Scaffolded Student Collaboration: Writing Fellow Integration for Enriched Critical Analysis

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Overview

In spring 2014 the writing center (WC) coordinator and the instructor of ENG 220 (Literary Analysis) began attaching writing fellows (WFs) to the course. We repeated this pilot each successive spring, implementing small changes every year, and conducted assessment following spring 2016. This integration paired "specialist" English major WFs who had completed ENG 220 with English majors currently taking the course. We are using "specialist" following the terminology of Zawacki, Antram, Price, Ray, and Koucheravy (2008), who distinguished "specialist" WFs "in the major" from "generalist" WFs "outside the major." Since the WFs had already taken the course with the same instructor, there was no need to "embed" them (i.e., they did not attend the class). Instead, the instructor and the WC coordinator met with the WFs outside the course to discuss specific integration goals.

One initial goal of this integration was enhancing disciplinary writing skills, including but not limited to mechanics. Because English majors often mistakenly believe they do not need tutoring, an additional goal was to encourage increased voluntary visits to the WC.

During the three years of the pilot, we conducted informal surveys (not provided). They were somewhat underwhelming. ENG 220 students widely, although certainly not unanimously, reported that WFs were helpful for both short assignments and the final paper. In the third year, we recorded a modest (approximately 10%) uptick in the percentage of voluntary (i.e., unassigned, optional) WC tutoring sessions. The course instructor also noticed a similarly modest improvement in student use of writing mechanics.

More significant improvements, however, occurred in an unexpected area. The theses of most 220 final papers for all three years were noticeably clearer than they had been in the six previous years the instructor had taught the course. In addition, students used better evidence for their arguments. This type of improvement is difficult to quantify, and the correlation *could* have been coincidental. To find out more about what was happening in WC tutorials that might account for the increased quality of the final papers, we surveyed the WFs. (See Survey Methodology, below, and Appendix.) These surveys revealed high levels of scaffolded critical thinking occurring during the student tutorials. Moreover, the WF responses revealed clear correlations between WC training and the productive nature of the collaborations they described.

Here, we are defining "critical thinking" as the process of improving one's thinking through analysis and/or assessment of one's initial ideas. Inherent in this definition is a recursive process that assumes sustained reflection/analysis will catalyze revision and or change of the original idea. The recursive reflection process can take place in myriad ways—many of which will be illustrated in the WF feedback below.

Our assessment of the WF responses reveals that WF-student collaborations included both cognitive and motivational "scaffolding" that encouraged higher level critical thinking. We are using the term "scaffolding" as defined by Mackiewicz and Thompson (2015): "scaffolding metaphorically refers to teaching a student to determine an answer to a question, to correct an error, or to perform a task without telling the student the answer or doing the work for him or her" (p. 5). Mackiewicz and Thompson also distinguished between "cognitive" and "motivational" scaffolding. Both types of scaffolding involve a "prod" and "push" process that allows students to think critically (p. 5). Ideally, in a "writing center conference, the dialogue of cognitive scaffolding allows the tutor to assess the student writer's level of understanding and then adapt his or her next moves according to what the student writer already knows" (p. 5). "Motivational scaffolding" refers to the affective building of "rapport, solidarity and trust" (p. 5). The WF responses revealed both types of successful collaborative scaffolding.

Assessment Survey Methodology
In August 2016, the WC coordinator emailed all nine of the WFs who had served over the three-year period as part of the WF-ENG 220 pilot. Eight of the nine WFs had graduated, seven of whom responded to the survey, in addition to the WF still enrolled at the university. The survey contained three questions:

1) Did the experience as a writing fellow in English 220 (Literary Analysis) seem different to you than your regular work as a writing tutor? If so, how?
2) Do you recall any instances when having worked previously during the semester with an ENG 220 student—and thus knew their writing habits—helped?
3) Any other observations about your work as a writing fellow in ENG 220?

The WFs were all asked to include in their e-mail reply a sentence that gave permission to use their responses in conferences and papers. They were assured of anonymity.

The responses were collated by question, and key ideas in the responses were coded in an effort to determine frequency of occurrence. (See Appendix for coded responses.)

