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Havva Zorluel Ozer and Jing Zhang

# The Response to the Call for RAD Research: A Review of Articles in *The Writing Center Journal*, 2007–2018

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## Abstract

The study examined in this article explored the impact of RAD research on articles ( $N = 97$ ) in a 12-year period of *The Writing Center Journal* (*WCJ*), in 2007–2012 and 2013–2018, to achieve four purposes: 1. to document the amount of replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research published in *WCJ* in two equal periods before and after Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) call for RAD research in writing center scholarship; 2. to identify how *WCJ* articles score in individual areas specified in Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's RAD research rubric; 3. to provide an understanding of methodological trends in research published in *WCJ* by examining the most common methods of inquiry; and 4. to understand trending research interests in the field by highlighting themes running through the research articles. The analysis demonstrated important differences between *WCJ* articles published in these time periods in all four areas examined, i.e., the amount of RAD research, changes in individual RAD rubric scores, methods of inquiry, and research trends, illustrating that the field is taking up Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's call for more such research. This article includes a discussion of findings, acknowledgement of study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

In 2012, Dana Lynn Driscoll & Sherry Wynn Perdue published an influential article that argued for “replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) research” in writing center studies (p. 12). Drawing on Richard H. Haswell’s (2005) oft-cited article “NCTE/CCCC’s Recent War on Scholarship,” Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012) analyzed the amount of RAD research in *The Writing Center Journal’s* (WCJ) thirty-year history from 1980 to 2009 and, upon finding how little RAD research there was in the field, called on writing center scholars to shift their orientations toward evidence-based research practice. Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012), among others, contended that “because writing center studies emerged when both English literature and composition began to resist empirical research, particularly quantitative methods, we suggest that the field has internalized this *dis*-ease to some degree, which is reflected in the research we produce” (p. 14); Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s 2012 article was the first to empirically document the scarcity of RAD research in writing center studies, and their call to change popularized the explicit use of the term “RAD” by writing center scholars.

As Paula Gillespie, Alice Gillam, Lady Falls Brown, & Byron Stay (2002) observed almost two decades ago, writing center scholarship has historically been grounded in “‘unsystematic,’ descriptive, and practice-based” research because “not only was such research more familiar to most humanities-trained writing center administrators but it also was more congruent with their everyday work in writing centers” (p. xviii). Furthermore, the limitations peculiar to the discourses of writing center scholarship, such as scarcity of resources (financial support, time, etc.) and professional marginality, have constantly reinforced the field’s commitment to non-empirical research practices (Nordlof, 2014). With this being the case, the writing center community has long experienced the need “to legitim[ize] writing center work through the production of scholarship and research, to understand and improve writing center practice, and to prove the writing center’s value to local institutions” (Gillam, 2002, p. 6). Particularly in efforts to further establish the field’s disciplinary status—which is often enunciated in relation to composition studies—Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2014) have called on the writing center community to conduct research that is “replicable (systematic enough and descriptive enough to be replicated), aggregable (able to be built upon and extended), and data-supported (presents clear evidence in support of claims)” (p. 106).

It has now been nine years since the publication of Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s 2012 call for the writing center community to produce more RAD research.<sup>1</sup> As Steve Price (2020) pointed out, Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s (2012)

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1 We acknowledge that the call for empirical inquiry in the writing center field is not a new phenomenon (Nordlof, 2014). As Block (2016) argued, it is not the call that is new, “but our willingness to do something about it” (p. 34).

call has been heard loudly by the writing center community, and “after 2012, RAD was frequently invoked at our conferences and is increasingly now referred to and used in *WCJ* publications” (p. 155). Indeed, the call has been cited frequently and explicitly in articles appearing in the field’s flagship journals.<sup>2</sup> Citation patterns are “a way to characterize the impact of a published work” (Lerner, 2014, p. 71), and these show that Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s (2012) study has attracted conscientious attention from the writing center community since it was published. Furthermore, as Rebecca Block (2016) observed, the efforts taken at the 2015 IWCA Collaborative, where many workshops focused on the topic of RAD research, evince the writing center community’s desire to advance empirical knowledge-making in the field. Despite the increasing attention to and discussion of RAD research, it remains unknown whether more RAD research has indeed been conducted since Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s (2012) call. We wanted to know the following: To what extent has the RAD research movement impacted current research practices within the field, and how has the writing center community responded to the RAD call that promoted more systematic knowledge-making?

To address these questions, we analyzed the articles published in *WCJ* from 2007 to 2018.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, we looked at two equal periods of *WCJ*’s publication history, before and after Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s 2012 article—from 2007 to 2012 and from 2013 to 2018—because this would allow us to investigate *WCJ* authors’ response to the RAD call. Using Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s (2012) RAD rubric and continuing their meta-analysis approach, we sought not only to replicate but also to extend Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s (2012) work, with the aim of further examining the development of RAD research practice in the writing center field. As Price (2020) observed, many writing center studies have made explicit efforts to make their methods replicable; however, “follow-up studies or related studies addressing similar research questions” are yet to come (p. 157). (For a reflection on the importance of replicability, see Hall & Ryan in this issue.) Our study attempts to extend the conversation surrounding RAD research in the writing center field by seeking answers to the following research questions:

1. How much RAD research was published in *WCJ* between 2007 and 2018? How did this amount change before and after 2012?

2 For example, in *WCJ* (Lerner, 2014; Nordlof, 2014; Nordstrom, 2015; Block, 2016; Wells, 2016) and in *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* (Babcock, 2015; Hopkins, 2016; Giaimo, 2017; Griffiths, Hickman, & Zöllner, 2017; Naydan, 2017).

