Building Networks of Enterprise: Sustained Learning in the Writing Center

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Abstract

This essay examines the learning processes of writing center professionals through the lens of "networks of enterprise" (Wallace & Gruber, 1989), which reflects on the dynamic processes through which creative people, like writing center professionals (WCPs), bring together the diverse and complex tasks undertaken in their everyday work into a cohesive and satisfying career. While there is substantial turnover in the profession, some WCPs stay in writing center positions for decades. Drawing on information gathered through surveys and interviews with ten long-term WCPs (with an average of 28 years of experience), as well as reflecting on his own career, the author attempts to discern what long-term learning WCPs take away from work. This piece shares participants' responses to the following questions: (1) What do writing center professionals learn from the diversity of their duties and long-term exposure to the ideas of writers from a multitude of disciplines? (2) Are the lessons, processes, or theories, WCPs encounter in the center of use in their own scholarly, administrative, or creative pursuits? (3) To what degree does such learning make WCPs better at their jobs and motivate them to spend years or even an entire career in the writing center? Though not unanimous, the participants' answers indicate that WCPs do indeed gain and apply to their work —including their own creative and academic writing projects — a deep,

broad, and ever-growing network of knowledge gained from tutoring, training tutors, teaching, and performing the many practical, rhetorical, political, and administrative tasks required in these positions. Most, though not all participants, cited the building of such knowledge as a key motivation for spending their career in or around writing centers.

Perhaps the best student I ever taught, who now writes for *Texas Monthly*, once implied that in choosing a career path, I had sold myself short. "But Dr. Sherwood," she said and grimaced, "the writing center?"

Her tone suggested I should be doing better at my age and with my education.

Though appalled by this backhanded compliment, I laughed and asked, "What do you mean? We do important work here. And the university actually pays me."

During my three decades of writing center work, many others have pointed out the foolishness of devoting time and energy to a job that lacks tenure protection, appears to offer few tangible rewards, involves high student contact, and demands constant growth to meet a bewildering, ever-growing set of responsibilities. As I reflect now on these caveats, I believe I can understand why those who see themselves primarily as a writer, a specialized scholar, or a teacher might view the catchall, hodgepodge writing center-professional (WCP) role as at best a detour and at worst a mistake. From our conversations, my student knew about my lifelong goal of being a productive scholar, fiction writer, and memoirist, and she apparently assumed my work in the writing center was getting in the way. She had a point. I have managed to produce a steady trickle of creative and scholarly works over the years, but I may have been more productive as a writer and scholar in a position that offered sabbaticals and summers off. For a time, her implied criticism threw me into a crisis of confidence, made me ask why I had turned down offers of tenure-track jobs and stayed so long in my current position. I love the work, of course, and I had some pragmatic reasons for staying: stability, good pay, tuition benefits for my children, and a spouse who has a job she also loves in the same city. Equally important, though, are lessons I've learned from the job. In fact, I have come to see writing center work, in all its complex, interrelated facets, as a continuous and potent learning experience.

As WCPs help student and faculty writers from across the disciplines develop their writing skills—and do all our other administrative tasks, including program building—we engage in collaborative writing, learning, invention, and problem-solving processes; encounter unfamiliar ideas, facts, theories, and epistemologies; and become adept at building relationships. Such learning, I would argue, though secondary in importance to that of the writers we serve, is nevertheless vital because we acquire an immense fund of knowledge about

a wide range of topics and disciplines we can use when we do find the time to write, whether we compose scholarly or imaginative works. Thus, we often gain as much in terms of intellectual development as we give. As I wish I had told my student at the time, directing a writing center was not a mistake or a detour. It has given me much of what I needed to fulfill my goals as a writer, teacher, scholar, administrator, and person. I wondered, though, if other long-term WCPs felt the same way about the lessons they learned from their diverse and demanding jobs.

