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Dana Lynn Driscoll

Building Connections and Transferring Knowledge: The Benefits of a Peer Tutoring Course Beyond the Writing Center

Abstract

This article explores how a peer tutoring education course with a transfer of learning focus can meet not only writing center goals of tutor education, but also broader university goals of general education. By drawing upon principles of learning transfer, including Perkins & Salomon's "detect-elect-connect" model, a curriculum is presented to help engage in transfer-focused tutor education. Results from a classroom study of one semester of the peer tutoring course and follow-up interviews with students suggest that this pedagogy is effective, although it presents some unique challenges. The article concludes by considering the role of peer tutoring education in the university more broadly and argues that writing center pedagogies can serve diverse populations of students.

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Introduction & Background

The value of tutor education and tutoring coursework is well known within the writing center community—it is evident in our experiences, our stories, and our observations. It’s also evident in the fact that nearly every writing center engages in professional development for tutors, including coursework, activities, and/or observations. But how are the positive benefits of peer tutoring coursework reflected to outside stakeholders, including colleagues across the disciplines, administrators, and potential tutors? How can we articulate the value of peer tutoring coursework in ways that move beyond preparation for the writing center? In this article, I suggest that we might do so by emphasizing and measuring transfer of learning from peer tutoring courses to a variety of other contexts. In its most basic definition, transfer of learning is the ability to adapt knowledge, strategies, or skills from one context to another. This article demonstrates that a transfer-of-learning approach can be successful in tutor professional development through coursework, and it describes why peer tutoring courses can help address the demands of the 21st century for transferable, adaptable, and high-impact learning within a general education curriculum. Peer tutoring coursework, taught with an emphasis on writing studies and transfer-focused pedagogy, can aid in students’ learning of writing, interpersonal, and metacognitive skills that can transfer to broad educational, professional, civic, and personal contexts.

Why should the writing center community be concerned with how peer tutoring coursework impacts tutors beyond writing center work? I faced this question when I started preparing to teach Oakland University’s peer-tutoring course, WRT320: Peer Tutoring in Composition, seven years ago. WRT320 takes place prior to employment in the writing center; however, tutors conduct observations and engage in team tutoring throughout the term as part of the course (so they are actively involved in tutoring, but not independently so). Students—often elementary education majors—take the course primarily for general education credit; a minority of students (usually 1–2) each term enroll specifically to work in the writing center. Given the context of this course, in order to reach the students and demonstrate connections, I wanted to ensure that students who had little knowledge of the writing center and who may never tutor could still benefit in learning about peer tutoring and writing center pedagogy.

While Oakland University’s situation may be unique with regard to our peer tutoring course’s general education status, the lessons I learned by developing and conducting research on this course suggest

that peer tutoring coursework has the potential to be transformative not only for prospective tutors but also for students in diverse disciplines. This research on transfer of learning in peer tutoring courses will be useful to others by articulating why writing center coursework can provide students with transferrable skills. I discovered that making transfer of learning a focus of the course did not lessen the tutors' preparation for tutoring, but rather motivated students from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, it opened the doorway for conversations and curricular innovations that can put writing centers in a more central position within the university.

This article describes principles for a transfer-focused peer-tutoring course and presents data supporting the efficacy of this approach. First, I examine research on transfer of learning and related areas that can help facilitate transfer. Next, I describe the methodology and results from a longitudinal classroom study of one peer tutoring course cohort (18 students) and follow-up interviews with three students as case studies, demonstrating the successes and challenges of this approach. I conclude by presenting broad suggestions for incorporating transfer-focused pedagogies into writing center courses.

Transfer of Learning within Writing Studies and Writing Centers

Transfer researchers and educational theorists including Robert Haskell (2000), David Smit (2007), and the National Research Council (1999) argue that transfer *is* learning; if students are unable to apply and adapt learned material in new contexts, they have not truly learned. As Anne McKeough, Judy Lupart, & Anthony Marini (1995) discuss, however, transfer of learning is a tremendous challenge for both students and faculty in educational contexts. Researchers have been more successful in demonstrating the lack of transfer rather than successful transfer, a problem exacerbated by incomplete understandings of what transfer looks like and how to measure transfer. David Perkins & Gavriel Salvendy (2012) suggest that the question is not whether or not students transfer (which has been the focus of much traditional transfer research) but whether or not the conditions for transfer are present—in other words, how we might build successful mechanisms for encouraging transfer (p. 248). One way we can begin to address the “problem” of transfer described by these scholars is in writing center contexts—both in our tutorials, and, as this article will demonstrate, in our peer tutoring courses.

Research on the transfer of learning has been a growing area within writing studies, although it has received much less attention within writing centers. In the last decade, a number of studies on writing, primarily in first-year composition (FYC) and professional communication journals, have addressed the issue of transfer. Elizabeth Wardle (2007), for example, followed seven students as they left their FYC courses and demonstrated that while students said that some FYC material was useful, students largely failed to transfer because 1) low teacher expectations allowed them to complete assignments without careful research and revision, 2) they did not prioritize writing, and 3) because they did not “perceive a need to adopt” knowledge to their other courses in order to be successful (pp. 73–76). Other researchers, such as Anne Beaufort (2007) and Rebecca Nowacek (2011), and my own work (Driscoll, 2011; Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Driscoll, 2014), focus on transfer beyond the classroom and investigate challenges and successes in adapting and transferring writing knowledge to broad contexts. Mary Jo Reiff & Anis Bawarshi (2011) examined the role of prior knowledge (or knowledge that students have prior to college writing courses) and discovered that the use of prior knowledge by students is largely individualistic. In 2012, calls within writing studies have encouraged researchers to pay attention to the students’ own affect, motivation, and dispositions (Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Wardle, 2012) as these aspects have been traditionally overlooked. What these studies suggest is that attitudes towards transfer, especially coming in and out of our courses, is one area in need of further study—and is an area directly addressed by this research.