3 Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012) analyzed the articles published in *WCJ* from 1980 to 2009, examining the journal’s thirty-year history through the context of RAD research. In this study, we take up the torch and continue their work to provide insight into the impact of their call on articles published in *WCJ*.

2. How did *WCJ* articles score in individual areas of the RAD research rubric? How did this change during the periods 2007–2012 and 2013–2018?
3. What were the methods of inquiry (research design, data collection strategy, selection of participants) in research published in *WCJ* between 2007 and 2018?
4. What were the thematic trends in research published in *WCJ* in 2007–2012 and 2013–2018?

In what follows, we describe the methods we used to answer these questions, and we present and explore our findings. Results indicated that the field's transformative efforts toward more RAD research had, indeed, taken place: We observed twice as much RAD research in *WCJ*'s 2013–2018 publication period as in the 2007–2012 period. Our analysis showed that the RAD research conducted during these time periods covered a wide range of topics, though the topics investigated by authors were still limited. Much work remains to stimulate empirical questioning into the field's absent or underexplored areas, such as K–12 and community writing centers as well as online tutoring. Similarly, we still do not know much about what is happening at writing centers to eliminate discriminatory practices, especially in challenging situations that involve talk about issues grounded in disability, gender and sexuality, and race and social justice. As we move forward, more nuanced attention to these and other underexplored topics is needed to promote more inclusive practices in writing center work. Lastly, we discuss shifting the orientation of researchers toward developing a paradigm of methodological pluralism and actualizing this orientation under new research directions.

## Methods

To learn more about *WCJ* authors' responses to Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) call for RAD research, we followed a two-level analytical procedure: 1. classifying the articles published in *WCJ* between the specified dates to determine the number of RAD research articles published in twelve years of the *WCJ*'s publication history; and 2. analyzing the research articles to identify methods of inquiry and thematic trends. We not only replicated but also extended the research methods used by Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012).

Our methods of inquiry aligned with Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) methods in the following ways:

1. Although our two data sets were distinct, we both analyzed all the articles published in *WCJ* within a particular time frame, rather than sampling articles.
2. We used the same RAD research rubric (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012, pp. 21–23) to identify the amount of RAD research published in *WCJ*.
3. In addition to categorizing each article using the RAD research rubric, we both coded the articles to analyze methodological choices in the research articles, including both RAD and non-RAD studies.
4. Both of us employed collaborative coding in our studies to “reach agreement on each code through collaborative discussion rather than independent corroboration” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 401).

Some of our methodological choices, however, differed from Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012):

1. We used statistical tests, i.e., chi-square and Mann-Whitney U tests, to compare the differences in the number of articles in each of the article categories and the RAD rubric scores between articles in these two publication periods; we assessed all statistical results at the 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ).
2. We ran a Cohen's kappa test to evaluate the reliability of our RAD research scores.
3. We examined the themes in research-based articles to understand the trends in writing center research.

Next we describe our methods of inquiry in greater detail along with our study's limitations.

### **Data Set**

Examining the complete contents of the *WCJ* issues published from 2007 (volume 27, issue 1) to 2018 (volume 37, issue 1), we arrived at 177 sources in total. Following Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012), we removed from our data set 34 book reviews; 21 editors' notes; seven International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) related documents; six reprints of previously published articles that appeared in volume 30, issue 1; five announcements; four keynote addresses; a bibliography; information for authors; and reviewer

lists, leaving a total of 97 articles for the twelve-year period between 2007 and 2018. Finally, we split the articles into two six-year periods: 54 articles published between 2007 and 2012, before and including Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's call, and 43 articles published between 2013 and 2018.

### **Classification of Articles: RAD, Non-RAD, and Other**

We classified the articles in our data set as RAD, non-RAD, or other, conducting a comprehensive analysis using Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) RAD research rubric. The rubric included seven areas for evaluation: background and significance, study design and data collection, selection of participants and/or texts, method of analysis, presentation of results, discussion and implications, and limitations and future work. After applying this evaluation criterion, we scored each article in a range from 0 to 14 (0–2 points per area). Following Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012), we set 10 as the threshold score for what we counted as RAD research because “an article had to score a ‘high’ in at least three of the seven areas to earn a 10” (p. 20). The non-RAD category included the articles that did not score a 10 or higher based on the rubric. Although many of these articles introduced some background, methodological description, results, and/or discussion, essential details needed for other researchers to replicate the study were missing. Theoretical articles, which, of course, did not involve any data collection (e.g., Condon, 2007; Grutsch McKinney, 2009; Nordlof, 2014; Carillo, 2017), we categorized as “other” and did not analyze further. Based on the stated criterion, we selected the research articles qualified as RAD research that were suitable for further analysis to answer the second and third research questions.

### ***Inter-Rater Reliability***

We independently evaluated all 97 articles using the RAD research rubric introduced by Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012). Every two weeks, we met to exchange scores and memos, and we discussed the articles for which our scores were more than two points apart. Through discussion, we resolved discrepancies larger than two points. Following that, we took the average of our scores in each rubric area, arriving at a single RAD research score to classify the articles. To learn more about the reliability of our analysis, we investigated inter-rater reliability between the scores given by both of us by using both adjacent percentage and Cohen's kappa, a statistical test that is used to calculate inter-rater reliability. Thanks to our collaborative discussion, the differences between all our scores were within 2 points, as shown by the high adjacent percentage of all the scores (> 90%), including total scores and the scores for the seven categories. Although the inter-rater reliability coefficient for the total scores (kappa = 0.57) was a “moderate” level of agreement between the two raters' total scores, the inter-rater reliability coefficients for all the seven break-

down areas were higher (all above kappa = 0.70), which indicated “substantial” inter-rater reliability (see McHugh, 2012, p. 279 for information about Cohen’s kappa values and levels of agreement).