Structural Elements of WF Integration
In order to integrate the WFs into the ENG 220 classroom, we developed the following protocol over the three years of the pilot:

- **WF Awareness of Assignment Goals:** The course instructor and WC coordinator met with the WFs in a full group twice during the semester: once before their first required student tutorial and again before the final paper conferences. Additionally, both the WC coordinator and the course instructor met on an as-needed basis with WFs in person. We also all corresponded by both individual and group emails.
- **WF Instructions for Dealing with Mechanical Skills:** WFs were instructed to direct attention to "top five" mechanical issues: comma splices, fragments, run-ons, quotation embedding, and MLA citation.

- **Transfer Instruction:** WFs had access to the graded assignments (including instructor comments) and were required to read them carefully to help students transfer learning to future assignments.
- **Open-ended Instruction**: We encouraged WFs to conduct their tutoring sessions in accordance with their WC training, so that mechanics did not dominate their sessions.
- **WF Classroom Visits:** The WFs visited the classroom twice: once to introduce themselves shortly before the first tutorial and once at the end of the course for a popular pizza/Bingo final editing session.
- **First WF Tutorial (between Assignment #1 and Assignment #2):** After the first pilot year, we realized that the first meeting between the WF and the tutee should take place *after* the course instructor had graded and returned the first assignment. Rampant low grades on this first assignment are intentional and legendary in this course. This timing element—and an emphasis that students were fully responsible for what they submitted—freed the WFs from being blamed for not "fixing" all their mistakes. This blaming phenomenon was observed in year one, but not in succeeding years.
- **Required WF-Student Meetings:** ENG 220 students were required to attend only two sessions with the WF: first to go over a draft of assignment #2, and later to discuss a draft of their final papers. All other meetings between students and their WFs were optional.

Grammar in Context

Our emphasis on selected mechanics above (comma splices, etc.) might seem counterproductive given the unfortunate stereotype that identifies the primary role of the writing center with "fixing grammar mistakes." Higher level conceptual work in English literature and writing studies is often invisible to those outside these disciplines who not only confuse the two fields but also often assume both fields exist primarily to police grammar mistakes. However, there are distinct reasons for this element in this integration.

First, it provides one immediately transparent focus for the students' first meeting with their WFs. We know (and the evidence below illustrates) that the WFs swiftly put grammar in its place. More importantly, this requirement allows motivational scaffolding by building rapport within the specialized discourse community. ENG 220 is a gateway course to the major that intentionally and transparently sets a high bar for a wide range of discipline-specific standards, from basic mechanics to clear, organized and synthesized research papers. Many of the WFs themselves did poorly on the first ENG 220 assignment and still battle the carefully chosen "top five" mechanical errors on which this course humorously but earnestly declares war.

In addition, in the discipline of literary analysis, there is an added emphasis on understanding form as integral to function. Students need to be experts at grammar not only to write clearly, but also to understand how literature often abuses or exploits the rules in order to achieve powerful effects. This discipline-specific focus on grammar *as essential for literary analysis* deconstructs what is sometimes treated as a binary distinction between "higher order" concept discussion and "lower level" attention to fixing mechanical errors. Because form and function are so tangibly reciprocal, discussion of mechanics is consistently integrated with analysis throughout the Roger Williams University (RWU) English

curriculum. Grammar is discussed in context, not only in student papers, but in the act of interpretation, where a mastery of mechanics can be crucial for analyzing meaning (e.g., Emily Dickinson's famous use of dashes). Thus, although a focus on mechanical errors was not the main goal of this integration, it was nonetheless a discipline-specific goal.

