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How Participation in a Peer-Led Writing Center Impacts Struggling Students' Self-Efficacy and
Motivation

Laura Peterson

Kennesaw State University

A Dissertation submitted to the Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Education

KENNESAW, GEORGIA

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ABSTRACT

Many secondary students struggle with writing, both in terms of skill and confidence. This qualitative case study follows six students who have a history of struggling in English Language Arts class as they undergo a tutoring intervention based on the writing center model of peer tutoring. Students were observed in seven writing sessions which took place at multiple stages of the writing process and with informational, narrative, and analytical writing assignments. Through interview and observation, the researcher examines how students' self-efficacy and motivation shift over the course of the intervention. Students who began with low self-efficacy and low motivation were shown to have increased in both components through the tutoring process; students with high self-efficacy and low motivation did not experience the same positive impact.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Motivation; Writing Center; peer tutoring; writing

DEDICATION

To Michael, who agrees and encourages me every time I start a sentence with “I’ve been thinking about...” and finish it with some type of new educational opportunity I’ve decided to pursue. And to Eliza and Maggie, who are growing up too quickly and will undoubtedly change the world soon.

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There are so many people who made this whole journey not only possible but also less overwhelming. Gayle and Mike Farmer filled my childhood with trips to the library and to bookstores, allowing me to fill my mind with the possibilities that literature offered. They also stepped in whenever we needed some help with childcare, literally giving me the time to get this done. Leeanne Kline was by my side throughout every step; her to-do lists, reminders to just write, and breaks to talk about nonsense helped me persevere through this process. My dissertation chair, Dr. Darren Crovitz, was a consistent, calming voice every time I started thinking I would never get done. The other members of my committee, Dr. Michelle Devereaux and Dr. Rob Montgomery, offered encouragement and guidance to help make sure this dissertation communicated what I wanted to say—and to make sure that all the sentences I left unfinished were completed.

The students involved in this study are amazing human beings. They were willing to let their former English teacher make them into guinea pigs, and they did so without hesitation. I'm proud of each and every one of them, tutors and tutees, and I hope that they recognize that their voices are worth hearing.

And my husband, Michael, gave me the time and the space and the support to make this dream happen. He listened to me every time I needed to talk through how to articulate an idea, every time something didn't go as I planned, and every time I needed to vent my stress. He also never questioned exactly how much my coffeeshop budget has increased over the past two years.

DEDICATION.....3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....4

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW12

INTRODUCTION.....12

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....12

RESEARCH QUESTIONS15

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.....16

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY16

Dimensions in Need of Further Research18

 Impact on Writing Skills.18

 Focused Writing Center Intervention.18

 Focus on Secondary Context.....19

Local Context.....19

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK20

Self-Efficacy Theory.....21

Sociocultural Theory.....22

Motivation and Engagement23

Writing Center Theory.....23

Connections between Theoretical Frameworks24

REVIEW OF RELEVANT TERMS.....26

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY.....27

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....29

INTRODUCTION.....29

Theoretical Research29

 Self-Efficacy Theory.....29

 Sources of Self-Efficacy.....30

 Emotional and Physiological Reactions.32

Sociocultural Theory33

Motivation34

Writing Center Theory36

Review of Literature37

Writing Skill Gaps37

Writing Instruction and Student Motivation39

 Self-Efficacy and Motivation.39

Writing Self-Efficacy41

Peer Feedback and Peer Tutoring42

 General Benefits of Peer Tutoring.....43

Writing Center Background48

 History.....48

 Design and Protocol.....48

 Benefits51

Current Best Practices in Writing Instruction52

 Writing Processes.53

Standardized Testing Complicates Best Practices.....56

Issues of Student Choice and Ownership in Writing56

Contemporary Writing Center Research.....57

 Dimensions in Need of Further Research58

 Impact on Writing Skills.58

 Focused Writing Center Intervention.59

 Focus on Clients Rather than Tutors.59

 Focus on Secondary Context.....60

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS.....60

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY61

Problem Statement and Research Questions61

 Research Questions.....62

Research Approach and Rationale62

Research Paradigm	62
Case Study Rationale	65
Participant Parameters	66
<i>Table 3.1</i>	67
<i>School Setting and Context</i>	68
Research Site	68
Access to Site	68
<i>Data Collection</i>	69
Overview of Methods	69
Interviews	70
Observations	72
<i>Table 3.2</i>	73
Writing Discourse	75
Data Analysis	76
<i>Researcher Positionality</i>	77
Worldview	78
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	78
<i>Limitations</i>	80
<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	81
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	82
INTRODUCTION	82
<i>Participants and Tutoring Pairings</i>	83
Specific Participants	83
<i>Table 4.1</i>	84
Remy	84
Elvis	85
Sera	85
Clinta	85
Matteo	86

Oakley.....86

Tutoring Pairings.....86

Table 4.2.....87

Remy and Margot.....88

Elvis and Margot.....89

Sera and Jewel.....90

Clinta and Marie.....91

Matteo and Caleb.....92

Oakley and Dakota.....93

Initial Interview Findings.....93

Table 4.3.....94

Attitudes about Writing.....95

Attitudes about Peer Tutoring.....96

Participants' Responses to Tutoring.....97

Remy.....99

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles.....99

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X.....99

Motivation.....99

Self-Efficacy.....99

Peer tutoring.....99

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X.....100

Assignment Four: Six-Word Memoir.....101

Assignment 5: Second Theme or Characterization Paragraph for The Poet X.....102

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph on Theme or Character in The Poet X.....103

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay.....105

Table 4.7.....106

Elvis.....107

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles.....107

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X.....108

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X.....108

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir 109

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 111

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X..... 111

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay 112

Table 4.8..... 113

Sera 114

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles 114

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 115

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X 116

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir 117

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 118

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X..... 119

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay 120

Table 4.9..... 121

Clinta 122

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles 122

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 123

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X 124

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir 124

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 125

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X..... 126

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay 127

Table 4.10..... 128

Matteo..... 129

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles 129

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 130

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X 131

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir 131

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 132

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X..... 133

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay 134

Table 4.11. 135

Oakley...... 135

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles..... 135

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 136

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X 137

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir 137

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X 138

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X..... 138

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay 139

Table 4.12. 140

Patterns in the Sessions...... 141

Session One: AI Article Synthesis 142

Session Two: The Poet X First Paragraph 142

Session Three: The Poet X First Paragraph Revision 143

Session Four: Six-Word Memoir and Explanation 144

Session Five: The Poet X Second Paragraph 144

Session Six: The Poet X Final Paragraph..... 145

Session Seven: The Poet X Revision and Final Draft..... 146

Table 4.13. 146

Table 4.14. 147

Table 4.15. 148

Final Interview 149

Table 4.16. 149

INITIAL COMMENTS ON FINDINGS 152

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION..... 154

STUDENTS WANT PERSONAL WRITING TO STAY PRIVATE..... 155

CONTINUED COLLABORATION LED TO CONVERSATION 157

CONSISTENT DISCOURSE LEADS TO DEEPER DISCUSSION..... 159

AVOIDANT BEHAVIORS DECREASED OVER TIME 161

NOT EVERY INTERACTION WAS POSITIVE OR IMPACTFUL..... 163

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 164

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH..... 166

Student Populations 166

Quantitative Measures 167

Writing Skill Measures 167

Writing Center Realities 167

IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING PEDAGOGY 168

Implications for the Writing Classroom 168

 Make Writing Less Painful and More Productive..... 168

 Build an Environment of Collaboration and Trust..... 169

Implications for the Writing Teacher..... 170

IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING CENTERS 171

CONCLUSIONS..... 173

WORKS CITED 174

APPENDIX A: FIRST FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS..... 186

APPENDIX B: PROPOSED FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS..... 187

APPENDIX C: ASSENT FORM 188

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

Introduction

As an English teacher, I fully believe in the importance of developing writing skills, both for the classroom and for life outside of it. I am also keenly aware of the gaps in writing skills exhibited by my own students. In my years of experience teaching in my school's Remedial Education Plan (REP) program, the students have changed my opinion of struggling, unmotivated students. The prevailing belief among some teachers is that these students are simply "dumb" or "lazy," but working alongside them has given me new insight. Many of them have been let down by the system, and they have been continually told that they are never going to achieve. When met with my encouragement that they can absolutely read a passage or write a paragraph, they have continued their emphatic belief that they simply cannot. These thoughts and assumptions, particularly the ones that involve the ability to influence student motivation by improving their confidence and belief in themselves, come from my core beliefs as an educator: no student is incapable of growth, and no student's mind is worthless or empty.

Statement of the Problem

In secondary schools, the reading and writing fluency skills of students have been an area of concern for decades. While most teachers express frustration with having their students measured with standardized tests, there is concerning data to be found in those results. In 2015, 35% of students were at the NAEP Basic level of comprehension, and 28% scored Below Basic. In 2019, however, these percentages differed significantly, with 33% scoring at the Basic level and 30% scoring Below Basic (NAEP Reading Report Card, 2020). Of the 61% of students who applied for or had been accepted to a four-year college or university, 19% of those scored below the NAEP Basic Level of reading comprehension (NAEP Results, 2020, p. 3). The standardized

test given in Georgia, the Georgia End-of-Course test, examines both reading and writing skills. For the American Literature test, given to all enrolled eleventh grade students, results from my school's 2021-22 scores showed that 55.3% of students were below Proficient (GADOE EOC, 2022). However, it is important to note that standardized tests are often a poor reflection of a student's actual skills and knowledge. The nature of standardized tests leaves no room for differentiation, demanding that all students take the same test regardless of their cultural, ethnic, academic, or socioeconomic background. Often, students from marginalized communities score poorly on these tests, not because they are any less capable or intelligent, but because questions are asked in biased ways or are not contextually connected to that student's experience (Baldner, 2021; Rezai-Rashti & Lingard, 2021). The students who took the American Literature test last year are now enrolled in our school's 12th-grade Advanced Composition course.

These gaps in skills manifest in multiple ways in the students at the school where I teach. While our EOC scores are the lowest in the county (20.7% Beginning Learners, 27.6% Below Grade Level Lexile, compared to the county's overall 13% Beginning Learners, 19.4% Below Grade Level Lexile; GADOE EOC, 2022), that deficit can be partially accounted for by the unique population that we teach (13.6% English Language Learners and 14.2% Students with Disabilities; the school with the next highest percentages has 6.5% and 12.3%, respectively, with 500 fewer students; GADOE CCRPI); given the problematic nature of depending on standardized test scores as a true measure of the efficacy of writing instruction, the more significant concern is the overwhelming apathy or avoidance that students demonstrate toward any sort of writing. Our school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) for this year was written as a reaction to our students leaving high school without preparation for what they will face. One goal states that "[School] will increase participation in future-readiness programs by 1% yearly over 3

years as measured by CCRPI Accelerated Enrollment and Pathway Completion indicators” (CHS, 2023). That the school made sure to focus its growth on future readiness for the next three years shows that administration recognizes that students are leaving the school without being prepared for life afterwards. Communication in multiple forms is a vital part of that future-readiness.

In conversations in my Professional Learning Community (PLC), made up of other eleventh grade teachers in my school, there are commonalities I hear from my colleagues how many students will simply sit and stare at a blank computer screen without moving their hands to type, how many will doodle and tear up their notebook paper before writing one sentence. One teacher admits with frustration that she believes that a lot of the struggle with writing comes from the fact that we as a district have moved away from the writing process. We do not have the time built into our curriculum for students to revisit their own writing. Therefore, when they receive a bad grade, they just think they are bad writers instead of understanding that every writer makes mistakes. Another teacher says that our focus on standardized testing, particularly in eleventh grade, means that we only focus on making sure students are prepared to write for the EOC rubric instead of making sure that they are able to gain a sense of their own voice. This echoes Hillocks’ (2002) finding that teachers often teach more to the type of writing that the test measures rather than teaching the full spectrum and depth of writing.

Even the students who are identified as Advanced Placement are not necessarily successful writers. One teacher of AP Language and Composition reports that students in her class are so concerned with grades that they often do not care about making sure their writing is genuine or reflective of themselves; instead, their identity as writers is tied up in the number of comments left in the margins and the grade they receive.

Overall, the student culture surrounding writing in our school is a culture that believes writing is too difficult, too boring, or too irrelevant to attempt. Obviously, there are exceptions to this, but the students who most consistently express this attitude are those who are enrolled in the Remedial Education Plan (REP) classes—students who are considered to have significant struggles with both skills and motivation. The qualifying criteria for a teacher or administrator to label a student as REP include failed classes, low test scores, or trouble keeping up with the pace of instruction and assignments in a general education classroom (which is perhaps the most subjective of the criteria and is entirely based on teacher recommendation).

Because writing is often viewed as an extremely personal endeavor, students often avoid writing at all and are hesitant to show their work to peers (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Graham, Beringer, & Fan, 2007; Hayes, 1996; White & Bruning, 2005). Building a system in which students grow comfortable engaging in peer tutoring and peer review can help students gain confidence and competence—being able to name the issue helps empower students to fix the issue (Camfield, 2004). This writing center intervention provides a guide for how other schools may be able to implement this same peer tutoring strategy and help build writing self-efficacy.

Research Questions

Research Questions:

- How can participation in a peer-led writing tutoring center impact struggling students' perception of and confidence in their writing skills?
- How can participation in a peer-led writing center impact the motivation of struggling students when approaching a writing task?

- Areas of interests: a) struggling students' attitudes toward writing; b) impact on struggling students' self-efficacy in terms of their writing; c) impact of increased self-efficacy on students' motivation and engagement.

Purpose of the Study

Through this study, I hope to examine how consistent, continual participation in a peer-led writing center model of tutoring can help struggling students not only overcome some of the gaps in their writing skills but can also help them build self-efficacy in their writing. By targeting students who have already been identified as struggling and who have already demonstrated at least a lack of motivation in completing English assignments, I can examine how direct guidance and feedback from peers might impact their attitudes about writing.

Significance of the Study

As students exit high school and either continue their education or enter the workforce, they find themselves lacking the writing skills necessary to succeed. A 2004 survey of corporations found that, while “writing is a regular part of the job for two-thirds of all employees” (Eatherington, 2012, as cited in Grandinetti, 2012), when it came to the ability to accurately and appropriately complete workplace writing, “a third of all workers fall short of employers' expectations in written communication skills” (Eatherington, 2012). Further compounding the issue of writing skills is the fact that our students increasingly communicate in cell phone- and social media-based short spurts, amplifying the need for them to be able to skillfully engage in and understand longer, more formal forms of communication (Carroll, 2014). Therefore, ensuring that students have developed writing competence before they graduate high school is vital for their lives after they leave the school.

Confidence in writing is a key component to skill in writing (Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, & Gómez-Artiga, 2017). Students who do not believe they have the ability to write well will avoid it. When they avoid writing, they also skirt around practicing the needed skills, further compounding their lack of skill in writing. Researchers (Myhill & Jones, 2018; O'Rourke et al., 2018) discuss the importance of self-efficacy in building skills. Students need to be empowered to know that they are capable of getting better, even if they currently struggle. RAND and Snow (2002) discuss the effect that a lack of confidence has on motivation and skill building, arguing that students who do not feel like they are good at a skill like writing or reading will be hesitant to engage in that skill. Following these researchers, it stands to reason that one of the ways to overcome or to fill in the gaps in writing skills is to simply convince students that they are capable of writing well. Students who feel confident will be more likely to engage in writing, therefore practicing and strengthening their writing skills.

Struggling learners are particularly susceptible to low self-efficacy because “many struggling learners resist academics, thinking that they lack the ability to succeed” (Margolis & McCabe, 2004, p. 241). These same struggling learners are also more prone to exhibit low motivation or avoidance behaviors when faced with a writing task (O'Rourke, 2018). These students are arguably the ones in most need of some sort of writing intervention; this study aims to see the impact of peer tutoring on their attitudes toward writing. Following the literature that outlines the benefits and limitations of peer tutoring (Barnett & Rosen, 1999; Loretto, DeMartino, & Godley, 2016; Schunn, Godley, & DeMartino, 2016), this study applies these same concepts to the idea of a peer-run writing center.

Dimensions in Need of Further Research

While there is varied research regarding the components of this study, there are a few areas where further research is needed.

Impact on Writing Skills. Jones (2001) gives an overview of existing research on writing centers and their efficacy. Jones' review shows that, while there is increasing scholarship about the formation and maintenance of writing centers, there is not a wide selection of research about the impact on writing skills. This research gap makes sense, given significant variance in writing center structure and operation. Despite the difficulty in obtaining clear, direct measurements of writing skill improvement, several studies give anecdotal indication that students do see a positive effect from participating in writing centers (Davis, 1988; Davis & Bubloz, 1985; Davis, McKeague & Reis, 1992; Naugie, 1980; Sadlon, 1990; Wills, 1984). By focusing specifically on the writing submissions and writing feedback given before and after participation in the writing center model, my study can offer more data on this possible relationship. Although the writing skill impact is not the main focus of my study, the planned methodology can offer more anecdotal evidence and steps for future research that focuses directly on the link between writing centers and improved writing skills.

Focused Writing Center Intervention. This study is unique because of the case study design. Previous studies of writing centers have examined the overall clientele coming into the centers and judged changes in attitude about writing. These studies rely on students coming into the center on a consistent basis. My study, however, focuses the writing center intervention in a way that ensures the participants have consistent, targeted tutoring interactions. The case study design allows me to truly examine the impact that the writing center sessions have on both the participants' approach to writing and self-efficacy about writing. Additionally, the case study

nature of my research will allow for a more thorough examination of how struggling students view writing and where these views are rooted. This examination could offer practitioners insight into ways to approach writing instruction and writing protocols in the future.

Focus on Secondary Context. There is a much higher ratio of writing center literature that deals with the centers established in colleges and universities than those located in middle and high schools. While this makes sense, given the lengthier history of post-secondary writing centers and the larger number of active centers, the growing number of secondary and middle grades centers indicates a need for more research into the impact and benefits of these centers. Additionally, the context for secondary schools and the logistics behind running a center are much different than at the postsecondary level. Therefore, this study could offer steps forward for emerging directors looking to create or grow their own center.

Local Context

This study took place at the high school where I teach, Chosen High School (CHS), which is located in a small suburb north of Atlanta. My school is the largest and most diverse of the seven high schools in the county. According to US News and World Report (2022), of the 2,873 students enrolled, 34% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and the demographic breakdown is as follows: 59.2% white, 29.8% Hispanic, 7.5% Black, 2.9% multiracial, and 0.6% Asian. The school was built in 1954, and the building shows its age. There are leaks, low ceilings, dim hallways, and at least once a month the air or heating goes out in one of the halls. The school is located next to a water treatment plant, so there is a distinctive smell that permeates the campus, especially after it rains. The school also lacks in technology, with Wi-Fi that is often unpredictable and only about half the English department having laptop carts

available for student use. Some of these factors contribute to an overall low morale that can make it difficult to convince students to learn.

Chosen High School has the highest percentage of ELL students, RTI cases, and Special Education students in the county (GADOE CCRPI, 2022). We have the lowest standardized test scores, although our AP and SAT scores are just as high if not higher than the other schools in the county (niche.com). Our school also serves the two group foster homes (one for males and one for females) in the county. Many of our students are transient. Of the 625 seniors in the 2022-2023 graduation cohort, 37 were enrolled in REP Advanced Composition. Sixteen of those students were enrolled in the class that received the writing center intervention. Of the sixteen, only three had enough credits to be considered seniors at the beginning of this study, meaning that they had failed three or more classes in the past. When looking at their past transcripts, seven students had failed more than one English class of the six they took in high school.

Conceptual Framework

There are four main theoretical research interests reflected in this study. Sociocultural theory will look at how students construct meaning and build literacy together. Of particular interest is Vygotsky's work, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (1978) and the More Knowledgeable Other (1978). This theoretical research will help establish the benefit and impact of peer interaction for struggling students. Another significant area of theoretical research is self-efficacy theory, where Bandura (1986) argues that a person's belief in their abilities to complete a task successfully impacts their motivation to engage in the task at all. Self-efficacy theory will inform my study by connecting writing skill development to developing confidence and motivation. Woven within self-efficacy theory is academic motivation, which coincides with student engagement (Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Motivation and engagement have multiple

manifestations; this study is concerned with affective and behavioral (Appleton et al., 1996), which deal with peer relationships and work avoidance. Finally, writing center theory (Carino, 2010; Murphy & Sherwood, 2008) examines how writing centers build communities of literacy and skill for students of all levels of writing skills.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Much research has been conducted on the connection between ability and motivation in students. Bandura (1997; 1986) enacts more focused study on this idea, examining how the way an individual perceives their abilities can affect their motivation and engagement. Bandura defines self-efficacy as “a person’s particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (1977). In other words, regardless of how capable an individual actually is or isn’t, their own perception of their skills is more significant in determining how they will approach that situation.

Self-efficacy theory plays an important role in education, particularly with students who have historically struggled with academic skills and concepts. Often, lower self-efficacy results from poor performance on standardized tests, low grades in academic classes, or a belief that other students find the curriculum easy. Bandura (1997) argues that when students believe that they are less capable, they will be more likely to engage in task avoidance rather than risk failing at the task. It is important to note that self-efficacy is not always directly connected to actual competence; self-efficacy is not a measure of what an individual can do or will do, but what they believe they *can* do (Maddux, 2009). It is also important to notice that standardized test scores are often a poor reflection of a student’s actual skills and knowledge.

Several studies have found that self-efficacy is not necessarily tied to personality traits, and self-efficacy is often content-specific (Bong, Cho, Ahn, & Kim, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik,

2003; Jackson, 2002; Maddux, 2009; Margolis & McCabe, 2004). In other words, students who have low self-efficacy in math may have high self-efficacy in writing. Bandura and Schunk (1981) found that as students develop their skills using specific goals, their persistence and self-efficacy increase. Therefore, fostering self-efficacy means targeting the areas in which students feel they are weak, creating goals that are content- and skill-specific. Using these study results, it can be assumed that using the writing center model of tutoring to help students make goals for writing improvement can also enable students to build their self-efficacy and their persistence in writing.

Sociocultural Theory

In social constructivism, individuals construct their own meaning based on their own experiences and values. Students who have long struggled with writing carry certain attitudes and beliefs about their own skills. These attitudes affect their willingness to engage in writing and their motivation to improve their skills (Chumney, 2015). Vygotsky (1978) considered that children do not have the same abilities or levels of skills, so when they begin to learn together, they learn from each other. Vygotsky describes the “Zone of Proximal Development” as: the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86)

In other words, students who may be struggling with one area of learning or a specific skill can learn more by learning alongside a peer who has already mastered—or come close to mastering—that same skill or concept. The Zone of Proximal Development works in coordination with Vygotsky’s assertions about the so-called “More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).” Wald and Harland (2014) contend that “the learner has a certain amount of potential, and the task of a more

capable peer is to help them realize this as fully as possible” (p. 418). The Writing Center builds on the tutor as the MKO—an individual who helps guide the struggling student in building skills. For both the ZPD and the MKO to be successful strategies in learning, “students need to value and engage in a ‘collectivudual practice’ whereby students may have their unique positions but are still committed to common goals that are shared with others” (Wald & Harland, 2014, p. 421). In other words, for students to fully learn from each other, they must also learn together.

Motivation and Engagement

Motivation and engagement are known by many researchers as being synonymous, or at the very least, intertwined (Appleton et al., 2006; Eccles et al., 1998; Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Dornyei and Otto (1998) offer a comprehensive definition of motivation that aligns the idea of an individual evaluating their own desires and wishes, then evaluating the processes and effort that will be involved in completing a task; the level of motivation corresponds with the willingness of an individual to prioritize the work to complete a task over their own desire to avoid the task. Connell and Wellborn (1991) argue that having or perceiving autonomy, competence, and relatedness—or secure connection—are key factors in a person’s engagement and motivation (p. 51).

Writing Center Theory

Carino (2001) argues that there is no one theory that guides all practice. Instead, what writing centers have in common is that they want to make a change. Carino argues that “as the writing center community continues to mature, it will need to see theory and practice in a multivocal dialogue” (p. 136), using theory to examine practice and practice to shift theoretical adherence. Harris (1985) continues this exploration of the variance and commonalities in writing centers, complicated even more by the fact that writing centers “are in a constant state of motion

— growing, expanding, and redefining their role” (p. 5). Despite this perceived lack of stability—or at the very least, a lack of definability—Harris maintains that a writing center is a place where all students can go to discuss and practice their writing, as well as a place where tutors are there out of a desire to help others improve. While achieving the “ideal” version of a writing center is most likely impossible, she says, as long as writing centers are always striving to adapt, grow, and “[work] on it” (Harris, 1985, p. 8), then they are a writing center. Bruffee’s articulation of the writing center goals align with Murray’s view of the writing teacher. Ede (1988) explores how writing centers can be the locus of collaborative learning, leaning on the social nature of the writing process, tying back to the sociocultural ideas of developing literacy and co-constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978).

The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors, Sixth Edition (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016) outlines best practices for tutor training and for writing center work. These guidelines are meant to help writing tutors build confidence in themselves as tutors, empowering them to help clients. Some of the strategies for basic tutoring include sitting next to the client, having the client read their own work out loud, and asking questions that help guide the client through their thought process rather than making direct suggestions. There are also chapters for how to troubleshoot challenging tutoring sessions, ways of writing across the curriculum, tutoring for special populations, and helping to build a writing center community. This guide brings together many of the ideas found in writing center theory; it also served as a training guide for the tutors involved in this study.

Connections between Theoretical Frameworks

These three frameworks work together to offer a way to help struggling students write. By understanding that motivation is often negatively impacted by low self-efficacy (Bandura,

1997; Maddox, 2005), and that self-efficacy can be built through collaborative practice and help from a More Knowledgeable Other (Vygotsky, 1978; Wald & Harland, 2014), it stands to reason that the writing center model of tutoring (Bruffee, 2002; Harris, 1985; Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016) can help students build skills and confidence, thereby increasing motivation. Figure 1.1 demonstrates the connective strands between these theoretical frameworks and how they can work together to accomplish the goal of positively impacting struggling students' self-efficacy and motivation. In it, student self-efficacy and motivation are equated to the level of gas in a car; when one is low, so is the other, and the car will not move. Sociocultural theory, collaborative learning, and the More Knowledgeable Other are gas that will help fill the car's tank, and writing center theory provides a method for the gas to get into the tank. After a successful writing center intervention, a student's self-efficacy and motivation will increase, and the car will be ready to go.

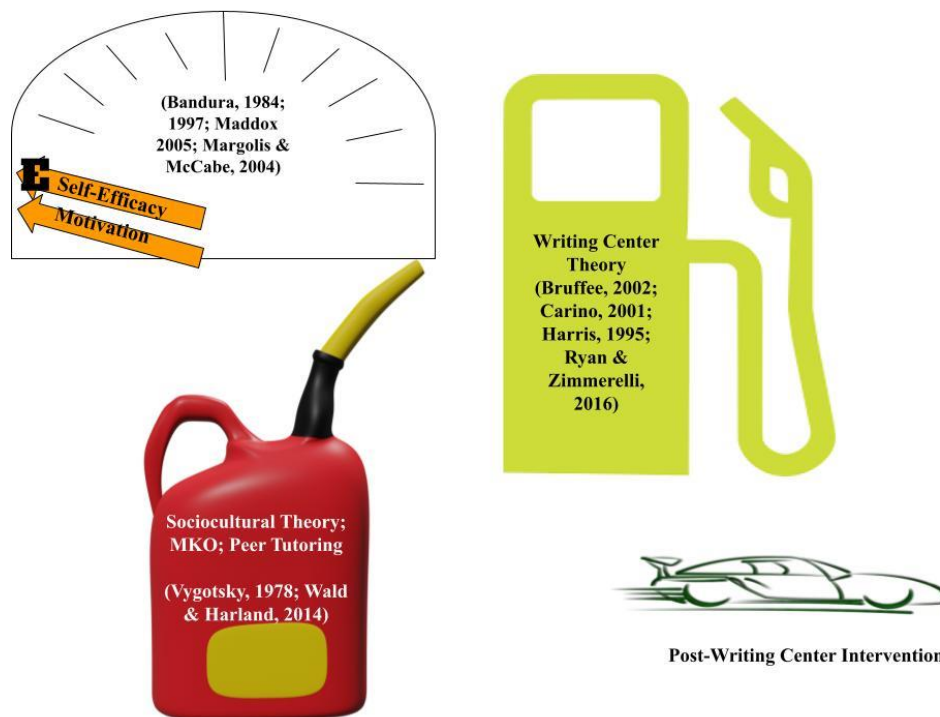


Figure 1.1. *The components of the theoretical frameworks illustrated as a metaphor.*

Review of Relevant Terms

- **Self-efficacy-** Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in "their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). In other words, self-efficacy is not necessarily a student's ability to actually complete a task, but it is rather a belief in their ability to do so. Self-efficacy is student- and subject-specific, and is impacted by myriad factors, including past experience, peer interactions, and perceived difficulty of the task (Bandura, 1997; Bong, Cho, Ahn, & Kim, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Maddux, 2009; Margolis & McCabe, 2004).
- **Remedial Education Plan (REP)-** As defined by my school district, REP students are ones who have failed a subject one or more times, who have low standardized test scores, or who have in some way shown themselves unable to succeed in a general education classroom. The REP curriculum is nearly identical to college-prep curriculum; however, there are often fewer assignments, and more time is spent on introducing and covering material.
- **Avoidant Behaviors-** As identified through observations of body language and conversations, avoidant behaviors include instances of distracted/distracting conversations, lack of eye contact, moving around or leaving the room, being on the phone, and not being prepared with supplies.
- **Struggling students-** For the purposes of this study, I will define struggling students as those who are currently enrolled in our school's REP program, who have failed one or

more English classes in the past, and who demonstrate either lack of motivation or lack of developed skills related to writing assignments.