### **Statistical Analysis Procedures**

Following the classification of articles based on the RAD research rubric, we compiled our scores into a Microsoft Excel file and imported these scores into IBM SPSS,<sup>4</sup> a statistical analysis program. First, we analyzed the data descriptively to learn the frequency distribution of the article categories. Then, we computed a chi-square test to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the frequency distribution of the article categories between the *WCJ*’s 2007–2012 and 2013–2018 publication periods. We used a chi-square test because our data were nominal, as the values were categorical (i.e., RAD, non-RAD, and other) and each category had at least five articles, thus meeting the needed conditions for conducting a chi-square test (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2013, p. 137). By using the chi-square test, we determined whether the distribution of articles by category differed in the earlier and later periods. Then, because the data under investigation were ordinal, as the values of the RAD research score were ranked (i.e., 0-low, 1-medium, 2-high), we ran inferential statistics to compare the RAD scores in the two publication periods, using the Mann-Whitney U Test (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2013, p. 95).

### **Coding Procedures for the Analysis of Research Articles**

To identify the methodological and thematic characteristics of the research articles, we constructed a coding matrix, drawing upon Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012). The coding matrix covered five descriptive categories, including the author(s), methods of inquiry (research design, data collection strategy, selection of participants), and themes. After we each independently coded the research articles using the coding matrix, we compared our codes and discussed and resolved our discrepancies. Subsequently, Author 2 performed a two-pass coding scheme in order to codify data in a systematic order as advised by Johnny Saldaña (2009). For the first pass, Author 2 used a first-cycle holistic, exploratory method. In this cycle, each research article was coded into broad topic areas. For the second pass, Author 2 proceeded with this information to conduct a second cycle of pattern coding, supported by NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program. During the second cycle of coding, similar codes were combined, after which the researchers arrived at 13 themes. To illustrate, codes such as “writing center administrators’ beliefs

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4 While we used IBM SPSS for statistical analysis, all the tests we ran can be completed in Microsoft Excel, with the addition of the free Analysis ToolPak.



about research” and “writing center professionals’ experiences with administrative development” that emerged through holistic, exploratory coding in the first cycle were assembled under the theme “writing center administration” in the second cycle.

In the following subsections, we reflect on our collaborative coding process. In an effort to make our own research as RAD as possible, we state here our belief that an in-depth discussion of our observations and insights will not only demonstrate a more authentic and transparent coding process but also offer important questions and implications that our results do not necessarily cover. Readers should, of course, feel free to skip straight to our results.

**The Structure of RAD Articles.** When we used Driscoll & Wynn Perdue’s (2012) RAD research rubric, we found that each article’s specific headings/sections, such as Method, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Results, etc., made it easy for us—both as coders and readers—to search for information matching the RAD rubric. In other words, headings/sections commonly seen in an IMRAD (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion) format created a more identifiable structure for RAD articles (see Silvia, 2015, for further discussion of this very commonly used format for research studies). While we categorized some non-IMRAD articles as RAD studies, we also found ourselves wondering the following: In the field of writing center studies, in which narratives and anecdotes traditionally have been valued, how much flexibility do researchers have when aiming for their studies’ reports to meet RAD research expectations? Simultaneously, we recognize that the RAD rubric sets parameters for the reporting of research in our field; we note here that we highly value non-RAD research, such as theory, history, and archival work.<sup>5</sup> More important, the RAD rubric also lays down requirements for the design and implementation of research. As such, we further ask: If researchers choose to present their research in ways that deviate from the IMRAD format, how should researchers balance these choices with the ease for readers to identify, comprehend, and replicate their RAD research? Furthermore, for journal editors and publishers, who share the power to engage in such decision-making, what guidance would help scholars whose RAD research reports differ from the IMRAD format? We are interested to see future discussions regarding innovative ways to share RAD research in our field.

**Adding a Holistic Score to the RAD Rubric.** Oftentimes, when we struggled with discrepant scores for an article, particularly when this discrepancy was the cause of an article’s crossing the threshold line between the cate-

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5 We also recognize that historical and archival research, while not generally categorized as RAD, can be disseminated in replicable forms when researchers provide insight into their archival methodologies and allow future researchers to follow similar paths. For an example, see Mendelsohn and Walker in this issue.

gories of RAD and non-RAD research (between 10 and 11 points), we tended to step back to assess, overall, whether this was a RAD study. We asked: Is it replicable, aggregable, and data-supported? Such a holistic approach helped us constructively resolve conflicts and facilitated our decision-making process. We therefore propose the following: Alongside using the RAD rubric to assign nuanced breakdown scores, a holistic score can help readers judge whether a study is RAD/non-RAD. In writing assessment, holistic scores, combined with scores from individual analytical categories (e.g., content, organization, mechanics), allow for a better assessment of students' strengths and weaknesses (Bacha, 2001). By the same token, adding a holistic score in the RAD rubric helps us focus on the overall performance of the study, which not only invokes our researcher knowledge and common sense, but also further develops our "intuitions" as researchers.

***Providing Explicit Justification for Methodological Choices.*** During our discussions, a recurring cause of us designating a score of 1 instead of 2 to the section in the rubric called "study design and data collection" was authors' failure to "giv[e] justifications for methodological choices and how those choices relate to the study objectives" (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012, p. 21). Although studies lacking explicit justification for methodological choices might "still present enough information about methods that replication could occur" (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012, p. 21), we deemed such omissions to be a problem for replicability. Offering explicit justifications for methodological choices is not just a matter of validating the researchers' methodology, but it is also a way to convince other researchers to replicate the study using the same or adapted methods.