Within the writing center community, a small but growing body of scholarship examines the role of transfer. The Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project initiated by Bradley Hughes, Paula Gillespie, & Harvey Kail (2010) opened the doorway to discussing the skills and knowledge that peer tutors adapt beyond writing centers. While their work does not use the term “transfer,” their findings align with transfer scholarship. Jennifer Wells’ (2011) article describes her experiences teaching a high-school writing studies course as preparation for writing center tutoring. In her dissertation, she followed a subset of her students as they left high school after taking a writing-about-writing peer tutoring course and entered college and found that students had success in transferring a writing-center/writing studies focused course. My co-authored work with Sara Harcourt, a former WRT320 student (Driscoll & Harcourt, 2012) examined the pedagogical implications of a transfer-focused peer tutoring course, arguing that transfer should be a goal of tutor preparation. My previous work suggested three ways in

which tutor preparation can become more transfer-focused. Peer tutoring courses can encourage transfer first, by making connections across prior, current, and future contexts via course activities and assignments; second, by having students engage in metacognitive reflection about their learning processes and encouraging students to play an active role in that learning; and third, through building transferrable knowledge, including writing studies concepts, rhetorical knowledge, and interpersonal skills (p. 4). While my previous work provided a pedagogical context, it did not provide any data-supported evidence of the efficacy of such an approach. One goal of the present study is to provide such evidence.

Because of the gap in our current understanding of transfer in writing centers, particularly in a tutor preparation context, this present study seeks to accomplish two goals. First, it seeks to describe theories and approaches that may be useful for facilitating transfer in peer tutoring courses; second, it provides data on the efficacy of using transfer as a pedagogical emphasis in peer tutoring courses.

Theories of Transfer that Intersect with Peer Tutoring Courses

Two transfer theories help shape the pedagogy and data analysis in this study and have been previously unexplored by writing center scholarship: the first is John Bransford & Daniel Schwartz's (1999) preparation for future learning; the second is Perkins & Salomon's (2012) detect-elect-connect. This section describes these two models and suggests how we might use them to help teach and understand transfer in peer-tutoring courses and beyond by framing them in the context of WRT320.

A traditional view of transfer assumes that transfer occurs when knowledge is taken from one circumstance and applied (often without adaptation) to a different circumstance; Joanne Loboto (2003) describes this as "task-based" transfer. The problem with this view is that it assumes a one-to-one connection between contexts, and it does not take into account the difference in contexts, individual dispositions, or how students may adapt strategies. This one-to-one transfer might occur when a potential tutor takes a peer tutoring course, then comes to work in the writing center and is able to transfer their learning from the peer tutoring course to work in the writing center. Even when this occurs (and we certainly hope it does), the broader question remains—where else might that tutor use/adapt that knowledge? What mechanisms might that tutor use to transfer that knowledge elsewhere? To provide a more developmental model of transfer, Bransford & Schwartz (1999)

propose “preparation for future learning” (PFL) that places the emphasis not on specific knowledge or tasks to be learned and applied, but rather on an individual’s preparation for learning in all circumstances. PFL is accomplished through qualities like adaptability and making use of one’s resources (p. 68).

Bransford & Schwartz give the example of new elementary teachers, who, under a traditional view of transfer, would be expected to take skills/knowledge gained from specific teaching methods courses and apply them to their classrooms. A PFL view of transfer suggests that what these new teachers need are strategies for learning and adapting in their new setting rather than specific skills. They write, “there is no preliminary education or training that can make these people [new elementary teachers] experts; it can only place them on a trajectory toward expertise” (p. 68). Under this view, successful transfer is based on direct assessments of a student’s ability to learn in a new setting and connect that learning to their previous learning (p. 78). The concept of PFL is particularly useful for peer tutor education because tutors develop expertise over time and because tutors are rarely tutors forever; as the Peer Tutoring Alumni Research Project suggests, tutors learn ways of adapting their experiences and seeing broad value in their tutoring. And like elementary education students, tutors in preparation for tutoring are not yet experts—only the act of tutoring, over time, can help them develop expertise.

A second theory that directly applies to transfer and peer tutoring coursework is Perkins & Salomon’s (2012) detect-elect-connect (DEC) model. This model includes three “mental bridges” that students must build in order to transfer: *detecting* connections between previously learned knowledge/skills/approaches and a new situation, *electing* to explore that connection, and *connecting* those knowledge/skills/approaches in some way (p. 250). Perkins & Salomon suggest that DEC may occur for an individual in sequence, all at once, or in a sudden burst of insight (p. 250). DEC may also be done consciously or unconsciously/automatically, depending on the complexity of the learning tasks (p. 251). Two decades of previous research by Salomon & Perkins suggests that for most complex learning (such as learning to write or tutoring writing), students must make a conscious effort (which they call *mindful abstraction*) to create an understanding of similarities between learning contexts, where anticipating connections (*forward-reaching transfer*) and recognizing how previous learning applies (*backward-reaching transfer*) are both critical.