Evidence of Collaborative WF-Student Metacognitive Scaffolding
One tutor described the collaborative critical thinking in this pilot as "absolutely a different experience than my usual work as a writing tutor" (WF5, Appendix). Notably, the WFs cited several motivational scaffolding factors that we had anticipated, including knowledge of the course, course instructor, and familiarity with the assignments. They also identified two important factors we had not considered: awareness of the importance of writing within the major and the benefits for collaboration when a tutor makes a personal connection with a student. WF6 made the correlation explicit between these two factors and higher order critical thinking:

> [M]y relationship with them [the 220 students] was far more comfortable and consisted of more dialogue than a monologue; they were more comfortable asking questions and responding to mine, and it often felt as though we were working collaboratively, rather than like I was just there to "fix" the paper. (Appendix)

This description reveals enriched scaffolding in which one student is helping another to pursue or discover ideas without just "telling." *Both* students are asking questions. And the collaboration feels "comfortable." This response does not directly mention that the WF is learning with the 220 student, but the use of the term "collaboration" suggests that might be the case. The generation of questions is the critical thinking skill most obvious in the above example, which is described as occurring for *both* tutor and tutee.

Interestingly, WF6 used the term "collaboratively" in a way that might be eliding two senses of the term. RWU tutor training uses the definition of "collaboration" from Andrea Lunsford's (1991) article "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," in which knowledge and reality are understood to be "mediated by or constructed through language in social use" (p. 4). Tutors are provided this definition of "collaboration" as essential to the social construction of knowledge in order to help them distinguish between fixing a mistake and coming to an understanding—which seems to be the distinction WF6 has in mind above. The workaday denotation of "collaboration" is also at play in the sense of simply sharing ideas.

WF5 was more explicit about the idea that mutual learning and meaningful collaboration lead to higher level thinking:

> This program gave me and other students the chance to put on our English hats outside of when we would typically wear them and discuss cool ideas and concepts without any sort of guidance or enforcement from a teacher. The discussions were really authentic, comfortable, and always super interesting. (Appendix)

Here, the WF correlated "super interesting" ideas with the collaborative nature of a "comfortable" and "authentic" interaction. Indeed, the words "authentic" and "comfortable" peppered the WF survey feedback.

Mutual learning at a high cognitive level is correlated with collaboration in yet another WF response even more explicitly: "I learned almost as much about literary analysis when I tutored ENG 220 as when I took it. Most of our sessions ended up being discussions of the concepts they were learning rather than discussion of grammar" (WF3, Appendix). Likewise, yet another WF reported, "Whether I or a student found a certain theory confusing, we could have an earnest discussion about the theories and how they worked and applied elsewhere" (WF7, Appendix).

In both of the above comments, the WFs are not just reviewing the material. Instead, they are analyzing the 220 course concepts further than they had taken them during the course and experiencing additional discovery.

The WF feedback also suggested that tutors felt this level of collaboration was "deeper" than a typical WC tutoring session:

> I was able to make specific suggestions and point out, for example, "In this chapter, remember when this character did this? That's a great example of what you're talking about here, and I think it could really strengthen your paper if you discuss it." This was the basis of some of the most exciting conversations that took place during my writing fellow meetings. Sometimes the student had a great original idea, and knew there was evidence to support that idea, but was having trouble pointing to that evidence in the text. . . . I was able to help point out the evidence, because I was familiar with the text. (WF8, Appendix)

Likewise, WF5 wrote,

> I remember very clearly working with one group of students on an analysis of the movie *Mulan*. . . . I met multiple times with each student and I was able to see their essays develop and take form. . . . It's a much deeper level of tutoring. (Appendix)

WC Training Correlated with Metacognitive Scaffolding
Thus far, the WF survey responses strongly suggest that our initial hunch was correct: pairing "specialist" WFs with students from a class they had already taken with the same professor does tend to create productive collaboration. But the WF surveys also suggest that "specialist" pairing alone is probably not sufficient to produce the high level of critical thinking (i.e., metacognitive scaffolding) the WFs are describing above. The WF responses consistently reveal the importance of the WC training in producing high-level collaboration.

Significantly, our WC coordinator implemented a dramatic shift in tutor education and philosophy in 2009 by asking tutors to consider their role in the academic hierarchy. Instead of relying on very traditional tutoring rules (e.g., don't hold the pen, don't write on a student's paper, don't change sentencing or phrasing), the revised tutor education model helps tutors determine a student's comfort level with the writing situation, incorporating nondirective and directive techniques appropriate for that level. As part of this training, the

tutors read a broad variety of theorists (approximately ten articles per year). In addition, the tutors engage in professional development activities based on these readings. For example, tutors work in groups to role-play a conversation between a tutor and a student, using sample student essays (with the student authors' permission). As part of vetting the exercise, tutors must identify the article/theory that has informed their responses.