- **Writing Center-** In general, a Writing Center is an established program in a secondary or postsecondary school that serves as a place for students to seek guidance with writing at any point of their writing process.
- **Writing Center Intervention-** For this study, the Writing Center intervention is the targeted, consistent peer writing sessions that my leadership elective students will engage in with my colleague's REP students.
- **Writing Center Model of Tutoring-** The writing center model of tutoring refers to the best practices outlined by Ryan and Zimmerelli (2016) in the *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*. Some of these guidelines include having the tutor sit beside the tutee, having the tutee read their own work out loud, making sure the tutor asks leading questions instead of making direct suggestions, and engaging the tutee in the session as much or more than the tutor.
- **Tutor-** The peer who offers guidance and support throughout the writing process. In this study, tutors have been trained according to guidelines set forth by *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*.
- **Tutee/Client-** Used interchangeably, these terms refer to the peer who is seeking guidance or support on their writing task.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One of this dissertation, which precedes this section, includes the statement and explanation of the issue being examined in the course of the study. Chapter One also includes the research questions, purpose and significance of the study, a conceptual framework, and

definitions of terms that will be relevant to the study and the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter Two includes a review of literature pertaining to theoretical frameworks, writing centers, peer tutoring, struggling students, self-efficacy, and motivation. Chapter Three contains the methodology of the study, including research design, participant selection, data collection methods, and the process of data analysis. Chapter Four contains data results and analysis, and Chapter Five offers conclusions about the data from the study, as well as implications for future research and for writing teachers and writing center directors.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study intends to examine the impact that participation in a peer-led writing center model of tutoring has on struggling students' self-efficacy and motivation in terms of writing. This literature review outlines the theoretical and practical underpinnings of this study. First examining Bandura's (1986; 1997) self-efficacy theory and how an individual's beliefs about their abilities to complete a task shape their approach to and attitude about that task, the review then moves to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning. The final theoretical background for this study is Writing Center theory (Bruffee, 1994; Carino, 2001; Harris, 1985). The review of literature shows how each of these theoretical frameworks works together.

Theoretical Research

Self-Efficacy Theory

Much research has been conducted on the connection between ability and motivation in students. Bandura (1997; 1986) enacts more focused study on this idea, examining how the way an individual perceives their abilities can affect their motivation and engagement. Bandura defines self-efficacy as "a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (1977). In other words, regardless of how capable an individual actually is or isn't, their own perception of their skills is more significant in determining how they will approach that situation.

Self-efficacy theory plays an important role in education, particularly with students who have historically struggled with academic skills and concepts. Often, lower self-efficacy results from poor performance on standardized tests, low grades in academic classes, or a belief that other students find the curriculum easy. Bandura (1997) argues that when students believe that

they are less capable, they will be more likely to engage in task avoidance rather than risk failing at the task. It is important to note that self-efficacy is not always directly connected to actual competence; self-efficacy is not a measure of what an individual can do or will do, but what they believe they *can* do (Maddux, 2009).

Several studies have found that self-efficacy is not necessarily tied to personality traits, and self-efficacy is often content-specific (Bong, Cho, Ahn, & Kim, 2012; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Jackson, 2002; Maddux, 2009; Margolis & McCabe, 2004). In other words, students who have low self-efficacy in math may have high self-efficacy in writing. Bandura and Schunk (1981) found that as students develop their skills using specific goals, their persistence and self-efficacy increase. Therefore, fostering self-efficacy means targeting the areas in which students feel they are weak, creating goals that are content- and skill-specific. Using these study results, it can be assumed that using the Writing Center to help students make goals for writing improvement can also enable students to build their self-efficacy and their persistence in writing.

Sources of Self-Efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), there are four major sources of a student's self-efficacy in any given area: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological reactions.

Mastery Experience. Many studies and reviews of literature have found that the strongest impact on self-efficacy comes from a student's own experiences with success and failure. Having positive outcomes with similar academic tasks helps students "believe that an academic outcome is within reach" and even when they encounter setbacks or difficulties, they persevere because "they are certain that the outcome is still attainable" (Usher & Pajares, 2008, p. 785). However, although many studies of self-efficacy name mastery experience as the most influential source,

most studies leave some component of self-efficacy out of focus or focus too heavily on the area of mastery experiences (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

Vicarious Experience. Self-efficacy can be affected by students' observations of those around them and their attempts to complete the same work that the student is attempting (Bandura, 1997). Students' self-efficacy can be influenced by their peers in both positive and negative ways. According to Pajares and Johnson (2007), "when students are uncertain about their own abilities or when they have limited experience, they become more sensitive to observing others perform tasks" (p. 106). Struggling students may see a peer who is not struggling achieve easily on an assignment, and that may lower their self-efficacy further. Conversely, a student may also take encouragement from seeing a peer on their level complete an assignment and begin to feel like they, too, are capable. This source of self-efficacy is one of the premises of the writing center. As students watch how the tutors in the writing center work through the brainstorming or revision processes, they will see that the steps are accomplishable and might be more confident when approaching that step in the future.

Social Persuasion. Self-efficacy can be influenced by what others say to students about their skill, work, work ethic, or product (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2005). The effectiveness of social persuasion is limited by the perceived genuineness of the feedback; encouraging a student to complete an activity that is far beyond their current developed skill level can actually be more harmful than helpful. Instead, Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) caution teachers that "effective persuaders cultivate students' beliefs in their capabilities while at the same time ensuring that the envisioned success is attainable" (p. 107). When examining how positive feedback affects self-efficacy, Jackson (2002) found that receiving encouraging feedback after an exam increased student self-efficacy for the next exam, even when their initial exam performance was less than

optimal. Conversely, many students with low self-efficacy cited negative teacher feedback as a cause for their lack of confidence (Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996). However, this feedback does not necessarily have to be verbal or even overtly, specifically negative. Because of the personal nature of writing, students “have difficulty distinguishing corrections on their papers from personal assault...in response their composition strategy...becomes avoidance” (Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996, p. 20). It is important, then, that writing center tutors are trained in how to give complementary, constructive feedback, asking questions instead of outright “fixing” issues in a tutee’s paper. Social persuasion is the key factor in building self-efficacy through the writing center model of tutoring.

Emotional and Physiological Reactions. When a student encounters a task, their level of self-efficacy produces different levels and types of physical and emotional responses. In other words, if a student has low self-efficacy, they may have a highly anxious response to the task at hand. Referencing Barwick’s (1995) findings, Martinez et al. (2011) argue that for some students, writing anxiety “stems from early experiences and is expressed in the way they avoid, revise, and complete written assignments” (p. 352), resulting in their becoming either nonstarters, noncompleters, or nonexhibitors. Nonstarters simply never begin to work on the writing task, noncompleters abandon the task before it is finished, usually at the first moment of struggle or unsurety; nonexhibitors become obsessed with perfectionism, writing and rewriting their work but never feeling satisfied. Building self-efficacy can help mediate these responses so that students can focus on their ability to complete the task rather than their emotional reaction to the idea of the task. In order to build self-efficacy, students must be given support and encouragement to practice skills, as well as guidance in how to best apply the skills that they are

practicing. As a student builds self-efficacy, they will be less likely to experience writing anxiety to the same extent (Martinez et al., 2011).

Sociocultural Theory

In social constructivism, individuals construct their own meaning based on their own experiences and values. Vygotsky (1978) considered that children do not have the same experiences, same abilities, or same levels of skills, so when they begin to learn together, they learn from each other, thus building the sociocultural theory. Vygotsky describes the “Zone of Proximal Development” as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86)

In other words, students who may be struggling with one area of learning or a specific skill can learn more by learning alongside a peer who has already mastered—or come close to mastering—that same skill or concept. The Zone of Proximal Development works in coordination with Vygotsky’s assertions about the so-called “More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).” Wald and Harland (2014) contend that “the learner has a certain amount of potential, and the task of a more capable peer is to help them realize this as fully as possible” (p. 418). The writing center model of tutoring builds on the tutor as the MKO—an individual who helps guide the struggling student in building skills. For both the ZPD and the MKO to be successful strategies in learning, “students need to value and engage in a ‘collectividual practice’ whereby students may have their unique positions but are still committed to common goals that are shared with others” (Wald & Harland, 2014, p. 421). In other words, for students to fully learn from each other, they must also

learn together. Students who have long struggled with writing carry certain attitudes and beliefs about their own skills. These attitudes affect their willingness to engage in writing and their motivation to improve their skills (Chumney, 2015). Therefore, watching the Writing Center MKO model positive experiences with writing and offer guidance for taking steps in the writing process can open struggling students up to the possibility of their own writing.

Motivation

Motivation and engagement are known by many researchers as being synonymous, or at the very least, intertwined (Appleton et al., 2006; Eccles et al., 1998; Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Dornyei and Otto (1998) offer a comprehensive definition of motivation that aligns the idea of an individual evaluating their own desires and wishes, then evaluating the processes and effort that will be involved in completing a task; the level of motivation corresponds with the willingness of an individual to prioritize the work to complete a task over their own desire to avoid the task. Connell and Wellborn (1991) argue that having or perceiving autonomy, competence, and relatedness—or secure connection—are key factors in a person’s engagement and motivation (p. 51).

Building on existing research, Appleton et al. (2006) define four different manifestations of motivation: academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological, while many other researchers (Dornyei & Otto, 1998; Eccles et al., 1998; Fredricks et al., 2004) combine cognitive and psychological manifestations under the label of emotional motivation. While academic and behavioral manifestations are the most directly observable, the outcomes of cognitive and psychological manifestations are also deeply connected with longer-term self-efficacy and motivation. All manifestations are interconnected in terms of engagement and achievement in school settings (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Academic manifestation of motivation. Academic manifestations of motivation include in-the-moment components such as time spent devoted to completing a task and focus on the material. Academic motivation can also be measured by a student's homework completion, indicating that motivation can be driven by presence in the classroom environment. Longer-term academic motivation can be measured by overall progress toward graduation (Appleton et al., 2006).

Behavioral manifestation of motivation. Behavioral manifestations of motivation are the more obvious, more common signs that come to mind when talking about motivation. Behavioral motivation deals with the willingness to persevere through a difficult task. Lack of behavioral motivation manifests as avoidant behaviors when met with a difficult task. (Eccles et al., 1998; Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Behavioral motivation can also manifest as attendance and class participation (Appleton et al., 2006). The hope of the writing center intervention is that by increasing the affective motivation for struggling students through their supportive peers, we can also increase their behavioral manifestations. If they become convinced not only that they are capable of completing the task, but also that the making the decision to continue working until the task is complete has value, then their motivation will increase (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

Emotional manifestation of motivation. The sources of emotional motivation are often difficult to pinpoint, and emotional manifestations are often difficult to measure (Fredricks et al., 2004). Emotional engagement is often identified by the affective reactions that students have in the classroom, including interest, boredom, excitement, sadness, and frustration (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Emotional motivation can also deal with how relevant a student feels the work is to their life (Appleton et al., 2006) or how accepted by or intertwined with the school culture the student feels (Fredricks et al., 2004). Often, students who

struggle with the academic demands of school feel disconnected from school, decreasing their motivation (Maddux, 2009; Margolis & McCabe, 2004). The writing center model of tutoring can offer a point of connection for these struggling students, and it can improve their feelings about school and about themselves as students.

Writing Center Theory

Carino (2001) argues that there is no one theory that guides all practice. Instead, what writing centers have in common is that they want to make a change. Carino argues that “as the writing center community continues to mature, it will need to see theory and practice in a multivocal dialogue” (p. 136), using theory to examine practice and practice to shift theoretical adherence. Harris (1985) continues this exploration of the variance and commonalities in writing centers, complicated even more by the fact that writing centers “are in a constant state of motion — growing, expanding, and redefining their role” (p. 5). Despite this perceived lack of stability—or at the very least, a lack of definability—Harris maintains that a writing center is a place where all students can go to discuss and practice their writing, as well as a place where tutors are there out of a desire to help others improve. While achieving the “ideal” version of a writing center is most likely impossible, she says, as long as writing centers are always striving to adapt, grow, and “[work] on it” (Harris, 1985, p. 8), offering all students guidance through some or all of the writing process, then they are a writing center.

Bruffee (2000) argues that the Writing Center exists as a place for discourse and community, saying that:

“The tutee brings into the conversation knowledge to be written about and knowledge of the assignment. The tutor brings to the conversation knowledge of the conventions of discourse and knowledge of standard written English. ... What peer tutor and tutee

do together is not write or edit, or least of all proofread. What they do together is converse... about and *pursuant to* writing” (Bruffee, 2000, p. 213, emphasis original).

In other words, the goal of the writing center is not to produce perfect, error-free writing. Instead, both tutors and tutees contribute to the conversation and add to each other’s knowledge. Tutors are not cast as the only skilled student in the room; both students contribute to the session, and both collaborate to produce effective, efficient writing.

Review of Literature

Writing Skill Gaps

Atasoy and Temizhan (2016) discuss what writing fluency entails, defining fluent writing as having “an easy-to-read manner in which no element exists causing the reader to pause while reading” (p. 1460). They also include perspectives that involve text complexity, automaticity, and an understanding of the nuances of audience and purpose. Their study goes on to give details of the myriad ways in which students fail to meet the standard skills of writing. In order to fully understand and mitigate the gaps in writing skills, then there needs to be an understanding of what fluent writing is and how to achieve it. Miller et al. (2012) argue that there is a gap in the research regarding the connection between reading and writing because “there has been less agreement regarding what aspects of writing should be measured as well as how to measure them, especially when trying to move beyond spelling and grammar and into composition and richness of ideas” (p. 6). This gap in research extends to a lack of full understanding of where and why students struggle with writing, since there is no consensus on what should be measured and how. Like Atasoy and Temizhan (2016), Miller et al. (2012) believe that the only way to strengthen the skills that students lack is to understand exactly what skills are missing and necessary for success.

Several researchers (Brimi, 2012; Gan & Hattie, 2014; Kent & Wanzek, 2016; O'Rourke, Connelly, & Barnett, 2018) discuss the importance of the writing process to building writing skills. The process includes writing, feedback, and revision. These researchers all assert that writing can only become better if it is shared, critiqued, and shared again. However, Brimi (2012) argues that classroom teachers are severely limited in their ability to effectively teach writing because of the push to teach to prepare for standardized tests. Building a workshop or peer review process into the writing classroom would give room to improve writing instruction. O'Rourke et al. (2018) expound upon this, explaining that struggling writers "will not get better by themselves and may begin to avoid writing altogether" (p. 22). Therefore, self-efficacy and confidence play a significant role in motivation and developing writing skills. O'Rourke's argument supports the idea that an effective peer review or peer tutoring process can help to encourage hesitant writers and to build skill and confidence in weak writers; often, there is major overlap in these two groups of students.

In another attempt to define and understand the gaps in writing skills, Myhill and Jones (2018) discuss the variety of reasons that could compound writing difficulties, including learning disabilities and language acquisition. They go on with measurements of how to identify writing skill gaps, saying that these students "exhibit the kind of writing consistent with the knowledge-telling phase" (p. 143). This shows that improving writing is not just about improving mechanics, though that is part of it. When getting feedback on writing, it is vital that students see not only how to make their writing better in terms of usage and mechanics, but also how to make their writing go deeper and more analytical. Writing skill gaps also include the ability to communicate clearly and in a sophisticated manner (Atasoy & Temizhan, 2016), where students do not understand how to get past the knowledge-telling phase. However, Myhill and Jones

(2018) admit that “few studies, including [their] own, have taken sufficient account of the influence of motivation on the writing performance of struggling writers” (p. 152). Student motivation has long been a struggle for all educators, and it seems to have become particularly problematic in the writing classroom.

Writing Instruction and Student Motivation

Self-Efficacy and Motivation. Bandura defines self-efficacy as “a person’s particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (1977). In other words, regardless of how capable an individual actually is or isn’t, their own perception of their skills is more significant in determining how they will approach that situation. Bruning and Horn (1998) identify the motivational challenge of writing, as well as four conditions that are key to overcoming this barrier, asserting that “nurturing functional beliefs about writing, fostering engagement using authentic writing tasks, providing a supportive context for writing, and creating a positive emotional environment” (p. 1) are all integral factors in terms of cultivating writing motivation. While having no control over the second factor, a high school writing center has great potential to augment a teacher’s establishment of the other three. By nature of assisting with the intricacies and details of writing, offering advice and informal instruction about a student’s writing, tutors can help students understand that they are capable of creating writing that has value and voice.

The very process of learning to write and learning to write well involves struggle and frustration (Bruning & Horn, 1998; Camfield, 2016; Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011; Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996); having a place where students feel safe and supported in that struggle, particularly in a one-on-one environment, can help overcome some of this frustration. Camfield (2016) in particular identifies one-on-one conferencing about writing

as being transformative, offering students an opportunity for a discussion out of the glaring fishbowl of the classroom where they can feel freer to ask questions. Writing center tutors engage in this kind of encouragement in every session.

Confidence in writing is a key component to skill in writing (Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, & Gómez-Artiga, 2017). Students who do not believe they have the ability to write well will avoid it. When they avoid writing, they also skirt around practicing the needed skills, further compounding their lack of skill in writing. Researchers (Myhill & Jones, 2018; O'Rourke et al., 2018) discuss the importance of self-efficacy in building skills. Students need to be empowered to know that they are capable of getting better, even if they currently struggle. RAND and Snow (2002) discuss the effect that a lack of confidence has on motivation and skill building, arguing that students who do not feel like they are good at a skill like writing or reading will be hesitant to engage in that skill. Following these researchers, it stands to reason that one of the ways to overcome or to fill in the gaps in writing skills is to simply convince students that they are capable of writing well. Students who feel confident will be more likely to exhibit motivation and engage in writing, therefore practicing and strengthening their writing skills (Vrugt, Oort, & Zeeberg, 2002).

Self-efficacy theory plays an important role in education, particularly with students who have historically struggled with academic skills and concepts. Often, lower self-efficacy results from poor performance on standardized tests, low grades in academic classes, or frustration from a belief that other students find the curriculum easy (Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Usher & Pajares, 2008). Bandura (1993) argues that when students believe that they are less capable, they will be more likely to engage in task avoidance rather than risk failing at the task. It is important to note that self-efficacy is not always directly connected to actual competence; self-efficacy is

not a measure of what an individual can do or will do, but what they believe they *can* do (Maddux, 2009). By consistently engaging in writing center sessions, struggling students will receive consistent encouragement and guidance, which Jackson (2002) posits can positively affect self-efficacy. Showing students—particularly struggling students—the impact of continuing to choose to write can help them continue to make the decision to write, demonstrating an increase in motivation (Eccles et al. 1998).

Writing Self-Efficacy

Pajares, Johnson, and Usher (2007) define writing self-efficacy as a “student’s judgment of their confidence that they possess the various composition, grammar, usage, and mechanical skills appropriate to their academic level” (p. 111). Writing self-efficacy can be more indicative of anxiety about writing because “the personal nature of writing [means] that writing anxiety can prove such a strong emotion” (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007, p. 107). Wachholz and Etheridge (1996) examine these strong emotions further, searching to understand where writing perceptions come from and how students perceive themselves as writers. Students with high anxiety surrounding writing tasks cited previous writing failure as a source of low self-efficacy. Their anxiety manifests throughout their entire approach to writing, resulting in a process of writing that “is marked by confusion, indecision, pauses, and crumpled papers” (p. 16). Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011) used attitude surveys to look for predictors of anxiety and self-efficacy that affected writing performance. They found that some of the manifestations of writing anxiety were “nervous tension, preoccupation, or procrastination” (p. 352); they argue that if educators can find a way to increase writing self-efficacy, these behaviors will decrease, which will also make it more likely that students are able to improve their writing skills. In other words,

increasing a student's writing self-efficacy should have a significant impact on their motivation, driving them to make the decision to persevere in writing (Eccles et al., 1998).

Klassen (2002) found that “self-efficacy was usually found to be the strongest or among the strongest predictors of writing competence,” and writing self-efficacy becomes a more significant predictor in older grades. This indication is concerning because these are the students who are about to leave our classrooms for their college or career. Without sounding too dire, for those entering the workforce immediately after high school, this might be their last chance to gain confidence in their writing, cementing their self-perception as a person who “can’t” write. Understanding ways to mediate writing anxiety in order to increase writing self-efficacy is especially important; Similar to Klassen, Bong et al. (2012) found that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic achievement, with the strongest predictability in the Language Arts domain. In other words, if we want students to become strong performers in English class, then we need to build their self-efficacy so they have the confidence to *know* that they can achieve.

Peer Feedback and Peer Tutoring

There is a considerable amount of literature regarding the effects and uses of peer review and peer tutoring. Schunn, Godley, and DeMartino (2016) discuss the effect of peer review on improving writing skills, finding that “student buy-in for using peer feedback instead of teacher feedback is strong” (p. 21). In other words, students often respond more favorably when their writing is critiqued by other students. This positive response is key to overcoming the existing gaps in writing skills. For one, students are more likely to take their peers' feedback seriously, going in and changing the areas marked for improvement. Additionally, when peers can give specific strategies for improving writing, this can help strengthen those weak skills. Importantly, the peer reviewers were trained in how to use the rubrics to provide consistent, accurate

feedback. This study proves the importance of ensuring that student tutors understand how to evaluate the work of their peers.

O'Rourke et al. (2018) describe the cognitive processes involved in writing, focusing on the challenges that students with learning difficulties face. The chapter discusses how the writing process can be scaffolded and repeated. O'Rourke's argument supports the idea that an effective peer review or peer tutoring process can help to encourage hesitant writers and to build skill and confidence in weak writers; often, there is major overlap in these two groups of students. When struggling writers work to "develop their writing processes, over time and given adequate practice, these processes require less effort and use fewer cognitive resources" (O'Rourke et al., 2018, p. 18). Therefore, self-efficacy and confidence play a significant role in motivation and developing writing skills.

Loretto, DeMartino, and Godley (2016) found that students felt that peer review and peer tutoring were beneficial to their academic performance. If students perceive that the Writing Center is helpful to their writing, then they will be more likely to participate and perhaps even recommend the center to other struggling students. More importantly, if students feel as though their writing skills are improving, they will be less hesitant to write.

General Benefits of Peer Tutoring. When tackling the overall topic of peer tutoring and its objections, Bruffee (2000) establishes his line of argument that peer tutoring—and writing itself—is all about conversation. When a tutor and a tutee are able to engage in conversation about a written work, the process of questioning, reflecting, discussing, and adapting allow both students to gain a deeper understanding of both the piece of writing being discussed and of writing in general. Citing Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, Bruffee maintains that both tutor and tutee are able to collaboratively construct knowledge through the tutoring process. However, he does

caution that peer tutors must be trained and prepared in order to be effective and beneficial rather than harmful. Kail and Trimbur (1987) cite Bruffee's "Brooklyn Plan" for a writing center peer tutoring model when discussing how effective peer tutoring allows "students who aren't receiving the signals properly [to] tune in better to the same message, except that now it is in a new voice, the voice of the students' peers" (p. 8), but also extends to the same discourse model that Bruffee argues for. Again, peer tutoring works best and is most beneficial when students are co-learners. Engaging in the writing center model of tutoring allows the tutor and the tutee to each display their individual knowledge and to become the experts in different areas.

Peer tutoring can be especially beneficial for students who have struggled with academic tasks in the past. According to Zhang et al. (2016), peer review and revision is a component of improved student writing. Often, student writers who are "engaged in the peer response process can take an active role in their learning," (p. 682). In this way, peer review not only helps students improve their actual writing assignment, but it also helps them understand and engage in the writing process more thoroughly, even "[incorporating] their reflections on others' writing into their own writing" (p. 682) and giving them more ways to improve.

Engaging in peer tutoring as collaborative learning allows students to become "active participants, negotiating the meaning of their text with the tutor and collaborating to make the writing as clear and concise as possible" (Barnett & Rosen, 1999, p. 2). Therefore, students who have historically been passive about their writing, putting words on paper just to have something to turn in—or, in more extreme cases, avoiding putting words on paper—have a chance to take an active role in their writing, gaining ownership over it and feeling more in control. Moreover, consistent peer tutoring sessions allow students to build an arsenal of skills and experiences to combat any future obstacles they face. The process of peer tutoring is beneficial to struggling

students, Camfield (2016) argues, enables students to “accurately understand one’s weaknesses, [making it] possible to find solutions” (p. 6). Therefore, effective peer tutoring can not only be beneficial for the assignment at hand but can also build skills for all future assignments. Kennedy (2010) elucidates the far-reaching impacts of effective peer tutoring and collaborative learning, which have “been found to enhance cognition, foster intrinsic motivation, and increase achievement” (p. 3). It stands to argue, then, that the writing center model of peer tutoring has the potential to increase the self-efficacy and the motivation of students who have historically struggled with and avoided writing.

Non-Verbal Communication

When humans communicate with each other, particularly in a relationship that could be perceived as critical or judgmental (such as peer tutoring), it is important to pay attention to the verbal and nonverbal cues that tutors and tutees exhibit in order to evaluate the success or failure of the peer tutoring relationship. Fast (1970) published *Body Language*, which summarized early research on how people display and interpret their thoughts and emotions nonverbally. While explaining many different facial expressions and kinesthetic indicators, Fast asserts that “no single motion ever stands alone” (1970, p. 113). When examining body language, he argues, observers must consider several factors, including race, gender, class, and context. Yawning could indicate boredom, but it could also indicate a long day or a lack of sleep. Therefore, it is important to realize that any interpretation of body language or facial expressions is subjective and different for each individual subject. While verbal cues are often more direct and easier to interpret, young people also communicate through facial expressions and body language, sometimes without realizing it. The follow section outlines existing literature on the meanings

behind common facial expressions and body language movements and how these can and should be used in evaluating peer tutoring relationships.

Facial Expressions

Rodat (2019) outlines some of the facial expressions that are associated with active listening. These include making eye contact, smiling, and nodding the head. However, she also argues that the duration of these gestures is dependent upon both the listener and the talker, as well as cultural factors. Lewis (2012) lists a few similar indications of interest, including holding a steady gaze, focused attention on the item of interest; “slightly raised eyebrows; lips slightly pressed together; head erect or pushed forward” (p. 40). Tutors need to be aware of these indicators, as well as indicators of boredom or inattentiveness, to ensure that their tutoring client views them as someone who is respectful and responsive to their work. According to Lewis, some indications of boredom or disinterest include “eyes looking away; face generally immobile; corners of mouth turned down or lips pulled to the side; head propped up with hand” (p. 41). While tutors should be trained to be aware of their own facial expressions and what those might communicate to their clients, they should also be aware of possible strategies to re-engage a client when he or she demonstrates these signs of boredom. When clients feel uncomfortable expressing their disagreement, perhaps because of a lack of confidence in their work, they often subconsciously let their face do the talking for them. According to Giddens and White (2016), eyebrows can also communicate levels of discomfort or disagreement as “[l]owering the eyebrows is a sensitive indicator of disagreement, doubt, or uncertainty. Slightly lowered eyebrows may telegraph unvoiced disagreement among colleagues.” Similarly, avoiding eye contact completely can indicate disagreement and discomfort (Giddens & White, 2016).

Tutors can also be trained that one way to establish and maintain a connection with their tutee is to mirror the client, reflecting their more positive facial expressions back at them (Rodat, 2019). Being met with similar attentive facial expressions helps make a connection between the tutee and their tutor, making them feel seen and valued.

Body Language Movements

While Huxter et al. (2023) warn against possible errors in the interpretation of facial expressions, their study found that when presented with a combination of body language *and* facial expressions, identification of emotion was much more accurate. Therefore, neither body language nor facial expressions should be viewed as independent indicators of emotion; instead, observers should draw conclusions based on the combination of the two. Coupled with the attentive facial expressions listed above, Rodat (2019) asserts that having posture that is leaned slightly forward or sideways, while also nodding and slightly tilting the head, indicates that the tutor is invested in what the client is saying. Giddens and White (2016) also assert that tilting the head to either side indicates friendliness or openness, which would be a good stance for a tutor to take when speaking to a client, since this movement also “fosters rapport.”