In an attempt to answer this question and to justify the decision I and other WCPs made to stay in our jobs for so long, I turned to scholarship on creativity and learning, finding there such useful concepts as the "network of enterprise" (Wallace & Gruber, 1989) and "distributed collaboration" (John-Steiner, 2000). The network of enterprise concept describes a dynamic process through which creative people, such as WCPs, turn the diverse and complex tasks that comprise their daily work into a cohesive and satisfying career. Distributed collaboration describes a process through which pairs or groups of people engage in creativity. Beyond reading scholarship about these concepts, I also conducted IRB-approved surveys and interviews with ten other long-term WCPs with an average of 28 years of experience in the field, discovering that most agreed with the idea that the network of enterprise and distributed collaboration concepts have relevance to their work without entirely buying into my notion that the learning they have done in the writing center justifies spending decades there.

To describe how creative people—whether scientists, engineers, linguists, artists, entrepreneurs, writers, or WCPs—organize their careers in ways that allow them to fulfill long-term goals while also embracing unexpected opportunities, Doris B. Wallace and Howard E. Gruber (1989) conceived of the "network of enterprise." This concept, they argued, helps explain how creative people overcome obstacles to success and persistently discover new projects to pursue. As Wallace & Gruber (1989) explained, "Enterprises rarely come singly. The creative person often differentiates a number of main lines of activity. This has the advantage that when one enterprise grinds to a halt, productive work does not cease" (p. 11). Jackie Grutsch McKinney (2013) alluded to a similar dynamic, opening her first chapter of *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* with a list of 25 activities in which a director engages during a single day. These activities include writing conference proposals, job ads, memos, reviews, and reports; meeting with innumerable people; training tutors; tutoring students of all levels and majors; scheduling tutorials; keeping records; coping with interruptions; and addressing such pragmatic issues as budgeting, personnel problems, and even keeping the center clean. Peer tutors, she noted, meanwhile have equally complex lives, balancing their writing center duties against their many personal, academic, and social activities.

As an overarching metaphor, not only does the network of enterprise appear to capture the diverse and complex jobs of WCPs, most of whom have goals that include the work they do in the center to help writers improve, but also it appears to go far beyond their job responsibilities. Besides tutoring, teaching courses, and performing administrative duties, many of us aspire to write academic books and articles, novels, poems, short stories, personal essays, and other creative works. Although we somehow find time to work on these projects, always on our minds and central to our identities, we often put them aside to make room for other important aspects of our professional and personal aspirations—including Grutsch McKinney's (2013) long list of activities. As Wallace and Gruber (1989) described,

> In the course of a single day or week, the activities of the [creative] person may appear, from the outside, as a bewildering miscellany. But the person is not disoriented or dazzled. He or she can readily map each activity onto one or another enterprise. (p. 13)

Perhaps as important as making the diversity of activities manageable, the network prevents stagnation:

> By providing different levels of risk and other kinds of emotional coloration, the network of enterprise allows the person to choose tasks that fit different moods and needs. Similarly, the network provides an organization of goals within which the person can set different levels of aspiration. (Wallace & Gruber, 1989, p. 13)

The director of a center whose primary mission is to serve student and faculty writers from all disciplines will, out of necessity, privilege activities that promote this mission—including tutoring and tutor training—over such secondary or tertiary goals as designing a new course, pursuing grant funding for research, or composing a chapter for a novel. However, as long as WCPs view our many activities as component parts, major or minor, of our networks of enterprise, we somehow find the energy and focus to accomplish them all (see Figure 1 for an attempt to capture visually my own network of enterprise).

Figure 1

My Network of Enterprise)
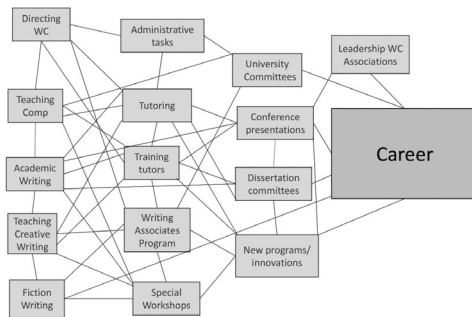
Whether cheerful or not about such interruptions as a drop-in tutorial, an urgent request from the chancellor to edit a document, a question about American Medical Association style, or a complaint about our services, WCPs learn to move from task to task almost seamlessly. For most of us, though, our tutoring, teaching, personal reading, administrative work, and academic and creative writing blend with and nourish each other in ways not always clear or intentional. For instance, some of the lessons about classical rhetoric I learned while working on my doctorate—particularly about *ethos*—informed my fiction writing when I realized the main character in my unpublished first novel was inconsistent and unlikable. Although I have yet to rehabilitate that character, I applied the lessons about *ethos* to my next two novels. At the same time, lessons I've learned from fiction writing about imagery, perspective, and sentence richness sometimes apply to writing academic essays, to teaching writing classes, and to tutoring in the center. Beyond our many activities, I would argue that each person with whom we collaborate on writing or other projects becomes a strand in our network of enterprise, contributing to our skills and knowledge, while we become a strand in their network.

