “Two Related Issues in Peer Tutoring: Program Structure and Tutor Training,” provides specific guidelines for what he believes are the most effective tutor development practices. First, he argues that tutors should be able “to distinguish and practice three kinds of reading critical to good tutoring: descriptive, evaluative, and substantive” (77). These three critical practices enable readers to look for form, technical quality, and responding to the paper’s argument respectively. Bruffee argues that learning the ways of reading a student’s paper allows the tutor to “govern their tone” during a session with a tutee (78). This then allows the tutor to “establish priorities appropriate to that author’s needs and level of development” (78). Further, these critical reading practices also help develop the tutor “as self-aware writers themselves” (78). With these strategies as tools for peer tutors, their professionalization within the program is enhanced while their self-regulated learning strategies are also developed.

Additionally, critical reading goes toward Bruffee’s second criteria of an effective tutor development tool, for reading critically leads the tutor to provide tutees with “tactful, helpful, and truthful” feedback (78). In defining these three areas, Bruffee demonstrates how peer tutors help their tutees realize that “writing is an act of publication—an act of making public what they have on their minds” (78). Bruffee’s instruction for tutors helps them gain an adaptable structure for their tutorial sessions in which they have flexibility in determining which reading strategy best suits the needs of the student, thus, Leonard Podis’ assertion in 1980 that “the ideal tutor should strive to be both knowledgeable and helpful” (70). In his article, “Training Peer Tutors for the Writing Lab”, Podis—writing committee chair at Oberlin College—also nods to Bruffee’s notion (as well as Lewis et al.) that peers should not adopt the role of ‘instructor’ rather

they should function as a knowledgeable helper. Like Bruffee, Podis aims to develop his tutors' flexibility and knowledge with "practice in the interpersonal aspects of tutoring through actual practice in the lab" (70). However, before Podis' tutors engage work in the lab, they too prepare in the classroom by developing their reading strategies. After tutors are selected and interviewed, their qualifications are tested as they first identify grammar and mechanics issues followed by reading student samples through descriptive, evaluative, and substantive lenses. They provide a written response to those samples "which might be made to the student writer as a first step towards revision and improvement" (71). Outside of these initial steps toward becoming tutors, Podis' course itself seems flexible, loose, and adaptable to individual tutors' needs.

For example, the course operates "as a small discussion group which meets once, sometimes twice, a week for an hour . . ." (71). With the first half of the course necessary for developing the tutors as knowledgeable apprentices, Podis provides his students with theoretical knowledge. However, this is the 'looseness' of Podis' course. While he has clearly planned and structured the course by first recognizing the need for training before actual practice in the lab can take place, he nonetheless leaves the development of robust theory investigation up to the student: "A tutor trainee interested in theory, however, may do independent work in rhetoric or linguistics and, for a third credit hour, can write a paper on the subject" (71). Interestingly, this work demonstrates the developing protocol of training tutors in flexibility. It also answers how Podis may work *with* his students instead of providing work *for* his students. Self-regulated activity is a base activity, or rule, in the implementation of tutor training coursework, and, in this case, Podis also encourages students to learn through their own investigations. By encouraging his students to engage investigative work, Podis helps his tutors, many of who are studying to be teachers, develop their self-regulated activity and, in turn, their teaching personae.

Hence, the professionalization of tutors continues to re-evolve with flexibility inherent in development programs. Beginning with Search et al. and reconceptualized here, not only does this maxim of laboratory writing exist within a session with students, it also exists in the classroom where the tutors' development grows. Through the work of practitioners like Bruffee and Podis, the seeds that were sewn with the earliest laboratory practitioners are re-articulated to develop roles for tutors. Bruffee's use of reading methods for tutors lends the tutor a means of developing their time for a session further adding to the helpfulness of the tutor. Similarly, adaptability and flexibility aid the tutor as they develop responses for the session with students. Now, the logs and records of student sessions take on an air of professionalism when tutors voice the strategies they have used with students while in-session. These strategies, as tools, offer students moments for forethought, performance, and reflection as they begin their revision work.

All the work tutors have explored in their development course enables them to talk professionally with students as they aim to help develop students as self-evaluators—one of the oldest student-centered principles of the laboratory movement. With flexibility reaching from the tutorial to the classroom for the tutor, the notion that the development of the writing center operates in a reverse fashion becomes clearer. Those practices first implemented in the classroom for students' growth are now present in the classroom as part of the tutors' development. This practice continues to take shape in the next decade with more retrieval from the Formative Period and professionalization of the tutor.

### **Conversation and the Maturation of the Field**

After Harris' 1977 disclosure of the research archive as a repository for learning materials useful in tutorials, she adds to the idea of record keeping, for the research archive not only houses student records, it also contains documents that can be shared with students, tutors, and other faculty members. Further augmenting her presence in writing center pedagogy and practice in 1980, Harris outlines central roles played by tutors. In her article "The Roles a Tutor Plays" Harris continues the actions of retrieval articulation as she reclaims earlier notions of the roles a tutor plays specifically exhibited by Francis Appel in 1936. He notices that student writing deficiencies may not simply lie in a difficult relationship with writing, but they may in fact stem from larger issues. Appel notes "petit mal" and a student suffering "from a serious pituitary disturbance and severe headaches" (75). However, Harris, as a sign of the times in writing center professionalization, places each role of the tutor in context. She suggests tutors, coach (established earlier by Murray), comment, and act as counselors. In her retrieval of earlier concepts, naming them, and placing them in specific contexts for tutors, Harris continues establishing her presence on the writing center stage. In her work, Harris not only reflects and retrieves the past, but as this section will demonstrate; her work is imbued with the work of her contemporaries as they continue developing conversational rules and collaborative tools for the professional tutor.

Like Harris, Podis also understands "tutee's problems are not strictly writing problems" (74). Thus, Harris' "Roles" ultimately creates rules for the tutor with Loretta Cobb, Director of the Harbert Writing Center at the University of Montevallo in Alabama, also supporting how broad tutor considerations must expand when engaging tutees and their writing difficulties. Cobb's 1982 article "Practical Techniques for Training Tutors to Overcome Defensive Blocks" asserts "piecing confidence back together and improving basic skills" relies on tutors

understanding “the defensive behavior of our students . . .” (33). To begin the process of developing her tutors’ awareness of blocking issues, Cobb has her tutors discuss specific tutees and their problems. Then the group of tutors brainstorm solutions for each scenario, with the general consensus being “to put a student at ease” (36). Of course, there are many ways to do this as noted in Cobb’s article, but what is important here is that the student tutors engage in collaborative problem solving. Similarly, student-tutors apply the rules set forth by Harris as they engage in a best practices approach that may range from what to notice with a depressed student to a student’s difficulty in grasping grammatical, syntactical, or organizational issues in writing. Through this process of tutor collaboration, they learn from each other, and in doing so, they develop best practices for their tutorial approaches.

Similar to Cobb’s assertion that the tutor helps piece confidence back together, Stephen North in his 1982 article “Training Tutors to Talk about Writing” argues that students who come to the writing center “need help *doing* something . . . A tutor training course, then, develops people who understand tutoring as prevention in the composing process and who can do something about it” (434). North’s article, thus, continues the trend in conversation that builds onto Harris’ rules and Cobb’s collaborative efforts. What is different or unique about North’s article is that he focuses directly on the process of talking with the tutee and engaging them in a way that is self-regulatory in nature. North, for example, suggests “the best tutorials are those which lead/encourage/prompt the writer to engage in or reflect on composing” (435). However, for tutors to engage tutees in this way, the tutor must understand how this approach works in order to pass it on to the student. North offers several ways to introduce tutors to the tutorial situation: role playing, viewing videotaped conferences, observing live conferences, and providing student tutors with his own personal experiences (436-7). North provides the maxim

that “it’s the writer we work on; the text is essentially the medium” (439). For North, the text is the primary artifact the tutor must employ to get the writer to talk about their writing. With the text as another tool, tutors encourage students to engage the self-regulated activities inherent in developing their writing. Planning, monitoring, and evaluating their work begins in the first session as tutors establish rapport about the writing, what the writer intends to do with the piece, and how it will shape their future writing experiences.

North certainly understands the Bandurian concept of learning vicariously when he develops his tutors to engage tutees, for modelling provides opportunities for vicarious learning, and Irene Lurkis Clark, in 1982, continues broadening the field’s conversational activities. Employing the strategy of hypothetical writing center conversations as a way to train her student tutors for their writing center work, Clark points out how self-efficacy develops among her tutors when they engage in this process: “as we wrote, we became aware, vicariously, that certain questions were more likely to elicit full responses from students than others . . .” (24). Harris follows this line of scholarship with her 1983 article “Modelling: A Process Method of Teaching.” Specifically relying on the scientific approaches of think-aloud protocol and modelling to demonstrate the cognitive processes engaged during the composing process, Harris provides examples of think-aloud protocol and modelling in practice. She argues that “protocol . . . became an instant source of feedback for the instructor” (76), and that “modelling . . . focuses the observer’s attention on processes to be used in the act of writing; learning is accomplished by observation or feedback during practice rather than by trial and error” (77). What is striking about Harris’ work is that she begins “borrowing tools from other fields” (74). North, for example, certainly understands the concepts of Bandura’s efficacy development, but he does not reference Bandura in his work. Harris does, and that is significant, for not only does Harris reach

into the past to retrieve useful artifacts, but by enculturating the field of writing center work, Harris accentuates the past and begins the trajectory forward.

Tying into Harris' work, it was noted earlier how Podis encouraged his student-tutors to learn through their investigations; however, this investigation also encourages Podis' students to venture into other disciplines as they explore the fields of rhetoric or linguistics. This work is part and parcel to the larger events about to occur in writing center work as it begins to enter the multi-disciplinary milieu to become a much richer and specialized domain. In fact, University of Michigan professor Gregory Waters' argument in his 1981 article simply titled "Peer Tutoring" recognizes the richness of writing center work: "The work that goes on inside a writing center should be real enough to earn academic credit on its own merits" (749). Waters understand the field is developing; however, he also sees a need for broader theoretical applications built into a course: "The key is to design a system that allows tutors to learn as much as they can about rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and modern methods of urban education . . ." (750). Waters recognizes short-comings in the current conceptualizations of writing center work and tutor development, and from this point, his article seems to precipitate a progressive turn for the writing center with University of California's Thom Hawkins agreeing: "the personal dimension of peer tutoring provides valuable opportunities for cognitive development for both tutor and tutee. But the opportunity is lost for tutors if they don't participate, as Waters recommends, in a structured, rigorous training course while they are tutoring, and if they don't receive adequate supervision" ("Thom" 752). Thus, begins a shift in tutor development that will ultimately lead to a focus on the application of theoretical issues surrounding writing.

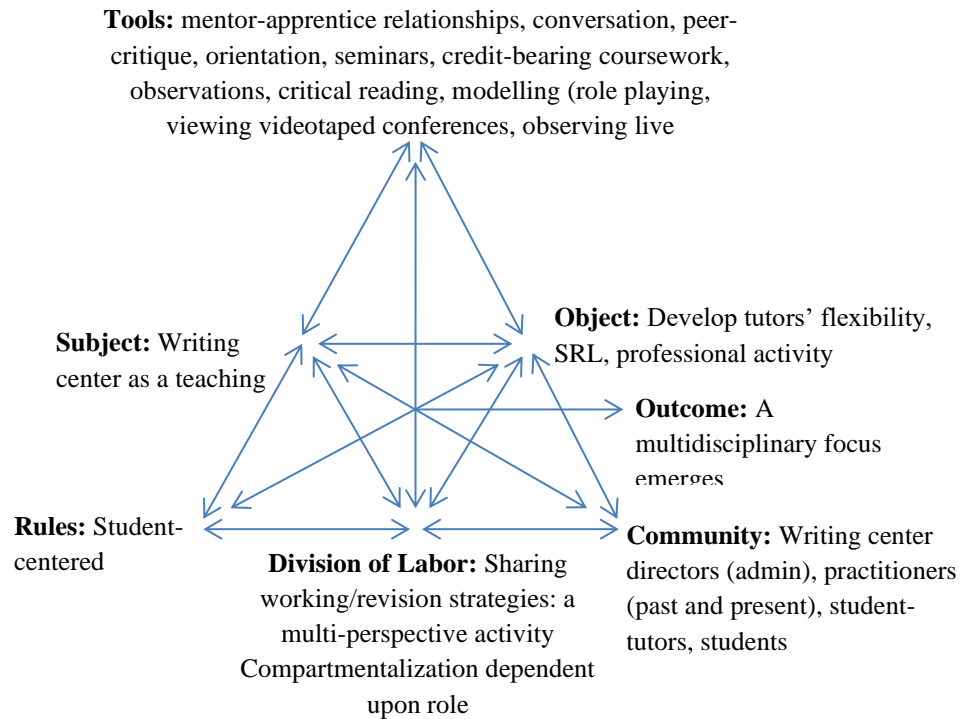
To offer a view of the system that has emerged through practitioners' experimentation through the 1970's, Figure 10 acts as a representative model of the evolving writing center

activity system.

This activity system represents how the contradictions that arise from employing peer tutors in the writing center such as their need for development get mediated.

Primarily, the

development of new tools provides for a new writing center activity system that may be used to evaluate the development of peer tutors. As indicated, a substantial increase in tools provides the system ways to enhance the service a writing center provides. The holistic elements of the writing center’s guiding principles i.e. student-centered work, teacher development and flexibility, collaboration, environmental factors, and technology all play a central role in the dialectic of the activity system. Through its activity, the system has “transform[ed] reality according to the laws of its own perfection” (Davydov 43). In other words, practitioners in the field of writing center pedagogy have developed and perfected ways from within—through collaboration with one another—that will sustain their work. Their involved experimentation has enabled them to create a system as it has emerged from their expertise. With self-regulated



**Figure 10:** The emerging Writing Center Activity System (WCAS) also operating as a teaching lab.



learning as a crux and steadfast objective of writing center work, and through the dialectic of CHAT, it may also operate as a rule for how to engage the work of developing the center, the tutor, and the student. Likewise, the multiple tools developed during this era operate to develop tutors, thereby, advancing the pillars of collaboration and flexibility. To this end, the self-sustaining apparatus has emerged as a system correcting itself through intensely involved deliberation and experimentation.

Additionally, Harris' 1982 article "Growing Pains: The coming of Age of Writing Centers" articulates the growth of the writing center. In her article she outlines the path writing center development has taken over the past several years from the 1970's until the writing of her article. Harris reinforces the concept that those in writing center work relied solely on each other when she cites there was "no organization, no network, no way to reach out from campus to campus or with each other. There were a sparse handful of journal articles, but no books to read" (2). Through her reflection, Harris established the *Writing Lab Newsletter* in 1976 with the Writing Centers Association following in 1979, and one of the first sourcebooks for tutors, *Tutoring Writing*, available in 1982, Harris, along with Bruffee became central figures in writing center work. In fact, Harris' and Bruffee's ideas are imbued in that of their contemporaries. It may be said that is the reciprocal nature of the period; however, each is clearly a trailblazer and frontrunner in developing writing center pedagogy.

The work of the 1970's leading into the early 1980's is no doubt unparalleled in the establishment, development, and re-articulation of writing laboratory work placing it into a new construct, but Bruffee and Harris specifically begin laying the groundwork for the future. Through acts of retrieval each has set in motion the future of writing center work, thus, leading to the development of a new and sophisticated emerging writing center activity system that not

only tutors young scholars as writers, but it also engages the work of developing pre-teachers. Tapping into the past, they retrieve what was once lost, and they place old ways into a new, modern context. Through this work, rules and tools get enhanced. However, as the field continues to grow, it outgrows its grassroots ability to learn from within. Now, it must rely on the multi-disciplinary context of the academy to further establish its presence on the academic stage.