One of the most important tutor education texts in enacting cognitive scaffolding is Peter Carino's (2003) "Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring." Carino encouraged tutors to make a determination about the student's comfort level with a paper's content in order to decide how much "authority" tutors should provide. During tutor education, we discuss at length Carino's "admittedly reductive" (p. 110) formula:

- More student knowledge, less tutor knowledge = more nondirective methods.
- Less student knowledge, more tutor knowledge = more directive methods.

WF surveys echo Carino's language, especially references to various forms of *knowledge* and *knowing* in relationship to the level of direction they are providing. For example, WF2 reported, "Having already taken the class and knowing what Dr. Case wanted me to look for in particular, I felt I had the ability to help guide the student toward Dr. Case's requirement and preferences" (Appendix). Likewise, WF5 wrote:

> As a former student of Dr. Case, I knew how she teaches writing and what she looks for in her students' writing. . . . I was familiar with the content and topics of the students' writing. Because of this, I was able to provide much more specific advice on how to improve their essays and how to become a stronger writer. (Appendix)

Likewise, WF6 stated, "I felt more comfortable [as a WF] in providing direction, regarding what the assignment was asking them [students] to demonstrate" (Appendix). In all of these examples, tutors are explicitly correlating their own knowledge level with the amount/type of direction they are giving students, just as Carino suggested. In a final example, WF7 went a step further:

> I felt that I could reach a higher level of understanding with another English Lit major, especially those in Literary Analysis, because I had been in their shoes, and could honestly offer advice and insight they might not have had. (Appendix)

Not only does this WF acknowledge her own authority as well as the common discipline and course content, but she implicitly correlates collaboration with reaching a "higher level of understanding."

The WFs reveal in their responses that they are not hesitant to offer advice, to be "very open about what works and doesn't work in [students'] writing" (WF5, Appendix), and to engage in "an unrestrained exchange of ideas" (WF8, Appendix). This language again suggests the "push" and "prod" that Mackiewicz and Thompson referenced—the scaffolding through which students reach higher levels of understanding.

In addition to Carino (2003), the reading list has long included Andrea Lunsford's (1991) essay, mentioned above, defining collaboration in the context of social constructionism and Nancy Grimm's (2011) "Retheorizing Writing Center Work to Transform a System of Advantage Based on Race." Lunsford challenged WCs to develop the skills that are crucial for collaboration and for promoting groups working together; she wanted us to "figure out . . . how to teach, model, and learn about careful listening, leadership, goal setting, and negotiation" (7). WF7's survey response strongly suggests that these skills are applied during WF tutoring sessions:

> Tutoring them [220 students] was not so much of a corrective/teaching process, but a two sided discussion of the ideas from the course and the assignment . . . Personally, I was never afraid to raise my hand and/or speak up during class. But I know that is not the case for every other student, and I think the ability to have individual tutoring sessions also allowed the ENG 220 students to "lay it all out" without having several classmates also pitch in their ideas. (Appendix)

While WF7 referred to "individual tutoring sessions," the process she described is actually collaborative in the "two sided" exchange of ideas, requiring talking and listening to each other, modeling leadership as a WF and expecting the student to take leadership within the conversation. Likewise, the latter part of the observation, that the students could practice a negotiation of exchanging ideas without the interference of other students' interruptions, is an important marker of careful listening.