For those WCPs who regularly tutor, a student or faculty writer may present unexpected creative or intellectual challenges we feel only partially prepared to address. Yet we somehow bring ourselves up to speed almost instantly as we work to help the writer achieve greater clarity of expression or discover a feasible solution to a specific problem. We do this sort of collaborative problem solving often in the course of even a single day, and so we become adept at improvising and synthesizing previously unfamiliar notions into sensible patterns. These interactions resemble what Vera John-Steiner (2000) called "distributed collaboration," which she described as follows: "The participants in distributed collaborative groups are linked by similar interests. At times, their conversations may lead to new personal insights, . . . [and] out of such informal connections some lasting partnerships may be built" (p. 198). Referring to such a relationship between an off-Broadway director and a choreographer, John-Steiner explained, "They see their partnership as particularly successful because they jointly generate a wealth of new ideas. [As the choreographer] commented, 'Ideas create ideas … like ping-ponging'" (p. 80).

An important psychological mechanism that characterizes such collaborative creativity, John-Steiner noted, is "mutual appropriation, or the stretching of human possibilities through the collaborative partners' shared experiences that sustains their endeavors" (p. 199). By "mutual appropriation," John-Steiner meant a process of sustained engagement "during which partners hear, struggle with, and reach for each other's thoughts and ideas" (p. 199). She quoted Nancy Goldberger (1997) who, in describing the process of working with a collaborator, explained she must "'try to place myself in her place so that

I feel inside her mind and heart, search for her meaning before I impose new words'" (as cited in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 199).

A writing center consultant frequently takes part in the sort of collaboration Goldberger described, attempting to assume, however briefly, the mind and heart of a student writer in order, first, to understand what the writer is trying to do and, second, to make suggestions appropriate to the writer's purpose, voice, and ability; the criteria of the genre; and the professor's assignment. This operation calls for delicacy. After all, we want to avoid taking over (or fully appropriating) a project or suggesting revisions we may have the skill or motivation to make but a particular student may not. Such delicate work is good practice for a fiction writer, who engages in a similar process by assuming the perspective of a character. An author's failure in a story to accurately sense and portray the key traits of a character may lead to inconsistent actions and reactions that strike readers as discordant and dissatisfying. Likewise, a consultant's failure to accurately sense a student's perspective and give advice appropriate to the student's purpose, conceptions, and level of ability may lead not simply to discordant words and ideas but also to a frustrated writer. Fortunately, over time we become adroit at stepping into the writer's role and temporarily assuming their perspective, thus giving us a fighting chance at preventing such failures.

As consultant and writer grope together toward meaning, trading notions and clarifying concepts, they also engage in a shared act of bricolage (or the construction of an idea out of available materials and notions) (Glăveanu, 2014). As Vlad Petre Glăveanu (2014) explained, "Activities of meaning-making and the co-construction of knowledge are both a constant outcome [of creative collaboration] and its engine, facilitating new forms of 'extension' of the individual towards the assimilation and transformation of culture" (p. 21). As we work with student and faculty writers from multiple disciplines, then, we transform alongside these writers, gradually gaining the intellectual flexibility to "extend" ourselves into unfamiliar genres and domains of knowledge. Sometimes the ideas or skills we absorb from interactions with writers from other disciplines become directly useful, leading to or supporting works of our own. Thanks to having worked alongside a number of graduate business majors, assigned to write Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threast (SWOT) analyses, I once managed to throw together a SWOT analysis for the writing center, which my provost demanded without warning one afternoon, due by 3 p.m.