## Results

In this section, we report, by research question, on our analysis of 97 articles, comparing the *WCJ* articles published in 2007–2012 and 2013–2018, before and after Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) call for more RAD research.

### Research Question 1

Our first research question was, "How much RAD research was published in *WCJ* between 2007 and 2018, and how did this amount change before and after 2012?" Of the 54 articles published in *WCJ* from 2007 to 2012, 56% were theoretical in nature, presenting a perspective, argument, and/or commentary on writing center theories and practices; this category was followed in frequency by non-RAD research and RAD research. We also analyzed the 43 articles published in *WCJ* from 2013 to 2018. The data showed that the percentage of RAD research articles dramatically increased in the six years after Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's 2012 call: RAD research made up 53% of articles

published, representing the highest proportion of article category in the time period. Theoretical articles represented the second largest article category, followed by non-RAD research articles. The growth of RAD research and the decline of non-RAD research articles in these two six-year time periods led us to explore, by conducting a chi-square test (see Table 1), whether the changes we saw were statistically significant. The chi-square analysis comparing the articles published in *WCJ* between 2007–2012 and 2013–2018 showed that the difference we see in the number of articles in each category (RAD, non-RAD, other) is statistically significant.

**Table 1**

*Chi-Square Analysis of Research Published in WCJ, 2007–2018*

Research published in <i>WCJ</i>	<i>n</i>	2007-2012	2013-2018	$X^2$	<i>p</i>
RAD research	34	11	23		
Non-RAD research	21	13	8		
Other types of articles	42	30	12		
Totals	97	54	43	12.048	.002*

*Note.* \*Statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ).

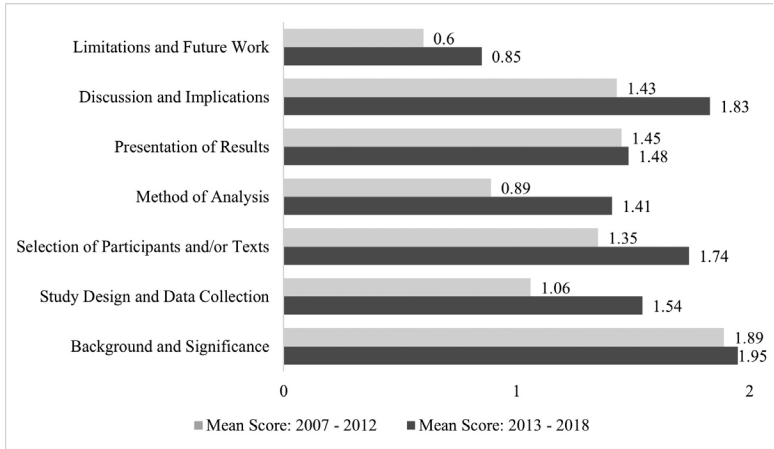
### Research Question 2

Our second research question was, “How did *WCJ* articles score in individual areas of the RAD research rubric, and how did this change before and after 2012?”

We then narrowed our analysis to the research articles (RAD and non-RAD), examining what scores these articles received in specific RAD research rubric areas (see Figure 1). On average, the research articles in *WCJ*’s 2013–2018 publication period received higher scores in all RAD research rubric categories compared to research published in the six years prior. We found that the research articles scored highest in the “background and significance” category and lowest in the “limitations and future work” category.

**Figure 1**

*Average WCJ Research Article Scores by RAD Research Rubric Category, 2007–2012 and 2013–2018*



Note. Scale: 0-Low, 1-Medium, 2-High

To determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the time periods and the RAD research rubric categories, we conducted Mann-Whitney U tests (see Table 2). We found that research articles published in *WCJ* from 2013 to 2018 scored significantly higher in four categories compared to research articles published in *WCJ* from 2007 to 2012; the Mann Whitney U tests show statistically significant differences in the study design and data collection category, the selection of participants and/or texts category, the method of analysis category, and the discussion and implications category. Overall scores of RAD research were also higher for research articles published between 2013–2018 than those published between 2007–2012, and, using a Mann Whitney U test, we found that this difference was also statistically significant.

**Table 2**

*Average RAD Research Rubric Scores of WCJ Articles by Time Period (2007-2012 and 2013-2018), via Mann-Whitney U Tests*

Item	Grouping	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Background and significance	2007-2012	27.04	649.00	349.000	.434
	2013-2018	28.74	891.00		

## Submission to Writing Center Journal

Item	Grouping	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Study design and data collection	2007-2012	22.33	536.00	236.000	.016*
	2013-2018	32.39	1004.00		
Selection of participants and/or texts	2007-2012	21.77	522.50	222.500	.006*
	2013-2018	32.82	1017.50		
Method of analysis	2007-2012	22.88	549.00	249.000	.027*
	2013-2018	31.97	991.00		
Presentation of results	2007-2012	27.79	667.00	367.000	.928
	2013-2018	28.16	873.00		
Discussion and implications	2007-2012	22.00	528.00	228.000	.006*
	2013-2018	32.65	1012.00		
Limitations and future work	2007-2012	24.77	594.50	294.500	.168
	2013-2018	30.50	945.50		
Overall RAD research score	2007-2012	22.17	532.00	232.000	.017*
	2013-2018	32.52	1008.00		