### **Refining a Respectable Ethos**

With the addition of books into the writing center diaspora, the field begins exemplifying how practitioners have learned from one another over the last one hundred years of the praxis. In fact, with the first books, much of the precedent continues. For example, in 1982, one of the first books outlining how to conduct, organize, and manage a writing laboratory appears to further reinforce the notion that writing centers are still learning from each other as a self-sustaining apparatus. Joyce S. Steward and Mary K. Croft write that “*The Writing Laboratory: Organization, Management, and Methods* represents the best that we have learned from our labs and from each other . . . In writing this book we have not only influenced and taught each other, but we recognize the many people who have contributed to our respective labs” (preface). However, toward the end of the Modern Period, books begin to resemble Harris’ foray into the multi-disciplinary milieu. As she recognizes self-regulated work, Harris argues “we are always doing ‘formative evaluation,’ trying things out to see how they work and getting quick feedback . . . All that ‘winging it,’ trial and error method, allows us to grow and expand, not ossify into rigid structures” (“Growing” 5). For Harris, this demonstrates how self-regulated work in the activity system’s community has spawned new developments and methods for operation. More importantly, however, Harris also suggests that writing center work undertaken thus far requires further expansion particularly as she envisions the cross-appropriation that waits.

Up to this point, the field has articulated guiding principles of writing center pedagogy, and with the introduction of books into the lore, the writing center begins its foray into completely reconfiguring its space in the academy. In the end, the addition of books, in conjunction with the continual and reciprocal content of articles during the latter part of the Modern Period, represent the movement and development of the writing center praxis. New tools in the form of books responds to Harris' call for expansion, and they create space from which writing center practitioners may build onto or create writing center practices that fit the needs of their campuses.

Upon the writing of their book, Steward and Croft note how the movement has relied on its own informants to procure its work, but they also define the writing laboratory. Noting the laboratory should be "student-centered" and "the tutor must . . . provide time (have the patience) to discover areas of weakness and to try various strategies . . ." (5) these authors fortify the guiding principles of writing center work (the work is student-centered, teacher development and flexibility is critical, environmental factors provide the necessary workplace atmosphere, work is collaborative and dialectical in nature, and technology plays a fundamental role in the center's work) while simultaneously re-articulating maxims of the Formative Period: "this teaching requires a commitment to diversity, to flexibility, to employing a variety of methods and techniques and not just one" (5). To this end, the authors also provide floor plans of laboratory settings by including where an aquarium might go, where dictionary stands should be placed, and where reception areas, carrels, files, technology, reference materials, and sitting areas may be located. The book also provides tenets of writing center practicality. The authors argue that "the director should be an enthusiastic composition teacher, possessing knowledge of a wide range of methods and materials and be willing to share them with others" (28). In short, Steward and

Croft's work provides a how-to book on developing a writing center covering the guiding principles of writing center work. They offer training aids, pre-conference forms, record keeping templates, and various handouts. The book operates as an outward manifestation of the research archive and a culmination of writing center best practices as these authors see them and have gleaned from their peers.

On the other hand, in 1984, Gary Olson's edited collection of essays titled *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration* is published by NCTE takes the genre in a new direction. Olson's book separates his book into three sections: *Writing center Theory*, *Writing center Administration*, and *Special Concerns*. In his preface, reflecting Harris' article on "Growing Pains", Olson contends "that the field of writing center operation is about to enter adulthood, directors are beginning to examine the concepts underlying their work. . . *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration* is in fact the first book to examine the pedagogical theories of tutorial services and to relate them back to actual center practices" (vii). Olson's book marks the beginning of a period of transition from writing center practitioners relying on their own research for advancement to being informed by other disciplines. In fact, Olson states that "instructors can inform their teaching from numerous new studies in fields such as rhetoric, cognitive psychology, and sociolinguistics" (xi). For example, this collection includes articles by Tilly Warnock and John Warnock reflecting on the educational work of Paolo Freire and liberatory education; Karen Spear's article focused on Piaget's work on cognitive development; and Thomas Nash's article "Derrida's 'Play' and Prewriting for the Laboratory" invoking the deconstructionist language theories of Derrida, the rhetorical work of Kenneth Burke, and from the fields of linguistics and physics, Nash applies tagmemic play to the writing center praxis. With these articles, Olson lays bare the future of writing center work.

In fact, included in Olson's book is Bruffee's now classic article "Conversation of Mankind." Not only does this landmark essay inform writing center pedagogy, it has also been reciprocally influential in composition studies as collaborative learning has become standard practice in many composition classrooms. Regardless, however, Bruffee argues in "Conversation" that "conversation as it takes place within us is what we call reflective thought. . . . That is, as the work of Lev Vygotsky and others has shown, reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized" (5). Interestingly, Bruffee uses Vygotsky here to support the use of peer tutoring, for "what we experience as reflective thought is organically related to social conversation, the two are also related functionally. That is, because thought originates in conversation, thought and conversation tend to work largely in the same way" (5). For Bruffee, conversation is a tool to use in developing or enhancing our reflective thought, and peer tutoring provides a social context in which students can interact more naturally than say, with their instructor, where assumptions may intrude or impede upon a student's natural discourse.

Coupled with Olson's book, other articles from the period develop the trend of a writing center paradigm shift that focuses on developing the field through expansion and application of multiple theoretical perspectives. For example, in 1983, Jay Jacoby writes an article titled "Shall We Talk to Them in 'English': The Contributions of Sociolinguistics to Training Writing Center Personnel." In his article, Jacoby argues that it is not just what the tutor says to their tutees that matters, it is also in how they say what they say. For example, Jacoby presents the issue of working with non-native English-speaking students. A greeting such as "You look nice today" may be misinterpreted to mean something the tutor had no intention of suggesting; for Jacoby then, the inclusion of socio-linguistics may offer "tutors considerably more direction in understanding the problems of ESL students" (6). As a tool for writing center directors who

develop their staff, these articles for nuance demonstrate just how specific the writing center praxis has developed. Noting in 1987 that “another set of strategies that tutors need to acquire . . . are those which promote effective interaction and communication between tutors and a student” (“Training Teachers” 11), Muriel Harris advances the notions of Jacoby. Multidimensional perspectives on writing center practices are on the rise with many of the articles of the day informing books of the future.

For example, in 1987, Robert Brooke’s article “Lacan, Transference, and Writing Instruction” appears in *College English*. Since its first appearance, Brooke’s article equating *the subject supposed to know* and psychoanalysis with the writing center tutor has also appeared in many writing center praxis collections. Further adding to writing center lore, such multiperspective articles underscore a new trajectory for the field as it aims to resolve the contradiction of its linear model of learning from within to a multiperspective model that incorporates practices from outside through a multi-disciplinary approach. In fact, for Carol J. Singley and Holly W. Boucher, this proclamation embodies the essence of peer tutoring and writing center work. In their 1988 article “Dialogue in Tutor Training: Creating the Essential Space for Learning” that “a problem is what challenges us to create: conflict inspires learning” (11). With the experimental nature of the laboratory or writing center space, Singley and Boucher advocate discovery through “dialogue, not monologue” (14). In this, they infuse the writing center discourse of Bruffee, Berthoff, Elbow, Sommers, and Kail with educational and psychology theorists such as Freire, Bakhtin, Piaget, and Vygotsky. The discovery through dialogue Singley and Boucher promote is aimed at developing tutors and their students, but the practitioners must take the first step to model the process of dialogue in action. And as they aim

to train their tutors through a multi-disciplinary approach—an approach that has been building since the early 1980’s—they advance an approach of discovery through dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

From the beginning of the Modern Period, articulation is a theme for the era. Gathering from dispersion has enabled the field to recognize pillars or guiding principles central to writing center pedagogy, and retrieval articulation has provided the field opportunities to establish ways to meet and sustain those guiding principles. This work has enabled Modern Period practitioners to reconceptualize previous attributes of the earliest writing laboratory practices. At the end of the Modern Period, an effort on the part of practitioners to enter the academy in a robust manner is evident. Heretofore, the field has existed for itself through its own inventions, recollections, and influences. Now, however, the field is tasked with a multi-directional shift. As noted earlier, Gary Olson notes the adolescence of writing center development is nearly over, and despite writing centers having “always been diverse in their pedagogies, philosophies, and physical make-ups”, the basis for those diversities have not been adequately truncated with specific theoretical rationale (vii).

As this chapter concludes, many practitioners have begun to provide grounding for writing center praxis in educational, psychological, or rhetorical theories, and Lisa Ede, in 1989, makes an explicit call for the application of a theoretical framework in writing center work in her article “Writing as a Social Process: A Theoretical Foundation for Writing Centers?” Ede believes “the time is right for those of us who direct work in writing centers to place our work in a rich theoretical context” (5). Certainly, this process has already begun, but with Ede’s declaration, she makes what was implicit explicit. More and more, writing center practitioners have begun to “cite studies in philosophy, education, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and

literary criticism” (Ede 10). Ultimately, this will lead the development of the writing center activity system into the present as books and articles alike recognize Ede’s proclamation: “What we’re witnessing is a fundamental epistemological shift, one that both draws on and will influence a broad range of disciplines, including our own” (10). The lab has always been a place for experimentation, and it is a place where self-regulation occurs organically. Certainly, early laboratory practitioners did not employ a thing called “self-regulated learning.” Rather they planned, monitored and evaluated or assessed their experiments. In line with CHAT analysis, practitioners resolved and mediated contradictions.

Examining the development of laboratory writing through the lens of CHAT reveals this current of organic activity. Self-regulated learning is the organic material or mechanism that keeps the evolution and revision of writing center/laboratory activity systems moving. Organic, self-regulated activity pulls or directs the work. The next era, however, reconfigures this system through its continued application of theoretical perspectives. As such, an applicable use of CHAT may provide a framework useful in evaluating local writing center contexts. With a reconfiguration of practices underlying this movement, the future is here.

## Chapter Five: The Theoretical Period



## Introduction

Throughout the historical epochs I have presented thus far, cycles of development for the Writing Center Activity System (WCAS) have emerged. With an inherent cyclical nature of expansion in mind, this embedded historicity in Engeström's CHAT model demonstrates how cycles bring forth "the emergence of new structures" (Engeström "Activity Theory and Individual" 32). For Engeström "internalization increasingly takes the form of critical self-reflection—and [through] externalization, a search for solutions, increases" (34). It is with this cyclical process of internalization/externalization that makes the continual development and reconfiguration of the WCAS possible.

To appreciate internalization/externalization, it is not necessary to move far beyond the literal meaning of the descriptors. For writing center work, internalization embodies a practitioner's critical reflection upon processes, methods, contradictions, or disruptions in a system's activity while interpersonal activity emerges through externalization processes. Thus, internalization, i.e. reflection upon system activity, evaluation or self-assessment, organically leads to the emergence or development of appropriate and practical resolutions for system contradictions or tensions. What I have tried to offer thus far is the observable process of this action as new structures have emerged out of the initial contradictions found in teaching composition. Mediation of these original contradictions led to the Formative Period where laboratory instruction began in composition classrooms. Then, with the Clinical Period's brief foray into rigidity, a transitional period brought forth the emergent WCAS à la Bruffee et al. As I have described it, the Modern Period re-charged the batteries, so-to-speak, of the original Formative Period, thus, bringing forth a new and refined system of activity after the Clinical Period. With Engeström in mind, this process represents an "expansive cycle" through which

system contradictions are mediated through the search for developing a refined system of activity.

Thus, Engeström provides the maxim for this near-final chapter. “An activity system”, he suggests, “is by definition a multivoiced formation. An expansive cycle is a reorchestration of those voices, [including] the different viewpoints and approaches of the various participants” (“Activity Theory and Individual” 35). As I have demonstrated, throughout the history of writing center development, the identification of tensions in the system has continually brought about a reorchestration of voices to help reshape the dynamics and formation of the writing laboratory or center. Consider, for example, how a multivoiced system has developed within the field of writing centers: the field of composition adopts laboratory practices found in science classrooms; clinics reshape that praxis to accommodate student populations from the Greatest Generation; and laboratory practices re-emerge in classrooms, independent centers, and as a tool for developing teachers of composition. Then, the Modern Period’s writing center work was influenced by the multi-voiced quality of contemporary writing center practitioner’s shared work. Yet, while these practices are the most noteworthy aspects of writing center development up to this point, a contradiction within this paradigm has emerged to further define modern conceptualizations of writing center work.

Despite the multi-voiced quality of the writing center discipline, those voices representing writing center development thus far, act as a singular voice of writing center praxis. While this voice has certainly reshaped the system by bringing it into the fold of academia, the praxis developed has, up to this point, been almost wholly articulated by practitioners of writing center work. Therefore, the contradiction faced at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—as writing centers enter the multi-disciplinary context of the academy—is, in fact, how writing center praxis might

include or engage the rest of the academy. As a result, I focus this chapter to illustrate how a reorchestration of voices has led to a new era of theoretical applications that looks to not only justify writing center praxis and methods, but those viewpoints are applied as the writing center movement continues improving upon ways in which we develop our tutors as well as moving in new, dynamic directions. Well into the Theoretical Period, this is especially important to Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald when they write in their 2012 article “Peer Tutors and the Conversation of Writing center Studies” that “we stand to learn a great deal—about tutors’ informed and informing perspectives on the conversations of writing center studies; about what to tutors believe should be next for the field and for the practice of writing center studies . . . and, most important about what their fellow students need” (9). Thus, it is with this current consideration that a reflection on social construction emerging as a prominent focus of writing center pedagogy at the beginning of the Theoretical Period is germane, for the writing center continues to develop its collaborative ethos while simultaneously engaging the wider academic community.

Though the foundation of social construction is always present in the development of the WCAS, during the most recent period of development, the Theoretical Period, writing center practitioners begin applying wide-reaching theoretical perspectives to writing center work. While I provide a very modest account of the available theoretical applications with this project, their inclusion, nonetheless, demonstrates how this activity informs current writing center praxes. This, then, leads to the suggestion, that with the modern-day center’s practices informed by disciplines across campus, the laboratory writing movement realizes a full-circle moment: With the lab starting as an appendage, or a spoke in the wheel of composition curriculum in the late 1800’s, I argue that, at this point, writing center work has come full circle to see the center

operating as a hub for Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) activities; thus, further illustrating the multi-voiced qualities inherent in the writing center movement. This argument supplements the suggestion that an activist approach to writing center activities may lie in wait for the writing center. With an activist approach to writing center work, the center may not only house WAC activities, but it may help writing centers articulate what a culture of writing looks like across campus or beyond the boundaries of an institutional setting. With this in mind, an application of CHAT—beyond the historical analysis of writing center activity—may not only continue the contribution of theoretical applications to writing center work, but CHAT may provide writing center practitioners a framework through which they may assess, evaluate, and mediate the work of their writing centers and the university at-large.

### **Emerging Contradictions: Signposts to New Space**

As I noted in the previous chapter, Lisa Ede believes, in 1989, “the time is right for those of us who direct work in writing centers to place our work in a rich theoretical context” (5). Though the emerging system from The Modern Period operates as a unified writing center and teaching lab (Figure 10), a new contradiction emerges as the writing center activity system operates as a singular discipline with a history and pedagogy of its own. Unfortunately, however, this system does not to fully engage the wider university community.

For example, at the end of the Modern period, the objective of the writing center, illustrated in Figure 10, shows a fully functioning writing center operating with tutoring services available to undergraduate as well as graduate students. Simultaneously, the center works to develop future teachers of composition with tutors engaged in rigorous localized programs for developing their teaching personae. However, with isolated research done in-house, the previous period’s writing center does not fully relate to the whole university community those practices

which writing centers employ, and which the larger academic community may find relevant or recognizable. In other words, the Modern Period's writing center certainly engages the new community members found in administrative roles but writing center approaches toward reaching out and convincing departments (outside of English departments) the value writing centers might offer, is largely absent. Without theoretical applications as a rule to support the work of the writing center, opportunities for fully engaging the university community may be marginalized.

Similarly, relying on in-house research as a rule and tool to justify or support the work of the writing center falls short in reaching the object of the writing center. Illustrated in Figure 11, the division of labor is complicated with the academic community at-large remaining outside of the writing center activity; thus, a new outcome emerges to reorchestrate a multi-voiced academic community. Similarly, in-house applications of writing center research limit the scope of the writing center's work, thereby, disrupting the entire system of activity as the center enters

a new era of development.