Both groups of researchers suggest particular avenues for the study of transfer: Bransford & Schwartz suggest that a PFL approach is best

suiting to longitudinal research rather than “one shot task performances” (p. 78). Perkins & Salomon argue we must teach—and study—students’ ability to develop and use skills in the present that may apply to the future (p. 257). To address both PFL and DEC, in this study, I examined both the initial learning context (the WRT320 course) paired with follow-up interviews a year after the course ended.

Transfer-based Principles in WRT320

Students need opportunities to use the DEC method as well as engage in PFL in ways that bridge contexts, specifically, the classroom, the writing center, and other areas of students’ professional, personal, or educational lives. In this section, the institutional context and pedagogical aspects of WRT320 will be described, so that readers have a context for the study data presented and also a description of the transfer-focused pedagogies employed using DEC and PFL principles.

Institutional context. Oakland University (OU), a regional, doctoral research university with approximately 19,000 students, is located in the suburbs of Detroit in southeast Michigan. OU has had a writing center since 2006 and has offered a major in writing and rhetoric (WRT) since 2008. As described in the introduction, WRT320: Peer Tutoring in Composition, a course that pre-dates the establishment of the writing center and WRT department, fulfills several conflicting educational objectives at the university. On one hand, it serves as our tutor preparation course for students wanting to work as tutors in the university’s writing center. It is also an elective course for writing and rhetoric undergraduate majors. Finally, it fulfills an upper-division “writing intensive” and “knowledge applications” requirement in OU’s general education curriculum. The knowledge applications requirement asks students to take a course from outside their major and apply that knowledge to their major—so transfer is implicitly expected with this requirement. This means that students with widely divergent goals take the class; these goals range from tutoring writing and wanting a career in writing to a perceived “easy” general education credit; finding a way to reach all of these students was one of the driving forces for creating a transfer-focused curriculum.

Because of the course’s general education status, WRT320 cohort typically includes 80–90% elementary and special education students (who are strongly encouraged to take the course for general education credit), 5–10% WRT majors, and 5–10% humanities or social sciences students (of all of these students, only one or two a term take the course to be writing tutors). Because of the high demand for the course from

education majors, the department offers several sections each term taught by multiple full-time faculty in Writing and Rhetoric. Due to the wide diversity in enrollment, typically fewer than half of the students enrolled have ever heard of the writing center and fewer than a quarter have actually visited. Appendix A contains a catalog description of the course, course goals, and major assignments and reflective prompts for my version of the course.

Enacting transfer-focused pedagogies. In WRT320, I encourage the principles of DEC and PFL in a number of ways, including by giving students opportunities to build connections across prior, current, and future contexts through in-class activities. Early in the term, students gain a theoretical understanding and vocabulary to talk about learning, the development of expertise, and writing studies by reading material in these areas. These include readings by Beaufort (2000), selections from the National Research Council's *How People Learn* (1999), and work of educational researchers Dale Schunk (2008) and Robert Haskell (2000). These theories, combined with reflective activity about students' learning, become part of the vocabulary of the course, which helps make the theories explicit. This learning about learning directly encourages PFL, where students can better understand themselves as learners.

In line with detecting connections via DEC, on the first day of class, we brainstorm a list of skills that good tutors should have and connect those skills to other contexts (like coaching, counseling, teaching, etc.). We revisit these connections in other kinds of assignments and in-class activities throughout the term, including multiple written reflections and assignments, such as an open-ended research project in which students bridge peer tutoring with a professional/educational interest.

Reflective activity forms a cornerstone of the transfer-based pedagogies enacted in WRT320, specifically through the use of prompts and techniques that ask students to bring their learning processes to the forefront and build bridges to past, current, and future learning, with prompts inspired by the work of Kathleen Yancey (1998). Reflective writing has a history within the writing center and tutor preparation. Michael Mattison (2007) suggests that dialogic forms of reflective writing (where tutors engage in reflective writing with other tutors) can be effective for tutor development. In keeping with this idea, reflective writing forms the core of WRT320, because it encourages students to understand their learning processes, connect their learning, use and apply course concepts, and recognize shifts in value. Students engage in many types of reflective writing aimed at promoting transfer, including

weekly reading responses, reflections with each major assignment, and a tutoring letter assignment in which students observe a tutor then write a letter that begins a conversation between the tutor and the student to benefit both.¹ A selection of specific reflective prompts can be found in Appendix A.

Methods

This research represents a classroom-based, scholarship of teaching and learning approach² that uses classroom activities and writing assignments as pedagogical tools and data collection instruments, as well as longitudinal follow-ups with students. After two years of revising and reshaping the curriculum to be more transfer-focused and address the challenges inherent in this course and population, in spring 2011, I conducted an institutional review board (IRB) approved pilot study. During 2011–2013, I also participated in the Elon University Research Seminar focusing on *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*, where I worked with a group of researchers to create additional pedagogical and methodological interventions (including the group of reflective assignments and interview protocol in Appendix A and B).³ I revised the course based on my work at the seminar and gained IRB approval to collect materials from the students for the main study in spring 2012, with follow-up interviews conducted in spring 2013.