Perhaps a better example of this type of extension comes from novelist Cynthia Shearer, an assistant director of our university's writing center, who observed several years ago that while doing research for a new novel, she had come across facts and anecdotes that would make good historical essays if only she felt confident writing in that genre. After working with a number of history

professors and graduate students in the writing center, she not only gained the courage to pursue two of these projects, including the history of Cosette Faust Newton, the first female Dean of Women at Southern Methodist University, but she also published both essays in quality journals, including the *Oxford American*. One lesson Ms. Shearer learned involved the depth of archival research historians must conduct before they ever begin writing a paper. To complete her *Oxford American* essay, she spent two days in a University of Texas archive to confirm a single yet crucial fact about her research subject. She now applies what she learned from this experience to fiction, essays, and the design of assignments for composition students, intended to teach them how to test and support their assumptions.

Do other WCPs accrue similar creative and intellectual gains from their diverse writing center activities and collaborations with writers at the "point of need"? (Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2007, p. 49). To find out, I sent survey and interview questions to colleagues who had been working in writing centers for at least a decade at a range of institutions, including non-profit universities, state universities, community colleges, and secondary schools. Sent via e-mail, the survey and interview questions asked for a mix of quantitative (using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating disagree and 5 indicating agree) and qualitative responses; participants had the choice of whether to use their names in this study or remain anonymous (see Appendix A for the complete set of quantitative questions and Appendix B for the complete set of qualitative questions).

The ten directors I surveyed and interviewed averaged 28 years of experience in writing centers, making them fairly rare in a profession with high turnover. As Valerie Balester and James McDonald (2001) reported in a *WPA* article, titled "A View of Status and Working Conditions: Relations Between Writing Program and Writing Center Directors," only 18% of the writing center directors they polled had held their position for eight or more years, with most holding the job for only four years before moving into another position (pp. 69–70). Some of these longer-term directors had won tenure, and the untenured among them "often wrote that they had professional status and job security 'equal' to tenure-track faculty..." (Balester & McDonald, 2001, p. 70). More recently, as Nicole I. Caswell, Grutsch McKinney, and Rebecca Jackson (2016) observed in *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*,

> The fact that many writing center directors are on year-to-year contracts, have the directorship responsibilities rotated among colleagues in a department, and/or are not in tenure-line positions, means many directors are not given the luxury of settling into a position for the long term. (p. 188)

As it happens, only four of the directors in my own sample have or once had tenure protection. Asked, "Which aspects of your work in the WC satisfy you

most?" none cited job security (though job security may make other satisfactions possible).

Most, but not all, of the 10 experienced directors in my sample acknowledged intellectual and creative gains from their work in writing centers. Most also confirmed both the complex nature of their jobs[1] and the relevance of the "network of enterprise" as an organizing principle for their many professional activities. As Bradley Hughes noted, "That's a fascinating concept to me, and I think it does apply." He pointed to inextricable links between his university's writing-across-the-curriculum program and its cross-curricular writing center, both of which he directed during the survey period, and to the research projects and publications that emerged from his duties. He explained that, as his job has evolved, "different areas of emphasis fade over time, opening up space for new ones." Allison Holland, now retired, agreed that the "network of enterprise" concept "completely describes my work," which included "multiple tasks and responsibilities" from "different sources of origin . . . ." As Michael A. Pemberton pointed out, a writing center director is "constantly at the mercy of other people's workflow, priorities and schedules." In fact, he obsesrved, most of the projects in which a director engages

> involve multiple moving parts and depend on others—in one way or another—for completion. In that respect, juggling multiple responsibilities . . . is just the nature of the beast. It's not always a matter of switching lines of activity because things have temporarily "ground to a halt." Just as often the switch is made because another line suddenly becomes much more urgent.