However, during

the Theoretical

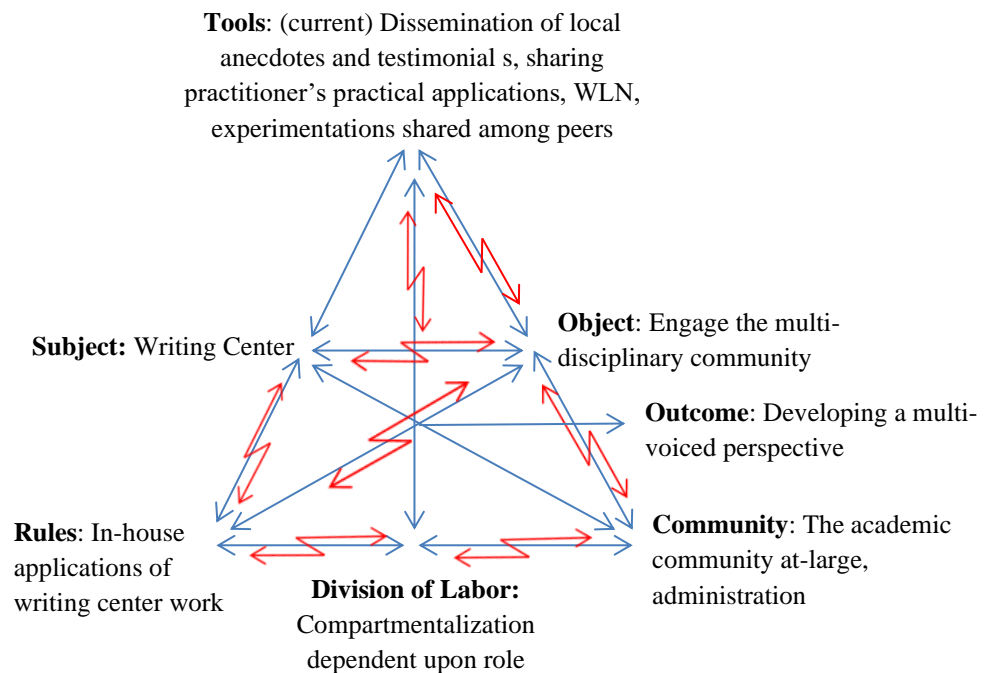
Period, a

polyphony of

voices will help

the writing center

further develop



**Figure 11:** Emerging system contradictions facing the Theoretical Period.

and share its organic ethos of collaboration.

In fact, by advocating practitioners “place our work in a rich theoretical context” (5), Ede encourages her colleagues to engage the community at-large by bringing them into the fold of writing center activity. With figure 11 illustrating contradictions arising after the previous era’s robust work, at the end of the 1980’s, the writing center is largely seen across campuses as a place where writing students, who need remediation, find help. This perception exists (and persists), in part, because an awareness across campus about *what* happens in the writing center is less-than transparent. Certainly, members of the campus community know there is a place called “the writing center” on campus, but what occurs there is unknown or misunderstood by many in the academic community. In order to resolve this contradiction and misunderstanding of the writing center then, practitioners during the Theoretical Period begin considering how theoretical applications may help clarify *what* writing centers do and *why* they do what they do. Grounding our work in broadly shared, widely respected, and roundly-appreciated theoretical concepts not only further defines the work of the writing center during this period, but it also continues to develop the organically collaborative ethos of the writing center. Additionally, incorporating theoretical applications into tutor development programs encourages the use of these strategies by tutors, thus, extending the writing center collaborative ethos across the disciplines by demonstrating how writing centers employ theoretical perspectives from across the disciplines to develop consultants and pre-teachers. Despite the development of an existent ethos, however, practitioners like Irene Lurkis Clark also advocate adhering to our organic ethos that has, in fact, brought the development of a writing center activity system this far.

Clark argues in “Maintaining Chaos in the Writing Center: A Critical Perspective on Writing Center Dogma” that writing center practitioners should “maintain and continue to value

some of the ‘chaos’ of our early days . . .” (82). Through this ‘chaos’, we see the Theoretical Period bringing forth the culmination of 100 plus years of organic development as we engage the “contradictions and contraries” inherent on writing center work (Clark “Maintaining” 82). Encountering contradictions and mediating them through a process of internalization/ externalization has brought forth what is now seen as a centralized philosophy of writing center pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> However, that does not mean the writing center has become normalized. In fact, as Muriel Harris argues in 1991, “writing centers cannot all function in similar ways” (“Solutions” 63). This is largely due to local particularities; however, despite writing centers largely varying from location to location, Clark suggests in her article, that this period, like all others in the history of writing center development “can lead to growth, discovery, and change” (82). In fact, placing guiding principles of writing center work alongside valued educational, philosophical, and theoretical applications will help writing center practitioners further define the work of writing centers.

For this chapter’s analysis, then, I present scholarship to demonstrate how theoretical perspectives have flourished during the current period to not only situate writing center work in the multi-voiced academy, but in doing so, I aim to illustrate how these contributions enhance professional development programs for consultants. Certainly, my review of scholarship in this chapter is not exhaustive; rather, it is representative to illustrate how varying areas of scholarship have contributed to writing center praxis. The use of multiple perspectives really takes off during the Theoretical Period; however, relatively speaking, this project only administers a small sample from the period to illustrate how theoretical tools have continued to push writing center work front and center in the academy. Picking up where the last era left off, there are still many

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. guiding principles: (student-centered work accompanied by continually developing, flexible teachers who offer direction through collaborative efforts and welcoming, technologically-enhanced environments)

articles written about the development of tutors using theoretical applications from across the academy. Such applications of scholarship not only clarify the work writing center consultants do with their students, but they also help define the work of developing tutors. Thus, I identify in this chapter representative scholarship that demonstrates the shift from practitioners relying on in-house anecdotal writing center scholarship to that which employs multi-disciplinary theoretical applications to writing center work, thereby, expanding writing center praxes.

### **Reorchestrating the Space: Robert Brooke and Christina Murphy**

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, scholars like Don Murray, Ken Bruffee, Muriel Harris and others helped bring the writing center we know today into sharp focus during the Modern Period. However, what I offer in this final chapter illustrates how the writing center field begins to mediate its current system contradictions. While Ede and Clark may have been some of the first to advocate for defining writing center work through a theoretical lens or demonstrating the promise writing centers offer, respectfully, there were others prior to Ede and Clark who had already begun applying theoretical principles to writing center work. For example, as I mentioned in chapter four, Robert Brooke's article "Lacan, Transference, and Writing Instruction" appearing in *College English* in 1987 predates Ede's and Clark's arguments. As such, Brooke embodies the presence of a pioneering community member at the forefront of The Theoretical Period. Along with Brooke, Christina Murphy also positions herself at the forefront of writing and writing center pedagogy as she grounds her work in theoretical perspectives from across the disciplines. From their work, Brooke and Murphy reflect Engeström's reorchestration of voices as the field begins developing a new writing center ethos to engage what Ede advocates as well as the growth, discovery, and change Clark envisions.



As a nod to the influence of Don Murray and Peter Elbow’s conceptualizations of “response teaching” Brooke’s article equates the work of these two influential practitioners to that of Psychologist Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis. Brooke’s article on transference and the Lacanian notion of *the subject supposed to know* argues “that Jacques Lacan’s theory of transference is a powerful model for understanding why teaching strategies like [Murray and Elbow’s] so often prompt students to learn to write” (679). Published in the *College English* “Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy” issue, Brooke’s article documents how two of the writing center’s model representatives, Don Murray and Peter Elbow, reflect the psychoanalytical work of Lacanian transference vis-à-vis *the subject supposed to know*. Defining *the subject supposed to know* as “an authority figure, a person who the ‘divided self’ supposes to know how to interpret the behavior” (681), Brooke suggests students represent the divided self with the “response teacher” acting as *the subject supposed to know*. Through this relationship, Brooke argues the response teacher acts as a facilitator of a conversation that enables the divided self to find “his or her own route to the truth” (680). In doing so, Brooke stretches the boundaries of our understanding of what writing center consultants do. With non-directive work in the writing center largely following that of Murray and Elbow’s response teaching approach, Brooke argues *the subject supposed to know*, in this case the writing consultant, embodies a Neoplatonist’s search for truth. With writing the perplexing behavior, writing center consultants, like response teachers, ask students where problems might exist in their writing. Hence, the application of question-response techniques like Murray and Elbow to discover a general truth about the student’s writing, consultants closely model methods of psychoanalysis as they seek the phenomena of transference.

Lacan argues: “As soon as the subject who is supposed to now exists somewhere . . . there is transference” (232) Thus, equating response teaching—a process of teaching largely modeled in writing center praxis—to that of Lacan’s theory of psychoanalysis, Brooke brings the social sciences directly into the fold of writing center studies. The lineage of Murray and Elbow tied directly to writing center pedagogy, hence, provides a beginning for multi-disciplinary applications to writing center work. Moreover, in addition to his discussion of Neoplatonic thought, Brooke brings Michel Foucault into his argument underscoring how psychoanalysis operates to “[help] us know ourselves as we can’t on our own” (682). By introducing Lacan, Foucault, and truth, as conceived by Neo-Platonists, Brooke inserts robust theoretical considerations into our understanding about what happens in writing center interactions. In addition to grounding our work in the social sciences, Brooke’s work encourages tutors to contemplate how these viewpoints might enhance, influence, and shape their work. Moreover, providing theoretical underpinnings to writing center work by incorporating timely theoretical approaches from across the disciplines, Brooke begins contributing to the field’s developing multi-voiced and roundly collaborative ethos.

Additionally, in 1989, another leading scholar of the Theoretical Period, Christina Murphy, writes one of her first articles applying psychoanalysis to writing center work. In “Freud in the Writing Center: The Psychoanalytics of Tutoring Well” Murphy argues in *The Writing Center Journal* that “the tutor’s role is primarily supportive and affective, secondarily instructional, and always directed to each students as an individual in a unique, one-to-one personal relationship” (13). Through Murphy’s description here, writing center instruction continues to adhere to guiding principles of maintaining a student-centered approach to instruction and offering a flexible teacher to offer guidance and suggestions. However, like

Brooke before, in order to fully understand and explain what occurs in the writing center, an application of broader theoretical applications from across the disciplines is in order. Thus, Murphy's article represents another useful artifact in the development of tutors as they begin to consider how these contributions to the writing center lexicon define their work with students.

Like Brooke, Murphy offers psychoanalysis as a tool to further explain writing center activity. Murphy understands "that learning is not simply a cognitive process" (14). Certainly, writing manifests through otherwise isolated, individual activity; however, the process of developing one's ideas correspondingly develops through a process of sociality. Murphy rests her theory on the notion that writers who have difficulty developing their work have "inherent abilities but inhibiting fears" (15). Thus, she recognizes "the psychoanalytic concept of information theory" (15). Referencing C. H. Patterson, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and author of *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Murphy reveals how Information Theory "views the individual as actively attending to, selecting, operating on, organizing, and transforming information provided by the environment and by internal forces" (qtd. in Murphy "Freud" 15). Through this explanation of Information Theory, a common line of thought exists between Brooke's and Murphy's individual articles. Though neither mentions the work of self-evaluation, each presents evidence of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) existing within the structure of tutorials. For Brooke, students discover their own truths, and for Murphy, students, similarly, plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning activities. However, in each case, this work is modeled and facilitated by an "other": the consultant or writing teacher.

It is no coincidence, then, that self-regulated learning and psychoanalysis fall under the same discipline of psychology, and with Brooke's and Murphy's contributions, each recognizes

the influence of psychoanalysis within the field of writing center work. Murphy argues “A good psychoanalyst and a good tutor both function to awaken individuals to their potentials and to channel their creative energies toward self-enhancing ends” (16). Thus, Murphy not only understands the applicability of specific psychoanalysis tenets, but she also presupposes how tutorials also engage individuals’ self-regulatory activity. Through this frame, tutors may consider how they plan, monitor, and evaluate their work to, in turn, help students develop their self-regulatory activity through the social network of the tutorial. It is within this frame that Murphy writes another article in 1994 titled “The Writing Center and Social Constructionist Theory.”

Here, Murphy builds onto her work in “Freud” by suggesting social constructionist theory may be useful to more fully explain writing center work. She argues: “Central to this task of broadening an understanding of the writing center’s role within the paradigm of collaboration is an assessment of the philosophy of social constructionist theory” (26). Murphy then provides a thorough overview to include differing interpretations of social construction’s applicability in composition studies. Through her analysis, Murphy recognizes the influence of many of the period’s leading composition social constructionists including Joseph Petraglia, Bruffee, Berlin, Bartholomae, Patricia Bizzell, and Andrea Lunsford. Through her work, Murphy recognizes the importance of these perspectives, but she also presents alternative views, which may not wholly endorse social constructionist philosophies within a composition studies framework.

For example, Murphy references education activist Howard Ryan, who argues that a social constructionist view “encourages social elitism” and “stifles dissent” (27). Also, further complicating the use of a social constructionist paradigm in composition work, Murphy references Psychoanalyst Joseph Smith, who believes “that to argue that an individual is wholly

constructed by his or her social experience and cultural moment is to obviate the very real presence of individual subjective experience . . .” (28). Murphy’s goal in providing contrasting views on social construction is to find a balance between the differing views on social construction’s role in composition studies as she seeks a viable and applicable philosophy useful in describing writing center work. In doing so, Murphy recognizes critics do not wholly discount social construction as a useful tool in composition work. Rather, they argue against an over-reliance upon one theory to explain the complexities of the composing self. Hence, Murphy seeks balance through her thorough analysis of diverse socio-political, humanist, and psycho-social views of social construction.

Thus, Murphy echoes Carole Blair’s argument in her 1989 article “‘Meta-ideology,’ Rhetoric, and Social Theory” that “social construction is the latest in our [composition] discipline’s searches for a ‘meta-ideology’” (qtd. in Murphy “The Writing Center” 36). Murphy suggests “that social construction is a response to the times” (33). In other words, she argues, through her comprehensive analysis of social construction, that the theory may not be perfect; however, it is a current and theoretically sound way to explain writing center praxis. Further, in her argument, Murphy posits that the writing center’s application of social construction embodies the field’s forward movement. In staying current with scholarship, writing center practitioners like Murphy have begun to situate their activity in the scholarly work of the academy at-large. Murphy’s argument is precisely what makes her a force in writing center studies today.

In fact, by providing a knowledgeable and thorough understanding of multiple voices from Habermas, Carl Jung, Freud, Carl Rogers, Henri Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, and others, Murphy includes and reorchestrates multiple voices toward building a unifying approach upon

which we may frame writing center work for the academy and our tutors. Through her scholarship, Murphy simultaneously embodies Engeström's maxim, Ede's charge, and Clark's hope for what lay ahead for writing center scholarship. Further, through Brooke's application of Lacanian precepts and Murphy's applications of psychoanalytics, each demonstrates how questions from the tutor model transference as students who visit the writing center begin developing SRL activities to monitor and evaluate their own work. Likewise, through the lens of Information Theory, the environment of the writing center presents information to the student which they mediate and transform through their individual internalization/externalization processes, thus, continuing a model of self-evaluation.

Though practices toward enabling transference to have been part of the laboratory instructor's repertoire since the late 19th century, they now have modern theoretical approaches attached to them, thus, rendering the praxis more recognizable to a wider academic audience. Additionally, providing these concepts to developing tutors lends them the ability to not only engage the activities found in the scholarship, but they may apply the scholarship to define their own activities. By mediating a multi-disciplinary collaborative constraint the writing center subject faces, the application of theoretical approaches, demonstrated by Brooke and Murphy, helps build bridges across the universities' disciplinary milieu, and in doing so, the scholarship also helps develop tutor's praxis, and in turn, the writing center ethos of collaboration and experimentation.

### **Broader Theoretical Applications**

Through their work, Brooke and Murphy begin building on to the guiding principle that writing center work is collaborative in nature. Whether the collaboration is through one-on-one work or in groups, applications of psychoanalysis and, specifically, social construction, begin

providing theoretical fortitude to the otherwise in-house strategies of writing teachers and tutors. Therefore, with social construction gaining prominence as a theoretical precept of writing center work in-consultation, the theory of knowledge as socially constructed applies to all writing center community members. Hence, there is important focus placed on collaboration in the development of tutors. As Andrea Lunsford argues in 1991 for a “need to embrace the idea of writing centers as Burkean parlors for collaboration” (“Collaboration” 8), the applicability of rhetorical theories à la Burke represent an inherent relationship between social construction and composition. By appropriating work recognized by other fields, writing centers may begin building bridges to other departments and fields across the university. For example, as we become more familiar with the work of other fields and how their work applies to writing center work, we may more easily enter conversations already occurring across the disciplines, thereby, bringing others into conversations about writing centers. As such, social construction need not only occur between students who visit the writing center and the consultants who work with them, but, as is the tradition, social construction and the transfer of information begins with the collaboration between faculty and tutors who provide a service to the community of writers in the academy. And as theoretical research continues to enhance the field’s praxis, a new generation of scholars begins bringing far-reaching theoretical perspectives into the Burkean Parlor of writing center discourse as they look to develop tutors and engage a wider swath of the community which they serve. As this process develops, old school, in-house work leads to theoretical applications that will define and fortify the work of writing centers.