In contrast, fidgeting, doodling, looking at the clock or a watch, checking a phone, or twirling hair could indicate distraction or disinterest (Rodat, 2019). Similarly, sighing or compressing the lips can indicate some type of disinterest or disagreement (Lewis, 2012, p. 57). Tightly crossing the arms is a defensive posture, indicating that the subject feels uncomfortable or anxious (Giddens & White, 2016). Shrugging shoulders or slouching the shoulders shows that a client is unsure of their work or uncomfortable in the situation (Giddens & White, 2016; Lewis, 2012). Understanding these body language cues allows a tutor to anticipate and respond to the

discomfort of their clients, taking opportunities to offer guidance, to give reassurance, and to pause tutoring sessions to regroup.

Writing Center Background

History

First called writing labs, writing centers have been present in postsecondary institutions since the beginning of the twentieth century (Boquet, 1999). Throughout the decades, writing laboratories began as places of remediation, providing “instruction for the students whose placement themes did not meet departmental standards” (Kelly, 1983, p. 5). Carino (1995) and Boquet (1999) mention that writing centers began to transform in the 1960s as overwhelmingly supportive places for students who wanted to improve their writing rather than places that stigmatized these struggles. This shift makes sense due to the open admissions policies enacted in 1960. More students with lower writing skills were admitted to colleges, and more students needed help with writing.

In the 1970s, writing centers began to spread from postsecondary institutions into high schools (Farrell, 1989). These centers took on much of the same work as postsecondary institutions, but on a smaller scale. Some secondary centers also work to partner with postsecondary institutions in order to augment their training and community outreach (Adams, 2011). Several organizations have formed over the past 25 years to support directors in creating and building their writing centers, including Secondary Schools Writing Center Association (SSWCA) (Brown & Waldrup, 2018).

Design and Protocol

According to Harris (1995), writing centers “have evolved with different kinds of institutions and different writing programs and therefore serve different needs.” Each

postsecondary writing center sets up their center according to the space they have, funding they have acquired, and traffic to their center. What most have in common is areas where tutors and clients can work collaboratively on writing assignments (Clark, 1993; Harris, 1993; Lotto, 1993; Mullin & Momenee, 1993; Neff, 1993). Furthermore, design is complicated by the idea that writing centers are “a curious mix of office and classroom, but metaphors of home are also often used to describe writing centers with the proverbial coffee pot offering a welcoming cup” (Hadfield et al., 2003, p. 170). Most writing centers are not content being simple classroom spaces; instead, they want to make sure their clients feel welcome and secure, wanting to visit the center again. Some centers also have dedicated offices or study rooms (Kinkead, 1993; Simon, 1993). Utah State University’s Writing Center also operated a mobile program, going into composition classes to help assist students and professors (Kinkead, 1993). Secondary schools writing centers often have smaller versions of the same setup; budgets and available space tend to be smaller for this level of institution.

As internet and computer availability and resources grow, university writing centers have begun creating Online Writing Labs, or OWLS. These writing labs offer resources for citations and different genres of academic writing. The larger OWLS, like Perdue’s, offer these resources to the general public. Smaller OWLS provide a place to make an online appointment or to submit a paper to be checked in an asynchronous session. Secondary schools offer online availability as well; services range from appointment setup to writing resources to online submission opportunities.

In addition to the physical set up, writing center practice and protocol depends on the context in which the writing center operates. These protocols continue to evolve as education evolves. In in-person writing centers, though, there is interaction between a tutor and a tutee, or

client. The tutee shows the assignment they are working on, and the tutor usually employs a non-directive approach to questioning (North, 1995). Instead of directly offering suggestions, edits, and revisions, the tutor asks questions that drive the tutee to think about what they want their writing to be. Operating in this way allows the tutees to retain ownership over their own work. Lunsford (1991) also asserts that centers should operate as a means by which students can find their voices, operating in collaborative conferences that guide students to constructing their own meaning. At the secondary level, tutor training is a vital part of all writing centers, ensuring that students selected are knowledgeable about writing and are supported in tutoring best practices (Hutton, 2018) Some training strategies include role playing tutoring scenarios, showing exemplars, and giving students the chance to reflect on their own tutoring practice (Passino, 2018).

Writing centers are as diverse as the institutions in which they are established. In addition to having multiple ways of operating, writing centers also engage in varied activities that help to build the overall culture of literacy in their institutions. Upton (1990) offers many ideas for literacy-building activities that secondary writing centers can host, including offering study skills nights, getting out of the center and into classrooms to assist with writing activities, and mini-clinics on exam writing. Writing centers also benefit students by helping “to diffuse the confusion and frustration students feel if they do not understand the act of writing” (Turner, 2006, p. 45). Because the feedback and guidance come from peers, the writing center participants are generally more open to hearing the feedback. Turner (2006) also mentions the activities that writing centers can participate in to help build a positive attitude about writing throughout the school, and Boquet (1995) concurs, mentioning that writing centers often become “a space where students should feel secure in their expression of thoughts and ideas” (470). These activities go

beyond mere tutoring and can include writing workshops, study skill groups, mini-clinics, and exhibitions, where student work is shown, and they begin to feel like experts in writing (Upton, 1990).

Benefits

Writing centers augment the benefits found from peer tutoring, as they offer a more focused process of collaboration. Dahl, Løken, and Mogstad (2014) outline the reasons that peer writing centers are likely to benefit secondary students. These centers give students the opportunity to approach other students with their weaknesses and ask for help. Dahl et al. (2014) argue that students are hesitant to approach a teacher for help with areas where they lack skills, but they are much more open to seeking advice from a peer. This willingness to seek help “closes the teaching-learning gap by acting as a supplementary bridge” (Mullin & Childers, 2020, p. 4), giving writing center clients a chance to reiterate and to remediate lessons from their classroom teacher. Similarly, Ady (1988) asserts that while students may initially be hesitant to seek help from peer tutors, once the center establishes itself as a judgment-free zone, students feel much more comfortable seeking help. Writing centers also focus much less on the mechanics of writing and editing, instead asking clients to explain their own thought processes and guiding them through organization and content rather than grammar and mechanics. Doing so allows students to “move toward a growing awareness of themselves as writers” (Tobin, 2010, p. 231), giving room for development of their confidence and writing voice. Additionally, Childers, Fels, and Jordan (2004) assert that, because the tutor is not assigning a grading for the assignment, the client feels like they have more “control over what happens with the revision and can ignore the [tutor]’s suggestions without fear of making the reader mad or not giving her ‘what she’s looking for”” (p. 2). Writing centers allow students, even students whose writing skills are below the

expected grade-level markers, to maintain their own agency over their own writing. Keeping this autonomy ensures that students grow as writers, in terms of both competence and confidence.

Current Best Practices in Writing Instruction

Writing is a difficult subject to teach for a multitude of reasons. Particularly at the secondary level, students who struggle with writing feel like they will always struggle with writing. Additionally, writing involves not only academic skill and thought processes, but also personal feelings and social interactions (Perin, 2013, p. 49). Added to this complexity is the fact that writing does not cover one set of academic skills; to be efficient at writing, students must understand their audience, their purpose, and the specific style and vocabulary that their field requires and be able to adjust their writing to the nuances that each component demands (Elton, 2010; Perin, 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2015). Even when writing for an English class, the varied types of writing (e.g., narrative, argument, poetry, informational) demand individual instruction and practice (Hillocks, 2007; Smagorinsky, 2015). Smagorinsky et al. (2010) mirror the position statement from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) by asserting that teachers of writing need to offer instruction in and opportunity for practice of multiple genres of writing for multiple purposes and multiple audiences. Although they cannot affect the writing that is assigned, peer tutors in a writing center can help students navigate different genres of writing, offering advice for how to address assignment instructions and interpret rubric requirements for different subjects.

According to Prior (2006), “by the early 1980s writing was commonly thought most fundamentally to be a dynamic, meaning-making process” (p. 18), which shows that educators understand that writing occurs in a cycle. Researchers have argued that writing actually helps to create and deepen new meanings and understandings (Bruning & Horn, 1998; Elbow, 1973;

Galbraith, 1999; Hayes, 2006). Klein and Meichi Yu (2013) submit that writing to learn is another strategy that involves both teaching writing and using writing to teach. When students are able to process their own thoughts through writing, they practice organizational strategies as well as analysis strategies, which allows them to make more sense of what they have learned (p. 170). Giving students the time and space to write and to look at their own writing to help them understand is vital. Peer-led writing centers allow for this time, even though it occurs outside of normal instruction time. Furthermore, as students review what they have written, they are able to do so in an environment where a peer can answer questions or offer new ways of understanding the content.

Writing Processes. Whenever individuals create writing, they go through a writing process that focuses on “*how* students write rather than on *what* they write” (Smit, 2007, p. 6, emphasis mine); however, this process is not identical in every circumstance. The processes vary according to timing, purpose, and the individual (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Smit, 2007; Troia et al., 2011). Several researchers (Applebee et al., 1988; Brimi, 2012; Cooper et al., 1976; Elbow, 1973; Gan & Hattie, 2014; Kent & Wanzek, 2016; O’Rourke et al., 2018; Smit, 2007; Troia et al., 2011) discuss the importance of the writing process to building writing skills. While the specific steps of the process differ according to researcher and to teacher, the basics of the process include planning, writing, feedback, and revision. Because of the opportunities that the writing center offers in terms of time and attention, students can receive help at every stage of their writing process, therefore operating as a support for all writing, from creation to publication.

The NCTE position statement on the writing process asks that teachers give students time to become comfortable with pre-writing activities, a position echoed by Applebee et al.’s (1988)

argument that “[b]etter writers reported engaging in more planning and revising than their less successful peers” (p. 33). Writing centers can act as a place for brainstorming to happen, where tutees come in with only vague ideas of what they want to or need to write about and talk through these ideas with their tutors. Tutors should be trained to ask guiding questions that encourage the tutees to think through their ideas, allowing them to talk through their topics, evidence, and organization before even beginning the first draft.

Part of the importance of the writing process is showing students that writing is never perfect, and it is rarely finished. Allowing them to revisit their first drafts will demonstrate to them that they have the ability to grow and become better writers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics’ 2011 Writing Report Card (NAEP), 44% of teachers reported asking their students to draft or revise their writing “very often” or “always.” Those students whose teachers asked them to revise on a consistent basis scored higher on the assessment than those who were seldom or never asked to draft or revise. Perin (2013) asserts that one of the strategies for building effective writing skills is to give students corrective feedback while they are practicing a new writing skill. Writing centers offer the opportunity for timely, directed feedback, which can help a student understand what they are doing well and the steps they can take to improve their writing. Having this information can help build a student’s self-efficacy by removing some of the mystery of what makes their writing successful.

An important factor in the feedback component of the writing process is sharing work with others. While we traditionally think of feedback as coming strictly from the classroom teacher, Brimi (2012) argues that classroom teachers are severely limited in their ability to effectively teach writing because of the limits on time and the focus on standardized test preparation. O’Rourke et al. (2018) expound upon the importance of feedback, explaining that

struggling writers “will not get better by themselves and may begin to avoid writing altogether” (p. 22). O’Rourke’s argument supports Cooper et al.’s (1976) assertion that writing requires encouragement and Troia et al.’s (2011) position that an integral part of the writing process is sharing, conferencing, and feedback. Following this grounding in the writing process, participation in an effective writing center can help to encourage hesitant writers and to build skill and confidence in weak writers; often, there is major overlap in these two groups of students (Maddux, 2009; Margolis & McCabe, 2004). Writing center tutoring is uniquely helpful because the writing center protocol involves focused, one-on-one conferences, which Camfield (2016) argues can be transformative, asserting that “accurately understanding one’s weaknesses [means it becomes] possible to find solutions” (p. 6). Again, empowering students with the knowledge they need to improve their writing offers a clear path forward.

After the feedback comes revision of work. However, revision is another skill that needs to be taught. Early and Saily (2014) demonstrate that students need to be shown how to revise, yet another skill that can and should be scaffolded into the classroom. Early and Saily assert that students need “opportunities to learn the definition of substantive revision, read examples of substantive revision, question and interrogate their own writing through self- and peer-led feedback sessions, and make substantial changes to their writing” (p. 216). While classroom teachers may not have the time or the flexibility to build in dedicated revision time, participation in the writing center process necessitates that students take at least a second look at their writing. As they do, they are able to make decisions about shifts in organization, content, and mechanics that they may not have considered before. The writing center model of tutoring (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016) can help with the revision process because students are able to experience how a reader interacts with their work. Additionally, best practices in writing center tutoring

recommends having tutees read their work out loud to the tutor so they can notice awkward wording or gaps in commentary for themselves (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016).

Standardized Testing Complicates Best Practices

Despite the amount of research that points to the benefits of portfolio-based assessment of writing, which includes pieces from multiple genres and assesses multiple stages of the writing process (Lam, 2016; Mincey, 1996), many teachers must still operate within a system that demands standardized writing tests. Hillocks (2002) outlines many of the issues caused by this focus on identical tests for vastly different students in five states: New York, Kentucky, Oregon, Texas, and Illinois. For all the states, which all technically have different standardized tests, he found that teachers were frustrated, and the system was flawed. Moreover, instead of the standardized tests pushing writing and the teaching of writing to a higher standard, “the theory of writing originally intended to account for the universe of discourse is substantially reduced to the point where it deals with only a fraction of that universe” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 70). In the worst-case scenarios, which are becoming more prevalent in my own school, students write at the surface, never fully developing their more analytical thinking skills.

Issues of Student Choice and Ownership in Writing

In order to improve motivation, effort, and quality of writing, students need choice in what they write about and how they write about it. Unfortunately, the high school writing center has little impact on the level of choice students have in their writing. However, focused, consistent participation in the center can help struggling students feel more ownership over their writing. Through conferencing and discussing with writing center tutors, students become responsible for their own work (Halley, 1982, p. 147). Having students take control over what and how they revise, allowing them to receive, process, and challenge the feedback given from

peer tutors, and enabling them to select the feedback that they take action on can help build students' confidence and self-efficacy in terms of writing assignments. The more confident students feel in making these decisions about their own writing, the more motivated they may be to engage in writing, revising, and rewriting.

Contemporary Writing Center Research

Much of the recent research in secondary writing centers has been in regard to adapting to changes in education and in society. Giles (2021) outlines the roles of tutors and directors in three different high school writing centers, finding that having returning tutors involved in recruitment and training of new tutors positively impacts their perception of the benefits of their tutoring role. Hahn (2021) discusses the challenges inherent in shifting from a writing center to an all-subjects tutoring center. Based on the successes of the writing center model, many schools are asking for an expansion of the tutoring protocols to other subjects (Barton, 2018a). Likewise, Goranssen (2022) expanded the scope of her school's writing center. Her study combats earlier ideas from Ede and Lunsford (2011) that spoke warily about extending writing center work outside of writing, instead finding that by creating a community of practice, dividing the work and the roles and making every tutor an active part of the process, the expansion was beneficial for all.

In addition to writing centers extending the scope of the subjects in which they offer assistance, writing centers are also becoming centers of human-centered change and work. Behne (2021) outlines the impact that the shutdown in 2020 had on student emotional health and interactions with others. She argues that working through the writing center enables students who are struggling—both with writing and with their emotional health—to make connections and build

networks of support. While she admits that there is occasionally a challenge in balancing academic and emotional support, she claims that, overall, the partnership is beneficial.

Barton (2018b) conducted a research study that examined the impact of writing center sessions on the self-efficacy and skills of Advanced Placement students. She found that the writing center model does have a positive impact on both skills and self-efficacy but admits that further research is needed for different demographics of learners.

At the postsecondary level, there exist many studies about different issues in equity and representation, including Haney's (2020) article regarding creating a mentorship and recruitment program for DePaul University's writing center, aiming at creating a more diverse, representative writing center staff that makes their student body feel seen and welcomed. Other ideas that call for changes in policy and training include disability access (Appleton-Pine & Moroski-Rigby, 2020; Fleming, 2020) and recognizing the value of other languages and cultures (Pena et al., 2020; Tonoco et al., 2020). These movements towards more social awareness and equity in the writing center are continuing to the secondary level, with mission statements being written to include diverse learners.

Dimensions in Need of Further Research

Impact on Writing Skills. Jones (2001) gives an overview of existing research on writing centers and their efficacy. Jones' review shows that, while there is increasing scholarship about the formation and maintenance of writing centers, there is not a wide selection of research about the impact on writing skills. This research gap makes sense, given significant variance in writing center structure and operation. Despite the difficulty in obtaining clear, direct measurements of writing skill improvement, several studies give anecdotal indication that students do see a positive effect from participating in writing centers (Davis, 1988; Davis &

Bubloz, 1985; Davis, McKeague & Reis, 1992; Naugie, 1980; Sadlon, 1990; Wills, 1984). By focusing specifically on the writing submissions and writing feedback given before and after participation in the writing center model, my study can offer more data on this possible relationship. Although the writing skill impact is not the primary focus of my study, the planned methodology can offer more anecdotal evidence and steps for future research that focuses directly on the link between writing centers and improved writing skills.

Focused Writing Center Intervention. This study is unique because of the case study design. Previous studies of writing centers have examined the overall clientele coming into the centers and judged changes in attitude about writing. These studies rely on students coming into the center on a consistent basis. My study, however, focuses the writing center intervention in a way that ensures the participants have consistent, targeted tutoring interactions. The case study design allows me to truly examine the impact that the writing center sessions have on both the participants' approach to writing and self-efficacy about writing. Additionally, the case study nature of my research will allow for a more thorough examination of how struggling students view writing and where these views are rooted. This examination could offer practitioners insight into ways to approach writing instruction and writing protocols in the future.

Focus on Clients Rather than Tutors. Much of the secondary school writing center research that I reviewed deals with the tutoring side of the writing center. Barton (2018b) concentrates on the impact on the tutors themselves, while Mackiewicz and Thompson (2018) detail the differing levels of success of different tutoring strategies. My study is interested only in the impact on the students who receive help from the tutors. With this study in place, I can augment the extant literature regarding struggling students and the Writing Center.

Focus on Secondary Context. There is a much higher ratio of Writing Center literature that deals with the centers established in colleges and universities than those located in middle and high schools. While this makes sense, given the lengthier history of post-secondary writing centers and the larger number of active centers, the growing number of secondary and middle grades centers indicates a need for more research into the impact and benefits of these centers. Additionally, the context for secondary schools and the logistics behind running a center are much different than at the postsecondary level. Therefore, this study could offer steps forward for emerging directors looking to create or grow their own center.

Summary and Implications

Students who have struggled with writing or who have received negative writing feedback from teachers often have low writing self-efficacy. This low writing self-efficacy often results in avoidant behavior or writing anxiety (Klassen, 2002). Because self-efficacy plays an integral role in a student's willingness to attempt and complete writing tasks, it is important that we seek to build both writing skills and self-efficacy in struggling students. Peer tutoring, particularly the Writing Center model (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016), offers students a chance to learn from a More Knowledgeable Other (Vygotsky, 1968), building self-efficacy through both vicarious experiences and social persuasion (Bandura, 1986) and increasing their engagement and motivation because of their sense of acceptance and relevance (Appleton et al., 20). Students who have the self-efficacy to believe that they *can* write will often be more motivated to actually complete the writing. Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which a peer-led writing center can help build self-efficacy in struggling students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study aims to examine the attitudes about writing that students have about their own writing abilities, as well as their motivation in terms of completing writing assignments, assessing how these attitudes shift and change as the students experienced continued, structured interaction with assigned peer tutors. Because I am interested in hearing the stories of how students form their beliefs about themselves and in examining how a collaborative experience through the writing center can help students form and adjust their beliefs about themselves as writers, the qualitative research method best suits this study. This chapter details the proposed methodology for conducting this research study, which is a qualitative case study. The chapter also outlines the criteria for how participants were selected, data collection and analysis procedures, and considerations related to ethics and reliability.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Many students are coming into secondary English Language Arts classrooms with gaps in their writing skills (NCES, 2011). Teachers try to address the skills needed through direct instruction, but many students, particularly at the later secondary levels, have given up on ever learning these skills, thereby allowing their lack of self-efficacy to hinder their efforts (Chumney, 2015; Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, & Gómez-Artiga, 2017). In conversation with my Professional Learning Community (PLC), many of my colleagues reported similar findings. Various teachers indicated that many students have been passed to the next grade without learning the skills needed to succeed, that by the time they get to eleventh grade, they have given up on ever learning them. Additionally, colleagues report that students are often so overwhelmed by what they do not know that they cannot figure out where to start asking for help (Peterson, personal communication, 2023).

Because some students are reluctant to approach teachers for help (Dahl, Løken, & Mogstad, 2014) and because teachers are often unable to provide extensive, timely feedback due to their curricular responsibilities (Loretto, DeMartino, & Godley, 2016), secondary school writing centers have been established in an effort to connect struggling students with peers who can provide one-on-one conferencing and feedback (Barnett, 2006; Sacher, 2016; Tobin, 2010; Turner, 2006). While much extant research on writing centers focuses on strategies for tutoring and filling writing skill gaps, this study aims to look at how the writing center model of feedback and support can impact the self-efficacy and motivation of struggling students.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine questions related to struggling students' self-efficacy and motivation and the impact of consistent, continued participation in a peer-led writing center model. The specific questions I seek to address are:

- How can participation in a peer-led writing tutoring center impact struggling students' perception of and confidence in their writing skills?
- How can participation in a peer-led writing center impact the motivation of struggling students when approaching a writing task?
 - Areas of interests: a) struggling students' attitudes toward writing; b) impact on struggling students' self-efficacy in terms of their writing; c) impact of increased self-efficacy on students' motivation and engagement.

Research Approach and Rationale

Research Paradigm

This study is founded in the social constructivist paradigm. According to the social constructivist research worldview, individuals construct their own meaning based on their own

experiences and values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Students who have long struggled with writing carry certain attitudes and beliefs about their own skills. These attitudes affect their willingness to engage in writing and their motivation to improve their skills. With the mental plasticity of young people, “adolescents’ trajectories of development are not fixed, and can be significantly influenced by factors in their homes, schools, and communities” (Lerner & Lerner, 2006, p. 5). In other words, even if a child starts on one path at the beginning of adolescence, good or bad, they are not cemented into that path. As a social constructivist, I am interested in hearing the stories of how students formed their beliefs about themselves and in examining how a collaborative experience through the writing center can help students form and adjust their beliefs about themselves as writers.

Research Design

I will conduct and present this research as a case study, with a mini case study performed on six students from one section of a colleague’s 12th-grade remedial education plan (REP) classes. Of these six focus students, I anticipate that at least one will have been my student from the previous school year. Their familiarity with me could allow for a base of trust, so even if they might be unsure about the tutoring process, many of them will most likely be willing to try what I ask them to try. My history with them will allow for me to have an understanding of their attitudes before the tutoring structure begins. By concentrating on just a few tutees, I will be able to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and beliefs about writing.

When students begin the research period, I will conduct a whole-class interview, asking questions about how the students feel about writing and where they need help. Conducting this interview will allow me to better understand these students’ previous experiences with writing and their questions and concerns about the writing center tutoring approach. Because their

experience of and with writing will comprise a collection of moments and experiences, telling this through a narrative will enable me to make connections between their stories and pinpoint where the attitudes differ and why. I can also use this information to better inform me when selecting participants and when matching tutees with tutors. After the research time period concluded (approximately 6-8 weeks), tutees will be asked to participate in another group interview about how the writing center tutoring model has impacted their confidence and attitudes toward writing and towards tutoring itself.

The study itself will consist of having students engage in weekly or twice weekly writing sessions with their writing center partners. These sessions will occur at all stages in the writing process, including but not limited to brainstorming, finding and explaining textual evidence, writing one paragraph at a time, reviewing the rough draft, looking at grammar and mechanics, and finalizing the final draft. The tutees will have the opportunity to identify what they need help with. If they say they do not need help, or if they seem resistant to the idea, the tutors will be equipped with specific questions they can ask, such as requesting that the tutees point out what they believed is the most successful sentence they had written or asking them to point out any sentence or section that they are unsure about so that they can receive feedback. Before the study begins, tutors will receive training in how to approach writing center tutoring using the sixth edition of *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan & Zimmerli, 2016). Guidelines for this tutoring include sitting beside the tutee, having them read their work out loud, and asking leading questions rather than making specific suggestions. In addition to their enrollment in our Writing Center Leadership class, they also serve as tutors in our school's physical Writing Center during lunch periods. This training ensures that the tutors will have additional tutoring experience to bring into each session.

At each observation session, I will examine how much writing the tutees complete on their own, listening to the questions they ask, and evaluating the parts of the writing process that give them trouble. As the study moves forward, I anticipate students becoming more comfortable with the routine, asking questions and sharing their work. At the end of the research period, I will evaluate how much writing the tutees are completing on their own, without guidance from the tutors, whether they continue engaging in the same avoidant behaviors, how their peer tutoring relationships change, and whether they have difficulty with similar steps of the process.

Case Study Rationale. My study aims to gain an understanding of why students feel the way they do about writing and about themselves as writers and how a focused intervention might impact these attitudes. According to Stake (1978), case studies are an appropriate method for studies in which the researcher seeks “experiential understanding” or “explanatory laws” (p. 7), making it a suitable approach for my study. This study comprises a holistic single-case study design (Yin, 2014). The class in which the proposed participants are enrolled exists within the same context in terms of the school and curriculum, and all participants will undergo the same treatment (targeted tutoring). Therefore, the tutoring intervention is the focus of the case study (Stake, 1978). Additionally, the focus classroom will be representative of a common occurrence in education—the students who are labeled as struggling or remedial—but the process of the study will be an innovative intervention, allowing me to examine how attitudes change over time. Even though this study will not occur over a significantly extended period of time, it can still be classified as longitudinal, since it will examine “the same single case at two or more different points in time” (Yin, 2014, p. 53)—before the intervention, during the intervention, and after the intervention is complete. Additionally, having the dedicated tutoring time built into my colleague’s instruction time means that the participants in my study can receive consistent help

and encouragement. This could reduce some resistance to the tutoring process and ensure consistency because participants will not be required to go to the Writing Center on their own accord outside of class time. Because of my existing relationship with the students, my access to their class and assignments, and my involvement in the intervention, concerns about misrepresentation are minimal.

Participant Parameters. Participants will be selected from 12th graders enrolled in a colleague's REP (Remedial Education Plan) Advanced Composition course. Students will work with an assigned tutor one to two times every week as part of the class period, which occurs every weekday between 9:30 AM and 10:30 AM. Tutors will come from my own Writing Center Leadership Elective, which has nine students total enrolled. With the numbers of enrolled students, seven tutors will be assigned two tutees, and two tutors will be assigned one tutee, which will remain consistent throughout the study. I plan to glean data and interview observations from one to two students at each level of skill and/or motivation: struggling, average, and above average. Because I will have taught most of these tutored students before, my colleague will have been teaching them since August 2022, and the students will have already participated in some tutoring sessions during the first semester, I plan to use anecdotal evidence and discussion with my colleague to categorize the students into the three categories (Table 3.1). Struggling students are classified as those who had severe gaps in writing skills or who demonstrate heavy resistance to the writing or tutoring processes. Average students are those who show some hesitation or experience some difficulty in parts of the writing process. Above average students are those who have insignificant or inconsistent gaps in writing skills or those who show no hesitation when approaching the writing process. I recognize that students may fit part of the definition of one category and part of the requirements of another; for instance, some

students have few gaps in writing skills but have a significant lack of motivation to complete writing assignments. Anticipation of this overlap is what led me to make the sample size six rather than simply three; the larger sample size will allow me to include some of the less easily categorized cases that are representative of the realities found in students in all classrooms.

Selection will be made based on the willingness of the student to participate in the study and observed writing skills. Any student who elects not to participate, or whose parents or guardians decline to give consent for participation, will not suffer any sort of retribution, negative impact on their grade, or feelings of discomfort. Students who do not participate in the study will still receive the one-on-one writing conferences and the help from their assigned tutors, ensuring that no harm will come to students who either choose to participate in the study or who decline participation (Glesne, 2012). Table 3.1 contains brief descriptions of each label of motivation and skill, with identifying components. I will use these parameters to classify the study participants in terms of their motivation and their skills. Additionally, I will look at how many credits the participants are missing, which can help give some background for their self-efficacy level in English class.

Table 3.1

Descriptions of Classification Component Parameters

	Struggling	Average	Above Average
Motivation	Student is often absent; student does not complete or turn in a majority of assignments; student frequently engages in avoidant behaviors or becomes distracted	Student does much of the work that is assigned; student works with some distractions or avoidant behaviors; student fulfills minimum requirements	Student completes all work that is assigned; student does not engage in distractions or avoidant behaviors; student goes beyond minimum requirements.