Nancy Grimm's essay explained the tutor role in transitioning "newcomers to academic discourse" (p. 77). It rejects those rules about holding pencils, writing on papers, and suppressing information from students because this practice "does harm" by impeding transition efforts. WF8's survey response provides an example of a tutor's successful listening to the tension the student felt with her own writing. Familiar with the assignment and the theory, this WF waded through the murkiness with the student:

> Her assignment was a short homework reflection detailing parts of the reading that confused her. As a result, her writing was a little confusing, but she was sort of writing her way to understanding. We talked about ideas that needed to be fleshed out more. She pointed to sections where she was afraid she was rambling, but after discussion, we decided that pretty much everything in the sections was necessary to explain how she understood the text and why she was confused. The best part was, through reading and analyzing her own reflection, she gained a better understanding of the text and was able to answer her own questions. (Appendix)

This student was fortunate to work with a WF who understood and was familiar with the reading, since it was at the heart of the confusion. The WF's analysis suggests that analytical and critical thinking occur as the student and tutor determine which ideas are underdeveloped. They then agree that "everything" actually should stay in the reflection, and, using a text she wrote herself, the student discovers the generative nature of writing.

Here, the WF is allowing the student to push and pull herself via the metacognitive scaffolding.

WF8 clearly echoes Wenger's (1998) and Grimm's (2011) emphasis on communities of practice (as detailed by Grimm in "Retheorizing Writing Center Work") in which members cultivate "identities of belonging" in order to "participate" in those groups and ultimately "imagine a trajectory for themselves" within the community (Grimm, p. 95).

> Let me start off by saying that the most rewarding part of my tutoring career at RWU was getting to know the students—not just their writing, but getting to know about their college experience, their interests, and their plans for the future. Sometimes I would feel like I really hit it off with a student the first time I was tutoring them; more often, I felt this relationship start to develop after a couple tutoring sessions. . . . I took it as a compliment when a student would return to me for help with their next assignment. It indicated that the student found my suggestions to be helpful. It also indicated that they were comfortable with me. I know from experience that having someone read your work while you're sitting next to them is, by nature, an uncomfortable experience, because it puts you in a vulnerable position. Helping a student learn to feel comfortable during this experience is just as important as helping them to become a better writer because accepting and processing feedback is a necessary skill for lifelong learning. (Appendix)

Notice the ideas referencing "belonging," "participat[ion]" and the sense of a "trajectory": the repeated interactions with the 220 students created an identity for this WF that transcended notions of hierarchies and regulations that can prevent meaningful collaboration. Moreover, it's revealing to read the intentionality in this analysis regarding the role *relationships* play in tutoring, relying on the creation of an affective environment that allows collaboration to increase literacy.

Implications and Conclusions
Although initially we had hoped this integration would lead English majors to identify their WC tutors as a rich resource, our assessment suggests that the WFs were far greater "agents of change" (Hughes & Hall, 2008) than we had anticipated.

We now theorize that an important implication of this study is that "specialized" integration may lend itself to what Spigelman and Grobman (2005) advocated as a productive "decentering" of the classroom. They noted that embedded tutors must contend with "complex, hierarchical, contested classroom spaces" (p. 1). In contrast, our model of non-embedded, specialist integration allows the WFs to operate within a less hierarchical space. Indeed, the first time the 220 students meet the WFs, the students themselves choose where to meet next—whether it is in the writing center, a study space in the library, a table in the dining commons or outside on the lawn. Likewise, the 220 students never witness the WFs being directed by the course instructor or the WC coordinator. They have clearly been endorsed, but since the WFs are not embedded in the classroom, they do not occupy the same vertical relationship to the instructor.

Our assessment of the WF student surveys led us to identify additional essential ingredients of this integration that had already been included but that we had originally underemphasized or overlooked:

- providing peer tutors with readings that train them for metacognitive scaffolding (underemphasized)
- training peer tutors to reflect metacognitively on their tutoring practices (overlooked).

Following Cairns and Anderson (2008), we now theorize that one of the most essential elements (that we had not fully appreciated prior to the WF survey assessment) was encouraging WFs to use their own judgement about when and how to provide guidance in higher order critical thinking. Cairns and Anderson noted the importance of working out the tutor's role "within deliberately vague, loosely defined requirements" (para. 6). In our model, the most important loosely defined requirement is our "Open-ended Instruction" that WFs apply their WC tutor training (see Structural Elements, above).