For example, in 1990, Peggy Broder, Cleveland State University’s Director of Composition and Writing Center Supervisor, models how collaboration works in situating writing center tutors inside the writing center to gain experience, for she sees the writing center

as a pathway for teacher development. For Broder, the collaboration found in writing centers is instrumental for vicarious, experiential learning. As demonstrated in the previous era, this strategy for developing teachers is at the forefront of writing center tutor development.

Delivering her message from the perspective of a writing center administrator, Broder's article represents the previous era's best practices in tutor development. Articulating the typical seminar course for writing center work—discussing theoretical work, examining student papers, studying grammar concepts—Broder also provides the complementary activity of working in the writing center as part of a developed program of study. She argues “this is experience that can be gained in no other way: reading textbooks and observing experienced teachers in the classroom are useful to the novice, but actually working with the students themselves is invaluable” (38). This activity allows the student to witness the activity of a tutorial session with all its complications i.e. observing the dynamics of student-tutor relationships, observing strategies used by the tutor, and discussing those strategies with the tutor.

To this point, related to the experience teachers gain in first-hand situations like those found in the writing center, Broder advances a tenet of developing self-efficacy. She argues “another important benefit that the writing center provides to tutors is what we might call ‘vicarious learning’ experience gained by working closely with their own peers” (41). Though Broder does not specifically cite or credit Bandura and his work in developing efficacy as she makes her argument for developing teachers in the writing center, she nonetheless sees the benefits of collaboration within the framework of a tutor development program. In fact, for Bandura, one influential way of development and growth is through vicarious learning: “Seeing people similar to themselves succeed by perseverant effort raises observers’ beliefs that they, too, possess the capabilities to master comparable activities” (3). Through Broder's work, an



application of contemporary perspectives on development is prominent as she looks to advance self-efficacy in tutors, who may also be pre-teachers—either in secondary or post-secondary schools or as a graduate teaching assistant.

Seeing that vicarious learning benefits the tutor, Broder argues this also translates to teaching situations: “The writing center’s usefulness as a training ground is clearly not limited to the tutors themselves . . . Even a teacher who has conferenced with his own students may become more acutely aware of the difficulties inexperienced students face, as his role shifts from evaluator to coach” (42). Consequently, in her article, Broder sets a precedent for writing center administrators: that vicarious learning is part of the collaborative nature inherent in a writing center. While she does not provide specific references to well-known theoreticians, she nonetheless provides theoretical applications—derived through the social sciences—that writing centers employ as practitioners work to develop teachers.

With this, in 1992, Zelenak et al. support current-day writing center praxis by equating much of the anecdotal work found in writing centers to cognitive growth and experiential learning, thereby, supporting Broder’s work. For example, in the *Journal of Developmental Education*, Zelenak et al. (five educators from the University of Missouri Columbia), argue in “Ideas in Practice: Preparing Composition Teachers in the Writing Center” that experiential learning represents a crucial learning experience for pre-teachers. However, unlike Broder, Zelenak et al. preface their studies’ findings by presenting the applicability of writing center work to experiential learning. They argue:

In his well known [*sic*] book *Experience and Education* [1938] John Dewey calls for a theory of experience, positing that experience is both a means and the goal of education. Piaget [1978], Bruner [1966], Knowles [1978], Brookfield [1986], Chickering [1976],

Kolb [1981], Gould [1978], and Tough [1982], among others, have also built the case that experience enhances and promotes learning. (28)

By providing readers with this (mostly) contemporary collection of current theoretical research on learning, the authors set up a pathway to justify their findings—that work in the writing center has prepared composition teachers to think about their classroom experiences in more practical and theoretical ways. They claim, “nearly 90% of all participants acknowledge during interviews that the [writing center] program has helped them become better classroom teachers” (29).

Providing results from their study of pre-teachers working in the writing center, Zelenak et al. describe multiple benefits of building a teacher development program through writing center participation: pre-teachers learned to develop writing assignments by viewing those discussed in the writing center; they learned new ways of prioritizing tasks; they developed more empathy for their students’ writing difficulties; and “18% indicated . . . an increased interest in holding teacher-student conferences as a way of becoming more actively involved in their students writing process” (30). For Zelenak et al., the results of their work speak well to the teacher development factor as they reflect models of development presented in the robust research of cognitive growth structures, adult learning, and experiential learning theories.

Further, in 1991, Diane Stelzer Morrow writes in *College Composition and Communication* about her personal experience in the writing center. With her previous experience as a physician, Morrow brings a new richness to theoretical applications for consultant development emerging during this period. Providing support from the medical field to bolster her claims that physicians and writing teachers share similar philosophies of operation, Morrow, simultaneously, distinguishes the two occupations. She first starts with Muriel Harris’ argument that the “goal of the writing teacher is instructional, not therapeutic” (qtd. in Morrow

219). Using the juxtaposition of two distinctly different schools (medicine and education), Morrow provides clear distinctions between that which physicians do and that which writing consultants do. As such, Morrow provides models of comparisons for future writing instructors who may also gain experience in the writing center.

For example, referencing the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, Morrow argues there are “three basic models of the doctor-patient relationship: activity-passivity, guidance-cooperation, and mutual participation” (219). She explains and provides examples for how each of the practices work in medicine and in the writing center, comparing each’s applications of these models. With the activity-passivity model, she explains the physician is assumed to be in charge and the patient simply follows the doctor’s order. In other words, they diagnose a problem and provide the treatment. The patient simply allows the physician to work on them. However, as one of the least effective models, in medicine as well as in writing center work (as demonstrated during the Clinical Period), Morrow recognizes “that activity-passivity was not to be the preferred mode of instruction in composition.” She says “I understood I was not to assume authority in these tutoring sessions. I understood that my role would be to allow the student to teach himself” (221). To assist beginning tutor’s ways of developing their praxis so they may better assist the student to teach himself, Morrow encourages beginning tutors to adopt ways of engaging the student, which requires them to take charge of the session.

Like the activity-passivity model, Morrow’s second recognition of “guidance-cooperation” also closely resembles a Clinical Period model with writing centers diagnosing students’ deficiencies and prescribing them a remedy the student followed. Much like the activity-passivity model, writing center practitioners may certainly see this model in the writing center when students expect their tutor to tell the student exactly what they need to do. However,

adding further credence to the influence of Murray and Elbow, Morrow encourages beginning tutors to, instead, follow their response teaching models. For Morrow, engaging the student in such a way leads the student to “discovering what parts [are] not yet clear and [need] explanation” (224). To this end, Morrow encourages the use of “mutual participation” further conveying Burkean Parlor collaboration as a tenet of writing center work.

Recognizing that the model of “mutual participation” is most useful in writing center work, and “except in rare cases, foreign to medicine”, Morrow also understands that since the three models of doctor-patient relationships were articulated, the world of medicine has changed with patients asking more questions of their physicians who “are aware of the uncertainty of their own knowledge” (227). With this, Morrow compares the collaborative work in medicine to that for which we strive in the writing center. As a guiding principle, collaborative efforts with the student sees the student “joining in the search [for answers . . . and] seems to free them” (228). Thus, through her analysis and application of physician’s approaches, Morrow identifies and may clarify ways in which writing tutors may adopt practices of collaboration. Morrow’s analysis provides a rich discussion to demonstrate how the roles of physicians and writing tutors are similar and dissimilar. Beginning with the premise that “the central relationship in medicine is between a patient with disease and a physician who cures” (219), Morrow provides a clear distinction between physicians and writing tutors. Nonetheless, her application of a physician’s how-to guide in patient-physician relationships helps Morrow establish how collaborative efforts span the two very different fields, thus, furthering the reach of theoretical applications in writing center research and writing center practitioners’ abilities to engage wider Burkean Parlor conversations.

Like the work of Broder and Zelenak et al., for Morrow, the practical work of the writing center leads to an application of new theoretical principles. These practitioners make connections to scholarship external to the field of writing, thus, contributing to a multi-voiced writing center ethos. With the articles presented in this section, I aim to show how each present the practicality of working in the writing center and how each posit emerging theoretical applications to writing consultant development. While Morrow justifies her work through theoretical applications from the medical field, Broder and Zelenak et al. recognize experiential learning as a cornerstone of writing center development programs. Specifically, Zelenak et al. forthrightly reference work in this area to justify their findings. In doing so, each of the preceding articles represent Engeström's maxim of reorchestrating voices as well as Ede's charge for a more theoretical approach to writing center work, and each seeks what Clark advances when she seeks a route for "growth, discovery, and change" (82). Much like the cross-appropriation that ignited the laboratory movement of the 1880's, these practitioners embody the organic writing center approach of developing scholarship enriched and supported by adopting other field's theoretical perspectives and practices. However, as we have seen, the work presented is not only useful in engaging students who visit the center, but each perspective is also instrumental in developing tutors who engage those students. Thus, the collaborative and social nature of writing center work defined through an application of theoretical perspectives during this era inherently leads writing centers to adopt a Vygotskian frame for collaboration.

### **A Vygotskian Frame**

With multi-disciplinary applications to writing center practices, the multivoiced quality of CHAT becomes more realized by writing center practitioners. As a result, these scholars start to articulate Vygotskian principles to the writing center diaspora. Beginning with Nancy Grimm

and ending with Muriel Harris, I offer this section to demonstrate how collaboration and the sociality inherent in laboratory work represent a larger role writing center work embodies.

Nancy Grimm argues in 1996, that writing center practitioners should “struggle with theory rather than to focus narrowly on technique” (qtd in Grimm “Rearticulating” 534). She suggests in her *College Composition and Communication* article “Rearticulating the Writing Center” that there is a central tenet to all the varied theories that unifies them all. She argues that, “echoed in the work of many literacy theorists” (536), writing center practitioners continue to recognize social construction as a guiding theoretical approach to writing center work. In other words, much of the work applied during this period adheres to the edict of collaboration and social construction found in the writing center. This, then, leads to the development and recognition of an existent Vygotskian Frame within writing center studies.

For example, in 1999, Grimm’s book *Good Intentions: Writing center Work for Postmodern Times*, an extension of her previous article, develops her position on social construction by continuing an application of Lev Vygotsky:

The notion that intellect develops as a result of interactions with others justifies writing center practice more powerfully than does a list of multiple services provided . . . the intellect develops by participating in human relationships, not by sitting on the sidelines and listening to the rules being explained. (89)

In other words, whether we recognize and define the work in writing centers as that which underlies practices in the medical field, social work, or the social sciences holistically, the common thread is sociality. As such, Grimm is among those who begin to centralize and further define the work of writing center practitioners as collaborative and socially constructed vis-à-vis Vygotskian principles.

As she extends her argument and focuses on the work of Vygotsky, Grimm prefaces CHAT. She argues: “Within a Vygotskian framework, an interactive relationship with someone willing to construct a scaffold for the work of abstraction, someone willing to recognize and engage existing patterns of literacy, is essential for literacy development—not just an extra service for ‘undeveloped’ individuals” (*Good Intentions* 90). Grounding her work in Vygotsky’s rationale of social learning, Grimm identifies the interactive or dialectical framework needed in order to see *how* we engage students in the writing center. Further, she sees the scaffolding that incorporates the tools we use for that engagement as well as what outcomes we might resolve through our collaborations. Though Grimm does not mention CHAT, her visionary work prefaces the application of the framework.

In fact, in her contribution to *The Center Will Hold*, Grimm demonstrates the center as a place for research. Responding to Muriel Harris’ argument in “Preparing to Sit at the Head Table”, Grimm recognizes that “It’s time to probe more deeply and to learn how to explain what we have to share with colleagues in other departments and schools on campus” (qtd. in Grimm “In the Spirit” 44). Grimm’s argument that writing center directors, who are typically too busy running a center’s day-to-day activities, need to engage more research to meet Harris’ charge. For the center to hold its place in the academy, Grimm recognizes the importance of Harris’ argument, and as Grimm’s book *Good Intentions* makes clear, she has engaged the research Harris makes a centerpiece of the current era.

Similarly, in 1999, Nancy Welch’s applications of social construction and psychoanalytic theories of development in her *College Composition and Communication* article “Playing with Reality” merge multiple practitioners’ approaches (presented herein) to define writing center work. In fact, Welch gets closer to adopting a CHAT rationale than any of her predecessors:

. . . those of us who teach in writing centers can learn that the contradictions we experience day to day don't have to be grim facts of life to hunker down and accept.

From an object-relations perspective, these contradictions and divides become 'potential spaces' that can be the locus of activity, questioning, and change—activity, questioning, and change that a writing center in pursuit of the practical would eclipse. (54)

From recognizing contradictions to identifying object-relations and the activity that embodies such work, Welch engages the representative dialectic of CHAT. As such, we find the guiding principle of collaboration exhibited throughout the system of the writing center. From the students who visit our centers to the tutors and administrators who guide and support the work of the center, each plays an integral part in student learning, the development of the center, and in developing the theoretical underpinnings that justify our work.

In addition to the work mentioned here by Grimm and Welch that the recognition of a Vygotskian frame may operate as a way to view the social work of writing centers, Harris' call to action for sharing the work of writing centers embodies how the sociality and collaborative ethos of writing center work continues to grow. In fact, throughout the Theoretical Period, it is Harris' *Writing Lab Newsletter* that showcases her efforts to explain what writing centers do. Indeed, Harris' legacy still leads the way as we establish new ground and extend boundaries in writing center work.

For example, in the *Center Will Hold* (2003), Michael Pemberton's edited collection of articles in tribute to Muriel Harris, offers "an overview of Muriel Harris's continuing legacy and as a general framework for the writing center research that is yet to come" (Pemberton and Kinkead 2). Specifically noting Harris' groundbreaking contribution of the *Writing Lab Newsletter (WLN)*, Pemberton further illustrates in "The Writing Lab Newsletter as History"—



his solo contribution to the *Center Will Hold*—how Harris’ work helped develop the community of practitioners we recognize today. Further developing the guiding principle of collaboration, the *WLN* and Harris’ work embodies the organic growth of the writing center: Growth through collaboration. Hence, the *WLN* enables practitioners, to this day, to not only share anecdotal applications in writing center practices, but the publication also plays host to wide-ranging theoretical applications.

With some of the earliest examples (Steven North, Judith Fishman, Angela Scanzello, and William Stull among others), Pemberton and Kinkead argue that the *WLN* commanded respect for writing centers:

. . . the people who work in them will only come if they are well-read, well-trained, and willing to wage war on the battleground of theory for the pedagogies they believe are the most effective. . . [The *WLN*] facilitated communication and organization among its members, built a network of academics and professionals with similar interests, and provided a forum for discussions that helped to build both a professional identity for writing center specialists and agendas for future action. (Pemberton 30)

In fact, in 2000, Harris sums up the 1990’s and beginning of the Theoretical Period when she argues in “Preparing to Sit at the Head Table” that in order for us to sit at the “head table” so to speak, writing center practitioners must be versed in multi-disciplinary perspectives—what grounds their research and how that research also simultaneously relates to the work we do in the writing center. She writes:

. . . we will not only work with [student] writers, we will help our colleagues as well—in workshops, in consultations, in in-service training—in whichever format they meet with us, to learn how to respond to all of the writing these students will be turning in to

them—history papers, economics exams, biology reports, computer science proposals, engineering dissertations, and so on. (20)

Harris recognizes that our knowledge and cross-appropriation of discipline-specific research allows us to enter conversations across the academy, thus, further advancing Lunsford's application of the Burkean Parlor as a centerpiece of writing center work, but also establishing our ethos as partners in collaboration.