Participants included 18 students (out of a total of 19 enrolled in the course, 16 females and 2 males) who gave informed consent during the main study in 2012. Majors represented were education (15 elementary and special education students) and writing and rhetoric (3 students). Two of the writing and rhetoric majors were dual majors in English. Although the pilot study students were not included in the analysis presented here, I did use the themes developed from the pilot as a starting point for analyzing the main study data. The case study students were selected based on three factors: first, availability for a follow-up interview; second, nearness to graduation, to gain a sense of both educational and professional transfer; and third, if they worked in the writing center (I wanted to interview both those who went on to

1 Although outside the scope of this article, this class also focuses on building writing studies knowledge using a “writing about writing” approach advocated by Doug Downs & Elizabeth Wardle (2007).

2 This work is the tradition of SoTL approach advocated broadly in higher education. For more information, see Cathy Bishop-Clark & Beth Deitz-Uhler (2012).

3 More information about this group can be found at the Writing Transfer Project website: www.writingtransferproject.com.

work in the writing center and those who did not). Case study students included two from elementary education (one has since left the university) and one from writing and rhetoric (who was also the writing center tutor).

The data included written materials that students produced in the course: major assignments (tutoring letter, tutoring case study, open-ended research assignment), reflections connected to each major assignment, weekly reading responses and forum posts, and all homework assignments. The year following their WRT320 course, I contacted a random sample of 9 of the 18 students to participate in a 45-minute follow-up interview. The interview (see Appendix B for interview script) consisted of 30 minutes of follow-up questions and 15 minutes of discussion of a specific piece of writing they completed after WRT320. Nearly all of the students I contacted had already graduated; however, I was able to follow-up with three of them for an in-person interview and interview three more via email (because they were no longer in the area), giving me a response rate of 66%. All interviews were recorded and then professionally transcribed.

After stripping student work and interviews of all identifying features and assigning each student a pseudonym, the interviews, student papers, and student reflections were analyzed using Dedoose Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research Software. A multi-level coding strategy, described by Johnny Saldaña (2009), involved multiple readings of study materials and refinement of codes. Final codes discussed in this article included building connections (to the writing center and to professional settings), preparing for future learning, and metacognitive awareness. After coding, codes were exported to SPSS 20 for additional descriptive statistical analysis. In the results, each code is listed by the total number of students who demonstrated that characteristic and the total number of instances, which refers to the total number of times the code appears in all documents in the course dataset. The number of students gives a sense of how widespread the individual characteristic was among students; the number of instances tells how often it occurred.

This study has several limitations. First, the study represents research only into one context and classroom; as such, additional research in other settings is needed to understand how the results and suggestions might apply to other peer tutoring courses. Second, the study investigates transfer-focused thinking and initial connections students are making as they leave a peer tutoring course and their self-reported experiences a year after the course concluded. It relies mainly on self-reports of activities rather than directly observable measures of transfer (which are much more difficult to obtain). The validity of self-reported data is

always a cause for concern—and how much students are using vs. reporting using is an issue. However, since this study focuses on the DEC model, which is largely based on students' willingness to detect, elect, and connect learning to other contexts and build connections, hearing from students about their perceptions and self-reports is an important part of that process. Additionally, the sample included students who were not necessarily invested in writing center pedagogy or in tutoring at the start of the course; these techniques may need to be modified to be used with students or tutors directly invested in the writing center.

Results

To address transfer-focused pedagogy in my peer tutoring course, I will describe results as they relate to two areas that encourage PFL and DEC: 1) building connections and engaging in successful transfer and 2) fostering metacognition. Overall, results suggest that a transfer-focused pedagogy in this peer tutoring course was effective in building connections to multiple contexts, encouraging transfer-focused thinking during the course, and encouraging students to be prepared for future learning and to detect-elect-connect after the course concluded. The follow-up interviews suggest that students are engaging in DEC and are prepared for future learning, especially in educational settings, although what they report transferring is varied. Along with presenting the whole-class results using descriptive statistics, I will provide the three follow-up interviews as case studies: Hilary (elementary education), Amber (writing and rhetoric/English), and Cindy (elementary education). To better understand the three case-study students, short descriptions of each are presented here.

At the beginning of the semester, Hilary, a senior elementary education student, had tutored college-level math but was not confident about her writing ability and suffered from some writing anxiety. (In her interview a year later, she revealed that the idea of taking a writing class “literally made me sick beforehand.”) By the end of the course, she wrote in her final reflection about being “confident enough to tutor her husband” in his writing. Hilary worked with another student to apply principles of writing tutoring to tutoring in other subjects in her open-ended research project; they created a 2-hour professional development workshop for teachers. The year after she completed the course, she left the university because of changes in her personal life and began taking classes for an online degree in early childhood education. To supplement her income, she also started her own day-care business that included individualized tutoring.

Amber was a junior writing and rhetoric/English dual major who took the course both as an elective and from a desire to work in the writing center. Amber came into the course with excellent writing ability and with experiences of being tutored in the writing center. During the semester, Amber tackled a difficult service-learning project where she co-developed and co-led a day-long tutor education workshop for a community literacy partner. After the course concluded, she spent a year working as a writing consultant before graduating in spring 2013; her current career also involves writing center work as a tutor mentor.

In Cindy's second to last semester, she took WRT320 to fulfill her general education requirements. Since Cindy was graduating, working in the writing center was not possible; however, she was enrolled in field placements during the course and, in her reflective writing, connected the course to her field placements. Cindy was an excellent writer and engaged in metacognitive activities, such as monitoring her writing process and sharing that monitoring in class, understanding herself as a writer (including her strengths and limitations), and reflecting on her success as a writer⁴, having developed these strategies throughout her college career. Since finishing the course, Cindy works full-time teaching language arts and communication to 6th and 7th graders and reports using material learned on peer review and the writing process in her classes.