Like Hughes, Holland, and Pemberton, Balester acknowledged, "I am often accused of having too many irons in the fire, of doing too much, but this is how I naturally do best." Her current duties include serving as assistant provost for undergraduate studies, as executive director of her university's writing center and, more recently, as director of an academic skills center, which "might seem tangential to the writing center, but it is not. In fact, I can see consolidation becoming a fact of life at this university and so by taking on both units, I can control the way that happens." Shareen Grogan, former president of the International Writing Centers Association, saw a positive side to the complexity and diversity of her job:

> I would say that my to-do lists address the multiple projects that I'm engaged in, and that always having more to do keeps me from dwelling on any one success or failure. Having multiple projects going at the same time keeps me from being too emotionally invested in any one project,

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1 Asked to choose phrasing that best described the nature of their jobs, four directors chose "highly complex, diverse, and challenging," four chose "complex, diverse, and challenging," one chose "somewhat difficult," and one chose "simple and straightforward."

so perhaps I am more willing to take risks and to try new things.

Their openness to challenge and risk appears to allow these WCPs to acquire from their multifaceted jobs an abundance of practical knowledge they apply not only to their writing center work but also to their other personal and professional pursuits, including writing projects.

In fact, several of the directors pointed to significant lessons about writing, research, and tutoring they learned—and later applied to their own work as writers, scholars, or administrators—from interactions with faculty members and student writers, particularly those who specialize in other disciplines. Muriel Harris said, "Not only did I learn about the subjects students write about, . . . the variety of writing processes and individual differences, and the politics of our field, but I also learned a lot about how to help others learn." Likewise, Hughes offered a list of eleven ways in which working with writers from across the disciplines deepened his own knowledge, including the following:

- "how to use theory in a research project;"
- "how to stay motivated with complex writing projects;"
- "how to integrate interview, survey, and ethnographic data into an analysis and argument;" and
- "how to be satisfied with less than perfection."

He added:

From a doctoral student in sociology, writing articles for publication, I learned (and we figured out together) some smart approaches to distilling complex theoretical conversations and data—in order to meet ruthless word limits in some journals without sacrificing too much of the nuance in the argument.

A director who preferred to remain anonymous explained, "From each discipline I've worked with, I have found a lot of 'cross pollination' of ideas that somehow, in some way, end up in my work either as an administrator or as a scholar." In particular, she mentioned how lengthy discussions in the center about neuroscience led to her own research in positive psychology and the concept of flow. Working with writers from all disciplines, Balester noted, has taught her "more about writing anxiety and writer's block than books tell us." Also, while helping an instructor rethink a writing emphasis class in industrial distribution, she gained insights from the instructor into how to form viable groups for collaborative work by considering each member's gender, level of performance, learning preferences, and specific abilities.

While several directors indicated they had *not* learned significant lessons from tutoring that applied to their own writing, they also mentioned, in long-form answers, that they no longer tutored writers themselves either because they had moved into upper administrative positions or because they now primarily trained others to tutor. The same directors also mentioned that they found other aspects of their WCP work, such as program creation or tutor

training, more gratifying than one-to-one tutoring. By contrast, when asked, "What aspects of writing center work satisfy you most?" Balester replied, "What I get to do least—sitting one-to-one with a student and tutoring. I do this seldom now, but when I do, it is a thrill."

Besides knowledge about writing, tutoring, or teaching, the directors indicated their work in the writing center has taught them a huge amount that is hard to articulate. Through experience, direct training, or interactions with other administrators, teachers, and scholars, the directors cited key lessons they learned by engaging in the following activities: building communities, hiring and evaluating personnel, reading in a variety of fields, sorting and reporting data, creating and developing a website, writing grants, advocating for causes/goals/programs, using statistics, composing administrative policies, spearheading university-wide initiatives, being proactive and collaborative, meeting human resources standards, engaging in difficult conversations, confronting troublesome behaviors directly, promoting the center's services, budgeting large (and sometimes small) amounts of money, building coalitions to create new programs, protecting their programs' staff, and developing many other skills and competencies.

Asked how they learned to cope with such a bewildering miscellany of duties and still do their primary jobs, the WCPs credited such experiences as growing up on a farm (Joyce Kinkead), depending on "trial and error" (Harris, Balester), exchanging advice on WCenter (Harris), serving an apprenticeship with a previous director (Holland), relying on "practice and feedback, (just like learning to write)" (Balester), "observing other administrators" (Balester), "being put in positions where I was forced to do so" (Pemberton), and "juggling complexity as a teacher in the classroom" (Clint Gardner). Others said they have yet to master the ability to balance their ever-growing responsibilities. As Hughes replied,

> Hah! I'm not sure I have ever learned to do this successfully. I do a lot, and I think I accomplish a lot—but over the years, the programs I lead have grown significantly, and I keep doing new things. So I guess I've learned to do some routine things more efficiently and have had great colleagues in leadership roles who do a lot, and created new leadership roles for graduate and undergraduate tutors. But I also work way too much, and I'm always worried that I'm juggling too many things and forgetting about or neglecting some important ones.