Through her work, Harris advances the important roles the work of Brooke and Murphy provide with their applications of psychoanalytics and social construction to define the writing center's work. These definitions help shape our praxis as we employ them to more fully develop our tutors. Similarly, the work of practitioners like Broder, Zelenak et al., and Morrow exemplifies how we sit at the head table. Through their work, we see how the field has moved from discussions of in-house anecdotes to a more formal explanation of praxes. These explanations provide a rationale for our praxes, but more importantly, they situate writing center work in the academy well-positioned to engage the discipline-specific areas Harris lists. Inherent in Harris' article and exemplified in each of the articles presented, specifically Grimm and Welch, is the central theme of collaboration and social construction, for, as the future of writing centers will discern, writing centers are places where the whole writing community interacts. In fact, Grimm and Welch's descriptions of activity plants the seed for a way in which CHAT may in fact, provide a frame through which we view, shape, and organize writing center work. In doing so, CHAT—as a framework for analyses—may be situated within the field of writing center studies as a theoretical perspective useful in moving the field forward.

### **WAC and Becoming a Hub of Activity**

Ede and Lunsford point to the future of writing centers in in 2000, in their *Writing Center Journal* article “Some Millennial Thoughts about the Future of Writing Centers”:

. . . centers offer new and productive ways of thinking about research paradigms and rewards. Rather than a model based on highly competitive individual research, writing centers foster team-based and collaborative research. . . such research aims less toward individual advancement and more toward programmatic and institutional improvement and, as a result, collapses the binary between theory and practice in particularly interesting ways. (35)

With institutional improvements and the binary between what writing centers do and the theoretical justification for those practices coalescing, writing centers in the new millennia have moved into the multidisciplinary milieu to further develop the collaborative nature of the center as an entity ready, willing, and able to engage in and share research. This, then, initiates and promulgates a full circle moment for the writing center movement: as a WAC hub across campus. Further, with the idea of laboratory writing, and ultimately writing centers, emerging through an activist ideology that continues today, the growth of the writing center demonstrates how practitioners’ activities have not only adopted the work of multiple disciplines, but in doing so, they have positioned themselves as de-facto representatives in organizing WAC activities. Keeping with an organic ethos of natural development, the writing center, representing Engeström’s maxim of reorchestrating voices, has developed the unique ability to engage conversations in education, communication, philosophy, the social sciences and more, thus, providing a mechanism for information and knowledge transfer. From their beginnings as an appendage of teaching composition by adopting laboratory methods, the writing center, through

years of organic development, has come full circle to now act as a hub of activity for Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) activities.

In fact, this opportunity has been recognized for some time beginning with Mark Waldo, in 1993, providing a preview of what he believes the future holds. In his *Writing Program Administration* article, “The Last Best Place for Writing Across the Curriculum”, Waldo claims that writing centers are “the most logical home for writing across the curriculum” (15), thus, outlining part of the process for developing writing centers as WAC hubs:

. . . centers [need to] provide a definable space for expertise, with identifiable goals and services, which the campus will need to initiate and sustain WAC. Second, through their varying services for faculty, they encourage the dialogue between diverse rhetorical communities. Finally, they offer a rhetorically neutral ground on which to carry out the program. (16)

The scholarship presented thus far demonstrates how writing center practitioners have created spaces for nuanced expertise across the disciplines. Indeed, this space has been developing since the late nineteenth-century with guiding principles of providing a welcoming, technology-driven space at the helm of activity. In that space, student-centered, collaborative learning with flexible teachers helping students navigate the waters of their individual learning is offered. Moreover, the flexibility of writing center practitioners has initiated the process of engaging the “the dialogue between diverse rhetorical communities” (Waldo 16). Though there is still much work to do in engaging communities across campus, the work of writing center practitioners demonstrates how they have engaged the larger community of academe through a cross-appropriation of techniques, philosophies, and practices from the community at-large; thereby, placing writing center praxis in the context of rich theoretical perspectives. Further, engaging

faculty, campus-wide, by offering workshops or serving as a practical pre-teacher development program also helps develop the center as that “rhetorically neutral ground” which Waldo recognizes as a place from which we might engage the larger academic community.

This is part of the future of the writing center that unfolds in this era, for if the center is to provide a space for WAC, they must have expertise in varying fields to continue, expand, and develop dialogue. Waldo contends “having a tutoring staff experienced and versatile enough to work with students from any class at any level” is essential for the modern-day writing center (23). Waldo recognizes the guiding principle of flexibility in the writing center must be a central component of the center as a WAC hub. Further, Waldo argues that hiring an “eclectic staff” provides the center a “theoretical frame independent of discipline for its practice, a frame that gives tutoring, workshop, and consulting activities research legitimacy” (24). Waldo’s language, juxtaposed with the marginal amount of scholarship from across the disciplines I have presented in this chapter, articulates the expanding writing center boundaries as practitioners exercise fluency in theoretical pedagogy and practices that have influenced their work.

For example, Kate Chanock from La Trobe University builds onto the previously mentioned scholarship of Brooke, Murphy, Lunsford, et al. In 2002, Chanock reports in her article for the *WAC Journal*, “How a Writing Tutor Can Help” how cross-disciplinary collaboration, coupled with non-directive approaches, can lead to noticeable transfer of knowledge. She suggests “there is nothing private about the models of a discipline’s discourse community; they may be internalized, and they may be tacit, but they are held communally and they can be articulated. . . a student can learn more by having to explain the topic . . . than she would by having it explained to her” (118-122). This assumption showcases how applications of theoretical underpinnings of the social sciences, particularly social construction and

psychoanalysis, or transference through non-directive questioning, assists students not only in writing center activities but across the curriculum as well. Work in the writing center helps students from across the curriculum not by imitating the literary practices of a discourse community, but by “draw[ing] out the students’ latent knowledge of how things are done in . . . the classes they are in” so they may transfer information from one context to another (115). Thus, practitioner’s demonstrable expertise may encourage dialogues across the disciplines from the neutral ground of the writing center.

Further, Chanock continues her work in 2004 with “A Shared Focus for WAC, Writing Tutors, and EAP.” She trusts that transfer not only occurs with students through her work as a writing center consultant, but her work may also lead to transfer to writing teachers across the disciplines. Chanock states “I would like to suggest that routines developed in individual writing consultations can be transferred to classroom teaching to address the problem of purpose at both the generic and discipline-specific levels” (20). Thus, Chanock sees the writing center not only as a place where students may gain transferrable knowledge useful in contexts across the disciplines, but she also sees the center as a flexible place where pre-teachers may gain valuable, transferable knowledge as well. It is precisely this flexibility that has been in place in writing center work for well over one hundred years at this point and which leads Catherine Sacchi to argue in her 2006 *Young Scholars in Writing* article that “flexibility and student-centeredness make a writing tutoring session effective . . .” (52). Thus, relating two of the guiding principles established during the Formative Period, these two writers demonstrate how a student-centered approach and an adherence to flexibility continue to morph by reaching across the disciplines to meet the standards of the times.

Heather M. Robinson and Jonathan Hall of York College, part of the CUNY system, also follow this logic in their 2014 *WAC Journal* article “Connecting WID and the Writing Center: Tools for Collaboration” writing “the roles of WAC/WID and of writing centers appear to be complimentary . . .” (30). It may be no surprise then, that, when developing their Discipline- and Assignment-specific Tutoring Tools (DATT), i.e. creating one-page statements such as “Infosheets” or “Guided Paper Starters” housed in a writing center kiosk and available to students, tutors at York College also “participat[ed] in the production of these materials by examining them and helping the writing fellows adapt them for the writing center context to help focus the resources on their students’ problem areas in a particular assignment or course” (33). These tools directly involve pre-teachers in the writing center in the development of strategic writing devices they may transfer to their classrooms, but they also further bridge multi-disciplinary faculty members and the writing center as the center becomes a central location for writing activities.

With writing center work situated within WAC discussions, the idea of laboratory work in composition, starting out as an appendage of composition work, continues the great organic, composition activist experiments of the late 1800’s. The growth of the writing center during the Modern and Theoretical Periods has exploded with practitioners bringing theoretical applications ranging from education, medicine, the social sciences, or communication and rhetoric into the fold of their study. In doing so, practitioners have used those theories to help mediate contradictions found in current writing center practices. This type of work is inherently activist and will surely continue well beyond the scope of this project into the next era of the center as it becomes a site for new and exciting activist initiatives. Not only will the writing center host student writers who need assistance with their undergraduate writing courses or graduate course

work; and not only will centers host student and faculty workshops, they may also play host to a wide-range of campus initiatives focused on inclusion of community members that include not only the campus community but the larger community surrounding the university. Thus, the writing center movement will continue to model new approaches to teaching and activist work. Moreover, through their activity practitioners will also continue to develop new approaches to developing future teachers across the disciplines. The organic ethos of experimentation and collaboration that radiates from the writing center may situate the center as a place that informs practices across the disciplines. We see this occurring with the center's inclusion in WAC discussions, but there may be broader implications for writing center activists as we continue to engage the academic community.

### **Assessment in The Theoretical Period**

In her 2017 article titled "Toward a Rhetoric of Labor" in *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, Liliana M. Naydan, Associate Professor of English at Penn State Abington, argues that the multi-disciplinary work found in the writing center provides practitioners opportunities to reconfigure perceptions of writing on campus. Occupying a space such as that which Waldo envisions, Naydan argues "writing center practitioners are well positioned by way of the attention that they inherently pay to language to reconstitute their identities: to re-envision themselves and their colleagues as poised to engage in activist rhetoric and live lives as academic activists" (29). As a new era in writing center development begins to emerge, we are reminded the work found in modern-day writing centers has always been activist work. When it was introduced, laboratory work was new and pushed against the status-quo. This activity has only continued throughout the ages beginning with the Formative Period and the development of guiding principles; the Clinical Period's efforts at redefining the working praxis; the Modern



Period, which solidified the center as neutral space on campus; and the Theoretical Period, which grounds writing center work in rich theoretical contexts, thus, ushering in an era of cross- and multi-disciplinary collaboration through WAC activities.

Working within an activist frame, then, in this section, I employ Naydan's consideration of noted assessment researcher Brian Huot and his equation of "assessment with 'progressive social action' because of its power 'to disrupt existing social order and class systems'" (35). With the writing center becoming a hub of activity for WAC activities, and as the center is recognized as an activist space rich with a history in mediating contradictions, this work provides practitioners at least a modicum of credibility as practitioners begin to model and set parameters for the assessment of our work in the writing center. Providing a discussion on assessment as a nexus from which positions on systems evaluation emerges, in this section, I survey literature on writing center and writing assessment as a way to situate writing center assessment activities within the frame of CHAT, which may lead writing centers to share the universal approaches of assessment—through the lens of CHAT—across campus.

To begin, Neal Lerner observes, in his article "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the 'Proof' of Our Effectiveness" that another contradiction for writing center activity exists. He argues: "Two words that haunt writing center professionals are 'research' and 'assessment'" (58). Lerner's work here reflects a growing concern for writing centers as well as academic departments across the disciplines—especially in the humanities and more specifically writing courses—about accountability. In his article, Lerner argues "it is important to think broadly of writing center outcomes, not in terms of the narrowest measures . . . but in terms of such things as students' development as writers and success as college students, as well as the ways the writing center contributes to the professional development and future success of its tutors" (67).

With ‘outcomes’ a central component of CHAT, Lerner’s argument seeks assessment measures that not only evaluate how students leave the writing center more capable students, but he also aims to encourage the development of holistic assessment measures. Thus, with a historian’s eye, Lerner informs his readers by surveying literature on writing centers’ approaches to assessing writing center work.

Beginning with Mary Lamb’s survey of 56 writing centers in 1981, Lerner notes Lamb identified “six ‘methods of evaluation’” including “basic statistics . . . questionnaires or surveys of students and faculty . . . pre- and post-tests . . . follow-up reports of students’ grades who used the center . . . external evaluations . . . [and] reports of staff publications and professional activities” (60). Reviewing Lamb’s findings, it is clear to see that not much has changed in the way centers currently evaluate their work. Nonetheless, to address more contemporary questions regarding assessment, Lerner also reviews Stephen Newmann’s “Demonstrating Effectiveness” and his own “Counting Beans and Making Beans Count.” Attempting to determine if students who attend the writing center receive higher grades than those who do not, and though Lerner and Newmann both found that students at the low end of SAT scores and who attended the writing center did better than those students who did not attend the writing center, Lerner notes “tying writing center effects to FYC grades is troubling territory when we really do not know for sure if the grade is a fair assessment of the goals that the writing center holds for its student visitors” (“Writing Center” 63). In other words, consistency, therefore, reliability, and consequently validity, would be difficult to attain with the presence of variables such as different goals for different sections of FYC as well as the varying degrees by which instructors evaluate FYC students.

Nonetheless, Lerner provides a list of assessment basics: “1) keep track of who participates, 2) assess student needs, 3) assess student satisfaction, 4) assess campus environments, 5) assess outcomes, 6) find comparable institution assessment, 7) use nationally accepted standards to use, and 8) assess cost-effectiveness” (64). Much of what Lerner lists here are local variables including campus environments and cost-effectiveness, and most on the list can be achieved through data collection. However, assessing outcomes seems to be the most problematic, hence, the issue of considering outcomes more broadly. With a CHAT frame in mind, outcomes manifest as the long-term effects of writing center work after the achievement of core objectives. In other words, once developed objectives of the system are met, the realization of that activity affects the larger activity of the center’s subject i.e. developing writing proficiency leads to more active students, tutor development leads to more developed teachers, and so on.

To this end, Lerner argues “goals themselves can often be broadened to include not just our effect on student writers, but our effect on the entire institution. Such is the strategic work of making writing centers central to the conversation about writing at our institutions . . .” (“Writing Center” 68). Therefore, developing our assessment and larger body of work through the frame of CHAT and bringing writing center work, specifically in assessment, into the fold of macro system conversations may serve as a model for the broader academic community. For instance, through developing their work, writing center practitioners may play a central role in helping other departments across campus in identifying outcomes they wish to achieve. For the center, this means developing holistic self-assessment practices that not only measure immediate successes or failures of the writing center but also determine what the long-term effects of writing center work may be for students, tutors, and the university at-large.

Assisting the center in reaching across the university, Isabelle Thompson argues in her 2006 *Writing Center Journal* article “Writing Center Assessment: Why and a Little How” adheres to the notion of realizing outcomes arguing that developing an assessment plan should emphasize progress as opposed to short-term successes. In doing so, she follows a model of programmatic assessment provided by O’Neal, et al. in their 2009 book *A Guide to College Writing Assessment*. With “the most common methods include surveys, interviews, analysis of teaching materials, analysis of student writing, and teaching observations” (O’Neal, et al. 119), Thompson, in addition to gathering usage data, records sessions and conducts interviews with students and tutors before and after sessions to gather data on each’s reflections of the tutorial session. This provides her data that assists in developing tutor development procedures that will then aid tutors in identifying what to look for in student behavior or identifying student needs. Thompson’s analysis of teaching materials and practices by the tutor also help her determine what is most useful for her tutors as they engage their student visitors. Assessment practices Thompson employs are uniformly and universally applicable to writing situations and programmatic assessments across the disciplines.

Additionally, she argues that, though assessments are a responsibility, mandated assessments may “become an impetus for change, a vehicle for testing established practices and conducting meaningful research, and a means for gaining as well as using power” (53). Through the process of developing her local assessment measures, Thompson employs widely applicable standards of assessment that myriad disciplines may similarly employ in their program or student assessments. Surveys, interviews, an analysis of teaching materials and student writing as well as conducting teaching observations or facilitating focus groups are universal approaches to assessment all departments may employ. Further, through her work, Thompson illustrates what

Ed White suggests when he says the key for assessment is that it is “creative and varied” (“The Changing” 110). Thompson exemplifies this maxim as she has engaged mandated assessment creatively so that she can develop her processes of assessment which responds to her local context. Again, the ideas of “creative and varied” and local assessment measures are adoptable to all academic departments.