Grimm's (2011) description of successful student collaboration offers another foundational principle we had not initially recognized as essential to the WF decentering of the classroom: "Because peer tutors are involved in the authentic practice of the university, they are also opening that practice to their fellow students, particularly if we avoid restricting what they share" and "encourage semester-long appointments so meaningful learning relationships can develop" (p. 98).

In light of these implications, we have decided to formalize two new elements in our WF attachment model:

- **Optional Student-Faculty-WF Conference:** We will invite WFs to the initial 20-minute brainstorming paper conference session to capitalize on their vital role as listeners and brainstormers in the exciting process of identifying questions and possible thesis claims. This was a suggestion from a WF who serendipitously attended one such conference.
- **WF Presentations**: We will invite WFs to present their ENG 220 presentations to the class as a model for current 220 students. And we will invite WFs to the 220 student presentations. Note: Students' presentations formed the basis for their final papers, so they are crucial to the higher level thinking/revision process required in the final paper.

Both of these new elements will hopefully augment the authority of the WFs to "decenter" the instructor as the sole authority in the class (Spigelman and Grobman, p. 8) in order to enhance their role as active and equal participants in a directed exchange of ideas for the benefit of the student writer, while also creating the boomerang effect noted by WFs who reported that they were re-learning content and skills.

Assessment Limitations and Opportunities for Further Study
Perhaps the most troubling puzzle that emerged from this assessment was that the evidence of higher level collaboration and concomitant excitement revealed in the WF surveys was not matched by the informal feedback from the ENG 220 students themselves. Since (unlike

the WFs) these students had not experienced the course without WFs, it is possible that they took the added resource of the WFs for granted. It is also possible that they did not recognize what and how they were learning in their tutorials, since they did not have the benefit of the theoretical context provided in WC tutor training. We may learn more if we request feedback from ENG 220 students immediately following each tutorial.

The increased quality of the written assignments in the course also requires further formal assessment. Admittedly, it will be difficult to design an assessment that quantifies the clearer thesis ideas and better use of evidence we think we are seeing.

The role of the WFs in the transfer of skills is an additional element that warrants further assessment and/or enhancement. Salomon and Perkins (1989), gurus of transfer of learning, reminded us that transfer from one learning situation to another is rarer than most educators realize. ENG 220 assignments require students to transfer skills from a similar assignment five times over the course of the semester before transferring these skills again to their presentations and final papers. This gateway course stresses that these skills must also be transferred to future writing and thinking situations. The WF surveys revealed evidence that tutors were indeed actively involved in helping students transfer their learning. The WF who wrote that she "knew to look for improvement next time we met" and the WF who noted "one student who particularly needed help" indicated how well they were able to help students identify opportunities to transfer learning. Perhaps WF training for this course should include metacognitive attention to the transfer of learning. This type of peer guidance cannot be replicated by instructors who are typically separated from the undergraduate experience by a decade or more of specialized training. Students who have recently completed a course are in a unique position to communicate with current students about which elements of that course they found useful for future transfer.

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APPENDIX

WRITING FELLOW SURVEY RESPONSES

1. DID THE EXPERIENCE AS A WRITING FELLOW IN ENGLISH 220 (LITERARY ANALYSIS) SEEM DIFFERENT TO YOU THAN YOUR REGULAR WORK AS A WRITING TUTOR? IF SO, HOW?