*Note.* \*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

### Research Question 3

Our third research question was, “What were the methods of inquiry (research design, data collection strategy, selection of participants) in research published in *WCJ* between 2007 and 2018?” Drawn from a comprehensive examination of the research articles (RAD and non-RAD), we investigated the methods of inquiry employed in research published in *WCJ* in these two time periods (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Methods of Inquiry in Research Published in WCJ Research Articles by Time Period (2007–2012 and 2013–2018)*

Methods of Inquiry	2007–2012 <i>n</i>	2013–2018 <i>n</i>
Research design		
Qualitative	14	15
Mixed-method	9	12
Quantitative	1	4
Total	24	31

Methods of Inquiry	2007–2012 <i>n</i>	2013–2018 <i>n</i>
Data collection strategy (may have used more than one)		
Survey/Questionnaire	10	10
Interview	6	15
Observation	6	4
Student/tutor writing	5	6
Documents (training materials, policy/position statements, conference records/transcripts, guidebooks)	4	7
Websites/databases	2	2
Focus group	2	0
Literature ( <i>WCJ</i> articles)	1	1
Participants (may have involved more than one type)		
Students	12	17
Tutors	11	12
Administrative staff/writing center professionals	2	7
Faculty members	1	2

Of 24 research articles published in *WCJ* from 2007 to 2012, 58% used qualitative methods, 38% used mixed methods, and 4% used quantitative methods. Data were collected using a variety of strategies, with surveys the most common. In addition, 83% ( $n = 20$ ) of articles studied human subjects, and 17% ( $n = 4$ ) were based on textual analysis without human participants. Students represented the most common type of participant, followed by tutors, administrative staff and/or writing center professionals, and faculty members.

Of 31 research articles published in *WCJ* from 2013 to 2018, 48% ( $n = 15$ ) used qualitative methods, 39% ( $n = 12$ ) used mixed methods, and 13% ( $n = 4$ ) used quantitative methods. Interviews, not surveys, were the most frequently used strategy to collect data. Additionally, 81% ( $n = 25$ ) involved human subjects and 19% ( $n = 6$ ) analyzed textual data. Similar to the earlier time period, students were the most commonly studied participants in the *WCJ* articles during the 2013–2018 period, followed by tutors, administrative staff and/or writing center professionals, and faculty members.

**Research Question 4**

Our fourth research question was, “What were the trends in research published in *WCJ* in 2007–2012 and 2013–2018?” Based on our two-pass exploratory thematic coding of the research articles, we arrived at 13 themes through NVivo analysis. We examined these themes in relation to the number of articles in *WCJ* exploring those themes (see Table 4). (We should note that one article might be coded more than once because it might match more than one code.)

**Table 4**

*Themes of Research Published in WCJ articles by Time Period (2007–2012 and 2013–2018)*

Codes	2007–2012 <i>n</i>	2013–2018 <i>n</i>
Tutoring strategy/style	5	10
Assessment	4	6
Writing center administration	1	8
Multilingual tutoring	4	2
Tutor-tutee interaction	3	3
Student needs	3	3
Tutor education	4	1
Knowledge building in the field of writing center studies	1	3
Online tutoring	3	1
Social justice at writing centers	2	1
Technology use at writing centers	2	1
Transfer	0	1
Writing center guidebooks	0	1

Research in six areas—tutoring strategy/style, writing center assessment, administration, knowledge building in the field, transfer, and writing center guidebooks—increased between 2007–2012 and 2013–2018. Research in five areas—multilingual tutoring (multilinguals as tutors/tutees), tutor education, online tutoring, social justice, and technology use at the writing center—decreased between the periods 2007–2012 and 2013–2018. Research in two areas—tutor-writer interaction and student needs—were equal during the two six-year periods.

## Discussion and Implications

### ***WCJ* Authors' Response to the RAD Call**

Our findings about the *WCJ* articles published before Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's 2012 call for more RAD research in the field of writing center studies are consistent with Driscoll & Perdue's analysis of the articles published in *WCJ*'s thirty-year history from 1980 to 2009, which showed that RAD research articles were the fewest (6%), after non-RAD (28%) and other types of articles (66%) (p. 25). How has Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's 2012 call affected the trajectories of research articles in *WCJ*'s recent history?

Our analysis of articles published in *WCJ* showed that RAD research has increased substantially; for 2013–2018, we found that RAD research was the largest article category (52%), followed by other types of articles (30%) and non-RAD research (18%). When compared to articles published by category in the 2007–2012 time-period, the increase in RAD research articles was statistically significant. In addition, the statistically significant increases in the overall RAD scores and in four of the seven category scores of the articles published in the two six-year periods provide important evidence that Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) call has been addressed in articles published in *WCJ*. The significant increase in the amount of RAD research in *WCJ*—the flagship journal of writing center studies—signals a prominent shift in the practice and reporting of research in our discipline. RAD research is being embraced as an important way of building systematic, evidence-based disciplinary knowledge, also advocated by many other scholars, including Gillespie, Gillam, Brown, & Stay (2002); Isabelle Thompson, Alyson Whyte, David Shannon, Amanda Muse, Kristen Miller, Milla Chappell, & Abby Whigham (2009); and Rebecca Day Babcock & Terese Thonus (2012). As Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012) maintained, “the amount of RAD research published over time . . . reflects the development of writing center studies as a discipline” (p. 28). Thus, building on the observed trend of increasing RAD research in *WCJ*, we recommend the following directions to further move the writing center discipline forward along this line of inquiry.