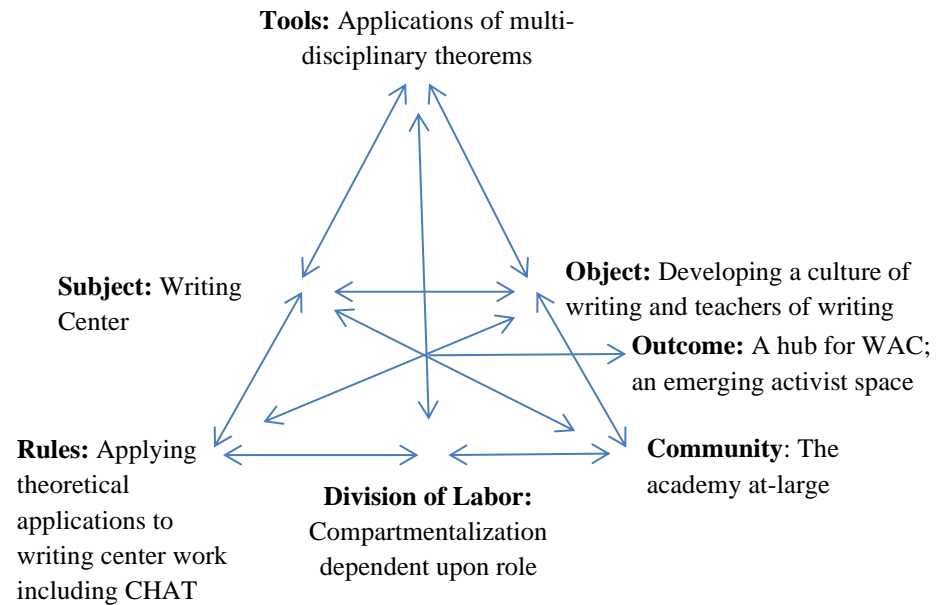
Also following the model of programmatic assessment set forth by O’Neal, et al. and Ed White, in 2013, Rita Malenczyk explores what she sees “as a community-building function—of the client report” (1). In “‘I Thought I’d Put That in to Amuse you’: Tutor Reports as Organized Narrative”, Malenczyk argues that conference summaries may operate as a form of evaluation for the effectiveness of a center. She claims “tutor reports are not just exchanges between the tutor and one or more people but are, rather, part of an institutional network of relationships, given that a writing center is typically part of a larger educational context, be it (again) a school, college, or university” (75). In her article, she suggests that studying conference summaries of session reports may, in fact, lead to assessing the center. She argues: “Studying the tutors’ narratives, I felt, would give me an insight not only into what the tutors were experiencing but also into how the center was being administered—since writing center administration includes not only tutor education and development but also public relations . . .” (77). Mark Hall also argues that the evaluation of session reports provide “multiple opportunities over time to develop critical habits of mind that encourage them to reflect on practices in the moment, then when tutoring isn’t working, to innovate new, more effective strategies, based on a sound theory of teaching and learning grounded in research” (45). In fact, Hall employs CHAT as a way for writing consultants to evaluate their work, and for both Hall and Malenczyk, developing ways to evaluate the effectiveness of their centers create precedent. In other words, session reports may

also determine how the director directs their center. Through evaluating their tutor's conference summaries, Malenczyk and Hall also evaluate their own strategies for developing their tutors. Hence, this mechanism for self-evaluation may also set precedent for other departments as each may encourage reflective reports from their students, faculty or staff.

To this end, Dana Lynn Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue argue in their 2012 article "Theory, Lore, and More: An Analysis of RAD research in the Writing Center Journal, 1980-2009" that when we "better represent the efficacy of our practices [through replicable and aggregable data: RAD] and if we are to influence the way that we teach and talk about writing across the disciplines, we must speak a common research language, one that allows others from both within and outside of our field to retrace our steps and to test our claims" (36). For example, when we see that assessment is largely localized, accordingly, we may also broadcast the usefulness of measures or frameworks we use for other centers or across the academic network of systems. For example, in their follow-up to "Theory, Lore, and More" Driscoll and Perdue argue in "RAD Research as a Framework for Writing Center Inquiry" that "the data we collect on said practices would be of use to [Writing Center Administrators] WCAs in many institutional settings" (122). Embodying the crux of all things assessment with data being replicable and aggregable, the holistic nature of writing center assessment Lerner envisions and which CHAT may embody, may also be of use across the disciplines specifically in WAC campuses or where graduate students or pre-teachers are developed.

Finally, when evaluating our centers, we might also keep in mind Peter Elbow’s article “Good Enough Evaluation.” In 2012’s *Writing Assessment in the 21st Century*, a book dedicated to the work of Ed White, Elbow writes: “Like White, we can try to use the calculus of need versus harm. Are there conditions where we need some kind of judgement strongly enough and where the danger of untrustworthy results is reduced enough that it is worth going forward with the evaluation?” (321).

Through the maxim of “need versus harm” writing centers and academic departments across the disciplines



**Figure 12:** The developing Writing Center Activity System (WCAS) at the end of the Theoretical Period operates as WAC hub and an emerging activist space.

can develop and employ assessment measures based on need while simultaneously developing measures that work to, as accurately as possible, evaluate the work of the center or department. And with writing centers at the center of assessment discussions across campus, who better to model the maxim?

Considering the discussion presented here, much of what Lerner provides still informs our writing center assessment, and that work is itself reflected in Elbow’s use of the White maxim “need versus harm.” Measures like those employed by Lerner are also reflected in Thompson, Malenczyk, and Driscoll and Perdue’s work. Data collection and student surveys are

standard practice, and with modern-day technology and software, the collection of data has become much more user-friendly. However, in her contribution to the 2012 book *Building Assessment That Matters*, Ellen Schendel also facilitates focus groups not only for writing center users, but also focus groups that gain valuable feedback from faculty who also inform the center's practices (129-30). Focus groups of faculty may, in fact, provide writing centers with valuable information, but they may also serve the larger institution when academic departments across the spectrum employ the same measures for evaluating their work. Doing so develops the rich, collaborative university settings we find reflected in writing centers across the spectrum of educational settings.

## **Conclusion**

Using CHAT, then, as the frame from which we identify disharmonious practices or tensions in our systems, may be the first step as practitioners begin to develop assessment measures for writing center activities. Focusing on the subject, objectives—including the tools used in achieving them—and outcomes of writing center assessment, CHAT may serve as the holistic frame Lerner and others seek in writing center assessment. Additionally, an employment of CHAT may be another way in which writing centers can continue to shape the discussion of writing on campus and how we might share our work with disciplines across campus.

During the Theoretical Period, rich multi-disciplinary, multi-voiced bodies lend their perspectives to develop the work of writing center praxes as the field continues developing as a writing center activity system. Illustrated in Figure 12, applications of theoretical perspectives from across the disciplines have helped shape the practices writing centers employ today as the center now begins the process of moving into a leadership role for adopting and shaping a culture of writing across campuses. While cross-appropriation and an adoption of practices has been a



rule and recurring theme throughout the development of the writing center activity system, it is from such communicable conditions that this project suggests it may provide an opportunity to pay that work forward.

While the field of writing center work has gleaned best practices from across the curriculum to shape their work and become a hub for WAC activities, practitioners can now employ CHAT—as an embodiment of the multi-voiced theorems employed in writing center praxes—to their own work, and in doing so, modelling its use as a other micro-(discipline-specific) or even macro-system analyses. Using and sharing the Vygotskian system of analysis then becomes a return on the work writing centers have employed from across the disciplines and which have helped create and inform the writing center praxes. When the writing center is viewed as a hub of writing activity on university campuses, the multi-voiced and social attributes of CHAT provide a frame that may be of use across the disciplines in multiple settings. Specifically, using CHAT as a frame through which practitioners assess their departmental activities may be modelled by writing center practitioners who employ CHAT as a frame for activity analyses. Through the collaborative nature of the work writing practitioners have engaged over the last 100-plus years, writing centers have always been situated within a collaborative frame; however, with the emergence of CHAT as an employable, albeit nuanced, frame for analysis in recent years, it may be time to apply the frame many practitioners like Grimm have alluded to in their discussions . . . not only as a framework for analysis, but to situate the writing center as an activist space on campus.

Chapter Six:  
An Emerging Activist Space

**Introduction**

Today, activist standpoints in the writing center continue to unfold in new and dynamic ways. Articulated in Liliana M. Naydan's "Toward a Rhetoric of Labor Activism in College and University Writing Centers" writing centers exist as a place for rearticulating writing on campus, but the neutral space of the writing center is also positioned as a fertile space for engaging conversations about equity. Figure 12 represents how a new activist space may be emerging, for, as Naydan argues, "writing center workers who are concerned about labor conditions must combat detrimental elitist attitudes that accompany the intelligent worker status that in many cases inherently accompanies academic jobs, be these jobs in or beyond writing centers" (33). Hence, as writing center practitioners have become part of the academic culture through sheer tenacity and sustainable, collaborative efforts, modern-day practitioners are those who may be equally qualified to engage conversations about equality—not solely exclusive to labor issues—in the writing center and across campuses. Such expansive initiatives may include WAC programs, assessment facilitation, or committees to address labor or racial inequities on campus. Recognizing the writing center as an active and activist space through the lens of CHAT leads current scholarship to continue those activist traditions found in the original structure of laboratory teaching's beginnings: those which have led to the development of guiding principles, mediated contradictions found within its own paradigmatic shifts, and which have culminated with the writing center's presence in WAC activities.

Relative to Naydan, writing practitioners today continue to broaden the scope of their Burkean parlor conversations about writing on campus. For example, in her 2015 article, "A

Place to Begin: Service Learning Tutor Education and Writing Center Social Justice”, Lisa Zimmerelli argues for “service learning tutor education as a rich site for social justice work as it helps us—and our tutors—take the conceptual and theoretical framework of antiracism education and apply it to the day-to-day of writing center praxis” (63). In fact, today, conversations hosted and initiated through the writing center may focus on writing activities that are as wide-ranging and varied as the diverse populations that make up the campus community. Discussions ranging from developing writing assessment measures to professional development of pre- or seasoned teachers and professors or the inclusion of underrepresented student and faculty populations continue to present themselves as opportunities for writing centers to develop and disseminate their ethos of collaboration and inclusion across the campus.

For example, as literacy sponsors, writing centers can reach across disciplinary boundaries to engage the campus community, as well as the larger surrounding community, in developing and promoting literacy initiatives. For Lori Salem, her examination of over 400 writing centers discloses how the politics of the academy not only influences the writing center, but she also uncovers how the writing center influences politics of the campus community—and beyond. In her 2014 *Writing Center Journal* article, “Opportunity and Transformation: How Writing Centers are Positioned in the Political Landscape of Higher Education”, Salem argues “writing centers clearly serve institutions in their efforts to compete in a stratified university system. Writing centers allow universities to signal the kind of literacy they sponsor, and they give universities a concrete venue for operationalizing institutional goals and agendas. These are potential sources of strength for our field” (37). As such, working within an activist frame, the writing center is situated to address extra-curricular initiatives including such far-reaching issues as equity found in university settings and which may affect the surrounding university

communities: “For the writing center movement to grow and for it to make good on the social justice agenda that many writing center specialists embrace, we will need to . . . find ways to re-think and re-imagine ways our pedagogies” (Salem 38). To this end, Richard Sévère hopes in his 2018 contribution to *Out in the Center*, a collection of articles devoted to addressing the diversity writing centers might explore in this new generation of the academy, that “writing center scholars and practitioners will continue to seek out the narratives that further complicate the existing discourse on identity politics in writing centers” (50). For Sévère, this means specifically addressing how our bodies may create or exhibit power dynamics between consultants and students in the writing center.

Part of such addressing such a contradiction, re-thinking or re-imagining, may begin with writing consultant development as Beth Godbee, Moira Ozias, and Jasmine Kar Tang argue in their 2015 article, “Body + Power + Justice: Movement-Based Workshops for Critical Tutor Education.” These practitioners believe the body houses and exposes our histories, and to address the histories imbued in and displayed by those bodies we must routinely address and be aware of those histories to engage in and re-direct our engagement with diverse campus communities: “Drawing attention to the body across these three spheres [the personal, relational, and systemic] helps us counter the damage done when the intellect or institution is divorced from the body or when certain bodies are made invisible in our educational spaces” (62). In other words, examining how our bodies of intertextuality, representing the systems from which they have emerged, may create dissonance in our engagement with diverse student populations may lead to new forms of engagement and empathy. While much of the dissonance may be unrecognizable from the perspective of the writing consultant, this lack of awareness is exactly what Godbee et al. aim to address in their Movement-Based Workshops. They argue: “Centering

the body can help us re-examine, re-envision, and rehearse interventions into educational inequities . . . This requires that tutor education engage with issues of identity and power, as well as the material conditions of language, learning, and writing” (62). For these writers, “critical tutor education acknowledges the importance of our bodies and spaces as sites for knowledge-making in order to more fully understand the intersecting and systemic nature of people’s lived experiences with literacies and learning” (62-63). With such critical development of writing consultants at the forefront of writing center professional development initiatives, Godbee et al. situate their activities within the framework and language of Naydan’s charge that writing center practitioners can “shape education and professionalism in their most influential and inspiring forms as always already activist enterprises that seek to change the status quo” (35).

To illustrate how today and tomorrow’s writing center practitioners may embody, represent, or model the work of Naydan, Salem, and Godbee et al. and (re)envision their work, I offer this chapter as an analysis of Nancy Grimm’s contribution to *Writing centers and the New Racism*, a book dedicated to addressing how writing centers may meet Victor Villanueva’s challenge “to examine the language, rhetoric, and material reality of racism that shapes our work” (1). Using Grimm’s article, I employ the lens of CHAT to illustrate how Grimm re-theorizes her work and articulates a pathway forward for her colleagues. With the continuation of CHAT as a tool used to identify how modifications in writing center praxes has emerged, changed, and developed over time, I use CHAT to demonstrate how the model may also be applied to retheorizing and developing local writing centers. The lab has always been a place for experimentation where self-regulation occurs organically; thus, this chapter also advocates CHAT as a tool for writing center self-evaluation. As the writing center experiment continues—with this chapter’s application of CHAT to Grimm’s “Rethorizing”—this project argues that

CHAT may provide practitioners a useful tool which will allow them to evaluate the activity of their workplace and mediate contradictions, tensions, or disharmonious practices found in their locale.

Further, using Grimm's article continues to demonstrate how CHAT may be applied to writing center and writing center related scholarship to reveal contradictions within a writing center context or frame. This time, however, Grimm's article specifically calls for readers to identify contradictions in modern conceptualizations of writing center practice and to also retheorize how those practices may be modified to address racial inequities promoted through writing center work. Therefore, this project's analysis of Grimm's article ties the CHAT model of analysis to contemporary contexts as today's writing center practitioners may identify similar contradictions in their writing center systems. This activity, then, continues to apply the Engeström maxim that "identification of contradictions in an activity system helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems" (Engeström "Activity Theory" 966). Therefore, with this chapter's final CHAT analysis of Grimm's work, this project aims to offer a model for identifying and isolating activities which may disturb writing center activity systems; thus, the model may provide a way for practitioners to more easily identify and mediate those contradictions and change the center's everyday workplace actions.

### **A CHAT Analysis Application**

With Nancy Grimm's contribution to 2011's *Writing Centers and the New Racism*, she re-examines long-established practices in writing center methodology. In her article, "Rethorizing Writing Center Work to Transform a System of Advantage Based on Race", Grimm argues for "the need to look more closely at ourselves instead of others, particularly to examine the extent to which our writing center was based on assumptions about language,

literacy, and learning that privilege white mainstream students” (75). In her call to challenge assumptions about writing center practices—as they relate to addressing racial inequalities in writing center praxis—Grimm retheorizes our practices, some of which have been strongholds of the writing center model, to offer a way forward as practitioners may begin to more adequately address a diverse student body.

For example, one principle of writing center methodology Grimm views as a contradiction includes the motto that centers *provide individual instruction to students*. Once examined through the Villanueva notion that covert racism takes place on campus, this focus on *the individual*, thus, excludes the student from group inclusion (Villanueva 6). For Grimm, this represents a contradiction in the writing center activity system. She supposes we could continue with the status quo, or we could begin asking *why*. Here, Grimm’s reflections serve as a model for CHAT analysis because she sees the contradictions in her system, and she sees they may interrupt achieving objectives of the writing center system. Therefore, she argues that through retheorizing writing center work, “writing center scholars can rethink the *why* of writing center work, in other words . . . we can examine the extent to which our theoretical discourse focuses on individuals rather than on the rapidly changing social contexts that create communication challenges, and then we find alternative ways to theorize” (78). With her argument, Grimm reflects the edicts of CHAT analysis: identifying contradictions and mediating those contradictions that will lead to new conceptualizations of practice. Through her article, then, Grimm places the onus of identifying contradictions in practice onto current writing center practitioners, who likely face the same sets of conditions on their campuses and in their centers, for those principles she distinguishes as contradictory are also widely adopted practices.