Near Connections: From the Peer Tutoring Course to the Writing Center

All eighteen students in the course were able to successfully describe using and applying knowledge from the course to the "near" context of the writing center (18 of 18 students, 192 instances throughout the course). Students applied specific tutoring strategies primarily through the tutoring case study assignment, in which each student observed four tutoring sessions and gained direct experience co-tutoring two sessions.

One of the case study students, Amber, was hired as a tutor in the OU Writing Center. In her interview a year after the course ended,

4 For more on these metacognitive coding categories, see Gorzelsky, Gwen, Driscoll, Dana Lynn, Pazcek, Joseph, Hayes, Carol, & Jones, Edmund (Forthcoming, 2016). Metacognitive moves in learning to write: Results from the writing transfer project. *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*. Moore, J. & Anson, C. (Eds), Parlor Press.

when I asked her if she was using any material from WRT320, she discusses her use of WRT320 concepts in her writing center work:

I can say that the stuff in WRT320 has helped me become a better tutor and that has helped me become a better writer.... I have these skills from WRT320 and I see all the different types and pieces of writing and students who come into the writing center. I think it gives me a better perspective on my own writing.

Amber also described specific skills and knowledge she was able to use as a tutor, such as learning about multilingual students and cultural knowledge and the listening, summarizing, and writing skills she gained. Important to note is that Amber isn't just discussing her experiences as a tutor but also using those experiences to become a better writer herself—demonstrating a high level of metacognitive awareness about her tutoring and her own writing abilities. Amber's ability detecting, electing, and connecting her learning to the writing center and other contexts appears, by her own admission, at least partially facilitated through experiences in WRT320. Amber does note, however, that she needed to heavily supplement her knowledge of tutoring beyond WRT320, especially as she moves into more complex tasks (in line with the PFL model) within the OU writing center.

Professional Connections: Engaging in Successful Forward-Reaching Knowledge

Since the goal of most students taking the course was not for future work in the writing center, students were also encouraged to build connections to other contexts. While enrolled in the course, seventeen of eighteen students made connections to other contexts in their reflective assignments and major projects; all seventeen students did so in at least two different assignments and at multiple points in the course. These students described 204 different connections to their future careers (approximately 12 connections per student), including pedagogical techniques for future classrooms, future writing situations, and interpersonal skills. Table 1 describes the specific connections students were able to make while in the course.

Area of Future Connection	Total Instances
Future career	17 students; 120 instances (includes 84 connections to teaching careers)
Future writing (in any context)	11 students; 27 instances
Future personal life	14 students; 24 instances
General/unspecific connections (e.g. “I will use this later”)	16 students; 33 instances
Total	17 students; 204 instances

Table 1: Areas of future connections

As the majority of students in WRT320 are education majors, connections to future classroom teaching and pedagogical principles were quite common. These connections allow students to engage in behaviors that will help with detecting, electing, and connecting their skills in future settings. To understand whether or not these initial connections actually continued beyond the course, we turn to Hilary and Cindy’s follow-up interviews.

Prior to her interview, in her final semester reflection, Hilary showed a value shift concerning tutoring and was able to connect tutoring more directly to her own future teaching:

Though I knew that tutoring in writing existed, I as a student stayed clear of it. I suppose it was due to preconceived ideas of tutoring and the fear of the unknown. This class not only introduced me to the benefits of the writing center to become a better writer, but it also allowed me to begin my adventure as a tutor. Having the opportunity to apply my knowledge from this course to real life is an experience that is necessary to my educational growth as well as helping me to become a well-rounded future educator. Knowing how to tutor will give me the ability to implement peer-tutoring programs in my own classroom.

In her follow-up interview a year later, Hilary again reiterates the importance of tutoring to her professional life when I asked her if she was currently using material from WRT320. Even though her career plans shifted from teaching to early education, she was still able to find value in the coursework as both a private tutor and as a day-care operator:

I will say that my love for math was the whole reason I was going into education. Since your class, I have been much more willing

to tutor.... The confidence alone that I got from the tutoring experience in your class has been such a help to me. Having knowledge of the interpersonal skills, and remembering the techniques to tutoring are also important. One thing that always stuck in my head was instructing maybe the first time so they learn, but allowing the student to correct the error the next time.

In her interview, Hilary also describes her one-with-one work with nephews and her work in her day care. We see Hilary being in a position to detect-elect-connect coming out of the course, and indeed, a year later, reporting using and adapting material to her immediate workplace context—her growing business. Furthermore, Hilary also uses course-specific language to discuss her tutoring and one-with-one work.

Like Hilary, Cindy was also an elementary education student who worked to build connections during the course. Her final project was a newsletter to parents that described learning differences among genders and best practices for writing centers in tutoring. In her final reflection, Cindy writes about her experiences in writing the newsletter and in the course:

This course has not only made me a better observer and listener, but has taught me to become engaged with my clients (the students) as writers. This will benefit me as a future teacher when I am working through writing projects or conferencing with my students.... I will sound like a resourceful and professional person when I try to assist my students and when I try to make that teaching connection with parents.

A year later, Cindy reports using her tutoring skills as a 6th/7th grade teacher through one-with-one tutoring of book reports, providing quality feedback, and engaging in scaffolding. When asked about what skills she is using from WRT320, she says:

I assist some students one-on-one when writing book reports when they need the help.... I offer feedback on how to elaborate, use correct grammar, include sensory details, and figurative language.