Skill	Student’s writing shows little depth of thought or analysis; student struggles with basic grammatical concepts; student struggles to connect ideas.	Student’s writing shows some depth of thought and analysis; the student has some basic grammatical errors; writing is simple and sometimes choppy.	Student’s writing shows depth of thought and analysis; student has few grammatical errors; writing is sophisticated and connections between ideas are clear.
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School Setting and Context

Research Site

Research and interviews were conducted at the high school where I teach. This site was chosen because it is the location for the Writing Center. The school is located in a small suburb north of Atlanta. My school is the largest and most diverse in the county. According to US News and World Report (2022), of the 2,873 students enrolled, 34% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and the demographic breakdown is as follows: 59.2% white, 29.8% Hispanic, 7.5% Black, 2.9% multiracial, and 0.6% Asian. Of the 624 seniors in the 2022-2023 graduation cohort, 37 were enrolled in REP Advanced Composition.

Access to Site. Because I teach at the school where the study takes place, I will have full access to the study location. Additionally, tutors will come from my elective course, meaning that I have one hour each weekday to discuss tutoring strategies, give feedback, and answer any questions they have about the tutoring process. This ensures that the writing center intervention that the other students receive will be based on best practices (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016) and that I can help troubleshoot any issues that arise.

My colleague’s classroom will be located across the hall from mine. Students will be able to walk freely between our rooms, meaning that the tutoring pairs can be split up during the writing sessions. In doing so, I will be able to pay closer attention to the students who are the

focus of the study, having them participate in my room, and my colleague will be able to assist the students who are not the focus for the study while they still receive the writing center intervention. All writing sessions will take place during the school day, during the students' scheduled class time; no student will be asked to commit to any time outside of their regularly required academic schedule. Therefore, I will be better able to ensure that students consistently and continually participate in the writing center intervention, and I will also be able to ensure that I have time and opportunity to conduct focus group interviews.

Data Collection

Overview of Methods

Yin (2014) asserts that using multiple sources of data offers better support for the study's findings (p. 121). In an effort to gain a more thorough understanding of the impact of the peer-led writing center intervention, I plan to employ three main methods of data collection throughout the study: interviews, observation of approaches to writing, and observation of discourse during tutoring sessions. As a tertiary data collection opportunity, I would like to examine students' writing samples after my colleague gives feedback on them, examining if they receive feedback on the same areas of opportunity throughout the entire study. The combination of these approaches to data collection will enable me to gain a fuller understanding of where attitudes originate, how they change, and how attitudes impact both the approach to and production of writing. The interviews will be the main tools to assess student attitudes and self-efficacy. Observation of student behavior during tutoring sessions will serve as a supplementary tool to examine student self-efficacy and motivation. Observation of the conversations during tutoring sessions can be used to show how peer tutoring relationships developed. I will triangulate the results from each of these methods to "provide multiple measures of the same

phenomenon” (Yin, 2014, p. 121). Doing so can allow me to notice patterns of attitudes and behavior.

Interviews. Yin (2014) argues that, because of the humanity-focused nature of case study research, “[i]nterviews are an essential source of case study evidence” (p. 113). I will conduct two focus group interviews during the implemented intervention cycle. These interviews will occur at the beginning of the study period (March or April) before formal participation in the writing center intervention begins and before senior finals (early May; after six to eight weeks of formal participation). The interviews can give a general idea of where the tutees stand in terms of writing attitude and the writing process, as well as their academic performance. Glesne (2012) points out that “topical interviewing,” which involves conceptions of a particular subject or protocol, opens the door to “explore alternative explanations” (p. 69); because I want to examine the truth behind students’ perceptions of writing and of themselves as writers, conducting a topical focus group interviews around this topic will allow me to adapt and augment my questions as students revealed more details. Appendix A includes questions for the first interview. Because my tutoring students will have already worked with the participants in a less formal writing center situation before the study begins, I want to make sure that I reference that experience and allow them to reflect on their participation. These questions also include inquiry into their general feelings about writing and about themselves as writers.

Questions for the second interview session (Appendix B) will be developed as I observe and analyze the successes and obstacles involved in the process. I intend to base the questions on responses from the first interview as well, referencing specific struggles that the students mention having previously. I will also ask direct questions about things that I observe during

tutoring sessions, such as asking students about particular assignments or asking about interactions with their tutors that I think might be noteworthy.

Using the interview method will allow students to share their thoughts and may lead to the revelation of unexpected insights and flaws in the writing tutoring process that I had not anticipated (Frey & Forman, 1991). Because these students will have already been classmates for six months before the study begins, they will have received identical instruction and identical assignment directions throughout the course. Therefore, they will come to the study with a similar shared experience. Kitzinger (1994) asserts that using focus groups comprised of people who are familiar with each other can lead to more natural and insightful conversation (p. 105); students who have been in the same class for six months—and some for all of high school—have shared experiences about which they can collectively reflect upon and even challenge others' perceptions.

One benefit of using focus group interviews is that the method gives students a chance to openly share their experience. Focus group interviews are particularly effective for determining the *why* behind the struggle; once one student starts talking about a negative or positive experience, others are more likely to contribute by adding their own experiences (Frey & Forman, 1991; Kitzinger, 1994) or through “sharing and comparing” (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018, p. 256). Focus group interviews allow students to agree with similar experiences of their fellow interviewees and to add additional, contrasting experiences. Listening to this range of experiences will allow me to gain an understanding of the multitude of reasons behind their attitudes toward writing, possibly even discovering information that I had not previously considered (Stake, 2009). Because of the nature of this study, which anticipates changing perspectives of and attitudes toward writing, I will be cognizant of these shifts, being sure to

recognize the “immediate implications” that such shifts in perspective have on the study and its findings (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018, p. 260).

My own familiarity with the students could serve as both an advantage and a challenge. Because a majority of the students in the class were my students previously, and because I have formed and maintained positive relationships with them, they might be more willing to talk to me than they would be to an unfamiliar interviewer (Creswell, 2014; Glesne 2012). However, I do recognize that this already-established rapport may make students less comfortable with critiquing teachers or the writing process, even if they are not directly critiquing me. I will need to reassure them that I want their honest opinions and memories, letting them know that they will not insult me, and I will not judge them.

Observations. Tutor-tutee pairs will engage in seven observed tutoring sessions throughout the study period. Table 3.2 gives descriptions of the writing assignments covered during these sessions, including skills the assignments focused on and the stage of the writing process in which they occurred. Stake (1978) argues that observational data is one of the components of case study research that makes it particularly suited for the social sciences. In addition to the pre- and post-interviews, observation will be an integral component in all seven tutoring sessions. During the interviews and during writing time in class, I will also observe students’ body language when approaching writing and discussions of writing. Because the classes will have been working together for a semester before the study officially began, my presence during these tutoring sessions will be expected and should not serve as a distraction. However, I will need to ensure a consistency in how I and my colleague interpret the body language and verbal responses of the students, and I will share my research about body language indicators with her. Since “observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative

research” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 166), these observations will be a key point in understanding how student attitudes toward writing develop over the course of the study. Maxwell (1992) asserts that, to ensure descriptive validity, researchers should include “activities seen as physical and behavioral events” (p. 287), such as components pertaining to body language and voice inflection. I will record my observations in a notebook and revisit them in order to categorize and later analyze the findings. Following the assertion that reliability is increased when more than one observer is recording information (Yin, 2014), I have asked my colleague to assist in making observations during the tutoring sessions and the writing sessions. Because she is enrolled in the EdD program and is CITI-certified, she has a working knowledge of how to make and record research observations. She will submit her notes to me through Google Drive, and I will use these observations to supplement my own.

Table 3.2

Assignment Descriptions and Skills Focus.

Date	Assignment Description	Skill Focus	Writing Process Stage
4.14	Nonfiction Synthesis Article. Students read two articles dealing with Artificial Intelligence (AI), then answered the question: Do you think the concern over AI is appropriate or being blown out of proportion? Students were expected to use evidence from both articles.	Synthesis; evidence incorporation	Revision; explanation
4.19	First body paragraph for <i>The Poet X</i> . After reading the first third of the book in class (with audio recording), students were given their choice of prompt.	Finding and explaining evidence; literary analysis.	Idea generation; brainstorming; finding evidence.

	<p>Which character’s relationship with Xiomara is the most complicated?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>What theme do you see developing in the book?</p>		
4.21	<p>First body paragraph revision. After receiving feedback from Mrs. Kline, students added explanation and evidence to their original paragraph.</p>	<p>Evidence incorporation; flow; sophistication</p>	<p>Revision; structuring</p>
4.25	<p>Six-Word Memoir. Students created a six-word sentence that describes their life or their life’s motto. Students also write an explanation of the motto.</p>	<p>Precision of language; exposition</p>	<p>Idea generation, creation, revision, finalization</p>
5.1	<p>Second body paragraph for <i>The Poet X</i>. After reading the second section of <i>The Poet X</i>, students describe how the relationship or the theme they picked for the first paragraph is developing or changing.</p>	<p>Evidence incorporation; evidence explanation; flow; sophistication</p>	<p>Idea generation; brainstorming; finding evidence.</p>
5.4	<p>Third body paragraph for <i>The Poet X</i>. Students write a final paragraph that explains either how their chosen theme manifested in the final section of the book or how the relationship they chose in their first two paragraphs changed and impacted Xiomara.</p>	<p>Evidence incorporation; evidence explanation; flow; sophistication</p>	<p>Idea generation; brainstorming; finding evidence.</p>
5.12	<p>Final Draft of <i>The Poet X</i>. Students use feedback from Mrs. Kline to finalize and combine their three body paragraphs that they wrote.</p>	<p>Evidence incorporation; evidence explanation; flow; sophistication</p>	<p>Revision</p>

Observation of how students approach and react to writing assignments is important for the study's focus on motivation. A variety of studies assert that low self-efficacy is linked to low motivation and high apprehension (Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996); therefore, through observing students' body language as they approach writing, I will be able to examine how their self-efficacy shifts throughout the course of the study and how their self-efficacy responds to different types of prompts. Body language, appearance of concentration, and the lack or presence of fidgeting can help me make informed assumptions about the students' level of motivation, anxiety, or avoidance when it comes to writing.

Writing Discourse. In addition to these responses, I will also pay specific attention to the types of conversations that occur during tutoring sessions. Conversations that are entirely off-topic, focusing instead on social lives or unrelated topics, will indicate to me that the pair is engaging in an unsuccessful or ineffective peer tutoring session. Conversations about writing that are initiated by the tutors will help show how the tutors guide the tutees in specific skills or stages of the writing process. Conversations about writing that are initiated by the tutees could indicate an increased trust in the tutors and an increasing self-confidence in the tutee's ability to write and explain their writing choices. I anticipate that these discussions will involve tutees asking direct questions about general writing skills or about their writing in particular.

Even though the study does not seek to examine the impact on writing skills, the link between writing skills and writing self-efficacy (Bong, Cho, Ahn, & Kim, 2012; Klassen, 2002; Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996) indicates that improved skills may indicate improved self-efficacy. Having students ask specific questions about how to write or what choice would be preferable could help me understand what skills they struggled with. Knowing where students

struggle can help provide context for their avoidance of or apprehension over certain writing assignments (Bong, et al., 2012; Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011; Pajares & Johnson, 1994).

Data Analysis

First, to ensure reliability, I will record focus interviews using a G L87 Digital Voice Recorder and took notes during all interviews and observation sessions. Focus group interviews were also recorded using Microsoft Teams on my laptop, which is accessible only through my personal login and password. After reviewing these recordings, I will transcribe the sessions using the Otter transcription software. Additionally, because the feedback provided on the writing samples will not come from me, I will engage in discussions with my colleague so that I can fully understand what she marks and why. This will enable me to more accurately code these artifacts for changes in writing skills.

When reviewing recordings, transcripts, and notes from interviews, I will engage in categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995), listening for concepts and themes that the students continue to articulate (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Doing so will involve looking for words or phrases that are repeated consistently, both in the whole-group interviews and in the focus group interviews; as I identify repeated words or phrases, I will make note of future mentions as they occur in interviews about observations, either in the margins of transcripts or in a dedicated notebook. I anticipate hearing many of the terms commonly associated with writing, such as “Senior Project” and “tasks”—labels that our county curriculum has given to many of the Advanced Composition assignments. However, these anticipated patterns may not emerge; instead, I will look for other common ideas that arise, such as disinterest in writing, past negative experiences with writing, and other attitudes associated with writing. Even if the students do not

discuss these ideas with the same or expected vocabulary or terminology, the repetition of the general concepts could be important for my findings.

After identifying these themes, I will mark transcripts according to these labels. I plan to use nVivo analysis software to help me code the full transcripts. According to Creswell and Poth (2018, pp. 214-215), using computer software can assist the researcher in:

- 1) storing, organizing, sorting, and locating multiple forms of data. Because I will have three different forms of data, having the ability to search them all for patterns, themes, and codes will be beneficial;
- 2) retrieving and reviewing common passages and comparing and relating among code labels. Having all my data in one searchable digital platform will allow me to more easily analyze how often themes appear throughout the data forms;
- 3) conceptualizing different levels of abstraction. This is another factor that can help reveal relationships among codes; additionally, because the software allows me to organize from broad parent codes to more specific subcodes, I have the opportunity to continually examine and reexamine relationships and patterns.

After analyzing the data and drawing conclusions about the relationships and patterns among the different data sources, I will engage in what Creswell and Poth (2018) call “naturalistic generalization,” or examining how my findings can be applied to other similar contexts and what others can learn from the specific case examined.

Researcher Positionality

I am a 38-year-old, white, female teacher with five years of teaching experience. I grew up upper middle class, and my husband and I are currently in that socioeconomic bracket as well. I fully recognize that I have an economic privilege that many of my students do not, and I try to

be cognizant of that, providing supplies and support to students with no questions asked. More than my economic privilege, though, my educational privilege means that I must push past my own biases to truly understand why students approach or avoid writing the way that they do. My own high school experience was without any academic difficulty, even in the gifted and AP courses in which I was enrolled; I was particularly fond of and skilled in English. I loved to write, and if I did avoid assignments, it was simply because I did not want to do homework right then and not as a result of any lack of self-efficacy. As such, I sought a Bachelors in English, and have two advanced degrees in English Education. Teaching REP classes during the two years previous to this study allowed me some insight into the lack of motivation of struggling students, and I know that I need to continue keeping in mind the vastly different educational experiences that my students have had if I want to understand where their struggles originate.

Worldview

As a social constructivist, I believe that students' experiences with and treatment at the hands of the education system both negatively and positively impact their view of themselves as students. I also ascribe to the transformative worldview, fully believing that educators have a duty to look at how the educational system privileges certain students and devalues others, and to then listen to and value the voices of marginalized students. I am a teacher who believes that students are capable of more than they believe, and more than the system has told them they can achieve.

Trustworthiness

I am the sponsor and director of the school's Writing Center. As such, I have a personal connection to this study; I want to grow this center into a successful place that helps change the culture of writing in my school. More than just the center's success, though, I want students to

know that they have valuable ideas and powerful words. I want to help them improve their confidence in sharing these words and ideas as they graduate and head into the real world.

Another of my hopes is that students become increasingly engaged in writing as their skills and confidence increase. In light of these goals, I know that I need to be mindful of presenting only positive outcomes, or of demonstrating confirmation bias. Creswell and Poth (2018) present several validation strategies that can be categorized into three lenses: the researcher's lens, the participant's lens, and the reader's lens (p. 259), and recommend using at least two validation strategies throughout the entire study. I used four: triangulation, reflexivity, seeking participant feedback, and peer review. Keeping thorough observation notes and comparing these with both the results from the focus group interviews and the writing samples allowed me to engage in both triangulation and reflexivity. Comparing the findings from multiple sources of data allowed me to "shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 260). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researcher reflexivity requires that the researcher be open about "the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings...from the outset of the study" (p. 261); they recommend making room for clear, purposeful moments to reflect on how these personal connections may enter into my observations and understanding of the data. The final focus group interview allowed me to present what I noticed during the tutoring sessions to the tutees and to check their perspective of the accuracy of my observations. From the reader's lens, I shared my observations and data with my CITI-certified colleague who also engaged in observations during the tutoring sessions. Because of our professional relationship and our shared goals, she was honest with me about gaps or biases that she saw in my findings; talking through my findings also helped me troubleshoot my own bias.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study is the special scheduling circumstances in which it took place. While there are dozens, if not hundreds of secondary schools that have Writing Centers (SSWCA, 2022), not as many have an elective specifically for the Writing Center leadership. Arguably, even fewer have the direct tutor-tutee access that was afforded to me by my colleague's willingness to help with my study. However, the model itself—of having tutees seek help from the same tutor—is replicable as long as there is an established Writing Center in the school.

The timeline of this study was also somewhat of a limitation. Because the students had already been working together for a semester before the study began, there was not as much examination of how to establish the relationship or as much of the initial hesitation to share writing that most tutors and tutees experience in their first tutoring encounters. Additionally, the study took place over a shortened period of time, meaning that there were steps of the writing process that were not covered, and I was not able to have one-on-one interviews with the participants throughout the process. Conclusions are based on observations of interactions and on the pre- and post-study interviews.

The number of participants is also a limitation. While qualitative case study research should include the number of participants who will represent “the number required to inform fully all important elements of the phenomenon being studied” (Sargeant, 2012, para. 5), and I believe that the six chosen participants account for the various perspectives needed to examine the impact of writing center participation on self-efficacy and motivation, I do recognize that the perspectives and experiences of my chosen participants cannot account for all relevant perspectives and experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Because this research involved high school students, all of whom were 18, and also involved working with an academic subject that was required for graduation, I was very conscious of how this study might have negatively impacted participants. In order to prevent any possible negative impacts, participants gave informed consent, where they were made aware of exactly what the study would involve. In the written permission form (Appendix C), I outlined the tutoring process, the types of questions that will be involved in the focus group interviews, and the fact that their writing samples may be used in the study, with any personally identifying information removed before publication. I also made sure that they knew that their participation was entirely voluntary, and if they wanted to withdraw from being a participant at any time, they could (Glesne, 2012). I have also made sure that any writeup or descriptions that I give of the students participating in the study does not include any information that can be easily tracked to their identity. Including participant feedback will also make sure that I am avoiding deception.

Additionally, students who chose not to participate in the study still received the writing tutoring; their answers in the focus group interviews were not published, and I did not access their writing samples. Because every student participated in the focus group interviews, there was no clear indication of who was chosen as a participant. Additionally, Mrs. Kline and I observed different groups on different days, meaning that students could not be sure who was chosen as part of the focus group. Only one student did not return the permission slip, and he was not made to feel guilty or treated differently in any way, other than not participating in the recorded interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This study aimed to examine questions related to struggling students' self-efficacy and motivation and the impact of consistent, continued participation in a peer-led writing center model. The specific questions I sought to address were:

- How can participation in a peer-led writing tutoring center impact struggling students' perception of and confidence in their writing skills?
- How can participation in a peer-led writing center impact the motivation of struggling students when approaching a writing task?

These research questions also required that I engage in some examination of how students felt about writing as a whole and where those attitudes originated. In order to answer these questions, I observed six sets of paired tutors and tutees during seven unique writing sessions. Sessions included opinion writing including textual details from a news article, writing and explaining a personal motto, and crafting an analytical essay about either theme or characterization from Elizabeth Acevedo's novel in verse, *The Poet* X. Sessions also covered many parts of the writing process, including brainstorming, creating, and revision. When observing the tutoring pairs, I paid close attention to body language and listened to conversations, looking for indications of avoidant behavior, motivation, and self-efficacy. Movement and choices such as leaving the room, looking for supplies, and engaging in non-relevant conversations were considered to be avoidant behavior. Motivation was measured by the willingness to begin and continue working on the assignment. Self-efficacy indicators included willingness to share their work with tutors, being the first to ask questions about their writing, and asking questions that

focused on specific elements of their writing. Other interpretations of body language and facial expressions are provided in Table 4.4, appearing later in this chapter.

To get a baseline for students' attitudes toward writing and themselves as writers, I conducted an interview with all students in Mrs. Kline's class before the observed tutoring sessions began. To judge whether and how these attitudes shifted after the writing center model of tutoring intervention, I conducted a final interview with just the focus students. This interview allowed me to see how responses had changed and how the writing center intervention had affected students' attitudes towards writing and writing tutoring.

Because this study aimed to examine the impact that the peer-led writing center model of tutoring had on struggling students' self-efficacy and motivation, I used the opening interview to get a baseline understanding of where the students started in their attitudes about writing and their views of themselves as writers. This chapter will discuss the overall findings from the initial interview, then discuss each participant's development over the course of the study in terms of self-efficacy and motivation. Finally, the chapter will review the final interview and discuss how participant perceptions changed.

Participants and Tutoring Pairings

The following descriptions discuss the personality traits, attitudes about writing, and personal observations about each of the six focus students. Additionally, I detail the process of how I matched tutors up with tutees, explaining the considerations that I took when attempting to create successful, effective tutor pairings.

Specific Participants

While all sixteen students from my colleague's second period class received the tutoring intervention, I selected six students to be the focus students for this study. This selection was

based on several factors, and students came from different levels of both skills and motivation/engagement in terms of writing assignments. Assessment of these two components came from both my observations during the first semester of tutoring interactions and from my colleague’s input. The only student who fit the parameters of high skill, high motivation did not return the permission form. The following contains specific details about each student and how they fit into the focus student parameters. Table 4.1 lists each study participant and their classification according to the parameters outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 4.1

Classifications of Study Participants

Student Pseudonym	Skill	Motivation	Missing Credits
Remy	average	average	6
Elvis	average	average	2
Sera	Above average	struggling	3
Clinta	Above average	struggling	3
Matteo	struggling	average	0
Oakley	average	Above average	0

Remy. Remy was an 18-year-old Hispanic male. Going into second semester of his senior year, he had six Literature credits to make up, meaning that he failed his freshman and sophomore years, as well as the first semesters of both his junior and senior years. Remy had always been a reluctant student, and he avoided writing. Additionally, he did not like to turn in incomplete or late work, which became part of his cycle of failure. In terms of his writing, he had no obvious gaps in skills, with his areas of opportunity being flow and sophistication. He often doubted himself and did not like asking for help. Remy was reserved; he needed to be

comfortable with a person before he would talk to or share with them. Remy was classified as average skill, average motivation.

Elvis. Elvis was an 18-year-old Black male. Elvis came into his senior year missing two literature credits. He was a very personable, gregarious student who enjoyed interacting with peers. However, Elvis's social skills often interfered with his academic performance. Generally, he eventually completed his assignments, but he required a lot of redirection and engaged in avoidance behaviors. The writing he turned in did not show any significant gaps in skills. When he was engaged in the task or assignment, Elvis would focus and complete his work. Elvis was classified as average skill, average motivation.

Sera. Sera was an 18-year-old Filipino female. As of January of her senior year, she was behind three Literature credits. Although she was a very skilled writer, she was full of self-doubt that made it nearly impossible for her to overcome her hesitancy. She would not turn in work that she felt was imperfect or flawed; because of her self-doubt, however, she considered all her work flawed and therefore turned in very few assignments, almost none of them on time. Sera had difficulty asking for help, but she would ask for directions to be repeated or clarified. Sera was classified as average skill, struggling motivation.

Clinta. Clinta was an 18-year-old non-binary white student. Clinta has both ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). As a result of their ASD, they did not respond well to strict guidelines for what they must write. Additionally, Clinta found it difficult to write about topics about which they had little or no interest. Because of this aversion, they often did not turn in work on time or at all. However, when Clinta was interested in the topic, their writing was sophisticated and articulate. Clinta entered their senior three credits behind in literature credits, and they wound up not graduating

during their senior year, the year of the study. They had a keen understanding of literature and little hesitation in sharing their opinions. Clinta was classified as above average skill, struggling motivation.

Matteo. Matteo was an 18-year-old white male. Matteo was not missing any literature credits; however, nearly all of his English grades fell between a 71 and 75, meaning that he did just enough and just well enough to pass. Matteo was sociable and willing to work, though he often wanted to just complete the task as quickly as possible. He did not see much relevance for reading or writing in his life after high school, so it was difficult for him to engage beyond a minimum level. He did turn in almost every assignment. Matteo's writing lacked sophistication and contained multiple grammatical struggles. Matteo was classified as struggling skill, average motivation.

Oakley. Oakley was an 18-year-old white female. She was not missing any Literature credits. Oakley was self-motivated, but according to Mrs. Kline, she was interested only in getting assignments finished. She responded well to rubrics, but she opted out of revising work based on teacher feedback. Oakley preferred to work on her own, though she would work with partners or groups if asked. Her writing did not demonstrate any significant gaps in skills, although it lacked sophistication. Oakley was classified as average skill, above average motivation.

Tutoring Pairings

When Mrs. Kline's class started working with mine during the first semester, I made sure to take note of the different personalities and how the tutors and tutees matched in approaches to work. During this five-month period, tutor/tutee pairings alternated. When it came time to start the study, I knew that I wanted to have consistent pairings in order to ameliorate any issues with

unfamiliarity, mistrust, or personality clashes. Mrs. Kline and I discussed what we had noticed about the different tutors and tutees and came up with what we thought would be strong pairings. Originally, there were 18 students enrolled in the 12th-grade class, meaning that each tutor had 2 tutees. However, after the first week of the second semester, two students stopped attending the school, so two tutors had only one assigned tutee. For tutoring sessions to be successful, tutors and tutees needed to be compatible as far as personality and approach to work. After conversation with Mrs. Kline, we collaboratively decided to pair the following students for the following reasons. Table 4.2 shows the tutoring pairings with brief descriptions of the rationale.

Table 4.2.

Tutor Pairings and Basic Rationale

Tutee	Tutor	Rationale
Remy	Margot	Remy’s comfort with Margot; Margot’s quiet nature; Remy’s reservedness
Elvis	Margot	Margot’s resistance to Elvis’s distractions; Elvis’s response to direct challenges
Sera	Jewel	Jewel’s experience as a tutor; Sera’s lack of confidence and number of questions
Clinta	Marie	Clinta’s discomfort with strangers; Marie’s calm demeanor
Matteo	Caleb	Similar senses of humor; Caleb’s balance of fun and work
Oakley	Dakota	Both share a direct approach to work and a compartmentalization of work and fun

Remy and Margot. Remy was a reserved, 18-year-old male student from Mexico. He reported never really liking school, and he was labeled as REP beginning in middle school. Middle school was also where some behavior issues started, and he received in-school suspension several times for various infractions. By the time he was enrolled in my eleventh grade REP American Literature class the year before the study began, he had received no credit for any high school English course, with the exception of second semester 9th grade. Remy resisted school, resisted reading and writing, and even resisted talking to anyone he didn't like. Unfortunately, Remy had a habit of finding reasons not to like a lot of people. However, Remy's second semester of junior year found him with a new determination to pass. He met with me, kept up with his assignments, and passed. Senior year saw that determination to pass continue, but frustration with his classes and the sheer amount of work he had to do to catch up found him slipping back into old habits. He refused to turn in anything that wasn't complete, hesitated to ask for help, and affected a "so what?" attitude whenever pushed.

When matching him up with a tutor, I knew that I needed someone who would persevere to get beyond the outer layer of "stay away; I don't want your help." However, I also needed a tutor who wouldn't be too pushy and in his face. Margot turned out to be the best match. Margot was a 17-year-old white female student who had been ranked first in her class since freshman year. While she herself was driven, and had multiple times incredulously uttered phrases like "How do you just not turn something in?" she brought a calm, non-judgmental energy to tutoring sessions. Remy responded to the gentle guidance and encouragement so well that when I told him I was making new matchups for the second semester, he said, "Please keep me with Margot. I'm doing good with her" (Peterson, personal conversation, January). Because their relationship was even more established than the others, by the time the study observations occurred, they had

a pattern that worked well. Remy, Margot, and Elvis (Margot's other tutee) would look over the prompt together, then Margot would ask them what they were thinking about writing. While Elvis engaged in his pattern of avoidant behaviors, Remy would think for a moment then quietly offer his thoughts. Margot would make encouraging comments or ask guiding questions, then Remy would start working. While this was one of the few partnerships where I witnessed almost no personal conversation or joking around, it was one of the most successful because of how much more comfortable and fluid Remy got with writing and with tutoring in general.

Elvis and Margot. Elvis was an 18-year-old Black male tutee. He came into his senior year missing three semesters worth of English credit, and he had to do course extension first semester in Mrs. Kline's class, meaning that he failed with a 65 or higher. Elvis did not struggle with basic writing skills, but he did resist revision and was often distracted. Elvis had an extremely gregarious personality, and he enjoyed talking and joking with everyone who was around him in the moment. As a result, Elvis had very strong peer relationships, but he often turned work in late. Additionally, Elvis made it clear that writing was one of his least favorite activities. As a result, for nearly every writing session, he engaged in a series of avoidant behaviors, including going to the bathroom before starting work, forgetting his book, pencil, paper, and assignment description and having to go find them, or being on his phone.

When matching him up with a tutor, I knew that he needed someone who would not be easily distracted, but also someone who would not totally shut down his attempts to connect. A tutor who was too serious or too disinterested in his conversations would cause Elvis to shut down. After talking with Mrs. Kline, we decided that Margot would be a good fit, for many of the reasons described in Remy's section.