For Grimm, if practitioners are to retheorize and replace the contradiction of an individual structure guiding writing center work, there must be a defined social structure for learning that can replace the individualized model. She argues for adopting a social model of learning: “A truly social model of learning should alter our understanding of why we do the work we do; it should change the language we use to describe our work; it should shift the focus of what we aim to change away from individual students and toward the social structure” (81). With this, Grimm extends the contradictions she finds in the individualized writing center praxis, for the focus on the individual is imbued in other writing center mottos. For example, in the adage that “good tutors make the student do all of the work” Grimm finds another contradiction. As all students learn differently, a one-size fits all motto is problematic. Suggesting the student only needs reminders about what to do suggests students understand the work to be done, thus, undermining the work of the writing center. Simultaneously, the idea that tutors should not write on student papers, despite the thorough education processes consultants go through as they begin their work in the center, is particularly baffling. Such practices may undermine the consultant’s efforts in providing students as much information or ideas that may model the language or literacies expected in the academy. Further, for Grimm, this “motto protects the ideology of individualism that operates in higher education” (83). Such a contradiction appears to go against the grain of Grimm’s social learning definition by further promoting the isolation of community members in what should be an otherwise collaborative environment.

Further, Grimm finds another contradiction in the writing center motto that “the ultimate aim of a tutorial is an independent writer” (85). Continuing her recognition of individualist contradictions in a system designed for collaboration, Grimm sees a semantic clash with the word *independent*. For example, if students who go to the writing center are labelled as



*dependent*, they may be less likely to go to the writing center. The stigmatization that comes from labelling students as *independent* furthers academic elitist stratifications, for if students seek independence, they must first realize they are dependent upon the writing center for help. Grimm suggests *interdependence* may be a more acceptable term than independent because “most social groups would benefit from more dialogic rather than independent thinking” (86). With the dialogue that writing centers regularly offers students, the interdependence suggested by Grimm offers a possible way forward in retheorizing the work of centers. Again, asking *why* writing centers employ terms they use to describe their work may reveal more recognizable contradictions. Thus, reasons for more suitable interpretations of writing center work become clear as new descriptors may invite more diverse populations of students to the center. Hence, Grimm suggests an alternative: “Depicting regular writing center users as hard workers rather than people who ‘need help’ would also create a more hospitable environment for students of color who may avoid writing centers because of . . . the concern that they will reinforce negative stereotypes of their race by making use of resources designed for people who ‘need help’” (87). For Grimm, the goal is to move away from an academic elitist model of privilege, which may have become part of the writing center as it has gained a more integral status in the university’s mission. Thus, it is with an activist spirit that Grimm’s arguments take a prominent role in the continuing development of the writing center as a welcoming environment for all students, faculty, and community members.

With her final noticeable contradiction, Grimm points to the Bruffee motto of writing centers making better writers not better writing. For Grimm, this represents another slogan perpetuating individualism as it shifts blame squarely on the shoulders of the student and not the community to which the student belongs. In other words, it is the student’s fault they did not

meet the professor's expectations. It is not the writing consultant's fault the student did not heed their advice, nor is it the professor's fault the student has not progressed to the professor's expected levels of mastery. This contradiction of equity is particularly unsettling when considering second language students. Grimm notes "those who communicate in more than one language environment learn to read social contexts to identify expectations, and they develop attitudinal resources . . . that contribute to their ability to communicate across differences in culture, language, social circumstances, and/or disciplinary expectations" (88). While writing centers are welcoming to all students, Grimm notices that the language her center uses may not encourage the access she wishes to see. Thus, through her identification of contradictions in her system, Grimm adheres to Engeström's view that the identification of contradictions helps practitioners establish root causes of problems. As demonstrated, Grimm's actions of asking *why* have led her to identify contradictions that she sees may limit access to her center. As such, she can begin mediating those contradictions as she retheorizes her actions to continue her center's growth.

While Grimm recognizes that structural change of the academy—moving from one that places value on independence rather than interdependence and holding the social entity accountable for student success—will require a substantial transformative period of time, she nonetheless, believes that "because writing centers operate on the boundaries of traditional curricular and pedagogical structures of schooling, they provide an excellent starting place for this transformation" (90). Such a notion of experimentation can be traced by to the very beginnings of the laboratory movement through the Formative, Clinical, Modern, and Theoretical periods of development I have presented throughout this project. Moreover, Grimm's actions embody Naydan's argument that the writing center may be the best place for activist

positions on campus. Naydan argues: “As writing center professionals reconstitute their identities to change dynamics involving academic freedom and shared governance at their respective institutions, they inevitably rework the narrative of their institutional histories as well as the narrative of writing center professionals broadly construed” (35). For Grimm, this means retheorizing how her writing center is run and exploring ways to develop participation among her center’s community members. To meet her objectives of more participatory action and creating an environment of accessibility, Grimm sees the urgent need to develop her consultant professionalization.

To counter those mottos Grimm identifies as contradictory, she begins her process of retheorizing by “fully incorporating undergraduate writing coaches into the decision making about coach education, about ways we represent and promote the center, about effective approaches to problematic situations. Thus, students of all racial identifies are involved in negotiating and establishing and revising practice” (94). Hence, professionalization as a tool in the system of activity is modified and expanded to meet the demands of the twenty-first century academy. By providing coaches to extend the practice of professionalization, each offer “all levels of information to share with students when they need it” (94). This developing community of practice is central to Grimm’s new theoretical approach, for her “writing center is clearly not an institutional program designed and run by white people, and this changes what students think they can expect from us in powerful ways” (94). Grimm believes increasing opportunities for participation further challenges the growth of the center, for newcomers will provide new contributions not yet considered; thus, the growth and experimentation of the center continues well into the twenty-first century and well over 100 years since it first started.

Such growth offers the writing center community of practice an ever-evolving ethos that will continue to bring newcomers to the table with more experienced community members where “there are no attempts to control or manage the powerful learning potential inherent in tutorial interaction with rules about who can or can’t hold the pencil or how many appointments a student is allowed to have” (Grimm “Retheorizing” 98). Such recognition of contradictions inherent in her system of activity allows Grimm to re-articulate and retheorize how her system operates. In doing so, she also provides a model for and a contemporary view of how writing center practitioners may also retheorize, re-imagine, or re-examine their writing center policies, structures, or participatory practices. Through the lens of CHAT, Grimm identifies contradictions that may interfere with the dialogic structure of her writing center. As a result, her analysis embodies how modern-day practitioners may also re-evaluate their praxis. Grimm argues there is “an ideology of individualism [that] not only shapes writing center discourse but also races writing center practice, making it inhospitable to students who are not white” (76). Thus, more complex issues are emerging in writing center studies, which require practitioners to engage in thoughtful and difficult conversations. Consequently, with writing center practitioners “poised to engage in activist rhetoric and live lives as academic activists” (Naydan 29), it may be useful to keep the dialectical nature of CHAT in mind as we engage contradictions in our writing center activity systems.

For Grimm, identifying contradictions has led her to make structural changes in her writing center’s professional development program. With her writing center objectives aimed at developing participation and providing accessibility to all students at all levels, she has identified and mediated the contradictions of individualism inherent in her guiding principles. By developing coaches as tools for newcomers and extending participation as rule to all participants

in the decision-making practices of the center, Grimm has re-articulated her activities and innovated “attempts to change the activity” (Engeström “Expansive Learning at Work” 137). Grimm’s example as a model for CHAT analysis opens the door for others to view their writing center praxis as something malleable and flexible. She broadens the community of her system, extends the perception of how tools may be employed to retheorize her work, re-defines her community of practice, and she engages her work from an activist’s point of view; thus, “the object and the motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity” (Engeström “Expansive Learning at Work” 137). In addition to demonstrating how CHAT may be used to examine scholarship and the burgeoning writing center praxis, this example of CHAT—through Grimm’s analysis and retheorizing—opens a pathway to possible scenarios that may emerge as practitioners engage the work of their local centers.

### **CHAT Analysis in Action**

For Liliana Naydan, the writing center not only exists as a place for rearticulating writing on campus, but she also sees the neutral space of the writing center as a fertile space for engaging conversations about equity. As demonstrated in Figure 12, a new activist space may be emerging, for, as Naydan argues, “writing center workers who are concerned about labor conditions must combat detrimental elitist attitudes that accompany the intelligent worker status that in many cases inherently accompanies academic jobs, be these jobs in or beyond writing centers” (33). Thus, as writing center practitioners have become part of the academic culture through tenacity and offering sustainable and collaborative efforts, our modern-day practitioners are those who may be equally qualified to engage conversations about equality in the writing center and across campuses. Illustrated in the Outcome from Figure 12, expansive initiatives may include WAC programs, assessment facilitation, or committees to address labor or racial

inequities on campus. Recognizing the writing center as an active and activist space through the lens of CHAT leads current practitioners to continue building upon those activist traditions found in the original structure of laboratory teaching's beginnings: those which have led to the development of guiding principles, mediated contradictions found within its own paradigmatic shifts, and which have culminated with the writing center's presence in WAC activities.

As I have tried to demonstrate in this project, the lab has always been a place for experimentation where self-regulation occurs organically; thus, it is with this section that I look to advocate CHAT as a tool for writing center self-evaluation. As the writing center experiment continues, CHAT may provide practitioners a useful tool which will allow them to evaluate the activity of their workplace and mediate contradictions, tensions, or disharmonious practices found in their locale. Through this activity, Engeström's work is most notable, for the "identification of contradictions in an activity system helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems" (Engeström "Activity Theory" 966). Thus, when we identify and isolate the activity causing a disturbance, practitioners may more easily mediate the tension to change the everyday workplace action of the writing center's local context. This section then provides examples—either purely hypothetical or created by piecing together collected fragments from memory—to illustrate or accentuate how practitioners may employ CHAT to develop their writing center activity.

### **Contradiction: A Missing System**

To begin, I start with a university or college setting that does not have a writing center. Looking at a boiler plate mission statement, it may read:

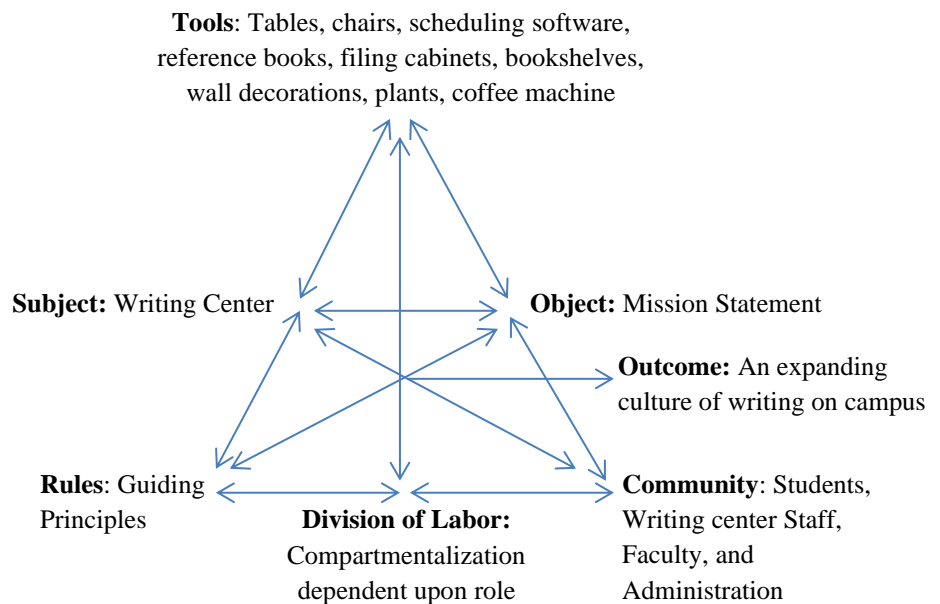
*The University is dedicated to student success by engaging and empowering students with the skills and knowledge to thrive in their personal lives and chosen fields of scholarship.*

*Specifically, we aim to provide a quality educational experience by offering high quality academics and innovative curriculum accessible to a diverse student population seeking leading-edge scholarly activities focused on student success.*

If this particular university does not have a writing center, we may argue that it, in fact, does not offer “leading-edge scholarly activities,” for a culture of writing may be marginal at the university. Further, it may be argued that the university does not offer “high quality academics” or “innovative curriculum” without a writing center to facilitate a culture of writing on campus. Thus, the activity system of the university is not fully-functioning as we see contradictions between the student and the university’s objectives in an original Vygotskian triad. However, placing a writing center in the triad as a mediating artifact or tool, the system develops to more fully engage the university mission statement and develop a culture of writing on campus. For Ed White, in order to develop a culture of writing on campus, we must “oversee a high-quality writing center as a resource for students and faculty writers” (“Testing In” 131). Thus,

beginning with a non-existent writing center allows us to build upon an original conception of how a writing center might adhere to our local needs and context.

Here, the development of a generic writing center begins. After



**Figure 13: A Writing Center Framework.**

the missing writing center contradiction is mediated, we must develop our community. Who are our students? Who are our faculty? Administrators? In short, who are all of the stakeholders within the university community that will benefit from the implementation of a writing center? At this point, we have begun developing our community for the writing center, so we may start developing our rules for the system. Plugging in the five guiding principles of writing center activity identified in this project is a start: the center is student-centered, collaborative, environmentally welcoming, technology drive, and flexible instruction by continually developed tutors is offered. We may also include, as part of our technology, some basic forms of assessment i.e. student surveys and the collection of demographics through on-line software also useful as scheduling software.

At this point, illustrated in Figure 13 we have framework for a developing writing center. Our subject is the university student while our objective includes the writing center mission statement:

*Our center promotes and supports research, writing, and writers throughout our diverse community through robust and ongoing development of our leadership, consulting staff, and graduate assistants. We seek programmatic sustainability to consistently engage a large and diverse multidisciplinary academic community. Further, we seek to cultivate relationships across campus to identify and respond to the writing concerns faced by undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and other members of our university community.*

Just as important in determining where tensions in the macro-system of the university lay, having a mission statement for the writing center is central for guiding the direction of our center. A fully developed mission statement for the writing center will help us articulate our directives, and



it will guide mediation of tensions found in the system. Our tools for the operation of the system will also continue to develop just as the rules will develop alongside our new tools. Similarly, the community will grow, and the division of labor will steer the outcomes of the system's growth.

### **Contradiction: Professional Development**

At this point, we have a new writing center on our campus, but some contradictions in the system begin developing. Teachers are not wholly satisfied with the returns of students who have visited the writing center, and some students are not happy with their tutors' expertise. This may lead the writing center administrator to begin the process of uncovering where the tensions exist. Exploratory efforts get underway with the administrator using system tools to evaluate feedback from student surveys and conferencing with faculty members across campus, thus, adhering to the tenet of our mission statement for cultivating *"relationships across campus to identify and respond to the writing concerns faced by undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and other members of our university community."* If our faculty and students are not seeing the results they wish to see, it is imperative we begin cultivating the relationships across campus in order to mediate any tensions found in the system. As is the case with any newly developed initiative, we may find that our tutors have not been developed adequately or at least not to the standards of our academic partners across campus. In this case, we may find through our discussions with faculty and students that the consulting staff is not consistent in their approach, or gaps exist from tutor to tutor. This may indicate the need for a more robust professional development program for our tutors.

Developing a professional development program for tutors ideally exists in the development of a credit-bearing course for tutors. However, this may not be feasible for many newly established writing center programs. In this case, there are options. First, adhering to our

guiding principles and enhancing our flexible instruction by continually developing tutors may help develop reading and discussion groups that provide tutors with pertinent and relevant perspectives on the art of collaborative tutoring. Adhering to the mission statement, offering tutors “*robust and ongoing development,*” while developing our “*programmatically sustainability*” is vital. Providing the consulting staff with reading and discussion groups offers them a way to encounter writing center work as a discipline in and of itself. Through such offerings, consultants may discover new ways of tutoring such as how to engage ESL students; use directive versus non-directive feedback; offer the question as a teaching tool; or use modelling as a tutorial approach. Learning more about the field of which consultants are a part will undoubtedly develop their teaching personae and as a result, their ethos as a tutor. Theoretically, this will enhance the ethos of the center; that is, if we can validate what happens in our reading and discussion groups. For this, using simple Likert scale surveys to determine the consultant’s satisfaction may be useful, but even more so, organizing focus groups to determine the program’s effectiveness may be more useful.