[1] Yes, being a writing fellow was different than my regular work as a writing tutor because as a WF I had much more context and knowledge about the assignment, the student, the course, and the professor. During my regular tutoring hours, I had no idea who might walk in that door, what they might be working on, who their professor was, or anything about the student. As a WF it was great to be able to communicate with the professor and student beforehand and know ahead of time what the student would be meeting with me for. I could read up on the assignment and prepare ahead of time, and often I'd be able to signal to the student what they would need to bring to the session (such as a book) and what the professor wanted us to make sure we covered during the session. Sometimes I would also have the student email me their paper beforehand so I could read it before our meeting if I had extra time, so we could get right into the conversation when they arrived. I felt these preparations made me better able to help the student and have more time in a session to have meaningful conversation. Additionally, I had previously completed most of the assignment myself with the same professor, so I could offer tips and information drawn from my own experiences when I took the class. The students seemed to "trust" me more since they knew I was coming from a place of having been where they were at the time. It also helped that I had a rapport with many of my students because we tended to all be of the same major and had other classes together, so that established a level of comfort that allowed us to have even better conversations. I noticed the quality of the conversations were higher as well, because we could both reciprocate having similar knowledge, having taken the same class, as opposed to speaking with a student with an assignment/professor/course with which I was unfamiliar. Meeting with the same student over a semester helped me keep track of their progress/weak spots that needed to be addressed (I could note that a certain student struggled with comma splices and be sure to watch for that the next time, etc.) Of course, there were some students who I rarely saw and did not learn about their habits, but even then I was more prepared for our meeting. If I had to sum up, I would say being a writing fellow was like being a more specialized, focused version of a writing tutor.

[2] Yes, the experience did feel different. Having already taken the class and knowing what Dr. Case wanted me to look for in particular, I felt I had the ability to help guide the student toward Dr. Case's requirement and preferences. White some writing skills are virtually universal in their appeal to professors, the instructor's individual requirements can also be an important factor in grading; as regular tutors, we do not always have the opportunity to know a professor's preferences in advance.

Key Ideas:	
1. Chance to talk about ideas	4. High Quality Analysis
2. Re-learning/WF experience a review of skills	5. Directed/targeted engagement in WC
3. Repeated interaction over time	6. WF confidence/Philosophy of tutoring
	7. Relationships

Margin codes: 6, 6, 4, 3, 6

[3] Yes, in general the students were not only at a slightly higher level in regards to grammar; they were always much more open to working on their papers. They were willing to spend more time "getting it right" and even to write more than one draft! I also felt like I had a better connection with the students because we worked with them more than once, which wasn't guaranteed at the tutoring center.

[4] My experience as a writing fellow differed from my experience as a writing tutor because I had more confidence when helping the students. In essence, a writing fellow is a tutor that had taken the same class previously with that same professor. Having taken the same class, I felt more prepared, such that I understood the content and the teaching style better than tutoring a student from a class I had not taken.

[5] This was absolutely a different experience than my usual work as a writing tutor. As a former student of Dr. Case, I knew how she teaches writing and what she looks for in her students' writing. In addition, I had previously taken ENG 220, so I was familiar with the content and topics of the students' writing. Because of this, I was able to provide much more specific advice on how to improve their essays and how to become a stronger writer. What's more, I knew that every person coming to me was an English major, so I was a bit more critical of their writing than I would be for other students in introductory level writing classes. Strong writing skills are absolutely essential for English majors, and peer review is such a useful tool. It's a bit ironic that in my time as a writing tutor, I rarely saw English majors take advantage of the Writing Center, even though it improves writing so much to have a peer give feedback. Finally, I knew many of the students personally, which allowed me and them to be very open about what works and doesn't work in their writing. Being comfortable with one's writing tutor is important in order to ask honest questions about writing and receive honest feedback.

[6] Yes, absolutely. As a writing tutor I typically interacted with students for an hour at most, and it often felt like triage - we worked together to fix the most glaring issues with their paper, but often the more minor tweaks were left off, and I can't remember ever having the opportunity to follow up with the student about how their editing process went, how they felt about their final grade on the paper, etc. It was a really valuable experience, but working as a writing fellow *did* provide those follow-up opportunities, and as a result, I felt that I was able to really track the students' improvements and struggles across more than just an hour's work. Additionally, I felt more comfortable in providing direction, regarding what the assignment was asking them to demonstrate; at times, as a writing tutor, I myself was unsure of what various professors were expecting, and felt uneasy giving students advice when I wasn't sure if it would be ultimately detrimental to their grade.