Sera and Jewel. Sera was an 18-year-old female Filipino student. In the school's attendance system (Aspen) she was coded as ELF, which means that she was at some point in the ESOL program, but her ACCESS scores were high enough to "graduate" out of the program. Sera was a skilled writer. She had a good handle on grammar and used varied syntax. However, Sera was paralyzed by self-doubt whenever it came time to write. When confronted with a writing assignment, she would sit with her head in her hands, staring at the paper. Once she finally started to write, it became a "one step forward, three steps back process" Sera would write a few sentences, then erase everything and start again. As a result, Sera very rarely turned assignments in on time, if at all.

Although Sera responded well to verbal encouragement in the moment, the encouragement never seemed to manifest into confidence for herself. Whenever Mrs. Kline complimented her writing, Sera reacted with surprise and pleasure. She would immediately start writing, but the motivation would not last into the next writing period. During a conversation about her lack of confidence, Sera indicated that her time in the ESOL program—or at least the time she struggled with learning the rules of English—gave her the feeling that she was not capable. Because of Sera's hesitancy about writing and her lack of confidence, I knew I needed to be careful about choosing her tutor. She needed someone who would be patient but also firm when redirecting to task. Jewel was the leadership team's most experienced tutor. She also worked with Sera throughout first semester, so she already understood how to work with her effectively. Jewel had a calm, quiet, serious energy. She was adept at knowing when to sit back and let a tutee work and when to lean in and offer guidance.

When working with Sera, Jewel was very careful to balance guidance and reassurance. However, there were moments when even the normally unflappable Jewel showed signs of

frustration with Sera. Generally, this occurred after Jewel tried multiple times to lead Sera or to encourage her not to doubt herself, but Sera could not overcome the doubt. In these instances, I would walk over to offer my assistance; other than these moments of intervention, I acted only as an observer during tutoring sessions. While Sera ultimately turned in all writing assignments, her hesitancy and second-guessing of her own writing meant that she was generally a few days behind the due dates for each assignment.

Clinta and Marie. Clinta was an 18-year-old white non-binary student. They had a dual diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Clinta was an incredibly intelligent student, but they were only motivated to complete assignments that they were interested in. This was particularly true with writing. Clinta loved reading and read every book, poem, and short story assigned. However, when asked to write any sort of analysis, they would complain, resist, and procrastinate until the due date passed. As a result, Clinta failed all but two semesters of the eight total semesters of English throughout high school. Unfortunately, this included their final semester as well. In all honesty, it was very difficult to decide on the best-match tutor pairing for Clinta. Their ASD diagnosis made it difficult for them to connect to some people and also made it necessary to keep Clinta aware of the daily plans and routines. For instance, in the first session, the plan was for Clinta, their tutor Marie, and their co-tutee Sophie to be in my room. However, Clinta was prepared to work in Mrs. Kline's room and refused to move. I had also planned to separate Clinta and Sophie because of their existing friendship and their consistent distraction of each other. However, when presented with the new pairings, Clinta complained until I capitulated and left them together. I knew that if I had pushed the issue, Clinta had a high probability of shutting down.

When picking a tutor for Clinta, there were a lot of personality quirks to consider. They were uncomfortable with males, and they also did not get along with strong personalities. Ultimately, Marie felt like the best fit. Marie was a 17-year-old white female student who was enrolled in three AP classes. She was quiet, but she was also friendly and supportive. Additionally, Marie played clarinet in the marching band, and Clinta was a member of the color guard. Therefore, the two had an existing familiarity with each other. Marie attempted to strike a balance between allowing Clinta and Sophie to engage in distracted, tangential conversation then bringing their attention back to the assigned task. However, Clinta ultimately turned in only about half of their work, despite the seeming success of the tutoring sessions.

Matteo and Caleb. Matteo was an 18-year-old white male student. He was enrolled in my 1st grade American literature class the year before this study took place. Matteo was not missing any literature credits coming into his senior year, but he did not earn higher than a 75 in any English class. While Matteo always had an excitable, pleasant attitude in class, his approach to work-and writing in particular was to do “just enough” to pass. Matteo’s main hindrance to academic success was his desire for socialization. He was easily distracted by conversations, movements, facial expressions, and basically any errant thought. Knowing this, I knew that Matteo needed a tutor who could keep him on track. I also felt like he would benefit the most from being the only tutee for his tutor.

Caleb was a 17-year-old white male student who was enrolled in five AP Classes. He had a relaxed personality, which I believed would complement Matteo’s personality well; Matteo tended to shut down if he was met with criticism that was too harsh or direct. Caleb’s sense of humor also fit nicely with Matteo’s, but he was adept at redirecting and refocusing. The two

wound up building a camaraderie that allowed them to work together academically while also having fun.

Oakley and Dakota. Oakley was an 18-year-old white female student. While she had been in REP English classes for her entire high school career, she had only ever failed one semester of freshman literature, which she had already recovered during her sophomore year. Oakley, while often distracted by her phone, preferred to work through her writing on her own as quickly as possible. Therefore, I classified her as highly motivated. However, most of her writing remained at a basic level of sophistication and a medium level of skill. Additionally, Oakley rarely wanted to revise her work. When deciding on which tutor to match with Oakley, I knew that I needed someone who would not allow themselves to be distracted and who would have enough confidence to convince Oakley to slow down and to take suggestions.

Dakota was a 17-year-old white female tutor. She was ranked second in her junior class and was also a leader in the school's JROTC program. Dakota's personality was calm and quiet, and she took her role as a tutor seriously. While never being overbearing or bossy, Dakota had a quiet way of redirecting Oakley's attention back to the task at hand and offering straightforward encouragement and guidance. The two girls worked well together. While Oakley had not previously had any issues with turning work in on time, Dakota's partnership with her led to writing that reflected deeper thought and contained more extensive detail.

Initial Interview Findings

All students who signed permission slips participated in the initial interview. Students talked easily with each other and had similar responses to the questions. Table 4.3 shows the general groupings of ideas and some key vocabulary that occurred in the initial interview.

Table 4.3

Concepts and Key Phrases from Initial Interview

Category	Positive Associations	Negative Associations
Writing Experience	<p>“In elementary school, I always got really good grades in writing.”</p>	<p>“All these red marks all over your paper.”</p> <p>“Take risks, but they’re the wrong risks.”</p> <p>“Assigned writing is always boring.”</p> <p>“I’m usually not interested in writing about the things they tell me to.”</p> <p>“All the assignments are the same.”</p>
Writing Attitudes	<p>“I feel like I’m good at writing.”</p> <p>“I’m good at creative writing.”</p> <p>“I’m good at writing about things I’m interested in.”</p>	<p>“I’m just not good at it.”</p> <p>“I never know how to make the words on my head go on the paper.”</p> <p>“Grammar sucks”</p> <p>“I just hate it.”</p>
Writing Help	<p>“I might get help with writing”</p>	<p>“No, never.”</p> <p>“It’s stupid.”</p> <p>“I don’t think it would help.”</p>
Writing Skill	<p>“They make it interesting.”</p> <p>“The words are really strong.”</p> <p>“It’s a story I want to read.”</p> <p>“Good at grammar.”</p>	<p>“...I’m not a real writer.”</p>

Attitudes about Writing

Overall, most students expressed a dislike of more formal, analytical writing; however, many of them claimed to enjoy creative writing. Reasons for this difference had a lot to do with freedom and autonomy offered by creative writing assignments. Clinta admitted that they liked creative writing because they felt “more-in control, or like there are fewer rules you have to follow.” Students also indicated a frustration with the ways in which their writing was evaluated by teachers. One student talked about being “encouraged to take risks, but then you’re marked off for the risks that you take. Like, was that the wrong risk.” This preference for creative writing is not surprising. After all, teachers from my school report that students often not only hand in more personal/creative assignments, but that the level of complaining about these assignments is much lower (Peterson, personal communication, 2023). However, the student’s response about being “marked off” reflected the overwhelming frustration that most of these students felt.

When asked about their first thoughts when being assigned a writing assignment, the responses followed a common theme. None of the sixteen students who participated in the introduction interview reported any feelings of excitement or welcome when faced with a new assignment. When asked to elaborate on their aversion to the academic writing assignments, students either did not want to write at all, or they did not want to write about the topic that was assigned.

These baseline attitudes about writing were not surprising. Their overall aversion to writing was reflected in their grades and in their noted complaining about and avoidance of writing assignments in the past. Some of this can be attributed to the nature of the writing assignments given over their high school career, most of which came from an ascribed curriculum created by the county; these assignments left little room for creativity or relevance to

the students' interests and real-life. The corresponding rubrics acted as more of a checklist of included components and the county had a strict schedule for required units, which left little need and time for engaging in the revision portion of the writing process. This is a complaint of the teachers as well, who feel constrained by the requirements of the curriculum, noting a loss of autonomy and ability to adapt to meet students where they are (Peterson, personal communication, 2023).

Perception of Writing Skill

Most of the students reported feeling like they lacked writing skills and sophistication. Many of them, including Sera, Elvis, and Matteo, put it as simply as “I’m just not good at writing” and “I’m not a real writer.” Students identified multiple struggles in their own writing, including grammar, word choice, and organization. Others could not identify specific areas of opportunity, but they demonstrated a lack of confidence in their own writing. The two students who demonstrated confidence in their writing were the ones who were most vocal about not liking the prompts assigned by teachers. However, students were able to identify the marks of a good writer, including interesting stories, sophisticated language, and engaging characters. Unsurprisingly, most of the discussions about what makes other writers good centered around creative writing, while discussions of themselves as writers centered around the more analytical writing assigned in school. In the moment of the interview, I did not make this connection, so I did not ask if students felt more capable of creative or personal writing than they did of academic writing.

Attitudes about Peer Tutoring

Because the students had already participated in the tutoring process for about six months before the study period began, I took the opportunity to have students reflect on their feelings

about tutoring in general. Students reported a marked difference in their willingness to seek help in writing compared to seeking help in subjects such as math and science. When asked to elaborate more on this difference, students mentioned the more personal nature of writing as well as the more structured approach to math and science tutoring. In other words, students felt more comfortable seeking help in math and science because both the process and the results feel more measurable and achievable. There was also a common conception that writing tutoring simply “wouldn’t help,” as though there was no way that writing skills could improve. This corresponds with a few of the previously mentioned constraints of the county curriculum. Students repeated the same kinds of assignments and received similar grades, communicating to them that their writing skills and sophistication never improved. Additionally, the lack of participation in the revision portion of the writing process served to communicate to students that however they wrote that assignment was a reflection of who they were as writers. Without an encouragement that writing can only improve with practice, students could not conceive of how peer tutoring in writing could help their writing.

Participants’ Responses to Tutoring

The next section will follow each study participant through the seven tutoring sessions. For each session, I will describe observations about their motivation (how willingly and continually they worked on the actual writing of the assignment), self-efficacy (questions they asked and confidence they showed when interacting with the tutor), and the peer tutoring relationship (how the relationship and rapport between the tutor and tutee developed throughout the process). These observations are based on body language and overheard conversations.

Tables 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 show some of the body language indicators associated with self-efficacy, motivation, and peer relationships that Mrs. Kline and I used in our observation notes. These indicators are based on the work of Fast (1970), Giddens and White (2016), and Rodat (2019)

Table 4.4.

Body language and facial expression indicators of self-efficacy

	Body Language	Facial Expression
Positive Indicator	Straight posture; relaxed arms and shoulders	Eye contact; slight smiles
Negative Indicator	Slumped shoulders; shoulder shrugs; crossed arms	Compressed lips; lack of eye contact

Table 4.5.

Body language and facial expression indicators of motivation

	Body Language	Facial Expression
Positive Indicator	Writing readily; turned toward assignment; sure grip on writing utensil; leaned forward toward desk	Focused on paper; lips in straight line
Negative Indicator	No writing utensil in hand; not seated at desk; twirling or tapping pencil; sitting back in chair; sighing	Rolled eyes; lack of focus on desk/paper

Table 4.6.

Body language and facial expression indicators of peer tutoring relationship

	Body Language	Facial Expression
Positive Indicator	Students turned toward each other; heads tilted to side; open posture	Eye contact; smiles
Negative Indicator	Students turned away from or parallel to each other; arms crossed	Avoidance of eye contact; pursed or compressed lips

Remy***Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles***

Remy was absent for the first session. While he was present the previous day to read the articles, he was not present to talk through the articles with Margot. To my knowledge, Remy did not turn in any response to these articles.

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

For this session, Margot was absent. In her absence, I paired Remy up with Caleb, since Caleb has an unassuming demeanor similar to Margot. Additionally, Caleb was paired with only one tutee, Matteo, whom Remy sat close to in class. The difference in comfort was obvious, though.

Motivation. Throughout the entire session, Remy worked quietly on his own. His body language indicated strong motivation, keeping his head down and writing diligently. Barely pausing in his writing, Remy finished the paragraph before the end of class.

Self-Efficacy. Remy was notably more hesitant to show Caleb his work than he generally was during sessions with Margot. While Caleb read what he had written, Remy asked to go to the bathroom, his shoulders slightly slumped when he left. When he returned Caleb offered encouraging advice, talking about the “juxtaposition” between the characters. Remy was thrown by this word, but instead of breezing past it, he spoke up and asked what it meant. When Caleb explained, Remy smiled and said, “Oh, yeah. I know that;” the compliment bolstered Remy’s self-efficacy at least a bit.

Peer tutoring. While the session was still fairly successful, Remy was overall quieter and much less comfortable with the new tutor. As Caleb proved himself to be similarly non-judgmental, Remy relaxed a bit and stopped looking only at his desk, but he still never fully

made eye contact or displayed body language signifying that he was comfortable with Caleb as his tutor—he remained facing forward instead of angling his body toward Caleb. However, this weaker peer relationship was expected because Remy and Caleb had not worked together at all previously, and because Remy was an introverted student.

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X

Motivation. After a short discussion about the prompt and looking at the feedback offered by Mrs. Kline, Remy began working and wrote continuously. He did not look at his phone, and he did not ask to go to the restroom. As in the previous session, his body language indicated that he was fully engaged in the writing session the entire time.

Self-Efficacy. In contrast to the previous session with Caleb, Remy handed his writing easily to Margot. However, he did exhibit some signs of discomfort as she read it, staring straight ahead instead of watching her facial expressions. Once she made suggestions about the type of evidence he needed to add, he flipped through the book quickly to find what he needed. He then asked, without hesitation, “where” the evidence he found would fit. This is significant because in sessions before the study, Remy usually asked “if” the evidence he found would fit. The subtle difference shows an increase in Remy’s self- efficacy in terms of understanding the prompt and finding appropriate evidence.

Peer Tutoring. The trust developing between Remy and Margot was clear during this session. Remy voluntarily asked questions, and the two engaged in reciprocal conversation about the assignment. Margot offered guidance without taking over the writing. When asking questions, Remy maintained eye contact, and the two remained angled toward each other throughout their conversation.

Assignment Four: Six-Word Memoir

During this assignment session Remy and Margot were in Mrs. Kline's room being observed by her. This assignment was also different because it was much more personal and also required less actual writing. From the beginning of the session, Remy was much more resistant than any previous sessions, saying "This is hard, Mrs. Kline. Why you gotta make me think?" He was clearly not looking forward to completing this assignment.

Motivation. Remy covered his face and stared off into space before lamenting that the things he likes are not school-appropriate. This, coupled with his challenge to Mrs. Kline, were his first truly avoidant behaviors during sessions this semester. He continued to twirl his pencil, and to tap it against his desk instead of writing.

One explanation for his lack of motivation could be the personal nature of the assignment. Because Remy is a private person, he may have been hesitant to create a personal motto that he would have to explain to Margot. After Margot shifted her attention to Elvis, Remy looked at his phone before coming up with the phrase "Lost myself, found myself, bettered myself." He also worked diligently on his explanation, asking Mrs. Kline if he could write in bullet points rather than a paragraph. Remy completed this assignment before the class period ended. This marked the first session that Remy resisted an assignment at first but ultimately turned it in on time. Previously, if Remy did not want to do an assignment, he procrastinated until the class period was over and did not turn it in.

Self-Efficacy. For the first time in a while, Remy was hesitant to show Margot his work. This reluctance was most likely due to the personal nature of the assignment; if Margot only read the six-word memoir, then she could have made her own assumptions about what Remy meant by "losing himself." However, asking her to read his explanation opened him up to the

possibility of having to elaborate and to answer questions. Although Margot told Remy that his memoir was “really good and unique,” he still struggled with the explanation. He tried to turn it in before showing it to Margot, but Mrs. Kline did not allow it. While Margot read the assignment, Remy leaned back in his chair with slumped shoulders, indicating discomfort (Giddens & White, 2016).

When Margot read over the response, she simply told him that it is good and then asked about how he could illustrate it. Remy was much more comfortable discussing possible artwork; his clenched shoulders relaxed, and he started making eye contact. He seemed relieved not to have to talk about his actual writing.

Peer Tutoring. Remy’s body language and interactions during this entire session were much different than all other sessions. He spoke much more to Mrs. Kline than to Margot. At one point, he turned his back entirely to Elvis and Margot. I believe this was simply a symptom of his discomfort with sharing his personal story rather than a reflection of his discomfort with or distrust of Margot. This was the first and only session where Remy exhibited outright discomfort with Margot.

Assignment 5: Second Theme or Characterization Paragraph for The Poet X

Remy was back to his normal attitude and work ethic for this session. He seemed much more comfortable returning to literary analysis and moving away from personal reflection.

Motivation. With the prompt displayed on the Promethean board, Remy sat down and began working quietly and calmly. When his first draft was completed, he handed the paper to Margot with no prompting. After Margot read over the paragraph and pointed out places that needed more detail and elaboration, Remy went back to work without complaining or sighing. He completed the assignment before the end of the class period. Like the first few sessions, his

body language and facial expressions indicated that he was committed to finishing the assignment. The fact that he understood the book, coupled with the positive feedback he had received on the first paragraph, could have helped augment his motivation.

Self-efficacy. While Remy moved quickly through writing the paragraph without asking questions, and he readily gave Margot his work to review, he did indicate a slight loss of confidence in his analysis. During his revision, he asked Margot for clarification of a quote while making eye contact. Margot helped him through this doubt in the following interaction:

R: “Do you think this right here” (pointed to a line from the book) “shows a different relationship?”

M: (Looked at quote.) “Do you think it does?”

R: “Well, yeah, I just...”

M: “What part of their relationship does it show?”

This interaction was the opposite of the interaction from session three, when Remy only asked about *where* his quote would fit and did not question his understanding of it. After Margot helped Remy to validate his own thought process, he more confidently worked through his explanation of the quote.

Peer Tutoring. Remy's body language during this session was much less closed off. He spoke easily to Margot, making and holding eye contact. His posture was upright, without the slumped shoulders that he had demonstrated in previous sessions. The entire session was very calm and encouraging. Remy's growing trust in Margot in terms of his writing was clear.

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph on Theme or Character in The Poet X

This session marked the final session that students had to create new content about *The Poet X*. Remy was absent during the class session in which Mrs. Kline played the final audio for

the last part of the novel. Therefore, he spent the first fifteen minutes reviewing the relationship between the main character and her mother.

Motivation. Remy seemed determined to catch up on what he had missed. Mrs. Kline gave him specific pages to look at once he told her that he wanted to focus on the resolution of the "brutal" relationship between mother and daughter. Once he reviewed that section, he began writing. Although he got the first round of ideas and initial draft completed before class was over, he did not have time to revise. However, the time constraints seemed to drive his motivation rather than constrain it.

Self-efficacy. Remy was confident in his ability to keep writing about the relationship. He did have questions about how to start a topic sentence; Mrs. Kline ended up answering these questions because Remy did not ask until Margot took a bathroom break. This session did see Remy advocating for himself much more, asking for Post-It notes to mark quotes and making a timeline for himself to finish his writing.

Additionally, Remy demonstrated confidence in his understanding of the novel. When Elvis left to go to the restroom, Margot asked Remy to help her understand what happened in Part 2 of the book so that she could better help Elvis with his writing. Remy quickly and confidently offered a summary of the pertinent parts while directly facing Margot and making eye contact. By demonstrating his knowledge of the material, Remy was able to take on the role of more knowledgeable other for a moment, increasing his confidence (Vygotsky, 1978).

Peer Tutoring. Remy and Margot had an easy, comfortable rapport during this session. He made sure to keep her up-to-date on the work he was doing and the progress he made while she was in the restroom. This day's session was undeniably a partnership, with the two talking easily and sharing smiles and eye contact.

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay

Motivation. Because this was the last assignment of their senior year, and because this session was the last chance the tutors and tutees had to work together, Remy approached the session seriously from the first moment it began. He had Mrs. Kline's comments, and he had his previous paragraphs, and he worked to find evidence to add and to work in. However, he did not want to entirely rewrite the essay. He asked Mrs. Kline if he could just use arrows and asterisks to add and change what he had already written. While his motivation to create an entirely new draft of the assignment was lacking, his motivation to complete the assignment was strong and consistent.

Self-Efficacy. This session showed Remy take full control over his own writing. He had ideas that he followed without questioning, and he asked only for clarification of the assignment requirements and for how he included quotations. For the first time, he kept his eyes on Margot the entire time she read his writing, not seeming to be concerned with her reaction. Throughout the peer tutoring sessions, Remy showed a marked increase in his confidence.

Peer Tutoring. Again, Margot and Remy worked very well together. They seemed to have gained a sense of how each other worked, and the session followed a pattern that had been established in earlier sessions. Their conversation was fluid and light, and they maintained eye contact and angled their bodies toward each other. After Remy turned in his work, they even talked about some personal topics, which marked a first for the semester.

Overall Observations. Remy showed improvement in both motivation and self-efficacy. Until the semester in which the peer tutoring intervention took place, Remy would avoid writing at all, simply because he "hate[d] it." However, after an extended time working with Margot, and receiving instant and personalized feedback for his writing, Remy stopped dreading the writing

process, instead taking part in it as something that just needed to be done. While he did not gain a love for or excitement about writing, he at least gained a bit of confidence in his ability to complete the assignments. His and Margot’s peer tutoring relationship was probably one of the most successful, both in terms of daily productivity and in outcome. The two worked well together, and they demonstrated a growing trust in each other. While Margot remained hesitant with offering guidance and suggestions to Elvis, she had no hesitation speaking openly and frankly with Remy. While Remy remained hesitant to show anyone else his writing, he reached a point where he trusted Margot not to be judgmental and to have his best interest in mind. Table 4.7 shows an overall summation of Remy’s observation sessions. ABS indicates that the tutee was absent for that observation session.

Table 4.7.

Overview of Remy’s Tutoring Sessions

Session	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Peer Tutoring
1	ABS	ABS	ABS
2	Asked for clarification of a word; avoided watching tutor’s response to his writing	Worked the entire session and completed the assignment	Unfamiliar tutor meant lack of eye contact and conversation
3	“Where” not “if” the evidence would fit; avoided eye contact while tutor reviewed his work	Worked quickly and quietly, no phone or conversation	Handed paper over easily; engaged in reciprocal conversation about his writing
4	Uncomfortable with the assignment requirements	Avoidant behaviors included complaining and being on phone;	Marked hesitancy to show and discuss his writing

		ultimately completed the assignment	
5	Seemed unsure of thoughts at first, but explaining his ideas to Margot helped build confidence	Worked without complaint or pause, even on the revision portion	Guiding questions help Remy make choices instead of fixing errors
6	Asked specific questions about topic sentence; demonstrated understanding of novel to aide Margot	Determined to catch up on missing information	True partnership: filled Margot in on what he accomplished in her absence
7	Followed his instinct about what and how to write; did not avoid Margot while she read his work	Immediately began working, but did not want to totally rewrite the essay	Established pattern for working relationship; discussed some personal topics

Elvis

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles

Motivation. Elvis opened the session with avoidant behavior, texting at first, then having to return to Mrs. Kline’s room to retrieve the article. Because he was absent the day before, he spent the first ten minutes reading the article. After he finished the article, he had to return to Mrs. Kline’s room again to retrieve notebook paper, even though I had a stack of paper on my front table. However, once Elvis began writing, he wrote until he completed a first draft of a paragraph. He seemed to be receptive to Margot’s questions about his writing and his opinions, answering easily and adding detail where she suggested. Therefore, while it took a moment for Elvis to activate his motivation, once he stopped the avoidance, he remained consistently motivated. Some of this avoidance could have come from the fact that he was behind on the

assignment and felt overwhelmed by having to read, process, and reflect on the article in a shortened amount of time.

Self-Efficacy. Elvis did not ask Margot any questions about what or how to write, but he readily showed his writing to Margot. He was very comfortable offering his opinion to her and explaining why he thinks the way that he does. His explanations were accompanied by straight posture and direct eye contact, demonstrating his confidence in what he was saying.

Peer Tutoring. This session demonstrated that the peer tutoring relationship between Elvis and Margot was not fully comfortable at this early point. Margot did not seem comfortable asking Elvis to deepen his thoughts, and when first asking about what he wanted to write, she did not push him to discuss his thoughts beforehand. The two remained mostly parallel to each other, only turning their heads to each other when they spoke rather than angling their bodies toward each other. This awkwardness could have been due to having to establish a new working relationship.

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Like Margot, Elvis was absent for this writing session.

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X

Motivation. Elvis began this session by demonstrating avoidant behaviors. Despite the fact that he was absent during the first writing session, Elvis did not exhibit any signs of urgency to complete the assignment. He began by having to return to Mrs. Kline's room to get the assignment description; as soon as he returned, he went to the restroom. However, once he began writing, he wrote until he completed the paragraph. This became an emergent pattern; Elvis would distract himself until he could not find any more distractions, and then he would settle down to work. Elvis was also distracted by a conversation with Oakley, who was attempting to

find out where Margot would be that evening so she would have a chance to get her out in the Junior/Senior Nerf Wars.

Self-Efficacy. Elvis wrote quickly and confidently. However, he did not want to show Margot his paper, attempting to turn it in as soon as he finished. This could indicate a lack of confidence in his writing or could simply be reflective of his unease with or unwillingness to participate in the peer tutoring process.

Peer Tutoring. Elvis did not demonstrate an interest in participating in the peer tutoring process, and Margot was not confident enough in herself to push the issue. These two did not seem to trust each other at this point in their tutoring relationship. They did engage in some personal reactions about the Nerf Wars, during which they made eye contact and angled their bodies toward each other. However, Margot maintained a slumped-shoulder posture, possibly indicating her discomfort with the peer tutoring relationship.

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir

Motivation. At the beginning of the session, Elvis asked to go to the restroom. When he returned, he avoided talking to Margot about the assignment by texting on his phone. Once Mrs. Kline gave a reminder to him to work, he started to talk to Margot about his words. Throughout the writing session, Elvis wavered between working and joking around. His six-word memoir “I live life with no regrets” was of high quality, but he seemed to avoid putting serious thought into the explanation. Margot attempted to ask for memories or experiences he could write about, but he answered with surface-level responses, such as wishing he had driven to prom or wishing he had gone to the playground when he was 8. These responses could have offered the opportunity for deep explanation, but Elvis did not have a follow-up story for why he felt these experiences were missed opportunities. While the relaxed nature of the assignment may have given Elvis a

reason to be less motivated to take it seriously, he did complete the assignment before the class period ended.

Self-Efficacy. This session, Elvis did not seem to understand the assignment. He and Margot engaged in a lot of back-and-forth trying to make sure they were on the same page. Once he understood what he needed to do, Elvis was confident in his writing, working without asking questions. He seemed more hesitant than usual to show Margot his work, slowly inching the index card toward her on the desk rather than handing it directly to her. It is unclear whether this was a result of the personal nature of the assignment or because he did not want her suggestions.

Peer Tutoring. This session was difficult for Margot and Elvis to work together. Mrs. Kline reported a lot of communication errors, particularly in terms of Margot trying to explain to Elvis what he needed to do. Margot and Elvis were both distracted by Oakley at different times. Additionally, there was a bit of tension when Margot suggested where Elvis could add more to his writing.

M: Maybe give a specific example of something you wished you'd done but why you regret not doing it.

E: I'm 18, not 50.

M: Write about something that most people would regret and why.

E: I regret not going to the playground when I was 8.

M: Why?

E: *shrugs*

While the shrugging and the lack of eye contact indicates a resistance to the peer tutoring process, the two recovered their rapport when discussing what Elvis could draw for his image; the conversation resulted in him taking her suggestion to draw an elephant in reference to Prom.

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Elvis was absent for this writing session, as well as for the class period during which Mrs. Kline played the audiobook and the students listened to part two of the novel.

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Elvis engaged in his normal avoidant behaviors at the beginning of the session, spending time looking for paper and a writing utensil. Once he found them, he realized that he actually had two paragraphs to write, since he had missed the writing session for the second paragraph. When he realized this, he began to work on the third paragraph quietly, since he had been there for that section of the novel. Once he started working on the third paragraph, he worked quietly until he finished. When he started his missing second paragraph, however, his avoidant behaviors picked back up. He tried to joke around with Margot, then went to the bathroom. When he returned, he engaged in conversation about the book with Margot, but he only wrote a few sentences. His vacillation between motivation and avoidance could be explained by a determination to complete the parts of the assignment he could control (the third paragraph) and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the parts he felt he could not control (the second paragraph).