Grogan, too, noted she is still "learning to set priorities, to know that not everything can be done in a day. I am also learning to say no to new projects."

This process of setting priorities among the competing needs and obligations within their network of enterprises is an essential part of the WCPs' ongoing training. As Hughes and Grogan suggested, so is realizing their limitations. Kinkead reported dropping some professional activities in the interest

of honing and refining the energies she needed to build and manage a writing center while also teaching courses. Pemberton added,

> I've learned to perform a variety of job duties reasonably well, developed some time management skills, gotten a fairly broad perspective on how the university operates, worked with budgets and finances, practiced diplomacy, and utilized negotiating skills. I've also learned that money, resources, and time constraints place severe limits on what it's possible for one person to accomplish.

As he and the other directors suggested, when their duties continually proliferate, WCPs must learn to work more efficiently on urgent, high-priority tasks, delegate others, and put aside longer-term or less-immediate matters until they can find sufficient time.

Such knowledge, gained from directing writing centers, translates well into other academic leadership positions, whether as writing program administrators, deans, or assistant provosts in charge of more than one program. Indeed, a number of current and former directors have assumed such positions. Of those I interviewed, three have moved into high- or mid-level administrative positions while still maintaining oversight of, or at least a stake in, the writing center. Asked about their greatest sources of job satisfaction, most of the WCPs, including those who have moved to upper administration, noted activities related to writing center work: training peer or professional writing consultants (Gardner, Holland, Kinkead, Pemberton, Grogan, Hughes); tutoring students (Harris, Balester, Pamela Childers); "building new programs collaboratively" (Hughes); interacting with faculty and students from other disciplines (Childers, Hughes); solving problems (Balester); working a varied and autonomous job (Grogan); "watching our tutor alums—undergraduate and graduate—launch exciting new phases of their lives, in advanced studies or careers" (Hughes); and taking care of the nuts and bolts aspects of the job, such as planning, organizing, and promoting the center (Pemberton, Kinkead).

Asked which aspects of their work satisfy them least, all contributed to the following list: coping with budgetary constraints, writing reports, record keeping, assessing the center's effectiveness, dealing with unresponsive upper administrators, and dealing with faculty complaints or misunderstandings about the center's mission.

Possible Takeaways

In this project, I have attempted, with mixed results, to determine whether the lessons writing center directors learn from their complex and busy jobs justify their spending many years—or even a career—in such a position. While gathering and sifting evidence in support of my own career choice, I may have been guilty of both conscious and unconscious bias. Long-term WCPs no

doubt have a number of reasons, whether professional, practical, or personal, for entering and staying in their careers, and their ongoing learning may play less of a role in their choice than in mine.

Nevertheless, the 10 WCPs who answered my survey and interview questions strongly agreed that the network of enterprise concept offers a useful way to think about their various activities. However, the quantitative results from some of the survey questions, in which respondents indicated scores on a Likert scale ranging from 1–5 (with 1 indicating disagree and 5 indicating agree), did not always demonstrate strong agreement; participants showed a wide range of responses to the following statements:[2]

- "Engaging in collaborative creativity as a writing consultant has motivated me to continue working for many years in the center": 4.0 average (indicates general agreement, but a standard deviation of 4.47 reflects responses ranging widely from agree to disagree)
- "The knowledge I've gained from writers in other disciplines has motivated me to continue working for many years in a writing center": 3.8 average (indicates some agreement, but a standard deviation of 3.95 reflects responses ranging widely from agree to disagree).
- "The generalist aspects of writing center work have helped my academic career": 4.1 average (indicates agreement, but a standard deviation of 2.62 reflects responses ranging from agree to disagree)
- "The generalist aspects of writing center work have hurt my academic career": 1.5 average (indicates general disagreement, but a standard deviation of 2.18 reflects responses ranging from disagree to agree)

These findings do not qualify as ringing endorsements of my thesis. A better question might have been whether the entirety of the WCPs' learning from the activities that comprise their networks of enterprise had motivated them to stay. Unfortunately, I did not ask it during the period approved by my IRB. The small sample of 10 directors who responded is also an obvious weakness of my method; a larger sample size might have generated different results.