### **Strengthening RAD Research**

Examining the individual area scores in the RAD research rubric, we found that the category “background and significance” had the highest mean score, whereas the category “limitations and future work” had the lowest. Our results corroborate those of Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012), who reported similar findings regarding the mean scores between 1999 and 2007. That is to say, our findings show that *WCJ* authors continued to situate their studies within the context of the field while putting less emphasis on acknowledging study limitations and giving clear suggestions for future work. Although we



observed increases in all seven rubric categories over time, we found that the rise in the mean scores was statistically significant only for the categories “study design and data collection,” “selection of participants and/or texts,” “method of analysis,” and “discussion and implications.” We infer that the significant developments in these four areas demonstrate the importance of these areas for RAD research, particularly the first three areas that characterize replicable, empirical inquiry.

So on the one hand, writing center researchers have made efforts to describe their methodological choices, which is conducive to producing replicable studies. On the other hand, with relatively low scores for the areas of “limitations and future work,” we suggest that authors should pay more attention to acknowledging what yet needs to be done to help others to build upon, expand, and extend their research. There is a need for resources that can help to open useful dialogues about how to design and evaluate research, what methods to use, and where to turn for help with methodological challenges. We suggest there should be more publications on research methodologies, like the one compiled by Jo Mackiewicz & Babcock (2020), as well as workshops and scholarly events in writing center related conferences, seminars, and symposiums in order to facilitate opportunities for our discourse community to understand various methods of data collection and analysis that can be used in writing center work. In this way, we can encourage researchers to conduct replicable studies that both refine and advance the original study by addressing what the authors put forward regarding limitations and future work, thus promoting research replicability and aggregability.

### **Implementing Methodological Pluralism in RAD Research**

In terms of methodological practices, we found the majority of research published in *WCJ*'s 2007–2012 publication period used qualitative methods (58%), followed by mixed methods (38%) and quantitative methods (4%), compared to the 2013–2018 publication period, in which 48% of articles used qualitative methods, 39% used mixed methods, and 13% used quantitative methods. The results from the earlier time period were similar to Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012) findings that revealed most of the research (63%) published in *WCJ* between 1980 and 2009 used qualitative data, followed by mixed methods (17%), and quantitative data (13%) (pp. 27–28). Our analysis showed that although the percentage of qualitative research has declined somewhat and the percentages of mixed-methods and quantitative research increased somewhat, it is notable that writing center researchers still favored using qualitative data in their studies. Consequently, our study reaffirms what Neal Lerner (2002) observed almost two decades ago: “Those studying writing centers are choosing qualitative methods—interviews, audio recordings, field notes, among other sources—to describe what happens in writing center

sessions” (p. 53). Indeed, our analysis showed that although writing center researchers employed a wide range of strategies to collect data, surveys were predominantly used in the earlier time period and interviews in the later time period, which indicates scholarship’s current interest in “in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4).

We suggest that the writing center community keep expanding its research toolkit by using a wider range of methodological approaches appropriate to their studies and promoting methodological pluralism in our field (Liggett, Jordan, & Price, 2011). For instance, we encourage writing center researchers to consult Babcock & Thonus’s (2012) work, which reviews how to conduct evidence-based writing center research. Similarly, Mackiewicz and Babcock’s (2020) more recent collection provides additional theories, such as critical race theory, feminism, activity theory, etc., and various additional methods, such as historical inquiry, meta-analysis, and corpus analysis, to enrich writing center scholars’ methodological repertoire. (See Salazar, this issue, for the first-ever meta-analysis of quantitative writing center studies).

### **Dedicating More RAD Research to Underexplored Areas**

Our analysis showed that research, both RAD and non-RAD, published in *WCJ* spanned a variety of themes. It is not surprising that tutoring strategy/style was the most common theme in the two publication periods given that “the act of tutoring—of working one-with-one with writers, of dealing with individual writing and writer-based challenges—is at the core of all our [writing center] practices” (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2014, p. 122). We suggest that scholars continue efforts to examine and understand the nuances of the central topic of tutoring. Meanwhile, we also encourage scholars to expand their research scope and carry forward understanding across the breadth of topics around tutoring and writing center interaction (see, e.g., Hall, 2017; Mackiewicz, 2018).

Reviewing the research articles published in *WCJ* between 2007 and 2018 revealed gaps in research in five areas. First, there was a lack of inquiry addressing disabilities in the writing center. We did observe limited attention to disabilities in *WCJ* (e.g., Kiedaisch & Dinitz, 2007), but none involved systematic, empirical inquiry. As one of the prominent authors engaged in examining disability studies within writing center scholarship, Babcock (2015) has also underlined the need for more data-supported research on tutoring students with disabilities. According to a report published by the United States National Center for Education Statistics, 19% of undergraduates in the 2015–2016 education year reported having a disability (de Brey, Snyder, Zhang, & Dillow,

2021, p. 276).<sup>6</sup> Once attending institutions of higher education, these students look for resources to support their learning, one of which is sometimes the writing center. The absence of empirical work on disability in *WCJ*'s articles between 2007 and 2018 makes us question what research writing centers are relying on to equip themselves to accommodate students with disabilities or to equip tutors to adjust to working effectively with such students in a tutorial. Although carrying out such research involves various challenges,<sup>7</sup> writing center researchers can start to address potential issues faced in disability studies by drawing on the extant literature. For instance, Allen Brizee, Morgan Sousa, & Dana Lynn Driscoll (2012) outlined user-centered and participatory approaches for empirical studies on the issues of accessibility and disability studies in the writing center. Furthermore, Noah Bukowski & Brenda Jo Brueggemann's (2020) recent chapter "Writing Center Research and Disability Theory" may inspire writing center scholars to embark on research that informs practices involving persons with disabilities and to make a difference to the field.