Self-Efficacy. Elvis worked quietly on his third paragraph, seeming confident in his understanding of the novel and of his writing. He asked for help with quote incorporation, then followed Margot's guidance. However, when it came time for him to work on his missing second paragraph, Elvis relied on Margot to tell him what he missed from the book and did not seem interested in reading the pages himself. His posture while Margot tried to help him fill in missing information from the novel involved him looking down at the desk and tapping his fingers on his leg, indicating an anxiousness.

Peer Tutoring. Margot worked hard to help Elvis catch up, including using Remy as a resource so she could understand what happened in the book. Elvis also used Margot as a resource for his writing. While some parts of the session were unbalanced, with Margot doing the heavy lifting on the second section of the book, the writing of the third paragraph demonstrated a strong partnership. The two remained angled toward each other, keeping eye contact during the discussion of the third paragraph.

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay

Motivation. Elvis continued to engage in avoidant behaviors, playing on his phone, going to the bathroom, and looking for paper and writing utensils for an extended period of time. Margot attempted to focus Elvis's attention on the revision comments that Mrs. Kline made on his two paragraphs, but he continued to change the subject. Because this was the last class session to work on the essay, Margot tried to remind Elvis of the urgency, but he took about half the class before he started working. Again, Elvis may have felt overwhelmed by how much he needed to complete in order to turn in the assignment; often, his overwhelmedness resulted in avoidance.

Self-Efficacy. Elvis was confident in his ability to make the revisions himself before the due date. He told Margot not to "worry. I got this" during one instance when she attempted to focus his attention. While his body language indicated total surety in his ability to complete the assignment, this could have been a façade to hide his feelings of anxiety about completing the assignment.

Peer Tutoring. This session was not a successful tutoring session. Although Margot approached Elvis with confidence and patience, Elvis was just not interested in working. However, he was never dismissive of her, and he was not rude. This may have just been an

occasion where Elvis was entirely unmotivated. Margot attempted to maintain a positive peer relationship, angling her body towards his and indicating interest in what he was saying by maintaining eye contact and raising her eyebrows in interest, Elvis remained angled forward and did not make eye contact.

Overall Observations. Elvis’s motivation fluctuated throughout these sessions. He was generally most strongly motivated during the middle portions of assignments. Once he started working on an assignment, he would work until it was finished. His interactions with Margot took several sessions before he took her seriously as a tutor. Once they both figured out the other’s personality, though, they got along and began to work well together. Elvis never really doubted his abilities, and his self-efficacy remained strong throughout the entire study. While Elvis turned in all assignments that were part of the study, his missing work from the rest of Mrs. Kline’s class sessions meant that he did not pass the semester. Table 4.8 shows an overall summation of Elvis’s observation sessions. ABS indicates an absence.

Table 4.8.

Overview of Elvis’s Tutoring Sessions

Session	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Peer Tutoring
1	Readily explains opinions and shows work freely; does not ask questions	Avoidant behavior at beginning; had to catch up on reading; wrote and was open to revision	Margot hesitant to push Elvis to deepen his thoughts or add more to his writing
2	ABS	ABS	ABS
3	Confident enough not to ask for guidance; did not want to show work	Worked without stopping; completed the assignment	No obvious trust between the pair

4	After understanding the assignment, worked without stopping. Hesitant to show work	Avoidant behaviors included leaving the room, being on the phone, and joking around	Many moments of miscommunication, frustration, and distraction
5	ABS	ABS	ABS
6	Asked for specific help with quote integration; doubted his ability to catch up on missing section	Avoidant behaviors before and after finishing third paragraph	Margot worked to fill in information for second paragraph; third paragraph was a more reciprocal collaboration
7	“Don’t worry. I got this.”	Very low motivation: no writing started until halfway through class	Elvis resisted Margot’s attempts to focus on the assignment, but remained respectful

Sera

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles

Jewel was home sick for this writing session. Because of her absence, Sera was matched with Rose, a tutor who was often distracted and had difficulty taking charge of the writing session. Sera and Rose were seated at the same table as Marie and Clint. Unfortunately, although I knew that Sera needed a strong tutor, Rose was the only tutor whose tutee was also absent, meaning that she was the only available tutor.

Motivation. After about 15 minutes of the session, Sera had only a few sentences written on her paper. She was looking at the article with a blank expression on her face, not asking questions or writing anything. She seemed a bit lost and in need of assistance, which Rose did not offer. Once Mrs. Kline stepped in and answered her questions, Sera got to work. Overhearing Marie’s explanation of how to approach the prompt also pushed Sera to begin writing. In this

case, Sera's lack of productivity appeared to be a result of her lack of confidence and a lack of strong peer tutoring, not of a lack of desire to complete the assignment. Sera did not complete the assignment by the end of class.

Self-Efficacy. Sera demonstrated a lack of confidence in her writing and her own ideas. About halfway through the writing session, she erased the half of a paragraph she had written. When Mrs. Kline asked why, she responded that she needed to erase things if she was not sure about the idea that she wanted to write about. Additionally, Sera did not ask for help. Instead, she waited to be noticed; she maintained her gaze on the desk without making eye contact with Rose or Mrs. Kline. Her lips remained compressed, and her shoulders remained slumped. She did engage in conversation if Mrs. Kline approached her first, but she was not comfortable or confident enough to seek out the assistance on her own.

Peer Tutoring. Because Jewel was absent, this session did not help establish a baseline for their tutoring relationship. Her replacement tutor, Rose, did not make an effort to help Sera. The two remained parallel to each other, and Rose looked around the room and at her phone instead of at Sera. However, Sera responded to suggestions from Marie, showing that she was willing to listen to peer tutors. When Marie gave sentence stem suggestions to her other tutee, Sera began using these stems in her own writing.

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Sera approached the session wanting to make progress. She talked with Jewel about which prompt she wanted to write about. However, she either was not paying attention during the class period where Mrs. Kline played the audio version of the book, or she simply did not understand the book. Sera spent most of her time trying to find evidence for the relationship she wanted to write about, and she did not make much progress in writing. However,

her focus remained on the book, and her body was bent over the book, indicating that she was motivated to find evidence.

Self-Efficacy. Sera was comfortable asking questions, both of Jewel and of Mrs. Kline. She looked them both in the eyes and her voice did not shake. However, she did not seem to trust herself in terms of her understanding of either the prompt or of the novel itself. After Jewel and Mrs. Kline answered her questions, her shoulders slumped when she went back to working on her writing, and she bit her lip, showing uncertainty.

Peer Tutoring. While Jewel tried to assist Sera, the fact that she had not read the book made it difficult for her to help find specific evidence. She was able to help Sera understand the prompt and to decide on which relationship to write about. The two discussed what they could while making eye contact and angling their bodies toward each other. However, as the session went on, Sera turned her body toward her work and Jewel pulled her knee up to her chest and sat with her arms around her knee. While I knew that this was one of Jewel's normal positions of comfort, Sera may have viewed it as closed body language.

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X

Motivation. Sera seemed motivated to get the assignment done on this day. However, her motivation waned when she realized that she didn't "really know what to write." Once Jewel reminded her of their previous discussions, Sera began to work in earnest. Because this was supposed to be a revision session, Sera knew that she was behind. As a result, once Jewel helped her find evidence, Sera began writing and wrote until the bell rang. In this case, having a lot of work to do increased Sera's motivation, while it decreased motivation in some other students.

Self-Efficacy. Sera continued to demonstrate a lack of confidence in her understanding and her writing. She questioned the validity of the evidence that she found, even though Jewel

told her that it would work for her argument. Even though Jewel complimented her, Sera's brow furrowed, and she remained looking down at her paper. She was comfortable enough to ask Jewel for help with how to structure her paragraph. Jewel also offered some sentence stems, which seemed to help give Sera the starting point that she needed.

Peer Tutoring. Jewel and Sera worked well together during this session. Jewel seemed to sense where Sera's hesitance came from, and she worked to ask questions and offer suggestions for how to overcome these moments. Jewel watched Sera write, pointing to specific moments that needed more elaboration as they occurred. However, her focused assistance did not seem to bother Sera, whose motivation tended to waiver each time she hit a point of uncertainty.

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir

Jewel was absent for this work session. I paired Sera with Lily, a seventeen-year-old senior whose tutee was also absent. Lily had a calm demeanor and was generally a kind, funny tutor to work with.

Motivation. After Lily explained the assignment several times to Sera, Sera began to work. She worked diligently, not becoming distracted. Unlike most other sessions, Sera finished the assignment before the bell rang. She remained focused on the work for the entire session, bent over her writing.

Self-Efficacy. Sera doubted her understanding of what the assignment was enough that Lily had to explain the assignment multiple times. She also seemed hesitant to show her work to Lily, keeping her entire body bent over her work and not allowing Lily to see. This could have been a result of having an unfamiliar tutor and of the personal nature of the assignment.

Peer Tutoring. There was little interaction between Lily and Sera aside from the initial explanation of the assignment. Lily remained ready and open to offer assistance, keeping her

body turned toward Sera, but Sera did not ask her for any guidance. Lily had a much different personality than Jewel, so Sera may have just been shy or uncomfortable.

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Sera wanted to talk about the book during this session. She gestured animatedly while she spoke, and her posture was straight and alert. She did take some encouragement to begin writing, but once she did, she continued writing. This was the first session where Sera was totally caught up on the reading and the writing, so her determination to continue that pattern made sense.

Self-Efficacy. Sera willingly shared her ideas with Jewel with little hesitation. However, she seemed surprised when Jewel told her that her ideas were strong. Sera still struggled with believing that her ideas were worth writing, raising her eyebrows to express surprise and laughing uncomfortably to brush off the compliment (Giddens & White, 2016). She was also reluctant to begin writing; she did not write enough for Jewel to have a chance to review it. Unlike the previous session with Lily, though, Sera allowed Jewel to see her paper while she was writing.

Peer Tutoring. Sera seemed relieved that Jewel was present for this tutoring session, greeting her with a smile and “You’re here!” when she came in the room. Jewel asked Sera about the book and listened intently while she explained what had happened in section two, nodding and tilting her head toward Sera (Rodat, 2019). Sera responded well to this active listening. Jewel then asked Sera about her ideas for the paragraph. When Sera had some difficulty articulating what she was thinking, Jewel was patient and helped her process her thoughts with leading questions. The two girls crafted a basic outline for the paragraph together before Jewel offered some sentence stems and allowed Sera to begin work. It seemed as though their

relationship was stronger during this session than during previous ones, perhaps because they had a short break from working with each other.

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Sera spent most of this session looking for evidence. She seemed determined to find the precise “right” quote, but she was unsure about how the ones that she found fit with her ideas. Her focus on the quotes demonstrated that she was motivated to complete the writing, but she wound up being too wrapped up in the search for the “perfect” quote that Sera did not leave herself much time to complete the actual writing. This session demonstrated that Sera’s motivation may not actually be her main roadblock to completing work; she has worked during the entirety of the sessions about this writing assignment, but her lack of confidence in her writing skills and in her understanding of the book and of evidence kept her from making writing progress.

Self-Efficacy. Sera checked each quote she found with Jewel, asking whether that quote would fit the idea she had in her head. For each quote, Jewel asked Sera for her explanation of how it would fit, and then she asked follow-up questions to help Sera process her own explanations. As Sera spoke, Jewel kept her attention on her, nodding along and pointing to the book when necessary. Still, Sera did not seem to understand that she was effectively writing the paragraph by talking it through with Jewel until Jewel told her to “just write that down! You just explained it perfectly!” Sera seemed surprised at this, squinting before raising her eyebrows (Giddens & White, 2016), but she started writing down what they had just discussed.

Peer Tutoring. This session marked one where Sera trusted Jewel more readily than in past sessions. Sera talked through her ideas with Jewel and followed her advice without hesitation. Jewel started by helping Sera look for evidence, then listened intently when she was

discussing what she was thinking. While Sera did not finish the assignment during this class period, the two made progress together. Both girls kept their attention on each other, and they made eye contact while talking easily.

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay

Motivation. At the end of the session, Sera checked in with Mrs. Kline to see how much she was meant to accomplish during this session. Her concern over whether she was on track indicated her motivation to complete her assignment. She worked throughout the session, stopping only to erase and to have Jewel check one of her quote incorporations. She kept her eyes on her work and her body angled over her desk.

Self-Efficacy. Sera asked fewer questions and showed less hesitancy in writing during this time. She showed Jewel her writing without being prompted. Additionally, this session was one of the only times that she showed Jewel her paper without a caveat explaining why it might be flawed. When Jewel made suggestions, Sera only asked for clarification once, understanding the advice and then working to implement it. Here, self-efficacy was demonstrated when Sera accepted Jewel's positive reinforcement without demonstrating surprise.

Peer Tutoring. Jewel and Sera worked with a calm, quiet rhythm during this session. Sera was more open to suggestions and also less unsure about her own ideas. As a result, the two were able to work together to complete Sera's third paragraph and to help Sera make a plan to finish the revision on her own.

Overall Observations. Sera's most significant struggle was with her self-efficacy. In turn, her motivation was negatively impacted. While Sera did show improvement in the amount of work that she completed throughout the semester, her lack of confidence in her own ability remained, although it did seem to improve nearer to the end of the sessions. When Jewel would

tell her to “just write down what’s in your head” she would do so with less hesitancy than in earlier sessions, showing that she needed less encouragement to trust herself. I also noticed fewer instances of Sera erasing everything she had written and starting over. The peer tutoring relationship went through some ups and downs, with both girls becoming frustrated with each other. However, once Sera realized that Jewel was on her side, and once Jewel realized that Sera was not doubting her abilities as a tutor, they began working together more easily. Table 4.9 shows an overall summation of Sera’s observation sessions. ABS indicates an absence.

Table 4.9.

Overview of Sera’s Tutoring Sessions

Session	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Peer Tutoring
1	Filled with doubt, to the point where Sera erased half a paragraph without showing it to anyone	Sera wanted to write but hesitated continuously	Unfamiliar peer tutor; no collaboration
2	Asked questions without trusting her understanding of the answers	Wanted to write but spent most of the time searching for evidence	Jewel demonstrated some frustration with Sera not having read the book
3	Sera demonstrated continued doubts in her ideas and writing	Eager to get started but motivated decreased with doubt	Jewel anticipated Sera’s needs and proactively made suggestions
4	Doubted understanding of the prompt; did not want to share work	Finished assignment before class was over	Unfamiliar peer tutor; uncomfortable collaboration
5	Readily shared ideas but surprised that Jewel valued them	Eager to discuss book; kept writing once she started	Relieved to see Jewel; active discussion about the book

6	“Just write down what you said!” Doubt in ability to write, but not ideas	Focused on finding the exact right quote	Talked through ideas, asked for and followed suggestions
7	Less hesitancy in writing; no verbal doubt of writing skills	Sera determined to complete the assignment	More comfortable, compatible relationship

Clinta

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles

Motivation. Clinta seemed very interested in this topic. They engaged in a lot of discussion about the tone of the article, calling it “fearmongering,” and they brought in a lot of their own experience with AI. Their conversation was peppered with animated hand gestures and alert posture. However, when it came time to actually write the assignment, they resisted. When Marie asked Clinta to begin writing, they slumped back in their chair before responding that they “just spit all [their] thoughts onto the paper” and did not “really care if it’s professional or not.” This interaction showed that Clinta did not feel interested enough in the writing portion of the assignment to give their full effort to it. This became another assignment to simply get done. However, Clinta did begin writing, and they wrote until they were finished, turning in the assignment before class was over.

Self-Efficacy. Clinta was very confident in both their ideas and in their writing ability. Marie worked to help Clinta expand upon their writing by asking specific questions and restating the points Clinta made. This restatement and guidance helped Clinta name specific examples of risks and benefits of AI. Clinta did not ask for much help with the actual writing, and they were not at all hesitant to show their writing to Marie. When Marie gave Clinta a specific compliment, saying that she liked their quote integration, Mrs. Kline observed that Clinta looked proud and excited as she turned her paper into the bin.

Peer Tutoring. During this session, Clinta demonstrated a growing comfort with Marie as their tutor. They freely engaged in conversation, and they usually allowed Marie to redirect their attention to the assignment at hand. Marie did wind up focusing more attention on her other tutee, Sophie, who was more resistant to the writing process, but Clinta contributed to the guidance for that student as well. Clinta also refrained from distracting the other student, who was one of their friends.

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Clinta was very motivated to talk about the book. Their copy of the novel was filled with Post-It flags of lines that they liked and moments they thought were important. When Marie asked about the book, both Clinta and their fellow tutee engaged in lively conversation. All three were angled toward each other, and all were speaking animatedly. Clinta explained their motivation to talk, saying “I have to talk about things with people. That’s how I process everything.” However, despite the intense discussion, Clinta did not begin working on the writing assignment.

Self-Efficacy. Clinta was confident in their understanding of the book and in their opinions about the characters and theme. However, they did not demonstrate observable self-efficacy in terms of their writing, simply because they did not engage in the writing process.

Peer Tutoring. Marie started the session by asking about the book, which would have been a good way to ease Clinta into writing. However, Marie became too involved in the discussion and did not push Clinta to focus on the writing assignment. The three did angle their bodies toward each other, and Marie engaged in active listening, asking questions that showed she was listening to Clinta’s responses.

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X

Motivation. Again, Clinta was more motivated to discuss the book than to work on the paragraph that they did not complete during the previous session. They started the session by showing Marie a poem, then they engaged in a discussion about graduation and plans after high school. The group did discuss the book, but Clinta wound up writing only two sentences, ending the session by saying “I didn’t get *nothing* done.”

Self-Efficacy. Clinta readily showed Marie the poem that they wrote. When both Marie and Dakota complimented their writing skills, Clinta responded excitedly. Clinta’s lack of concern about the lack of progress made on the writing assignment could be an indication of their confidence in their ability to write on their own, without assistance. However, this could also be an avoidance of the assignment at hand.

Peer Tutoring. Marie continually attempted to bring the conversation back to the book and back to the writing assignment. However, Clinta resisted Marie’s attempts at redirection, preferring to continue engaging in personal conversation. A couple of the times that Marie tried to redirect the conversation, Clinta turned their body away from Marie, cutting off the conversation.

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir

Motivation. Clinta seemed very interested in this assignment. They engaged in a lot of conversation with Megan about possibilities for what their six-word memoir could be. Once they decided on a sentence, they worked diligently and wrote their explanation quickly and thoroughly. Their focus remained on their writing, and their posture remained straight and focused.

Self-Efficacy. Clinta was very confident during this session. They showed no hesitancy in either talking about what their memoir could be or in sharing their completed work with Marie. They demonstrated significant self-efficacy when, despite having agreed with Marie on an option for their memoir, they changed the memoir with no discussion. When they showed their final work to Marie, Clinta seemed to downplay their work a bit, saying “It’s kind of cheesy, but it’s okay.” This marked the first time they seemed to doubt the quality of their writing, even if it was only a bit. Their eyes were a bit downcast while Marie read their memoir, and their shoulders were slightly slumped.

Peer Tutoring. Marie and Clinta showed a stronger working relationship during this session. The personal nature of the prompt allowed them to engage in the friendly conversation at the beginning of the session while staying on topic, and Marie gave Clinta specific, detailed compliments on what they had written, demonstrating her own engagement in the session. Both stayed on task for the entire session. Their bodies remained angled toward each other, and they maintained eye contact while talking about the assignment.

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. During this assignment, like the previous assignments, Clinta was much more interested in discussing the book itself than in completing the writing assignment. When answering Marie’s questions about the characters and the theme of the book, Clinta was fully engaged, talking clearly about what happened in the book and their thoughts. However, Clinta used the discussion as a way to avoid the writing assignment, admitting to Mrs. Kline at one point that they were “bringing up random topics to mess with [her] because [she kept] trying to refocus them on the writing assignment.” This was perhaps the most direct way that Clinta stated

that they were avoiding work. Eventually, they began writing in silence, only breaking that silence to ask for page numbers. They finished the assignment before class is over.

Self-Efficacy. Clinta continued to demonstrate confidence in their ability to write. They did not ask for guidance or assistance with their wording or grammar, just for page numbers to find evidence they knew existed. While many of the tutees still demonstrated reluctance to have someone else look at their work, there was no hesitation from Clinta in terms of showing Marie their writing. They kept their eyes on Marie while she read over the paper, not showing any nervousness about Marie's response.

Peer Tutoring. While Clinta and Marie's peer tutoring relationship was strengthening, it occasionally veered into being too friendly. Marie, in her effort to make connections and to make both her tutees feel comfortable, often followed their tangents during the discussion about the book, gossiping about real-life couples. While Mrs. Kline reported that the gossip was actually thematically related to the book, it still served as a distraction. Marie did very well using compliments layered with criticisms to encourage Clinta to add detail to their writing, and the conversations they continued to engage in helped both tutees feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and their work with Marie.

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. As in the previous sessions dealing with the novel, Clinta enjoyed talking about the characters and the plot. They enjoyed talking about the main character's triumph at the end, as well as discussing how the relationship between the main character and her mother resolved. However, Clinta had difficulty settling in to begin writing. Once they started, they paused every few minutes, putting down their pen to make an observation about the book or about the classroom in general. A few times, I had to remind them to stay on task. There were

short bursts of motivation and writing, but those were interrupted. Ultimately, they did not finish the paragraph before the end of class.

Self-Efficacy. Clinta was confident in their understanding of the book and in their opinions about the relationships and the themes in the book. Aside from motivation and distractions, they also had no trouble getting their thoughts down on paper. They showed their work to Marie without prompting, for the first time asking for guidance on how to phrase an explanation of a quote. While this did indicate a bit of uncertainty, it also showed a willingness to admit to a struggle, as well as a growing trust in Marie to be both helpful and nonjudgmental.

Peer Tutoring. Although Clinta suffered the same level of distraction as in previous sessions, this session demonstrated a more successful peer tutoring relationship than in the past. Marie was more able and more willing to redirect Clinta. Additionally, she did not engage in as much bantering or gossip as she had previously. Both were more focused on the task at hand.

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay

Motivation. Although today was the last day in class that students had to work on the essay that would be due in two days, Clinta continued to engage in distracted, avoidant behavior. Some of the distractions included worry and discussion over a project they had not completed for their Economics class, their average in English class, a discussion about French class, and colored pens. When they realized that they had not turned in the first paragraph for the essay, they did begin to work, but ultimately stayed distracted. It is possible that the sheer amount of work they needed to do in order to pass Mrs. Kline's class demotivated Clinta.

Self-Efficacy. Because Clinta did not spend much time writing during this session, there was no clear measure or indication of their self-efficacy.

Peer Tutoring. This session marked a very ineffectual peer tutoring relationship. While Marie and Clintia demonstrated their obvious comfort with each other by engaging in conversation and joking around, Marie was not able to redirect Clintia to work on the assignment.

Overall Observations. Because Clintia never truly demonstrated any doubt in their writing abilities or in their ability to understand a text, the tutoring process most likely did not make a significant impact on their self-efficacy. The days that Marie was able to redirect Clintia and to keep them focused did see improvement in their motivation. Overall, though, Clintia remained resistant to completing assignments that they were not interested in, particularly when they would rather have a discussion rather than write down their thoughts. Ultimately, Clintia did not pass Mrs. Kline’s class, which was a direct result of their not completing work, not of their ability or their level of understanding. Table 4.10 shows an overall summation of Clintia’s observation sessions. ABS indicates an absence.

Table 4.10.

Overview of Clintia’s Tutoring Sessions

Session	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Peer Tutoring
1	Confident in opinions and writing ability	Preferred discussion over writing; eventually began and completed assignment	Engaged in thorough discussion about the topic
2	No writing	Lively discussion of the book; no writing	Marie engaged in discussion of the book but became distracted by it and did not redirect
3	Confident in their ability to write and in their poetry	Entirely unmotivated to work on the assignment	Resisted Marie’s attempts to get on task

4	Demurred a bit about final product, but overall demonstrated confidence	Clinta liked this assignment, so completed the entire thing eagerly	Personal conversation related to the assignment; remained on task
5	No hesitation in showing work; total confidence in ideas and writing	Motivated to talk about the book but not to complete the writing assignment	Distracted by personal conversation, but the “compliment sandwich” approach was used effectively
6	Asked for guidance, showed writing without hesitation or prompting	Distracted, but still worked on the paragraph	Successful redirection and less distraction
7	Did not participate in the writing	Distracted by grades and other missing assignments	Only personal interaction with Marie, no writing

Matteo

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles

For this session, Caleb was out sick. Another student, Enrique, was also absent.

Therefore, I matched Matteo up with Enrique’s tutor, Lily, a 17-year-old senior girl who was friendly and encouraging.

Motivation. Like many of the students during this session, Matteo came in claiming that he was “not in the mood” to do this writing. This attitude showed throughout the entire session. Matteo was continually distracted from actually writing by listening to the conversations going on around him and by allowing his phone to distract him. However, Lily was adept at getting Matteo to refocus. She continued to physically indicate the paper for Matteo to write on; at each redirection, he picked his pencil back up and bent over his paper. Despite this redirection, however, he did not finish the assignment before class ended.

Self-Efficacy. Matteo felt comfortable enough to ask Lily questions about the topic and about his writing. He also showed no hesitancy in showing her what he wrote. In fact, she did not have to ask to see his paper; he wrote for a bit, then immediately handed it to her. While she read it over, however, he kept his eyes looking around the room, seeming to be uncomfortable anticipating Lily's response to his writing.

Peer Tutoring. Matteo responded very well to Lily's mixture of compliments and suggestions. She made sure to point out the positives of what he had written while also asking him how he would deepen the thoughts and explanations. Matteo needed to feel like writing more was his idea, so Lily's gentle suggestions helped him make the decision to continue his explanations. Matteo also benefited from having a tutor who would entertain his digressions but not allow them to derail the entire session. Lily remained an active listener, angling her body toward Matteo and listening with an open face and tilted head.

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Matteo came into this session ready to work. After some initial discussion with Caleb about how to approach the paragraph, and after talking through his ideas, Matteo began searching for evidence. While he did not finish the entire paragraph during the class period, he did turn it in after completing it during his lunch period. Matteo did not engage in any tangential conversations, and he did not look at his phone as a distraction. He kept his body and eyes turned toward his writing assignment, and his writing utensil never left his hand.

Self-Efficacy. At first, Matteo did not know how to approach the question. However, when Caleb began to ask him specific questions about the book and the characters within, Matteo responded confidently. The more questions Caleb asked, the straighter Matteo's posture became

when answering. Once Matteo decided what to write about, he searched for evidence without hesitation and without asking for assistance.

Peer Tutoring. This session showed how well Caleb and Matteo worked together. Caleb's calm demeanor balanced Matteo's active personality. Caleb asked questions that were accessible to Matteo, and he listened carefully to Matteo's responses. From these responses, Caleb offered suggestions for how Matteo could use them in his written response. This session showed the two boys beginning to establish a rapport and a pattern to their sessions together.

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X

Matteo was not present during this session.

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir

Motivation. Matteo began working after a bit of discussion with Caleb about the assignment. He completed his assignment fairly quickly. Once Caleb showed where he might need more explanation, Matteo added that without any complaint or hesitation. As these sessions progressed, and as his senior year came closer to an end, Matteo continued to demonstrate a strengthened motivation. In early sessions, and before the study began, Matteo found ways to avoid work and to turn in just the bare minimum. However, as the study began and as the sessions continued, Matteo seemed to commit himself to working, with his distractions being exceptions rather than the rule.

Self-Efficacy. Matteo was confident in this assignment and in the explanation that he provides. He did not ask questions, and he did not hesitate to show his work to Caleb. He watched as Caleb read over his work, not anxious about what Caleb's response would be. Again, this session showed how Matteo's self-efficacy had grown throughout the study so far.

Peer Tutoring. This tutoring session marked the most positive, academic interactions that Caleb and Matteo had. While the two boys had never had disagreements and had always gotten along, this session allowed them to interact more as peers. Caleb effectively asked questions that would help Matteo elaborate on his explanation, and he was more complimentary than he had been in the past, telling Matteo that his six-word-memoir was “awesome.” Additionally, Caleb attempted to give Matteo confidence for future assignments, saying that if he “could put the same passion into paragraphs about books, then [he’d] be unstoppable!” Matteo responded very positively to this comment.

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Matteo came in dreading the work that was coming. His shoulders were slumped, and he was taking slow steps, dragging his feet behind him. He sat down with a sigh and took five minutes before he picked up his pencil. Caleb tried to commiserate with him, saying “yeah, today sucks.” After some prompting from me, Matteo picked up his pencil and started writing slowly. Despite his attitude, Matteo did wind up writing the paragraph. This session showed that the participants in this study were indeed teenagers, who were dealing with stressors and emotions outside of the classroom. All Matteo’s motivation from the previous session was entirely forgotten during this session.