Still, the WCPs' responses to the following statements did offer a more definite perception of the utility of the knowledge they (or their tutors) have acquired from building networks of enterprise or engaging in distributed collaboration:

- "The knowledge I've gained from working in the writing center is too general or unsystematic to be of value to my scholarship or creative pursuits": 1.1 average, with a standard deviation of 0.95 (indicates clear disagreement and low variation among responses)

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2   See Appendix A for all survey results.

- "Tutoring often involves an act of creative collaboration that combines the ideas and insights of both the writer and consultant": 4.7 average, with a standard deviation of 1.45 (indicates clear agreement and low variation among responses)
- "To tutor effectively, I must often temporarily assume a writer's perspective—or 'see' through his or her point of view—to understand the writer's intentions and offer useful help": 4.5 average, with a standard deviation of 1.58 (indicates clear agreement and relatively low variation among responses)
- "My ability to assume another writer's perspective has improved with time and experience on the job": 4.6 average, with a standard deviation of 1.55 (clear agreement and relatively low variation among responses).

As these responses suggest, the WCPs who enjoy the tutoring process and working with writers from across the disciplines benefit from such experiences for as long as they stay working in the writing center. Many continue to train tutors, run writing centers, and consult one-to-one with writers, and they view the knowledge that results from such interactions as significant to their development as directors, teachers, scholars, and writers. Others take what they have learned about interpersonal interactions, program building, administration, and scholarship into mid- or upper administrative jobs, occasionally yearning for their previous interactions with student writers but also indicating they have learned their most crucial lessons from other aspects of the job.

At the least, the network of enterprise and distributed collaboration concepts offer ways to envision the ongoing learning processes of WCPs as they go about their work. Each student, faculty member, peer consultant, and administrator with whom we WCPs work becomes an important strand in our network of enterprise, and we become important strands in theirs by offering support, feedback, ideas, or other efforts to help them meet personal, academic, professional, and institutional goals. As part of this collaborative process, our ideas merge with theirs, proliferate, and lead to more ideas. On some level, I would suggest, such intellectual gains come to all who work in writing centers—even those who stay for only a short time. After all, WCPs sit at the crossroads of many fields of study, where, in addition to our various administrative functions, we struggle alongside writers to capture in words their half-formed notions about complex and unfamiliar topics. For as long as we stay at this crossroads, we receive regular exposure to and practice with such creative and critical work. In the process, we build ever-growing networks of enterprise informed by and indebted to others. And all of these activities, all the people with whom we collaborate, and all the ideas we encounter, though apparently only loosely connected, can add up to a satisfying and productive

whole and may help explain why some WCPs not only tolerate but also welcome spending their entire career in a writing center.

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Appendix A: Quantitative Survey Questions and Responses

Questions	Mean	*SD*
Tutoring often involves an act of creative collaboration that combines the ideas and insights of both the writer and consultant	4.7	1.45

Questions	Mean	*SD*
To tutor effectively, I must often temporarily assume a writer's perspective—or 'see' through his or her point of view—to understand the writer's intentions and offer useful help.	4.5	1.58
My ability to assume another writer's perspective has improved with time and experience on the job.	4.6	1.55
Engaging in collaborative creativity as a writing consultant has motivated me to continue working for many years in the center.	4.0	4.47
The knowledge I've gained from writers in other disciplines has motivated me to continue working for many years in a writing center.	3.8	3.95
The knowledge I've gained from working with writers in other disciplines has proven useful in my own creative and scholarly pursuits.	4.1	2.98
The knowledge I've gained from working in the writing center is too general or unsystematic to be of value to my scholarship or creative pursuits.	1.1	0.95
The generalist aspects of writing center work have helped my academic career.	4.1	2.62
The generalist aspects of writing center work have hurt my academic career.	1.5	2.18