Cindy also reported using the genre knowledge of reflective writing while she was in her final semester at the university, showing another element of DEC in regards to reflective writing (which she did for the first time in WRT320, according to her final reflection). However, while

Cindy reports using the skills to tutor, she did not use course-specific language to describe her approaches.

Preparation for Future Learning & Building Metacognitive Awareness

One way that students can prepare for future learning is by becoming more aware of their own learning, writing, and tutoring processes (also known as metacognitive awareness); substantial time during the course was spent having students reflect upon and understand those processes. While they were enrolled in the course, all 18 students demonstrated the ability to reflect on their learning using metacognitive strategies (88 instances), most frequently when they described overcoming learning difficulty in writing assignments or when they discussed shifts in values about writing (10 students, 8 instances⁵) or shifts in values about tutoring (16 students, 42 instances).

In their follow-up interviews, all three students discussed how theories of learning and metacognition helped them long-term and prepared them for new learning tasks. Hilary, who remembers not only the specifics but also uses the terminology a year later, says:

I still remember the whole shoeboxes under the bed theory.⁶ They really put things into perspective to me. I was one of those people where if I did not see a purpose for something I would just finish a class and not even get much out of it. I am glad we talked about this in our class, and that I was able to transfer what I learned in this class to real life. Plus it also helps me when I am working with children. If I can connect something they are learning to something in the future, they will have a greater chance of retaining it.

Amber discusses the reflective and metacognitive components of the course in her interview, and suggests that her writing center work helped reinforce the course:

And it's like, what things do transfer throughout time? I think 320 put a different perspective in my mind ... because in the writing

5 It is worth noting that most students start this course highly valuing writing already, as evidenced from their first two homework assignments.

6 This refers to an in-class presentation I gave on transfer of learning that focused on the concept of the “box under the bed” (first discussed in Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007); I used this both as a teaching concept and as an interview question, adapted from Bergmann & Zepernick’s work. Hilary brought this concept up in the interview prior to my asking her the question.

center I used all that I learned in 320.... If I didn't go into the writing center I would probably lose some of that.

Amber's quote here is of note because she is discussing near transfer, where she was trained and then used the knowledge; she questions whether or not she would transfer as much if she didn't have the opportunity of working in the OU writing center. This also suggests that some students may not have been as likely to transfer the content if not directly involved in writing center tutoring, despite the emphasis on broad transfer in the course. Likewise, Cindy uses transfer of learning concepts and reflection when she works individually with her students: "I use transfer especially with my students that need scaffolding to begin writing Reflective writing helps in every aspect of being a teacher." In sum, these three case study students report using their tutoring knowledge in diverse settings—the writing center, a day care, and a middle school classroom.

While most of the data was quite positive regarding students' reports of transfer beyond the course, I do want to mention one student, Sammie, briefly. I was not able to follow-up with Sammie for an in-person interview because she had graduated and moved to a different part of the state. However, in an email response to my query, Sammie indicated that while some of the course was helpful to writing done after the course (specifically, teaching reflections) she also thought transfer was too big of a focus in the course, "I found the transfer of learning focus to be interesting at first, but after a while when it kept coming back into class discussions I got bored of learning about it." She suggested, instead, that she wanted to spend more time doing observations and tutoring in the writing center rather than reflecting upon them (which were a substantial part of the course). She did not indicate any other use of skills beyond the course.

Discussion⁷

Along with providing students with valuable knowledge for tutoring in the writing center, a transfer-focused curriculum in a peer tutoring class can also provide broader skills. Such a curriculum can encourage students to make substantial connections between prior, current, and future coursework while still enrolled in the course and can set them up to detect, elect, connect and be prepared for their future learning in diverse contexts and careers. By providing connections and reflective opportunities, tutoring work becomes more valuable to students because they are able to make clearer connections between peer tutoring courses, writing centers, and other life experiences. Transfer of learning, then, provides a framework for students to engage not only in fruitful, productive tutoring sessions but also to prepare them for experiences beyond.

On the broader scale, transfer-focused peer tutoring courses can increase the importance, usefulness, and visibility of our work to broader audiences both within and outside of academia, including within general education coursework. Because WC pedagogies are so student-centered and versatile, writing center pedagogy and peer tutoring have much to offer beyond tutor preparation. Truly, our pedagogies, if placed within a transfer of learning framework, can closely align with other university goals including general education. General education curricula vary widely from university to university; however, all are concerned with

7 One of the reviewers for this manuscript suggested that the results I presented are too much of a success narrative. While I did my best to represent both positive and negative aspects of the course, largely, the data I have does point to this study's overall success. This was certainly more successful than I expected, and we don't have a lot of success stories in terms of transfer. Haskell (2000) goes so far as to say transfer is like an "antibiotic resistant bacterium...no matter what we attack it with it just won't go away" (xiv.) The laments from writing researchers, stretching all the way back to Anne Herrington's (1985) study of transfer in college chemistry courses, suggest that transfer is really difficult to teach and difficult for students to engage in. My own previous experience in studying transfer in FYC settings certainly supports this conclusion—that transfer is difficult and hard to teach. I have been collecting data in various contexts on transfer of learning since 2006, mostly in the context of FYC. This study of WRT320 was the first time in looking at any of my own data that I was excited, that I felt that perhaps that we could teach for transfer, at least in a writing center context. Certainly, these are the most positive results I've had an opportunity to write about. Given these positive results, I'm pleased to see that in time since conducting this study and revising it for publication, other conversations concerning transfer in the writing center have been taking place.

giving students a broad set of learning experiences that make them better academics, professionals, and civically-minded citizens. These skills often include problem solving, interpersonal, and literacy skills as well historical, global and cultural knowledge much of which is taught in peer tutoring courses (Brian Bourke, Nathaniel Bray, & Christopher Horton, 2009). Furthermore, the skills that we value and teach in tutor development are the same kinds of skills that students need throughout life; as my students demonstrated in their coursework and interviews, all of the above skills are useful well beyond writing center work. Because so many of these skills are already being taught in peer tutoring courses, if we are able to emphasize their transferable nature, we would be well on our way to aligning with broader educational movements at the university which could be of substantial benefit to writing centers.