Self-Efficacy. Matteo’s mood during this session made it difficult to evaluate his level of confidence in his writing. However, he did show Caleb his writing, and he explained some of his ideas clearly. While Caleb read, though, Matteo kept his eyes down and his shoulders slumped. This may have been a result of his uncertainty about his writing, but I think it was more likely a result of his mood.

Peer Tutoring. This was a difficult session, but Caleb did his best to keep Matteo from becoming too unmotivated and to keep him from becoming lost in his bad mood. Caleb muted his own personality a bit, seeming to understand that Matteo was not in the mood for jokes or loud volume. Even though the boys had established a working pattern before this session, Caleb adjusted to fit Matteo's needs. As a result, Matteo completed the assignment and walked out of the room at his usual speed and posture.

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Matteo came into this session ready to work. He sat down at a desk, started writing, and did not stop until he finished the paragraph. Once he was finished, he threw his pencil down, took a deep breath, and said "There. It's done. Can I have a snack?" This was the most productive session Matteo had, both during this study and during his entire junior year when I taught him.

Self-Efficacy. Matteo did not ask for assistance while writing, nor did he hesitate when putting down his thoughts. He let Caleb read his work right away, and he readily and clearly answered questions that Caleb asked about why he had phrased things the way he had. Matteo stood by his work and his ideas, although he did follow Caleb's suggestions for adjusting some word choices and grammatical issues.

Peer Tutoring. The two boys worked well together during this session. Seeing that he was determined and motivated, Caleb gave Matteo room to write. He was ready to review the writing as soon as Matteo finished. Once he read the writing, he exclaimed "That's one of the best ones you've written so far!" Matteo met this compliment with bashfulness, hiding his smile.

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay

Motivation. Matteo came into my room saying, “Okay. Let’s get this done!” He showed Caleb the comments Mrs. Kline had made, and the two started talking about where he could add the explanation that she asked for. Matteo and Caleb worked together for the entire class session, stopping only for Matteo to take a bathroom break.

Self-Efficacy. Matteo easily talked to Caleb about how he could add explanation to some of his quotes. He knew what he wanted to say, and he was comfortable admitting to Caleb that he did not quite know how to say it. Matteo did not doubt his understanding of the novel, and he was confident in his writing and in his ability to improve it.

Peer Tutoring. This session demonstrated how strong the tutoring relationship between Matteo and Caleb had become. The two talked easily, with their bodies angled toward each other and while maintaining eye contact, and Caleb was encouraging to Matteo. Matteo did not hesitate in his communication with Caleb.

Overall Observations. Matteo started this study with low motivation, more interested in social interactions and in turning in the bare minimum. However, as the semester continued and Caleb encouraged him to add more and think deeper, Matteo stopped resisting writing. By the end of the semester, Matteo found his own motivation, becoming determined to work hard to finish the assignments, knowing that Caleb would push him to add more. As Matteo wrote more, his writing became more sophisticated, and his mechanics improved. The peer tutoring relationship also improved as both boys took the process more and more seriously. Table 4.11 shows an overall summation of Matteo’s observation sessions. ABS indicates an absence.

Table 4.11.

Overview of Matteo’s Tutoring Sessions

Session	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Peer Tutoring
1	Handed writing over without prompting; confident in choices	“Not in the mood;” eventually completed the assignment with tutor encouragement	Unfamiliar tutor helped Matteo balance his distraction
2	Caleb’s questions help Matteo’s confidence that he knew what he was talking about	Worked on assignment after ensuring he understood it	Reciprocal conversation at Matteo’s level
3	ABS	ABS	ABS
4	Confident in choices and explanation	Worked and revised with no hesitation or complaining	Asked guiding questions; instilled confidence for future assignments
5	No questions asked, but no hesitation to share his writing	Slumped body language; unenthusiastic participation	Adjustment by Caleb to adapt to Matteo’s mood
6	Stood by work and ideas; confident in explanation	Ready to work from moment he entered the room	Compliments and respect for writing process
7	Confident enough to admit he was unsure of wording	Worked consistently and enthusiastically	Clear, easy communication between the two

Oakley

Assignment 1: Response to AI Articles

Motivation. Oakley came into the session ready to work, with her article and her pencil and paper on her desk. At first, she seemed determined to do it on her own, but after a false start, she entered into discussion with Dakota and then began to write in earnest. Oakley finished a

draft, then readily went back to add more detail at Dakota's prodding. There was very little phone use during this session, and no talking to other students.

Self-Efficacy. Oakley began the session by easily sharing her thoughts on the article. She was also confident in her ability to find necessary evidence. Oakley asked Dakota questions about organization and about some of the terminology discussed in the article, and she used those answers to write her response. While Oakley mainly showed confidence in her writing and her thinking, there were a few moments where she asked for validation of her choices, such as when she and Dakota were discussing the organization, and Oakley pointed to a spot on the paper and said "So, I can add in my own opinion about the level of concern here?" At Dakota's agreement, Oakley went back to working.

Peer Tutoring. This peer tutoring relationship demonstrated camaraderie from the beginning. While Oakley at first seemed to want to work independently, Dakota was gently persistent about asking her questions to get her to deepen her thinking about the topic. Dakota allowed Oakley to lead the session, asking questions to clarify her meaning, then using Oakley's own responses to help guide the writing process. The two girls demonstrated a mutual respect for each other, maintaining eye contact while speaking and demonstrating active listening.

Assignment 2: First Response to Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Once Dakota helped Oakley think through the prompt and decide on a character to write about, work began. Oakley stated from the beginning of the session that she wanted to just write on her own. She worked to find evidence and completed the assignment without a lot of input or guidance from Dakota.

Self-Efficacy. Oakley had questions about how to approach the assignment, but once she talked through those, she was confident in her ability to find evidence and to write her

explanations. She did not show Dakota her work, but it was unclear whether this was because of a hesitancy to share her work or because of a confidence that she did not need feedback.

Peer Tutoring. While the peer tutoring relationship was not contentious during this session, there was little interest from Oakley in engaging in the peer feedback. Dakota offered specific suggestions at the beginning, and Oakley participated readily in talking through the prompt and the options, but she worked independently afterward.

Assignment 3: Revision of First Response to The Poet X

Motivation. While Oakley did spend most of the session working on her writing assignment quietly, she also demonstrated some distraction. She and Elvis engaged in conversation about the ongoing Junior/Senior Nerf War, attempting to find a way to defeat Margot. However, Oakley did complete her revision before the session was over. Despite this assignment completion, this session marked a low point in motivation for Oakley.

Self-Efficacy. Oakley only asked for help once, asking Dakota how she could explain a piece of evidence further. She readily allowed Dakota to review her work, but she seemed confident enough in what she had written to not pay attention while Dakota read.

Peer Tutoring. This session was a very disconnected session for the two girls. Dakota spent most of her time helping her other tutee, who was struggling more than Oakley, and Oakley spent most of her time in the conversation with Elvis and Margot.

Assignment 4: Six-Word Memoir

Motivation. Like most of her assignments, Oakley began working immediately and completed all parts of the assignment quickly. She wrote a thorough enough explanation that Dakota did not suggest any further elaboration. Oakley's body language and gaze remained directed toward her writing.

Self-Efficacy. Oakley did not ask any questions, nor did she hesitate in showing Dakota her work. She was confident when talking through her thoughts.

Peer Tutoring. Because Oakley finished as quickly as she did, this peer tutoring session allowed Dakota and Oakley to build more of a personal connection. They had time after she turned in the assignment to talk about their weekends and get to know each other a bit more. The two girls faced each other while they spoke, smiling and gesturing easily.

Assignment 5: Second Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Oakley was absent for this tutoring session. She did complete the paragraph on her own at home, demonstrating that her motivation and self-efficacy remained strong.

Assignment 6: Third Paragraph about Theme or Characterization in The Poet X

Motivation. Oakley seemed excited to discuss the ending of the novel with Dakota. Because Dakota only knew what Oakley had told her about the novel, Oakley had a chance to be the expert and to share her opinion without fear of disagreement or judgment. When Dakota asked questions to deepen Oakley's explanation, Oakley had a moment where she paused, then said "ohhhhh" and immediately started writing down notes. She seemed not to want to forget the thoughts that had just come to mind. After the initial discussion, she began to write and continued to write until the paragraph was complete. When Dakota offered suggestions for how to add detail or clarify explanations, Oakley participated readily.

Self-Efficacy. Oakley was clear about her ideas and her opinions on both the novel and her writing. She wrote confidently, and she also showed Dakota her writing without hesitation. Even when Dakota made suggestions for something that Oakley could improve in her writing, Oakley greeted these suggestions with openness, not taking them as criticisms of her writing

itself. Oakley's posture remained erect while discussing the suggestions, and her eye contact remained steady, her gaze forward instead of angled down.

Peer Tutoring. This session demonstrated that Oakley and Dakota had formed a strong peer tutoring relationship. They understood each other's patterns and practices. Dakota showed that she knew Oakley wanted to be left alone for most of the actual writing process, and Oakley showed a willingness to ask Dakota for help, trusting in her guidance. When Dakota offered suggestions for where Oakley could add more explanation or evidence, Oakley listened to her while nodding, asked for clarification, and made the revisions.

Assignment 7: Final Draft of The Poet X Essay

Motivation. After receiving the feedback from Mrs. Kline on her three paragraphs, Oakley showed them to Dakota and the two looked over them together. Once Oakley was sure she knew what Mrs. Kline was asking for, she started working on making the revisions. She worked until she finished the assignment. While not in conversation with Dakota, her body and eyes remained focused on her writing.

Self-Efficacy. Oakley asked Dakota for advice on how she could carry out some of Mrs. Kline's suggestions for revision, including how to explain a quote more clearly. Oakley was confident in her understanding of Dakota's advice, and her clear ideas about the novel itself allowed her to make the revisions with no hesitation. Oakley was open with Dakota about her writing, and she was also confident when she chose not to accept one of Dakota's suggestions. She explained to Dakota that she did not think the mother and daughter's relationship had fully resolved, and she was passionate about explaining why; during her explanation, she maintained eye contact and pointed at specific parts of her writing.

Peer Tutoring. Oakley and Dakota worked as partners for this session, having discussions about the book and talking through options for how to revise Oakley’s writing. Once Oakley finished writing, and Dakota reviewed the revisions she had made, the two engaged in talking about summer plans and Oakley’s post-graduation plans.

Overall Observations. Because Oakley was a student who had not demonstrated any struggles with self-efficacy or motivation before the tutoring process began, I was mostly interested to see how she would respond to having consistent interactions with a peer tutor. While the first few sessions showed Oakley’s resistance—or at least hesitation—to asking for help, once she realized that Oakley was there to help her develop her own ideas, Oakley bought into the peer tutoring relationship a bit more. As the two continued to work together, I did notice that Oakley started writing more in her rough drafts, and she also seemed more willing to show Dakota her work and to follow the suggestions for revision. As a result, her final drafts showed a bit more depth of thinking than in the past. Table 4.12 shows an overall summation of Oakley’s observation sessions. ABS indicates an absence.

Table 4.12.

Overview of Oakley’s Tutoring Sessions

Session	Self-Efficacy	Motivation	Peer Tutoring
1	Oakley was confident, but also asked questions about how to improve writing	Oakley worked and wanted to be through, but willingly revised	Worked together professionally, with Dakota asking guiding questions that moved Oakley to revise
2	Oakley was confident enough in her own writing that she did not want Dakota’s input	Oakley worked quietly and diligently	Oakley wanted to work on her own; Dakota helped talk through the prompt

3	Oakley not interested in discussing her writing	Oakley distracted by NERF war	Dakota focused on another tutee
4	Oakley worked quickly and confidently	Oakley worked quickly and confidently	Established personal connection
5	ABS	ABS	ABS
6	Confidence when writing and when explaining writing; does not take suggestions as criticism	Oakley eagerly discussed the novel, then wrote down epiphanies and ideas before working in earnest	Dakota demonstrates understanding of and respect for Oakley's writing process
7	Oakley talked through her ideas with Dakota before beginning, then freely handed over her response	Oakley engaged in revision without complaint or hesitation for the first time	More personal conversation; in-depth conversation about writing

Patterns in the Sessions

Most of the sessions followed the same pattern; students would come in with the assignment description, talk about what they wanted to write, begin writing, then allow the tutor to review their writing and discuss it. Sessions were marked by different levels of engagement, resistance, and discourse. While the previous section describes the outcomes for individual students for individual sections, this section gives a brief overview of the overall measures of motivation, self-efficacy, and peer tutoring relationships for each session. Tables 4.13, 4.14, and 4.15 give a subjective rating of how successful, overall, each session was for each measure, with 1 being very unsuccessful for all pairings and 5 being highly successful for all pairings. Sessions 2-7 also contain an indication of whether this was an increase, decrease, or lateral move from the previous session.

Session One: AI Article Synthesis

In this session, students had to discuss two articles they had read the day before and give their opinion on the extent to which they agreed with the arguments being made. Overall, this session was fairly successful for each pairing, though there was a noted lack of enthusiasm about the writing.

Motivation. Most students were motivated to discuss the topic, and they engaged in conversation with their tutors, bringing in evidence from the articles. However, most did not want to actually do the writing, so did not begin until halfway through the session.

Self-Efficacy. Students were all confident in their opinions and their experiences with AI. None asked questions about how or what to write, but they also did not confidently discuss the choices they were making.

Peer Tutoring. Most of the tutoring relationships were new, so there was some discomfort with the unfamiliarity. However, pairings worked together and engaged in conversation about the topic, showing that both tutors and tutees were willing to collaborate and to begin to build a relationship.

Session Two: The Poet X First Paragraph

This session was the first time that tutees had a chance to discuss the book that they had started reading as a class. Because tutors were unfamiliar with the text, they relied on the tutees to have an understanding of the book. The assignment asked students to either describe how Acevedo was building a theme or to evaluate a complicated relationship in the book. Every focus student chose to focus on the complicated character relationships.

Motivation. There was some hesitation to begin this assignment. This was the first time that tutor pairings had worked on literary analysis, and this was also the first time that students had a chance to discuss the book.

Self-Efficacy. Most students were very confident in their explanations of the book, and in talking about their opinions of the characters. There were some questions about how to pick quotes.

Peer Tutoring. Tutors listened closely to tutees talk about the book. Most asked guiding questions that allowed tutees to better articulate their opinions about the book and the characters. While there was still some hesitancy about the tutors, particularly from Remy (who was not with his usual tutor), the pairs still worked together and collaborated effectively.

Session Three: The Poet X First Paragraph Revision

This session was the first one that was specifically devoted to revising work that had already been completed and turned in. Mrs. Kline gave back rubrics that she had made comments on, so tutees and tutors used these comments as a guide for what they needed to add or change to the original paragraph.

Motivation. Students were hesitant to begin writing this assignment, but after discussing the book and the assignment with their tutors, most began looking for evidence. Having the tutors there to help them begin the brainstorm process seemed to be beneficial in pushing them forward to actually writing. Discussions of the NERF war, of prom dresses, and of SnapChat's AI feature infiltrated the session. Phones were also a clear issue during this session.

Self-Efficacy. Once they started working, students showed confidence in their understanding of the book, but they looked to the tutors for guidance in terms of the type of

writing they needed to be doing. Most seemed unsure about how to translate their thoughts into writing, and asked tutors for “approval” of the quotes that they picked for evidence.

Peer Tutoring. Tutors had a chance to demonstrate to their tutees that they were valuable resources for the students struggling with writing. They acted as sounding boards for the tutees’ ideas about the prompt, then asked guiding questions to help turn those thoughts into writing.

Session Four: Six-Word Memoir and Explanation

Motivation. Students were highly resistant to this assignment. Remy, who had established himself as someone who would come in and start working, spent a lot of his time complaining to Mrs. Kline about the assignment. Elvis refused to take it seriously. Clint and Matteo distracted themselves by critiquing the example six-word memoirs. However, perhaps because of the short nature of the assignment, every tutee completed both parts and turned them in.

Self-Efficacy. Tutees were hesitant to share their work for this assignment, most likely because of the personal nature of the assignment. No tutee really sought assistance for this assignment, and tutors kept their guidance to just asking for more detail in certain places.

Peer Tutoring. This entire session was marred by distracted and avoidant behavior from the tutors and the tutees. Although the professional tutoring relationships failed during this session, the pairings did interact on a more personal level.

Session Five: The Poet X Second Paragraph

Students were asked to continue their first paragraph after reading another third of the novel. They were able to review their writing from the previous *The Poet X* sessions and decide what and how to build on those ideas. Students engaged in more discussion about the novel and began to engage in deeper discussion about their writing.

Motivation. Most students began talking about the assignment right away. They seemed eager to explain to the tutors how the novel had progressed. Most tutees also looked for evidence in a focused way, checking with the tutors once they found it. Once they began writing, most wrote diligently.

Self-Efficacy. Tutees continued to show confidence in their understanding of the book, and they also began to move away from asking for tutor approval of their ideas and evidence and toward explaining their own thinking.

Peer Tutoring. Tutees clearly demonstrated their trust in their tutors' willingness to listen to them and to respect their ideas. Tutors listened carefully and asked questions that deepened their thinking without challenging their ideas about what to write.

Session Six: The Poet X Final Paragraph

Motivation. Most tutees began working right away. The ones who did not, like Elvis, began working after going through their cycle of avoidant behaviors. Not every student finished this assignment during the session, but all made significant progress.

Self-Efficacy. Tutees in this session were confident about their ideas and their writing. They asked pointed questions about where information would fit best, not questioning whether it fit. Tutors served less as guides and more as sounding boards.

Peer Tutoring. This session marked the most productive session for the tutoring pairings. Students engaged in conversation about the book, about their previous writing, and about how to finish the essay. Tutors were encouraging and allowed tutees to lead the conversation about their writing. Clear patterns of work were established, and trust was clearly demonstrated.

Session Seven: The Poet X Revision and Final Draft.

Motivation. Most students were very motivated to complete this assignment, as it was their final chance to work on the writing before final exams. However, a couple of students were distracted or discouraged by the fact that they had an overwhelming amount of work to do, or that their grade in the class was too low to recover. These students did not complete the assignment.

Self-Efficacy. Students who were engaged in the writing assignment were speaking to their tutors confidently, checking their own instincts about their writing rather than asking for the tutor’s opinion first. Revising their writing seemed to give them the confidence that they were capable of increasing the quality of their writing.

Peer Tutoring. All peer tutoring relationships ended on a high note. Tutees showed trust in their tutors, and most of them also had time to engage in some personal conversation. The tutor pairings showed a clear, established pattern of how they worked best, with some pairings getting all the work out of the way first, then moving to personal discussions and some pairings have a moment of decompression before beginning the work.

Table 4.13.

Measures of Motivation in Each Session

Session	Measure of Motivation	Increase or Decrease	Notes
1	4	NA	Straightforward assignment; students mostly completed
2	2	Decrease	Many students did not complete
3	3	Increase	Half the students worked for most of the session; some distracted conversation

4	2	Decrease	Tutees and tutors were VERY distracted today
5	3	Increase	Students worked, but some talked more about the book than writing
6	5	Increase	Final paragraph seemed to give students a push to finish
7	4	Decrease	Some students were overwhelmed by amount of work they still had to do, so avoided; most completed

Table 4.14.

Measures of Self-Efficacy in Each Session

Session	Measure of Self-Efficacy	Increase or Decrease	Notes
1	3	NA	No real hesitation in writing or sharing, but no specific marks of confidence
2	2	Decrease	New book, new assignment. Students unsure of what they should write and how
3	3	Increase	Revisiting existing writing gives students a chance to see what they did well
4	3	No Change	Most students do not feel comfortable sharing personal explanations
5	4	Increase	More comfortable with assignment; more comfortable with the book
6	4	No Change	Beginning to ask specific questions about writing; confidence in choosing evidence

7	5	Increase	Specific questions about writing; reciprocal conversations
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Table 4.15.

Measures of Peer Tutoring Relationship in Each Session

Session	Measure of Peer Tutoring	Increase or Decrease	Notes
1	3	NA	Tangential conversations; unfamiliarity with tutors
2	3	No Change	Some still unfamiliar with tutors; new assignment
3	4	Increase	Revisiting same assignment increased conversation about writing
4	3	Decrease	Distraction from NERF wars
5	4	Increase	Continued non-relevant conversations
6	5	Increase	More conversation about writing
7	5	No Change	Students focused on getting done; conversations about writing; established patterns

Final Interview

Only the focus students for this study participated in the final interview. I had a list of possible questions (Appendix D), but I anticipated that I would allow their responses to guide where the interview went. My goal for this interview was to see how students truly felt about the writing center intervention and if and how their attitudes about writing had shifted.

Oakley was not present for the first ten minutes of the interview, but she did arrive in time to offer some thoughts near the end of the session. Remy demonstrated that he was still uncomfortable talking in front of his peers and remained silent with his arms crossed and his eyes directed to the table, although he did nod in agreement to some of his classmates’ responses. Like the first round of interviews, Clinta spoke the majority of the time, with Elvis and Sera also doing much of the contributing. This interview took place two days before final exams began for seniors, so many of them were full of energy, and the mood was lighthearted. Table 4.16 gives pull quotes for some of the patterns noticed in the final interview.

Table 4.16.

Participant Observations about Interview Topics

Topic	Positive/Negative Overall	Quotes
Peer Tutors as Helpful	Positive	“A lot of times, I needed her there to push me to get stuff done. Because I wasn’t going to do it on my own.” “It helped hearing another perspective.” “I liked having more eyes on my writing.” “[Marie] was really great. She was so encouraging and nice all the time.”
Peer Tutors as Equals	Mixed Reaction, Mostly Negative	“Felt pressure to go with their suggestions.” “Could be patronizing.”

		<p>“They were just trying to help.” “I don’t want to talk about myself with someone my age who doesn’t know me.” “It’s almost like they didn’t think we could do it”</p>
Future Help with Writing	Positive	<p>“Yeah, definitely” “I think if I were having trouble, then yeah.” “Yeah, it wasn’t as bad as I thought”</p>
Writing Process	Mixed Reaction	<p>“It was too much.” “I didn’t like them watching while I was writing.” “It was helpful when trying to figure out what I wanted to write.” “Having them there for revision was nice”</p>
Perspective of Self as Writer	Neutral	<p>“I still don’t like it, but I don’t dread it.” “I definitely think I’m better at some things. Getting my thoughts down, at least.” “Yeah, I feel like I can do it without procrastinating as much.”</p>

I began by reminding participants that they would be recorded. I also emphasized the fact that I wanted their honest responses; I did not want them to hold back their negative opinions for fear of hurting my feelings. Additionally, all the tutors were in Mrs. Kline’s room; I did not want the tutees to feel constrained in their responses for fear of insulting the tutors.

Peer Tutoring Relationships. Overall, the group reported having a positive experience with the tutoring. Some of the reasons for this included having someone that they could talk to about their ideas, getting another perspective on an assignment, and receiving guidance when they were stuck. Clinta, Sera, and Elvis reported that they would “almost definitely” seek help

with writing in the future if their college offered that. Multiple students mentioned or agreed that they were more comfortable receiving help with the analytical writing (AI Article Response; *The Poet X* essay) than with the personal writing (Six-Word Memoir). When I asked why, Elvis said that he did not want to talk about himself with someone his own age who he did not really know. Almost all the tutees nodded in agreement to this statement; Remy just looked down at the table and did not react.

When I asked about issues that came up that might have made tutoring more difficult, they all hesitated before responding. Clinta, hesitantly, said “The tutors could sometimes be...kind of patronizing? Not [Marie]! She was great. But sometimes...” and Sera agreed emphatically. Elvis disagreed here, saying that the tutors were just trying to help. The tutees engaged in a discussion about why they felt talked down to sometimes, with the consensus being that sometimes it felt like the tutors lost their patience or expected too little of them. When looking back, there were instances of the tutors having more closed off body language, either leaned back in their chairs or having their arms crossed. While I did not interpret this as an indication of tutor frustration, the tutees may have, since they weren’t as familiar with the tutor’s personalities.

Sera also added that sometimes she felt like she had to take Jewel’s advice, even when it did not exactly reflect what she had wanted to write or how she wanted to write it. Oakley said that she just wanted to get everything done and sometimes it was uncomfortable to be watched while writing. That comment got the most agreement. The set up for writing center tutoring, with the tutors directly beside the tutees (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016) could feel a bit like the tutors were hovering over the tutees, but this comment was also complicated by responses that indicated the positives of the peer tutoring relationships. Elvis said that he appreciated having

someone to kind of push him to finish his work, and Clinta said that Marie was really kind and encouraging.

Perspective of Themselves as Writers. They all reported that they thought the tutoring experience helped them become better writers. Matteo said that he still did not like writing, but he got to where he did not dread it as much. Sera, who reported always struggling with knowing what and how to write, indicated that the tutoring sessions helped her to understand how to get her thoughts down on paper. This coincides with the observations I made during her sessions, which saw her begin to take ownership over her writing and to doubt herself less (even though this doubt was never fully ameliorated). The group agreed that the best times to have the tutors there were at the beginning of an assignment, when they needed to figure out their ideas and talk through evidence, and at the end, when they needed to revise and add details.

Writing Skills. While there was no direct measure of specific writing skills in the study, students did report that they felt like their writing had improved. Elvis and Matteo both reported feeling like they were “better at some things,” with Matteo specifically mentioning feeling like he understood how to make precise word choices due to Caleb’s guidance. However, most of this final interview centered around the tutoring itself, with not as much focus on the more tangible outcomes of tutoring (such as grammar or writing improvement) and more focus on the emotional ones, such as confidence and relationships.

Initial Comments on Findings

While much of what I observed during the tutoring sessions was expected, there were a few things that surprised me. The sheer number of avoidant behaviors that students engaged in, particularly Clinta and Elvis, was eye-opening. That the tutors were also able to be distracted simply reminded me that, no matter how mature or academically advanced students are, they are

still teenagers. While some students experienced increased motivation and self-efficacy, particularly Remy, Sera, and Matteo, not all did. For Oakley, who was already highly motivated and confident, there was an increased willingness to participate in revision. Clinta seemed to not experience any significant change in self-efficacy or motivation. Elvis did not demonstrate consistent increases in self-efficacy and motivation.

However, all students were willing participants in the tutoring sessions and were open about their experiences, both positive and negative.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the impact that participation in a peer-led writing center model of tutoring would have on the self-efficacy and motivation of struggling students. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- How can participation in a peer-led writing tutoring center impact struggling students' perception of and confidence in their writing skills?
- How can participation in a peer-led writing center impact the motivation of struggling students when approaching a writing task?

In order to answer these questions, I designed a study that used principles of the *Bedford Guide for Peer Tutors* (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016), which involve tutors sitting beside their tutees as equals and asking leading questions to engage tutees in their own writing. However, instead of relying on students to voluntarily participate in writing center sessions, my colleague and I arranged to pair up students for scheduled, consistent tutoring sessions. Over the course of five weeks, I observed the six focus students and their tutors in seven different writing sessions. These sessions ran the gamut of brainstorming, creation, and revision, for both personal writing and analytical writing. Throughout these sessions, I and my colleague, their Advanced Composition teacher, made notes about body language, conversations, and other non-verbal interactions between the tutees and the tutors. We looked for motivation and self-efficacy, but we also made notes about how the peer tutoring relationship was evolving. Indications of motivation generally consisted of either avoidant behavior or diligent working; indications of self-efficacy included a willingness or hesitance to explain their writing, to discuss their ideas, and to show their work to the tutors; indications of the peer tutoring relationship consisted of ease of conversation, open and closed body language, and reciprocal questions and answers.

Throughout these observation sessions, several patterns emerged. One, students were much more comfortable writing and sharing non-personal assignments with their tutors than they were writing and sharing assignments that had them write about themselves and their experiences. Two, as tutees became more comfortable with their tutors, their willingness to engage in conversation about their own writing increased. Third, students began asking more specific questions about their writing and engaging in deeper conversations about their ideas and interpretations. Additionally, while students might not have become more excited about writing, they generally engaged in fewer avoidant behaviors as the study continued, indicating that their dread of writing lessened.

Students Want Personal Writing to Stay Private

Wachholz and Etheridge (1996) asserted that the personal nature of writing causes students to “have difficulty distinguishing corrections on their papers from personal assault” (p. 20). This tendency to take criticism incredibly personally is heightened when the writing itself is about a personal experience or opinion. As a response to the discomfort that arises when asked to not only write about but also share their personal experiences, students will often experience anxiousness and engage in avoidant behavior (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007).