Nonetheless, while reading and discussion groups may help develop tutors who do not have the privilege of a tutor development course, it may do little to ease tensions found among the faculty. However, reading and discussion groups may also take the form of workshops. For example, writing an effective conference summary for the tutorial session could go a long way in developing the center’s ethos among curious faculty members. Combined with the conference summary, the reading discussion groups should inform tutors of current practices found within writing center scholarship. Once tutors have acquired some proficiency through discussing and applying new skills in their writing center work, they similarly gain proficiency in discussing how they use these strategies during conferences. With conference summaries distributed to the

student and faculty members (after student approval), faculty members realize tutors have developed teaching personas as they exhibit a fluency in applying writing center and teaching lexis. Following are some examples of conference summaries that exhibit such fluency.

**Session Summary 1:** *My student came in today to get a little direction with her researched assignment, so we started by talking about the content of her paper. I asked her to describe the content of her paper in order to get her to develop a thesis for her final copy. I suggested she think about her thesis as a claim and a stated reason, or a “because clause.” Once we discussed this for a while, we had identified some key ideas she might use to help her organize her paper. I suggested Carmen take some of these key points i.e. voter apathy, confusion, and so on and develop sections that discussed each of these in detail. To get her to do this, I asked her to take a few minutes to label or identify and mark in some way parts of her work that she could develop into sections. After we reconvened, I was ready to note that she would need to keep in mind the need to develop transitions between her sections; however, when we started talking, she had already identified sentences that could be used as transitional sentences. In fact, she had done this pretty consistently. I was impressed with her work. It was smart and thoughtful. Next steps were to complete a final, organized draft that we can talk about tomorrow morning.*

**Session Summary 2:** *My student brought in a draft of his researched argument to get some feedback on proofreading and integrating his source material. We started off our session by editing some of his work i.e. getting rid of wordy sentences, omitting “you” from his text, and just generally cleaning up the text to make it a little more concise. What I decided to do was model how to do some proofreading. I turned on the Track Changes option so we could see exactly what I was changing and why I was changing*

passages. I also explained why I was doing what I was doing while I was doing it. After I modelled some ways to make the text a little more concise, we looked at some of his source material that was integrated into his text. For the next 10 minutes or so, I asked him to do some editing on his own. After we reconvened, his changes were pretty well-done. He works well to find ways he can improve his text. My suggestions for our next session include continuing to edit his current text in the manner which we did today, and also do some editing to his previous parts in the same manner and bring those in after he has done some editing. This way, we can see exactly what he has changed and that he continues to look at this text as a concise and clearly stated piece of work. I think this was a good session. He works hard and has some solid determination to do well.

**Session Summary 3:** My student came in today to get some advice on developing her thesis statement and then ultimately, the organization of her paper. In order to start the process of helping her develop her thesis statement, I wanted to get a sense of what she thought about the two stories she was analyzing by Amy Tan. She narrated a synopsis of each, and I used this time to take notes. I noticed her pointing out the connection Tan was making to her mother as well as a possible latent connection to Tan's culture. After we talked for a couple of minutes to reflect on my observations, I asked her to write her thesis statement. She took about five minutes to do so. After I came back to the table, she had completed what I thought was a good start, so we talked a little more and I asked her to write again without the aim of creating a thesis statement. When I came back to the table after about 10 minutes, she had written quite a bit that she could actually use in the body of her paper. However, what I noticed was that the first part of her newly created text, along with her initial attempt at a thesis, could get cobbled together to make a thesis

*that covers Tan's connection to her mother and her latent connection to her culture expressed in these narratives by Tan. I also suggested the student mention in her thesis the literary devices she had mentioned during our discussion i.e. metaphor and imagery. This discussion of her thesis statement led our discussion down a path that covered how she might order her paper. I suggested she stick to the two parts noted in the assignment sheet and let her thesis statement guide her paper's organization.*

As mentioned, to mediate contradictions of transparency, each of these summaries demonstrate pedagogical fluency on the part of the consultant whether they refer to thesis development, editing processes, such as modelling, or organizational methods the student writer might employ. Further, when conference summaries are released to the instructor with student approval, they create a three-way conversation between the student, the tutor, and the instructor. In fact, the student receives reinforcement at multiple points—during the session, after the in-session writing component of the session, after they re-read the summary in an e-mail, and possibly from the instructor who may build upon the writing center's work. Thus, the work and conversation between the consultant and the student represented in each of these summaries also demonstrates how the center follows the guiding principles of the center: the work is student-centered in a welcoming environment; the work employs technology; and the work is flexible and collaborative. Additionally, the summaries reveal the long-standing relationships centers build with students. In other words, through these examples, the mission of the writing center becomes clear: It is not a one-stop fix-it shop. Rather, it is a place where continual work is the focus. Each summary represents the developed lexicon of the consultant as well as how a flexible formula may operate in the writing center. To this end, with discussion groups and workshops assisting tutors in developing their writing center lexis and consultation proficiency, tutors also

may also develop a flexible, valuable formula—such as that represented in these examples—that will guide their tutorials.

Workshops in organizing the timing of a session may also help consulting staff develop their ethos. If our center offers a standard 45 minute session for students, we might suggest framing our session with 10-15 minutes of initial discussion time to identify areas the student may focus, 15-20 minutes for students to engage in the work, and a final 10-15 minutes for reinforcement and wrapping up the session. Using non-directive questioning or simply using questions as a teaching tool, the initial discussion at the beginning of a session will engage the student in their work. Traditionally, it is not uncommon for students to believe they simply have grammar errors or “comma problems” when they come to the writing center. However, with some initial questions by the consultant, deeper and thus, more meaningful issues may be identified in the student’s work i.e. thesis statement development, organizational or development issues. This then allows the consultant an opportunity to focus the work students may engage during the next 15-20 minutes.

During the time that students conduct focused work identified during the initial conversation, the consultant sits close-by to monitor the students’ activity, but they do not sit idle. Instead, this is an opportunity for consultants to begin writing the conference summary. Exhibiting the fluency consultants have developed is continued with this practice. For example, the more strategies they employ, the more flexible they become as consultants. Further, the more flexible they become as consultants, the more they develop their pedagogical lexicon, and they begin to exhibit an expertise in their work. This not only helps them develop an ethos, but it adds to the ethos of the writing center. In turn, this also increases the likelihood that the credibility of

the center is seen to aid students, but it may be seen as an instrumental component of the university in sustaining a culture of writing on campus.

Finally, during the last third of a session, the student and consultant might reconvene to discuss the work the student has completed. This is a time for reinforcement and further consultation with the tutor recognizing strong points made by the student while also offering further considerations for the student's work. During this time, the consultant and student may also go over the summary that the consultant has completed, and they may even complete the summary together. This not only offers more reinforcement of the concepts covered during the session, but it may also offer an opportunity for modelling by the consultant. What this sort of session framework offers is guided instruction that is also flexible in nature. There is an unknown when the student arrives, but the focus resulting from the first 5-10 minutes helps direct the work of the session. Further, such work represents a rule for the center: the work is long-term; it is not a one stop quick fix.

What I have tried to cover in this section responds to the contradiction that there may be some misunderstanding of what happens in the writing center. However, by providing professional development for the tutors, it is possible to promote a writing center ethos among the campus community. This answers questions about what occurs during a session when students and faculty are able to receive copies of session summaries, but such reporting also helps dispel the myth that the writing center is a quick fix. Rather, such work establishes the center as a place for focused and continual work. This work in explaining and demonstrating what we do in the center is tantamount to broad outreach initiatives. While our central focus is providing robust instruction to our students from across campus, the residual effects are that we develop our tutors; thus, we develop our ethos. Some of the initiatives discussed here may be

plugged in to the system as tools i.e. professional development, workshops, and conference summaries; or they may more appropriately operate as rules: a flexible framework for guiding a session. Nonetheless, what each represents is the continual growth of an expansive system à la Engeström. Still, while each of these developments within the system represents growth, they also only mark a beginning for the mediation a system may take. While many of the changes noted here are procedural, there are more complex issues with which the center may ultimately need to contend.

## **Conclusion**

From the beginning of this project, my aim has been to illustrate how the modern-day writing center has developed over the last 100 plus years. Looking through the lens of Activity Theory has, I hope, provided a way to theorize and speculate how the writing center of today began to take shape. Major questions for my project have focused on identifying contradictions that may have existed in the ongoing development of writing center praxis and which—through a mediation of those contradictions—have provided opportunities for systematic growth. From the earliest writing laboratory experiments of the Formative Period that developed guiding principles to the challenges the Clinical Period brought to the field's body of scholarship, experimentation has been at the root of all things related to writing center work. In fact, while much of the work has changed from the beginning of the writing laboratory movement, still just as much has remained constant. Guiding principles established during the Formative Period still direct the work of the writing center, though, as demonstrated by Grimm, we see some of those principles getting modified to better navigate the waters of our twenty-first century student and governing university bodies.



Accordingly, it is through the application of CHAT analysis to writing laboratory and writing center work that I hope this project serves as a model for analysis. The hope of the work herein is that it imparts a usefulness of CHAT applications to writing center analysis to reveal how we may organize, plan, re-imagine, or retheorize our writing center work to meet the challenges of an ever-changing student body and an academic model that may, at times, seem disconnected from the bodies it serves. In Jackie Grutsch McKinney's 2013 book *New Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers*, she points to two developments in writing center lore to discuss how the writing center keeps moving forward to develop a culture of writing. For McKinney, with the development of the multiliteracy center and the comprehensive writing center (CWE), each embellishes how writing center practitioners might retheorize and promote writing center work. McKinney suggests that "in addition to peer tutoring for students, CWEs might have faculty workshops and retreats, campus events focused on writing, and instruction for improving the teaching of writing on campus" (90). Thus, with writing centers taking leadership roles in developing a culture of writing at the academy, it is important that practitioners begin to put into practice their awesome power to reshape and inform the academy. From the basis of writing center work—assisting students in developing their writing skills to developing pre-teachers or providing professional development opportunities for teachers across the curriculum as more and more campuses develop their WAC activities—the writing center is situated to articulate objectives for myriad missions.

To this end, CHAT analyses may help writing center practitioners in their pursuits as they take on the challenges of developing professional staff members from across the curriculum that may reinvent robust writing curricula in their specific disciplines. Writing center practitioners may also need to address communities of practice on campuses as those communities feel

marginalized. This certainly applies to students, but it may also apply to faculty members, for the writing center should operate as a safe place for collaboration, participatory action, and learning. It is through the lens of CHAT that practitioners may determine what objectives need to be met and through what mechanisms i.e. tools or artifacts those objectives may be achieved. CHAT may also allow practitioners to review rules and community members as they identify stakeholders in the activities undertaken. In the end, with this project, I have tried to model such analysis by taking readers through the process of writing center analyses from the very beginning of its inception all the way through its current state of unending experimentation.

With the analysis provided throughout this project, and more specifically with the Grimm analysis provided in this chapter, my hope is that this work illustrates the feasibility of using a CHAT framework to analyze current writing center contradictions. Whether practitioners are looking to develop a writing center on their campus or if they have an established practice and they wish to embellish attributes of the center, using the CHAT framework for analysis may be useful in building a center that provides access to an ever-changing student body or challenges the corporate dynamics of the twenty-first century university. With the writing center poised as an activist space on campus, practitioners are well-positioned to use CHAT as a mechanism as Fodrey et al. argue in their 2019 *Composition Forum* article, “Activity Theory as Tool for WAC Program Development”, that might “encourage collaboration with a hope that this will instill cohesion in how writing is taught across campus” (1). Further, as Ed White argues in his 2008 *Writing Program Administration* article “Testing and Testing Out” in order to develop a culture of writing on campus, we must “oversee a high-quality writing center as a resource for students and faculty writers” (131). For Fodrey, et al. and many others, when a culture of writing may be marginal at the university, the activity system of the university is not viewed as a fully

functioning activity system. However, placing a writing center in the Vygotskian triad as a mediating artifact or tool, the system develops to more fully engage university mission statements that promote collaboration among the university's student body and faculty.

Similarly, as I have tried to demonstrate throughout this project, developing the staff and writing consultants who offer their support to students and faculty from across the campus is one of the most crucial steps toward developing a writing center activity system that engages and provides access to the university and its students. As demonstrated in Godbee et al., developing a flexible writing consultant by employing movement-based workshops may help demonstrate how tutors recognize issues of identity and power, for such “critical education acknowledges the importance of bodies and spaces as sites for knowledge-making in order to fully understand the intersecting and systemic nature of people’s lived experiences with literacies and learning” (62-63). Progressive initiatives like Godbee et al., Naydan or Grimm demonstrate how current writing center practitioners are analyzing, re-evaluating, and in Grimm’s words “Rethorizing” writing center praxis on small and large scales. Correspondingly, Dagmar Scharold continues constructing a pathway forward for professional development of consultants in his 2017 Writing Center Journal article titled “‘Challenge Accepted’: Cooperative Tutoring as an Alternative to One-on-One Tutoring.” Scharold argues: “Cooperative tutoring could provide more opportunities to gain further agency and become stakeholders in the growth and development of the writing center. . . becoming active participants in the current movement in writing center studies to bring forth issues of race and language diversity to the fore” (81). Here, Scharold reflects Grimm’s articulation that consultants—through their development—become members who inform the practices of the writing center that may well reach beyond the walls of the center as well as the university.

To this end, developing writing consultants today may also inform other professional development programs across the university using the simple concept of reading groups to bring issues embedded in race and equality front and center. For example, as John Nordlof argues in his 2014 *Writing Center Journal* article for “the importance of developing a theoretical perspective on our work . . .” (46), Ellen Carillo, too, reimagines in her 2017 *Writing Center Journal* article “Reading and Writing Centers: A Primer for Writing Center Professionals” how reading and developing a theoretical standpoint for writing centers is particularly prudent: “Writing center professionals’ perspectives have the potential to enhance theoretical discussions on reading across various fields, and their work on the ground has the potential to support more comprehensive literacy learning” (139). With Nordlof and Carillo in mind, the development of reading groups may provide opportunities for consultants to share theoretical perspectives toward developing their teaching persona. Similarly, more broadly, when consultants become part of the center’s patchwork of leaders, they may inform faculty members across campus how writing consultants utilize theoretical practices in their tutoring praxis to accommodate the multi-disciplinary milieu. Additionally, such work may, in fact, go beyond the walls of the university for as Raforth imagines in his 2015 IWCA address, what may happen “if writing centers created works for which there is a demand among teachers, learners, the institutions, and the community?” (23). Such a vision may help lead writing center practitioners toward developing broader cohesion among the diverse group of writing consultants but faculty and members of the surrounding community of the university as well. This is a vision tailor-made for the modern-day writing center as a Naydanian activist space.

## **A Final Note**

It is in the midst of a global pandemic, and in response to the soul-searching mandated upon the United States sparked by the current state of police brutality, and to the resurgence of authoritarianism and toxic ideologies, writing centers may express their explicit opposition to the gut-wrenching promotion and resurgence of such damaging ideologies. In their positions, writing center practitioners may further commit with resolve to the ongoing work of social justice in our communities, our nation, and our world. This moment is like the vision of a sailboat off in the distance with full sails, waves splashing upon the bow, and dolphin playing off the stern's wake all against the backdrop of an Atlantic sunrise. However, when we get on the boat, crew members are pulling lines and running across the beam of the boat to set sails and untangle lines all while the captain shouts orders to the helmsman, the linemen, and the boatswain. It is organized chaos not represented in the picturesque vision from the coast. Like these shipmen that need to get to their destination and keep their vessel afloat, we must also face the chaos in our culture with honesty, courage, and unwavering focus.

Walking a path of resistance to envision systemic change and recognizing how the guiding principle of collaboration and the myriad forms of narrative arts—promoted, accentuated, and inspired through the work of writing center practitioners—may embody the current movement for writing center activists. Emboldened with the power to effect change in the university as well as beyond the walls of the university, writing center practitioners could be one way to lead the nation by promoting social justice reforms and to recognize the systematically devalued lives of indigenous people, people of color, and disenfranchised people matter. At this juncture in American history, writing centers may offer a way to address a pedagogical order designed to challenge racism, homophobia, and other injustices through

ongoing reading groups, curricular revision, and other faculty development efforts. This ethos may help build empathy on every side.

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