A final benefit of bringing peer tutoring courses into mainstream university teaching through general education or other means is that a wider group of students are exposed to peer tutoring pedagogy. Students who might never learn about writing centers or seek them out now have an opportunity to gain valuable experience as tutors. The key is that we must clearly articulate these benefits through regular university channels (like general education courses, revisions, and assessments). We must also allow students to discover these benefits through reflective activities and transfer-focused projects while they are in peer tutoring courses and writing center professional development sessions.

This is not to say that the “mainstreaming” approach I am suggesting is free of negatives—and certainly, addressing students who are not necessarily motivated and/or interested in writing center tutoring at the start of a peer tutoring course can be challenging. However, it can also be a rare opportunity to educate students about the value of writing center work and writing more broadly, to shift perspectives, and to build connections between our work in writing centers and other places (and this is what transfer of learning is all about). The findings presented here can also help make the case for the positive benefits of tutor preparation courses for tutors.

In my previous article on transfer in writing centers, my co-author and I argued that one of the things we need to do in tutor preparation is to shift our terminology from *tutor training* to *tutor learning* because the term “training” de-emphasizes the importance of learning, which can be applied to a variety of new experiences (Driscoll & Harcourt, 2012). Learning implies transfer, it implies that students can take knowledge with them in some way and be better prepared for future learning once they leave the writing center (a fact well documented by the work of Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail (2010)). Since students rarely stay

tutors forever, it's up to us to make connections to broader learning experiences that tutors need when they leave the writing center, while also preparing them for working with students in the here and now. In doing so, we can also continue to validate our educational value to the broader campus community.

Transfer research suggests that knowledge and skills learned in educational settings should reflect what Susan Barnett & Stephen Cici (2002) call an “enduring applicability beyond the specific lessons” (613). As the results suggest, encouraging transfer-focused pedagogy in our courses can prepare tutors not only for writing center work but demonstrate how important tutoring is to the wide variety of places in which tutoring, one-on-one interaction, interpersonal skills, writing knowledge, and collaboration matter. In other words, we can show how tutoring matters not just to our tutees but also to the professional, personal, academic and civic lives of our tutors. Demonstrating and emphasizing this learning will allow tutor pedagogy to have a more prominent place in our curriculum and will motivate discussions concerning what constitutes non-classroom experiences in undergraduate and graduate work. Of all places on campus, writing centers are a key location where we can encourage transfer of learning—in both our peer tutoring courses, as this article has described as well as in our tutoring sessions. The transfer-focused work begins by building integrative, transfer-focused learning practices in our tutoring courses.

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About the Author

Dana Lynn Driscoll is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania where she teaches courses in teaching writing, methodology, and writing centers in the Composition and TESOL doctoral program. At her previous position at Oakland University, she taught OU's tutor education course and directed the embedded writing specialist program where writing center tutors are placed in basic writing courses. Her research interests include writing centers, writing transfer, research methodologies, writing assessment, and writing across the curriculum. She has published in numerous journals including *Writing Center Journal*, *Across the Disciplines*, *Writing Program Administration*, *Assessing Writing*, *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, *Computers and Composition* and *Composition Forum*. Her co-authored work with Sherry Wynn-Perdue, "Theory, Lore, and More: An Analysis of RAD Research in the *Writing Center Journal*, 1980–2009" won the International Writing Center Association's 2012 Outstanding Article of the Year Award. She also serves as a Co-PI on the multi-institutional research project, the "The Writing Transfer Project" which seeks to understand transfer of learning and metacognition across diverse settings. She serves the discipline as a CCCC Executive Committee member.

Appendix A: Description of WRT320 Course: Goals and Assignments

Catalog Description: Peer tutoring theories and pedagogies, and practical experience in tutoring. Work divided between classroom and tutoring assignments. Particularly valuable for majors in the humanities, education, psychology, human services and related fields. Satisfies the university general education requirement in the knowledge applications integration area. Satisfies the university general education requirement for a writing intensive course in general education or the major, not both.

Prerequisite: Completion of first-year writing with a 3.0 or better.

Course Goals:

- To develop tutoring strategies for specific interpersonal writing issues – i.e. ESL learners, learning styles, cultural differences, and dialectal issues
- To understand a variety of composing processes, including your own and others and to strengthen your own ability to write in various genres
- To learn the social, professional and ethical implications of tutoring writing in a wide variety of contexts
- To apply appropriate interpersonal skills for tutoring such as building rapport, clear listening, questioning, and collaboration
- To develop tutorial practices based on sound interpersonal, rhetorical, linguistic, and composition theory
- To utilize appropriate and effective conversational strategies that help the tutor uncover diverse student writers' attitudes toward writing, their understanding of specific assignments, and their awareness of discourse/genre conventions
- To use technology effectively to support your own as well as your tutee's writing development
- To apply tutoring practices to a wide variety of contexts, genres, and situations

Course Projects:

Project #1–Tutoring Observation Letter: For this project, you will be observing one tutorial in the writing center and engage in a conversation with that tutor about tutoring. From that observation and conversation, you will write a letter to the tutor discussing your experience and tying it with readings from the course. This will be given to the tutor, facilitating professional development both for yourself and the tutor you are observing and interviewing.