The session where students engaged in a form of personal narrative writing, the six-word memoir and explanation, occurred in the middle of the study period. However, while students had begun to be more comfortable in sharing their analytical writing with their tutors, the avoidant behaviors—including forgetting supplies, looking at cell phones, and engaging in tangential conversations—reemerged with a vengeance during this session. Tables 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 show the breakdown of how this session differed from others. Elvis avoided the assignment for as long as possible, then made light of the explanation part of it. Remy, who had stopped

resisting writing assignments, continually expressed his displeasure about the topic to Mrs. Kline. Once he finished the assignment, he attempted to turn it in before Margot looked at it. Matteo and Clintia each spent most of their session looking at the examples of six-word memoirs from the website, commenting on the impact or “cheesiness” of the different samples rather than working on their own. Once finished with their own writing, Clintia showed uncharacteristic shyness about their writing, noting that it was “cheesy, but it’s done” and slumping their shoulders and looking away while Marie looked over it. This was a marked difference for Clintia, who normally sat up straight while Marie read their writing. All the tutoring pairs demonstrated similar outcomes for this assignment, including the non-observed pairings.

From informally observing tutoring sessions from the first semester, I knew that students in this class were less willing to engage in conversation about writing in which they shared stories from their own lives and own experiences. I thought that assigning the personal writing assignment after the tutors and tutees had been working together for a while and had gained comfort with each other would remove some of this hesitancy, but there was still a block against sharing personal experiences. Because I did not ask the students about the cause of their reticence, I can only offer conjecture for the reasons. Some of the students, particularly Elvis and Remy, had difficult home lives and had each been in trouble for behaviors at school. Margot, the tutor for each of them, had a reputation for being a “good kid;” she lived in an affluent neighborhood in the school district, and she expressed surprise when hearing about some of the riskier misadventures of her peers. Both Remy and Elvis may have felt like Margot would judge them or think less of them because of their past experiences, opening themselves up to feeling like any feedback she gave would be an attack against them as people (Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996). Elvis spoke to this idea in the final interview as well, saying that he did not want to share

about his life with someone his own age who did not already know him. While Clint was usually incredibly open with nearly everyone about their experiences and opinions about a lot of controversial topics, something about the earnestness or honesty of the assignment made them uncomfortable with their product. Because Clint is a student who took all writing personally, it makes sense that they would be particularly sensitive about creating and explaining a personal motto.

Even though this session was one of the least effective or productive in terms of completing the assignment in a timely manner, I honestly believe that the hesitance of the tutees to share their work had more to do with how much they respected their tutors and wanted reciprocal respect.

Continued Collaboration Led to Conversation

The consensus among researchers in the fields of peer tutoring and writing center theory and practice is that effective peer tutoring involves collaboration and discourse rather than simple step-by-step instruction for how to “fix” writing (Barnett & Rosen, 1999; Bruffee, 2000; Camfield, 2016; Kail & Trimbur, 1987; Kennedy, 2010; Lunsford, 1991). Successful tutoring partnerships are ones where both students bring expertise to the pairing, and where respect and conversation are reciprocated. Struggling students are often able to begin to talk through their writing, asking specific questions about what they have already written and what they plan to write.

Every pair of tutees and tutors showed an increase in conversation about their work as the sessions continued. Tables 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 show how self-efficacy, motivation, and peer tutoring relationships improved or remained stagnant over the course of all the sessions. Additionally, during the sessions dealing with Acevedo’s novel *The Poet X*, the tutoring pairs

engaged in more and deeper discussion about the plot, theme, and characters in the novel. Remy, who was noticeably reticent at the beginning of sessions, began talking to Margot without prompting. He also began to hand Margot his paper without being asked, and he eventually stopped exhibiting anxious body language—such as staring at the desk or leaving the classroom—while she read over it. Remy began to ask specific questions about quote incorporation and wording. Sera, whose early sessions alternated between silence and repeated questions, began to smile a bit more with Jewel, talking more freely and showing less hesitancy when sharing her work. Sera increasingly asked specific questions about her word choice and flow, whereas in earlier sessions she would just erase her writing without asking Jewel for guidance.

Oakley, who generally had very few questions for Dakota about what or how to write, began to ask for Dakota's opinion about her wording or the quotes that she had chosen to prove a point. When reading back over her own work, Oakley identified areas that had the opportunity for improvement and preemptively asked Dakota about them. Later sessions were marked by much more collaboration in writing than earlier sessions, which involved Oakley writing entirely independently, then fully releasing her writing for Dakota to review. As Matteo continued working with Caleb, and Caleb began complimenting Matteo's writing more, Matteo started to be more open about when he was unsure of how to incorporate an idea or when he needed help with specific word choice.

The fact that the tutor pairings grew close enough for the tutees to take confidence in their own writing follows Behne's (2021) assertion that writing center work helps students form networks of support, both academic and emotional. The tutors established themselves not just as More Knowledgeable Others (Vygotsky, 1978) but also as partners, working collaboratively with the tutees (Camfield, 2016). Through this collaboration, tutees become more active participants

in their own writing and revision processes, affirming Halley's (1982) assertion that peer tutoring leads students to take responsibility for their own work. Instead of relying on the tutors to tell them exactly how to improve their writing, or removing themselves from the review process, tutors increasingly invited tutors to be part of the writing and revision process (Barnett & Rosen, 1999).

In addition to being more willing to discuss their own writing, the tutees became more specific about the questions they were asking the tutors about revision. Early and Saïdy (2012) posited that being guided through the process of revision would lead tutees to better understand and more willingly participate in the process. This proved to be true; though the revision was also a forced process, tutees participated more willingly and with less complaining than in earlier sessions. Following Bruffee's (2000) assertion that writing centers are places of discourse rather than instruction, the tutoring model that we used allowed students to engage in their own writing and revision process. Our tutees began pinpointing specific focus points for their writing and sought guidance for those specific skills, demonstrating the veracity of Zhang et al.'s (2016) assertion that making students active agents in their total writing process increases their self-efficacy in knowing what needs to be done and in understanding how they can improve their writing.

Consistent Discourse Leads to Deeper Discussion

Writing is, ultimately, a meaning-making process (Prior, 2006). Students write to help them process the meanings of texts and to allow them to articulate a deeper understanding of the complexities of plot, theme, or characterization (Bruning & Horn, 1998; Elbow, 1973; Galbraith, 1999; Hayes, 2006). The writing center model helps make this a collaborative process as well,

with tutors and tutees engaging in discourse that helps tutees talk and write through their own understanding of a text (Bruffee, 2000; Lunsford, 1991).

Through the five sessions that were devoted to creating and revising analytical writing about Acevedo's *The Poet X*, tutor pairings engaged in more and deeper discussions about the characters and themes of the novel. The first session allowed tutees to establish themselves as the experts in the room about the novel, since none of the tutors had read or heard of the novel before. In this session, tutees had to not only recount the basic plot of the novel, but they also had to begin to explain the beginning nuances of character relationships. All tutors followed the tutoring model of asking non-directive questions to encourage the tutees to think about their writing and ideas (North, 1995; Ryan & Zimmereli, 2016). Dakota and Marie were particularly successful at engaging their tutees in these conversations, showing interest not only in the novel but also in Oakley and Clint's opinions about the characters. As Clint said during one of the sessions, "[Talking] is how I process my thoughts. I need to talk through it before I write it!" The conversations with Marie help Clint figure out exactly which character relationships they wanted to address in their essay and talking through how the relationship shifted throughout the novel helped both Clint and Marie's other tutee find details to explain the relationship in their writing.

Having these chances to discuss the book before beginning on the writing also allowed tutees the opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings that they had about the text. Matteo often was unsure about exactly why some of the occurrences between his two chosen characters were significant, but when Caleb would ask him to explain why a character said something or why the reaction of a character was surprising, Matteo pushed his own thinking further. Often, Caleb would listen carefully to what Matteo said, then tell him to write it down. Matteo

sometimes seemed surprised by this directive, and Caleb would just tell him that he had explained it really well.

Remy and Margot engaged in the same type of discourse, with her gently pushing him to explain his personal reactions to the book, then guiding him into putting those reactions into analytical writing. This was particularly effective for Remy, who did not like to write and often felt like he had nothing to say. Margot's interest in his thoughts made him more confident in expressing them, particularly when she helped direct him to where exactly he could add those words to his written explanation. Remy and Margot's discourse follows the assertion that when students are guided by a peer to realize their potential, they will become more engaged in their writing (Wald & Harland, 2014). Self-efficacy increases with verbal validation, which in turn makes students more motivated to write (Chumney, 2015; Jackson, 2002).

The later *The Poet X* sessions also allowed students who were absent for some of the reading to gain the missing information from their peers. Margot and Jewel found themselves in this situation a couple of times. Elvis missed some days of the reading, and Margot asked Remy for the information she needed to help Elvis catch up. Remy took the opportunity to explain the book to Margot, and she asked questions that allowed him to prove his knowledge. Sera was not absent for any of the class reading sessions, but she was behind in the required reading, so Jewel took it upon herself to skim the book quickly to try to help provide missing information. However, these sessions did show that there is only so much a tutor can do if the tutee does not have the required background knowledge to complete an assignment.

Avoidant Behaviors Decreased Over Time

O'Rourke et al. (2018) asserted that writers with low writing self-efficacy will begin to avoid writing, and RAND and Snow (2002) assert that low self-efficacy leads to hesitancy in

engaging in a skill. This follows with Bandura's (1993) finding that students with low self-efficacy will avoid a task rather than risk failing at it. Most of the tutees in this study, with the exception of Oakley, demonstrated low self-efficacy from the beginning stages, and many of them engaged in avoidant behaviors during observation sessions. However, as the sessions continued, most of the students decreased the number or intensity of these avoidant behaviors, indicating improved self-efficacy or motivation, or a combination of the two.

Elvis was the tutee who most consistently engaged in avoidant behaviors. While other tutees favored being on their phones or engaging in tangential conversations with their tutors and co-tutees, Elvis's avoidance was much more visible and physical. Often, he removed himself from the writing session completely, asking to go to the restroom when it came time to write. Additionally, he would begin most sessions by missing and then retrieving some vital tools to complete the task—a pencil, paper, his book, the assignment sheet itself; even when I told him that I had those things in my classroom, he would still get up and go to Mrs. Kline's classroom to get his own. While Elvis's avoidant techniques never fully disappeared, by the last session he was no longer physically avoiding the writing task. Margot never addressed his avoidant behaviors, and she never firmly asked him to start working. However, I do not think that Elvis would have responded positively to that sort of direct challenge. Instead, he had to discover his motivation on his own.

Margot's other tutee, Remy, reached a point about halfway through the sessions where he stopped avoiding all together. He even began to smile during some of the sessions. This, combined with his deepening questions about his writing and his increased willingness to show Margot his work, indicates that he gained some writing self-efficacy and motivation. Matteo also began to resign himself to these observation sessions, and his avoidant behaviors of making

offhand remarks, playing on his phone, or allowing himself to be distracted by other conversations around him grew to be much less common. He and Caleb established an unconscious give-and-take scenario; Matteo and Caleb would focus on the assignment at hand for about two-thirds of the class, and once it was finished and discussed, they would engage in “fun” conversation. Having this promise of a reward most likely heightened Matteo’s motivation to complete the assignment.

Clinta was a more complicated case of avoidant behavior, which ultimately had little to do with their self-efficacy. Clinta focused on assignments that they deemed interesting, and they had enough confidence in their own writing that they did not see a need to enlist Marie’s help. However, out of respect for or resignation to the tutoring process, Clinta eventually toned down their distracted conversations, at least until the final session. Clinta’s motivation was derailed by their preoccupation with the fact that they were not going to pass Mrs. Kline’s class. By the final session, they avoided the work not because they did not think that they could do it, but because they no longer saw a point in completing the assignment. Clinta’s case is interesting because they were arguably one of the more capable, talented writers in the group, and they had one of the more friendly relationships with their tutor, but their continued lack of motivation in the class outside of the tutoring sessions meant that they were totally demotivated by the inevitability of their failing the class. If Marie had been a more forceful presence, there is a chance that Clinta would have focused more during the observation sessions, but they also had 13 other weeks in the semester where they needed but ultimately lacked motivation.

Not Every Interaction was Positive or Impactful

While much research touts the benefits of peer tutoring (Barnett & Rosen, 1999; Bruffee, 2000; Camfield, 2016; Kail & Trimbur, 1987; Zhang et al., 2016), some researchers also caution

that it may not be effective for some (Martinez et al., 2011; Pajares & Johnson, 2007). Students with low writing self-efficacy are often resistant to writing in general and to writing in front of more skilled peers in particular.

After the final interview, I had to acknowledge that my tutors had a tendency to unconsciously make the tutees feel judged and looked down upon. While all the tutees acknowledged that the tutors were kind and trying to help, about half of them indicated feeling like they were being watched and found wanting. This feeling led some of the tutees to not want to “perform” in front of the tutors, especially if their usual tutor was absent for some reason and they were paired with an unfamiliar person.

Additionally, I found that students whose low motivation was a result of their low self-efficacy benefited more from the writing center intervention than students whose low motivation was due to other factors. For instance, Sera and Remy seemed to exhibit the most significant increase in both motivation and self-efficacy, with each completing more assignments and each beginning to doubt their own writing less by the seventh session. However, Clintia, whose low motivation was due to their disinterest in the “boring” requirements of school, did not experience a significant change in motivation.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is the condensed timeline within which it took place. With only five weeks, there was not enough time to fully track and explain the shifts and changes in each student’s self-efficacy and motivation. Additionally, the observations of the shifts and changes that I did track are based on my understanding of the students and their body language. Without asking them specifically during each session to reflect on how they felt about their writing and themselves as writers, this study must rely on my professional observations.

The study also focuses mainly on one type of writing about one novel. There was one personal writing involved, but it was an assignment that was meant to last only one day, and it was not one that required students apply their knowledge of narrative structure, dialogue, or any sort of storytelling. While I was able to ascertain that students remained uncomfortable with sharing personal writing, there is no indication whether this would still be the case if there had been more assignments based on personal experience.

Additionally, while the number of students who were selected as focus students is appropriate for the case study model, they are representative of a small population of students. Students from other exceptional populations, such as English Language Learners, Special Education students, or Gifted students, are not represented. The tutors themselves represent an even narrower population of students, with very little racial, gender, socioeconomic, or academic diversity.

While the writing center model for peer tutoring is highly varied according to the context in which writing centers are situated, I recognize that my study reflects a unique situation. This version operated as an absolute best-case scenario for peer tutoring. Because I worked with my colleague to plan specific, consistent time for tutoring, there was a guarantee that tutees would receive continued peer tutoring. Many writing centers operate on the basis of tutees seeking out and even making appointments for tutoring.

Another limitation is that I had prior knowledge of both the tutors and tutees and was therefore able to match up effective tutor pairings. For instance, Matteo responded well to Caleb's friendliness and compliments, but Oakley responded to Dakota's quiet encouragement. Remy needed Margot to encourage him without complimenting him, as overt praise made him uncomfortable. I was able to debrief after each session with my tutors, offering suggestions for

how to approach the tutees and their unique challenges. Other writing center tutors may not have this same opportunity for immediate feedback and guidance on their tutoring strategies.

The nature of the writing center is that tutees, at least in their first visit, are matched up with whatever tutors are “on duty,” meaning that there may be personality clashes or learning style discrepancies. Tutees may be discouraged from going to further sessions after an ineffective or uncomfortable first session, and they may not experience any benefit. Additionally, these focus students were given specific time during their class period to participate in the tutoring; most students have to take time out of their non-class time to seek out the writing center. This prevents many students from seeking out writing help on a consistent basis.

Implications for Future Research

This study incorporates a population and a context that is unique to my school. It does indicate some correlation between the writing center model of peer tutoring and increased self-efficacy and motivation, but there are still several areas that need more research.

Student Populations

As mentioned in the limitations section, the focus students in this study represent students who have been identified as struggling. However, none of these students was classified as an active English Language Learner (ELL), which means that their actual understanding of the English language was not in question. Future studies could focus on the impact of this type of peer tutoring intervention on ELLs. Another population that is underrepresented is students who qualify for Special Education services. Clintia had an ADHD/ASD diagnosis, but they were the only student with any sort of 504 Plan, and no student had an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

While Barton (2018b) examined how the writing center model impacted Advanced Placement students, and this study examines the impact on struggling students, both of these

designations could be considered special populations. It would be worthwhile to examine how this type of intervention affects an “average” student. Doing so would give credence to the idea that the writing center model is impactful and beneficial for all students.

Quantitative Measures

Many studies regarding writing center work are qualitative. Because of the way that writing centers operate, it is difficult to measure skill improvement, grades, or other distinctly data-driven measures. However, there is absolutely room to include some quantitative measures. Future researchers could look at standardized test scores, grades, instances of specific writing errors, or even number of words written before and after a writing center intervention. Additionally, writing centers could track which types of assignments engender the most need for help, concerns that writing center clients have, or even number of times a writing center experiences repeat visitors. Because administration is often concerned with how a writing center will benefit the school as a whole, quantitative measures are often helpful when explaining why a school should establish a writing center or when seeking funding for an existing writing center.

Writing Skill Measures

This study did not look specifically at how the writing center intervention helped students improve specific writing skills, such as grammar, fluency, or sophistication. Because I did not have a baseline measure of students’ abilities, I could not comment on the improvement. However, there is a need to see whether this targeted intervention can be more beneficial for specific skills, such as grammar, or for overall writing fluency.

Writing Center Realities

Because this study examined an idealized version of the writing center model of tutoring, with consistent tutor pairings and continued tutoring sessions, more research needs to be done on

the realities of the writing center model. Studies could look at the impact of repeated visits, the drawbacks of having untrained tutors, and how to navigate personality clashes in the center.

There could also be more studies done on best practices in terms of preparing tutors and reaching reluctant tutees. Because the writing center world is filled with so many different contexts, populations, and ways of operating, there is still a lot of unexplored ground in terms of possibilities.

Implications for Writing Pedagogy

Through some of the findings in this study, I had a chance to reflect on my own practices in teaching writing. While the study did not explicitly examine the teaching of writing, observations of the study participants helped show changes that could be made to create a more effective writing culture in most classrooms.

Implications for the Writing Classroom

Make Writing Less Painful and More Productive. One observation from this study showed that students struggle the most—or at least perceive themselves as struggling the most—with the first steps of the writing process. As Clinta and Sera both stated, it was helpful for the students to have someone to workshop their ideas with. Building in time to work in partners or small groups before any actual writing begins may make the writing feel more approachable to students. Baumgartner (2005) argues that brainstorming allows students to exchange creative ideas, and McCann (2014) asserts that talking through ideas allows students to process and workshop their thoughts before attempting to get them down on paper in a more organized fashion. While many teachers build in this discussion time when talking about textual ideas like theme and characterization, there should be a concentrated effort to schedule focused brainstorming time at the beginning of writing assignments.

In every classroom, time is a concern. While at first it may seem impossible, or at least overwhelming, to include this “extra” time in an already full schedule, the benefits outweigh the costs. In my own experience, students spend the first 20 minutes of any long-term writing assignment trying to come up with their own ideas. If teachers instead plan for the first 20 minutes to be a brainstorming session, then this time will not be lost; instead, the time will be used to make progress on the writing assignment. Additionally, having students work together to process their ideas can help build toward a more collaborative environment in the classroom, which is another implication for the writing classroom.

Build an Environment of Collaboration and Trust. The first tutoring sessions during this study were difficult. Students took time to observe their tutors before they fully trusted them with their work. The pairings that wound up being the most successful were the ones who interacted as peers and as people; however, these relationships took time. Additionally, no matter how high the level of trust between tutor pairings was, there was still resistance when it came to sharing personal writing.

Writing classrooms should be places where students consistently share ideas and share work. Focusing on establishing rapport with and between students from the beginning of a school year could help open the door to increased collaboration in writing. Making the writing classroom a place where students feel comfortable working together can help make the writing classroom more productive. However, this seemingly straightforward idea is much more complicated in practice. Some strategies for building this collaboration include making more time for group work, establishing consistent pairings for the year, and normalizing imperfections in writing. Allow students to choose their own partners, but then assign groups of four based on those partnerships. Make peer tutoring an expected, consistent part of class. As students have

more practice with peer review and peer tutoring and with sharing their writing with each other, they will become more accustomed to the idea that someone besides the teacher will see their writing.

Implications for the Writing Teacher

Although there is already an incredible amount of pressure placed on writing teachers to motivate students to produce writing and to help students build skills in writing, the use of the writing center model of peer tutoring can help alleviate some of the workload for teachers. Helping to cultivate a collaborative environment in the classroom from an early point can empower students to become the experts in the room when it comes to writing, building their self-efficacy (Camfield, 2016; Kail & Trimbur, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978).

In terms of teaching practices, the interviews from this study provide some key reminders about why many students dread writing. Students report feeling like they are constrained by what school “expects” them to write, most of which does not align with what they are interested in writing. When possible, teachers should allow students some choice and autonomy in what and how they write. While standardized testing and curricular expectations prevent educators from making the writing classroom one that centers entirely around student choice, there is value in offering opportunities for creativity and experimentation, for what Kittle (2008) refers to as “life writing” (p 236). This follows with what Connell and Wellborn (1991) argue as the key components of engagement; students need to feel as though they have autonomy over their work, and they need to feel like what they’re asked to create in school has relevance to their lives.

Writing teachers, maybe especially those who teach struggling students, should also model and embrace risk, reward, and failure. As Kittle (2008) argues in *Write Beside Them*, as writing teacher should show students how they themselves write, since “the instruction has to

come during the process of creating the piece... or nothing changes” (p. 8). Students have been conditioned to view writing as the finished product. The writing classroom, and the writing center, should be a place where all aspects of writing are embraced and celebrated.

Implications for Writing Centers

Although writing centers comprise a multitude of individual best practices (Carino, 2001) and a variety of contexts (Barnett & Blumner, 2001), this study provides information that can be beneficial for teachers who are interested in starting or maintaining a secondary writing center, particularly in terms of training qualified tutors. I fully recommend that writing center directors look at the existing publications that are aimed at establishing a center and training tutors, such as SSWCA’s *The Toolkit* (2018) and *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2016), to help guide their practice.

As Harris (1990) asserts, writing centers are often considered “nurturing, helping places which provide assistance to other writing centers and sustenance to students to help them grow, mature, and become independent” (p. 17). A teacher who is interested in establishing a writing center, or a teacher who sponsors an already-established writing center, can keep several of the findings from this study in mind when designing, implementing, and maintaining their center.

As mentioned in the limitations of this study, the consistent, targeted pairings in this study represent an idealized version of the writing center model of tutoring. However, writing center directors can work to make sure their tutors are properly trained and have personalities suited to tutoring. Just because a student is a skilled writer, it does not mean they will be an effective tutor. Directors should attempt to ensure their tutor recruitment process includes an assessment of how well tutors work with others, particularly students who may be struggling with a subject that comes more easily to the tutors. Because one of the contributing factors to

self-efficacy is vicarious experience (Bandura, 1997), students can benefit from seeing a peer perform a writing task more easily. However, Pajares and Johnson (2007) remind us that this can also be discouraging for some students. Therefore, it is important that tutors be instructed in how to show tutees that a writing task is accomplishable without making the tutee feel inferior.

Another important component of writing center tutor training is informing tutors about body language. Tutors should be aware of how to read their client's posture, movement, and facial expressions. Understanding these physical indicators can allow a writing center tutor to respond in a way that acknowledges their feelings and encourages them to move forward. For instance, if a tutee sighs and drops their pencil to their paper, the tutor can feel equipped to know that student is feeling discouraged. They can ask guiding questions about the prompt, or they can commiserate briefly before drawing attention back to the paper. Tutors should also be instructed about the importance of active listening, making it clear to their clients that they are focused on the session and not distracted. Tutors should know that this demonstration of respect is the baseline for every tutoring session.

Because positive feedback is one of the key components to increased self-efficacy (Pajares, 2005), as demonstrated by Sera's response to her tutor's consistent compliments and Matteo's increased work ethic at Caleb's encouragement, tutors should be trained in strategies for specific, positive feedback. Directors should let tutors know that their goal should be to point out the strengths of every writing assignment or idea before offering guidance for improvement. Tutees who only receive negative feedback, or who receive no feedback, will not be as likely to gain self-efficacy, and they will be less likely to seek help in the writing center in the future.

Conclusions

Teachers who are interested in starting or maintaining a writing center in their secondary school may find this study useful for showing the benefits for struggling students. The relationship that is shown between consistent writing center tutoring and the self-efficacy and motivation of struggling students demonstrates that peer tutoring in writing can help students who have doubt in themselves as writers or ones who do not feel motivated to write. While this started as a study about the writing center model of tutoring, it also demonstrates the power that building strong peer relationships can have. As a result of this study, I have begun to offer the same kind of tutoring pairings to all the English teachers who have a class during my Writing Center Leadership elective class. Teachers report that these days of focused peer tutoring are some of the most successful in their class; one teacher requests the same students come in each time she has a writing assignment.

Writing remains a difficult subject to teach, both because of the growing skill gaps in our students (Brimi, 2012; Myhill & Jones, 2018; RAND & Snow, 2002) and because of the growing apathy towards the subject (Peterson, personal communication, 2023). Becoming educators who understand the importance and benefit of peer collaboration can help ease the load on our shoulders. Positioning students who are successful at writing as the supportive peers of those who are less successful can help demonstrate the feasibility and the importance of writing well.

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APPENDIX A: FIRST FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could I have each of you state your name, please?
2. Let's start by talking about English class. Not about Mrs. Kline's class in particular, but your overall feelings about it in high school. What do you like about Language Arts?
3. What do you dislike?
4. What do you think makes a "good" writer?
5. Do you feel like you're a "good" writer? Why or why not?
6. How do you feel when your teacher assigns you an essay or another type of writing assignment?
7. What have been your experiences with writing for school?
8. Other than what we did in second period last semester, have you ever participated in any sort of tutoring?
9. If so, how did you feel about it?
10. How did you feel about what we did last semester, when my students came in to help?
11. What do you think worked well?
12. What do you think we could do better?

APPENDIX B: PROPOSED FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. After experiencing the peer tutoring, what are some things that worked?
2. What are some things that didn't work?
3. How did you feel about the tutors being there to watch you write?
4. Which sessions do you think were the most helpful?
5. Which were the least helpful?
6. Do you think it would have been better to have fewer sessions?
7. Did your attitude about writing change at all?
8. Did how you think about yourself as a writer change at all?
9. Do you think, if you decide to go to college, or if you enter a field where you have to write a lot, that you will find a way to seek some help with writing?
10. Anything else that you think would be good to add?

APPENDIX C: ASSENT FORM

Research Study Assent Form (18 or Older Age Range)

Name of Minor: _____

Parental Permission on File: Yes No**

** (If "No," do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)

Study Title: How Participation in a Peer-Led Writing Center Impacts Students' Self-Efficacy and Motivation

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My name is Laura Peterson. I am studying for my doctorate at Kennesaw State University. I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Your parent(s) know we are talking with you about the study, but it is up to you to decide if you want to be in the study. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in it.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of the study is to help us learn about why high school students feel the way they do about writing and how we can help improve those feelings.

You are being asked to take part because you are a part of Mrs. Kline's second period class and have already worked with Mrs. Peterson's second period class.

What am I being asked to do?

If you decide to be in the study, we will ask you to participate in three small-group interviews that will take place during your second period class. These interviews will be recorded. Also, you will agree to be observed during the writing sessions that we have. Mrs. Peterson will make notes about conversations and body language during these sessions. Additionally, Mrs. Peterson may examine some of the writing you submit to Mrs. Kline.

Interviews will take place on or around March 1, March 29, and May 3. They will last approximately 30 minutes and will take place during 2nd period.

Observations will take place during the weekly partner writing sessions that we have, and they will last the entire class period.

Both interviews and writing sessions may be recorded. Mrs. Peterson will be the only one with access to these recordings, and they will be destroyed after the study and analysis is complete.

What are the benefits to me for taking part in the study?

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be able to express your true feelings about writing and school. You may also become a person who is more comfortable with writing.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

The potential risks of taking part in this study are:

- Having to talk about your past experiences with writing in front of 3-5 of your classmates. However, if you get uncomfortable during the group interview, you will have the opportunity to talk to Mrs. Peterson individually.

Will my information be kept private?

The data for this study will be kept private and confidential to the extent allowed by federal and state law. Under rare circumstances your data you may be reviewed by KSU officials.

- In the study write up, your personally identifiable information (your name, ID number, etc.) will be removed or changed.
- Your name and any other personal information will be removed your writing samples.
- All recordings will be kept on Mrs. Peterson’s personal, password-protected computer.
- All observation notes will be locked in a file cabinet.
- The only people with access to this information are:
 - Mrs. Peterson
 - KSU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB)

When we tell other people or write articles about what we learned in the study, we won’t include your name or that of anyone else who took part in the study.

Compensation

You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to be a part of this study if you don’t want to. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part and no one will be upset or angry at you. You may choose not to answer any questions you don’t want to answer, and you can change your mind and not be in the study at any time.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions at any time, you can ask Mrs. Peterson and you can talk to your parent about the study. We will give you a copy of this form to keep. If you want to ask us questions about the study, email Mrs. Peterson.

If you have questions about your rights in the study, or you are unhappy about something that happens to you in the study, you can contact the Kennesaw State University IRB Office at irb@kennesaw.edu.

Statement of Consent

If you want to participate in this research, please sign below. By signing, you are agreeing to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date