Note. 5-point Likert-scale, 5 =agree, 1=disagree

Appendix B: Interview and Open-Ended Survey Questions

Please answer the following demographic questions:

1. How many years have you worked in the writing center field?

   a. 5-10 years
   b. 11-15 years
   c. 16-20 years
   d. 21-25 years
   e. More than 26 years

2. In what capacities have you served during your career (please circle all that apply)?
   a. Undergraduate peer writing consultant
   b. Graduate peer writing consultant
   c. Professional staff
   d. Associate or Assistant Director

    e. Director

3. Which description best fits your current position:
    a. Director/tenured professor of an English department writing center
    b. Untenured director of an English department writing center
    c. Tenured director of a free-standing writing center
    d. Untenured director of a free-standing writing center
    e. Untenured assistant director/professional staff of a free-standing writing center

Please answer the following questions about learning and working in the writing center:

4. What term(s) best describes the difficulty of your work in the center?
    a. Simple/Straightforward
    b. Rarely challenging
    c. Somewhat difficult
    d. Complex, diverse, challenging
    e. Highly complex, diverse, and challenging

5. Which activities below do you perform on regular basis (please mark all that apply):
    - Recordkeeping
    - Planning
    - Budgeting
    - Hiring
    - Scheduling
    - Evaluating/Appraising employees
    - Tutoring writers in humanities disciplines
    - Tutoring writers in other disciplines (music, business, sciences, arts)
    - Writing reports for supervisors
    - Conducting research/scholarship
    - Writing fiction, poetry, drama, or creative nonfiction
    - Teaching classes
    - Conducting workshops
    - Speaking to classes or other audiences
    - Solving problems
    - Promoting the center's services
    - Serving on departmental or university committees
    - Directing or serving on honors, thesis, or dissertation committee

- Serving in leadership roles in professional organizations
- Other (please specify):

6. If these tasks describe your regular duties, what have you gained in terms of professional skills or knowledge from engaging in such diverse tasks over a long period of time?

7. How did you learn to balance or juggle the multiple duties you have as a writing center professional?

8. In describing how creative people, whether scientists, writers, or artists, organize their complex careers, psychologists Doris B. Wallace and Howard E. Gruber (1989) cite a concept called "networks of enterprise." As they say, "Enterprises rarely come singly. The creative person often differentiates a number of main lines of activity. This has the advantage that when one enterprise grinds to a halt, productive work does not cease" (p. 11). As a writing center professional or director, to what degree does Wallace and Gruber's "network of enterprise" concept apply to your work in the writing center?

9. Which aspects of your work in the writing center satisfy you most?

10. Which aspects of writing center work satisfy you least?

11. Student and faculty writers often learn from writing center consultants (which is the main purpose of tutoring) but in your view do the consultants often also learn from the writers?

12. What lessons have you learned from writers—whether student or faculty—with whom you've worked in the writing center that you did not anticipate learning but which proved useful in your own work as a writer, scholar, teacher, or administer (please be specific)?

13. Of these unexpected pieces of knowledge, in which of the following areas did the facts, lessons, skills, theories, or perspectives prove useful to you? Please indicate all that apply.
    - Interacting with other people
    - Tutoring writers in your own discipline
    - Tutoring writers in other disciplines
    - Writing/composing your own scholarly work
    - Teaching
    - Conducting research
    - Writing poetry, fiction, drama, or creative nonfiction
    - Administrating the center

- Training tutors
- Other

14. In your view has this knowledge come primarily from interactions with and exposure to writers in your own discipline (e.g., English or history), from exposure to writers in disciplines with which you are less familiar, or from both?

15. Please give a specific example of an idea, lesson, process, theory, or fact you learned from interacting with students or faculty members writing in another discipline (whether music, physics, business, nursing, etc.), using as much space as you like.

Steve Sherwood is the director of the William L. Adams Center for Writing at TCU and the author/editor of five books, including the *St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. After 34 years spent working in the center, 20 as director, he plans to retire in June 2022 and spend whatever time he has left traveling with his wife Jill, hiking, biking, writing, and playing with his grandchildren.