Project #2–Tutoring Reflection: For this project, you will be observing and engaging in one-on-one tutorials and reflecting upon the experience in order to gain practical experience in tutoring. The goals of this assignment are to help you gain experience and confidence in tutoring different types of writers, to apply and adapt course concepts to actual tutoring practice, to engage in reflective practice about tutoring, to begin to develop your own philosophy of tutoring, and to explore the ethical and professional dimensions of tutoring. You will also keep and turn in detailed logs for each tutoring session, which you will turn in with your final project.

Project #3 – Open-Ended Research Project: For the open-ended project, you will develop an individual or group project that can take a variety of forms: a community-based project, a research paper, a multimedia or visual project, a second primary research project, an article for publication in a place like the “Tutor’s Corner” in the Writing Lab Newsletter, materials for tutoring, etc. By completing this project, you are moving toward broadening your knowledge about peer tutoring and producing something that can benefit you as a tutor and help you enter into broader conversations about tutoring. The goal of this project is to help you apply this knowledge to some other area (the “knowledge applications” general education outcome for this course) through writing (the writing intensive outcome for this course) in a way that is transferable beyond the course.

Selected Course Assignments:

Writing Activity #1: Who am I as a writing tutor?

Throughout this course you will be learning more about your own identity as a tutor, or as someone who works one-on-one with others. This first assignment asks you to investigate your initial thoughts about tutoring. You can use the following questions to help guide you:

- Do you see tutoring as part of your future career goals? Why or why not?
- What do you believe are the most important qualities that a tutor should have?
- What personal strengths do you feel you already bring to tutoring?
- What would you like to get out of this course?
- How does tutoring connect with your professional and/or personal goals?

Write two–three pages (double spaced) on the above questions.

Writing Activity #2: You as a Writer

To begin our course, please reflect on the following questions in three pages (double spaced).

1. Think about you and writing being in a relationship. How would you describe that relationship?
2. What does learning involve for you?
3. Are you a writer? Why or why not?
4. Describe your level of confidence in your writing as you enter this class.
5. When you faced your greatest writing challenges this past semester, were you motivated to face that challenge—why or why not? How did you overcome those challenges?

Written Reflections with Each Major Assignment

Please reflect upon both your writing process as you wrote this paper. Please answer the questions below, in the order in which they are given.

1. (Process Question) Please describe your writing process for this assignment. This may include prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, peer reviews, the research process and interaction with your instructor, writing center, and/or others.
2. (Metacognition/writing studies) What key writing concepts, if any, were important factors in how you approached or carried out this writing assignment?
3. (Metacognition/prior knowledge) Was there something you found difficult to do in writing this piece? If so, please describe it and how you dealt with this difficulty. If you didn't find the writing task difficult, why was this piece easy for you to write?
4. (Rhetorical knowledge question) When shaping this project what audience—other than the teacher—were you targeting, if any? What values and/or needs did that audience have? How did you shape your writing to target that audience? What purpose did you hope to achieve in targeting this audience?
5. (Framing/Contextualizing) Did you “frame,” contextualize, or contribute to a conversation in some way? If so, how did you do so?

6. (Metacognition and transfer question) What knowledge/skills can you take with you to future writing projects?
7. (Research) If the assignment uses sources, please also include: What purposes do the sources serve in this piece?

Additional questions for end of semester reflection:

8. (Growth as writer) At the beginning of the semester, you were asked to describe your relationship with writing. How has that relationship with writing changed if at all?
9. (Dispositions) Describe your level of confidence in your writing when you entered this class as compared to now.
10. (Preparation for future learning) Imagine that you are in an upper-division course in a field different than your own (for instance, you might be an education major taking a biochemistry course) in which you are asked to write in an unfamiliar genre. How would you approach this situation?

Appendix B: Interview Script

1. What writing courses have you taken at university so far? Elsewhere?
2. Consider the kinds of writing you do in other university classes. Please describe the writing that you've done.
3. Are you doing any kind of tutoring or one-on-one work now? If so, can you tell me about it?
4. Teachers see what they call the "box under the bed" model when they ask students to recall in one class information they've learned in a different class. They find that students metaphorically put what they've learned each semester in a box under the bed after the course concludes. Have you experienced the "box under the bed" in your classes?
5. Have you experienced it in your writing classes? WRT320? (If no, what was different about that writing class?)
6. What kinds of knowledge, strategies or skills did you decide to "keep" vs. "stick under the bed" from WRT320? Why?
7. If there are some kinds of knowledge, strategies or skills from this course that you think you'll keep, why did you decide to keep/use them?
8. Do you feel you have strategies for shaping future assignments that you initially find uninteresting into a project that you find compelling?
9. Imagine that you are in an upper-division course in a field different than your own in which you are asked to write in an unfamiliar genre. How would you approach this situation? The second part of the interview was a text-based interview where we examined a text the student had written after WRT320.