Second, we observed that empirical inquiry into gender and sexuality remained under-examined in *WCJ*. Publications such as those by Harry Denny (2010) and Michele Eodice (2010) addressed gender identity and sexuality in writing center work, yet there remains much work to be done, as these studies were not empirical (for such an empirical study, see Webster, this issue). How do writing center administrators and tutors take on anti-sexist practices in writing center work? What types of conversations happen in tutorials that involve talk about homo-, bi-, trans-sexuality? Further research is indeed needed to understand the discourse of sexism taking place in writing centers. Such work might extend inclusive practices in writing centers by foregrounding the politics of sexuality and promoting the agency that writing center administrators, tutors, and writers need to navigate everyday struggles with gender identity. Specifically, we encourage interested writing center researchers to consult Mitch Hobza & Denny's (2020) piece on queer theory and writing centers. Furthermore, Denny, Robert Mundy, Liliana M. Naydan, Richard Sévère, & Anna Sicari's (2018) edited collection *Out in the Center* provides the writing

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6 As defined in this report, "students with disabilities are those who reported having deafness or serious difficulty hearing; blindness or serious difficulty seeing; serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; or serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs... students were [also] instructed to 'consider conditions including but not limited to a serious learning disability, depression, ADD, or ADHD'" (de Brey, Snyder, Zhang, & Dillow, 2021, p. 276).

7 These challenges may include, but are not limited to, ethical challenges of studying disabled populations, as some Institutional Review Boards list students with disabilities among vulnerable populations and require special consideration from researchers, as well as methodological challenges of participant recruitment, such as finding students with disabilities who may make up a relatively small percentage of a writing center's visitors.

center community with inspiring discussions on not only gender and sexuality but also other critical subjects of identity, including race, multilingualism, religion, class, and disability.

Third, we saw a lack of research in *WCJ* on K–12 and community writing centers. Only one study, by Emily Isaacs & Ellen Kolba (2009), which provided a detailed description of a partnership program that brought university students studying English education and public-school students together to conduct writing center practices in middle and high school English classrooms, examined K–12 writing centers, and no studies examined community writing centers. This lack might be attributed to material challenges that writing center practitioners at K–12 institutions face, such as inadequate training, support, budgets, and time for research. However, evidence-based knowledge made through empirical inquiry is as crucial for developing best pedagogies and practices in K–12 and community writing centers as it is in postsecondary writing centers. While the Secondary School Writing Centers Association supports writing centers in middle and high schools, and several book-length works address K–12 and community writing centers (Kent, 2006; Fels & Wells, 2011; Rousculp, 2014; Sanders & Damron, 2017; Brown & Waldrup, 2018), we advocate dedicating more research to K–12 and community writing centers in scholarly journal publications to build stronger networks in writing center work at all levels. To help bring research on elementary, middle, and/or secondary school and community writing centers more prominently into the academic landscape of our field, we suggest that interested researchers make full use of replication studies. Replicability, an indispensable aspect of RAD research, offers opportunities for scholars interested in similar topics to draw on well-validated research designs. Furthermore, replication studies help us understand “if findings are context-dependent or can move across contexts and be of more general use” (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2014, p. 124). Therefore, one way to study K–12 and community writing center work is by replicating and adapting the various RAD studies on writing centers in higher education.

A fourth underexplored topic in *WCJ* was race and social justice. Denny, John Nordlof & Lori Salem’s (2018) study on working-class students was the only RAD study on this topic in the 2007–2018 publication period. However, while there was a lack of RAD research, this did not mean *WCJ* authors were oblivious to racial and social justice issues. Instead, *WCJ* authors paid ongoing attention to these topics through non-empirical articles (e.g., Condon, 2007; Mahala, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Blazer, 2015; Godbee, Ozias, & Tang, 2015; Zimmerelli, 2015; García, 2017), non-RAD research articles (Valentine, 2008; Suhr-Sytsma & Brown, 2011), and article introductions (Grimm, 2010). In other words, *WCJ* authors have made marked efforts to address the topic of race and social justice in the writing center; while such efforts were not in the form of RAD research, they paved the way for RAD research in this area. These

theoretical and anecdotal articles can be used as heuristics, and the next step is to welcome more RAD research on race and social justice issues, perhaps by capitalizing on the various study designs, strategies, and methods used in research on other topics.

Finally, we point to online tutoring as another topic that begs more RAD research in *WCJ*. Although three RAD studies on online writing center work (Neaderhiser & Wolfe, 2009; Severino, Swenson, & Zhu, 2009; Wolfe & Griffin, 2012) appeared in the earlier time period and one study (Severino & Prim, 2015) appeared in the later time period, we believe that this line of inquiry is worth more attention due to the increasing needs for online tutoring today, especially during the time of a pandemic when much interaction has been shifted online (see Wisniewski, Carvajal Regidor, Chason, Groundwater, Kranek, Mayne, & Middleton, 2020 and Worm, 2020 for recent *WCJ* articles on this topic). How do we reach students with online tutoring? How does online tutoring factor into student writers' writing-related help-seeking behavior and their network of writing support? What are tutors and students' perceptions and experiences with online tutoring during the pandemic? The fruitful RAD research on face-to-face tutoring strategies and styles, as revealed in our study, can serve as excellent references and supply replicable research designs for researchers to adapt when investigating online tutoring.

### **Reinforcing Meta-Analysis Inquiry in Writing Center Research**

We advocate for the writing center community's engagement with meta-analysis to further establish and maintain the disciplinary status of writing center scholarship. As Price (2020) suggested, meta-analysis, namely "intentional gathering of research studies (not necessarily experimental) with analysis of the aggregate body of work" (p. 152), is "a powerful tool for generating critical thinking and understanding the trends in writing center scholarship" (p. 157). Until Jesus Salazar's (2021, in this issue), Lerner's (2014) and Lerner & Kyle Oddis' (2017) studies were the only meta-analysis studies we found in *WCJ* besides Driscoll & Wynn Perdue's (2012).<sup>8</sup> Despite the growth of publications in the field, there is a need for the writing center community to advance the disciplinary growth of the field, and meta-analysis is one way to achieve this goal, which can promote a more independent disciplinary discourse community. Building on the meta-disciplinary knowledge that Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012) created, our study examined the impact of their RAD call by conducting another meta-analysis study. We encourage

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8 Several non-*WCJ* studies have used meta-analyses in bibliometric studies, for example, Pam Bromley & Andrea Scott's (2020) bibliometric study of a writing center journal; see also research from across rhetoric and composition, such as studies by Ken Hyland & Feng (Kevin) Jiang (2021) and Derek Mueller (2012).

the writing center community to take on further meta-analytical inquiry to develop self-reflexive research practices and strengthen the field's disciplinary discourse.

### Limitations and Future Research

As with all research studies, our study has its limitations. First, we acknowledge that examining publications in *WCJ* is only one way to observe the effects of the RAD call on writing center work. With the process of knowledge creation being more complex than what meets the eye, it is possible that the significant increase in RAD research resulted not only from writing center researchers' purposeful efforts to conduct RAD research but also from other *WCJ* stakeholders' selective attention to RAD calls in the field. How does the RAD movement in the field shape the less visible, yet empirically observable, aspects of the publication process? How much influence does it have over the relevant stakeholders in academic publishing? For instance, a prospective study can investigate how journal editors and reviewers perceive the influence of the RAD call on their decision-making about which submissions to accept for publication. An additional limitation of our study is due to our limited focus on articles published in just twelve years of *WCJ*'s forty-year history. This limitation could be addressed in future work that analyzes writing center research not only published during other periods of *WCJ*'s history but also published in other journals to make broader claims about the scholarship's perspective on the RAD call.

The RAD research published in *WCJ* offers both a rich repertoire of research topics and a series of empirically tested research designs. In her address at the 2008 IWCA Conference, Nancy Grimm (2009) noted that "writing centers vary from campus to campus," and "there are a number of reasons for the differences among writing centers. Factors such as local contexts, financial considerations, and institutional missions can have a major impact on the direction of a particular writing center" (p. 12). Thus, by extension, we argue that writing center researchers need to reflect on these factors and their impacts on writing center services by engaging in replication studies. As an example of replication research, our study generated intriguing findings by drawing upon and modifying the rigorous methods of Driscoll & Wynn Perdue (2012). We encourage writing center scholars to harness the power of replication research, which can expand their methodological toolkit and produce fruitful studies.

### Conclusion

In this article, we established that RAD research is taking root in writing center studies, as seen in the prominent increase of RAD research after Driscoll

& Wynn Perdue's (2012) call for such work. The exciting momentum of RAD research efforts should continue to address the gaps in knowledge about writing center praxis, especially in the un- or under-examined areas that we have discussed in our study. With continued engagement in RAD research practices, our field can build a body of systematic, empirical research that expands and refines our methodological repertoires and further promotes the disciplinary development and growth of writing center studies.

Among our goals for this research project was to reexamine writing center scholarship's engagement with RAD research practices. Having found more RAD research conducted in recent years, we now proceed to consider the need and benefits of moving beyond and across methodological boundaries. Whereas we hope writing center scholarship will continue to cultivate more systematic, evidence-based knowledge-making in the field of writing center studies, we echo Haswell's (2005) caution against the temptation to treat empirical and non-empirical research as competitive or "to imagine that these two exclusionary paths are the only choices a discipline has to act as if the discipline cannot publish . . . RAD research as well" as other kinds of work (pp. 219–20). Thus, while this study, of necessity, categorizes research as RAD and non-RAD, we by no means hope to reinforce a RAD/non-RAD binary; instead, we maintain that writing center researchers should break free from such a binary by taking advantage of the varied ways in which research can take place.

Our field is one that historically has taken pride in storytelling as well as one that seeks to reinvigorate itself by drawing upon theories from other disciplines. Thus, even as we work to promote RAD research, we also highly appreciate the value and contributions of other ways of knowledge-making, such as the many "theoretical articles . . . that present an argument, frame, or new way of seeing" for writing center research (Driscoll & Wynn Perdue, 2012, p. 25). We would regret if our field's pursuit of RAD research were implemented at the cost of denigrating or suffocating other forms of work. Therefore, we propose that alongside our increasing attention to and efforts in conducting RAD research, we should also creatively explore potential ways to connect RAD research with other forms of work in productive and mutually beneficial ways. These might include not only conducting RAD studies to apply, test, and generate theories and to examine and challenge lore but also using theories and lore as guidance and heuristics for RAD inquiry. For writing center scholars who highly value collaboration, our field should not be characterized by one single line of inquiry; rather, we should keep moving the field forward by harnessing the infinite possibilities arising from the cross-pollination among RAD, theoretical, and lore-based research. Therefore, we hope that writing center researchers work collaboratively and imaginatively toward our shared goal of methodological pluralism and disciplinary growth by skillfully using all forms of research—whether RAD, non-RAD, or otherwise.



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