[7] Working in the writing center usually meant that student writers from a variety of backgrounds had to help other students from a variety of different disciplines. My favorite students to work with were those of my own discipline, English Literature. As a senior, I had had every English Professor and knew the nuances of their classes, assignments, and expectations. I felt that I could reach a higher level of understanding with another English Lit major, especially those in Literary Analysis, because I had been in their shoes, and could

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3. Repeated interaction over time	7. Relationships

1

7

3,6,7

honestly offer advice and insight they might not have had. Whether I or a student found a certain theory confusing, we could have an earnest discussion about the theories and how they worked and applied elsewhere. Either way, we could have conversations that I couldn't normally have with a student during my "writing tutor" hours.

[8] Let me start off by saying that the most rewarding part of my tutoring career at RWU was getting to know the students—not just their writing, but getting to know about their college experience, their interests, and their plans for the future. Sometimes I would feel like I really hit it off with a student the first time I was tutoring them; more often, I felt this relationship start to develop after a couple tutoring sessions. There's a lot I miss about RWU, but bonding with students in the Writing Center is near the top of my list. I took it as a compliment when a student would return to me for help with their next assignment. It indicated that the

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student found my suggestions to be helpful. It also indicated that they were comfortable with me. I know from experience that having someone read your work while you're sitting next to them is, by nature, an uncomfortable experience, because it puts you in a vulnerable position. Helping a student learn to feel comfortable during this experience is just as important as helping them to become a better writer, because accepting and processing feedback is a necessary skill for lifelong learning.

4

Working as an ENG 220 writing fellow, I took advantage of the opportunity to lead each tutoring session with conversations that set a casual tone and facilitated an unrestrained exchange of ideas. Starting a conversation was easy because the student and I immediately had at least one thing in common: we both studied literary analysis in ENG 220 with Dr. Case. Beyond that, we were both familiar with the theories and texts examined in the class, and we both had unique opinions and ideas that we were itching to discuss. Anyone

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who has taken ENG 220 understands that the real learning comes from class discussion; Tyson details the theories, but your peers help you to form connections with other texts and wrap your mind around a new way of examining literature (and of examining everything else, too!)

One of the ways being a writing fellow was different than being a writing tutor is that on many occasions, the student and I were able to discuss elements of the text that were not specific to the paper sitting on the table in front of us. In other words, our conversations

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extended beyond the assignment, while still exercising the literary analysis section of our brains. Discussing other parts of the text or examining the text through the scope of a different literary theory allowed us to trace overlapping ideas, and gave the student the space to form unique connections they hadn't previously considered.

Overall, while we did, of course, spend time looking at each individual assignment—at the paragraph level and even at the sentence level—I believe our unstructured discussions helped the students to improve their writing and critical thinking skills.

2. DO YOU RECALL ANY INSTANCES WHEN HAVING WORKED PREVIOUSLY DURING THE SEMESTER WITH AN ENG 220 STUDENT—AND THUS KNEW THEIR WRITING HABITS—HELPED?

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5

3

[1] Yes! I alluded to this above, but I'll go into more detail with two examples. I had one student who particularly needed help with some of the things that Dr. Case told us to watch out for on a basic sentence level, such as comma splices, run-ons, and the like. I picked this up during our first meeting and had a heads up from Dr. Case. Knowing this, I made sure we spent a good part of our session going over those errors and made a mental note for next time. This student met with me several times to specifically work on those errors and we dedicated a certain portion of our time to making sure we had those fundamentals covered. I believe there was improvement over the course of the semester (I can't remember anything quantitatively right now).

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As another example, I had another student where after our first meeting it became clear that she had a great grasp on the fundamentals and great control of her writing. I would often ask this student to send me her paper ahead of our meeting because I knew we would be having more in-depth conversations about her thesis, arguments, ideas, etc. Sometimes those conversations can be difficult to have on the spot having just been handed a paper by a student in a tutoring session, even if that student is on the level where they could have those conversations for most of the session and spend less time on the basics. It was helpful to be able to prepare ahead of time, if I was able.

3

[2] It was easier to help a student when I knew that they were prone to certain errors (comma splices, for instance), as I knew to look for improvement next time we met. If a student was not showing much improvement, I knew that further explanation or a different approach might be necessary.

3,5

[3] There were a couple of instances where having knowledge of the student definitely helped. I found it easier to gauge what I should be watching most for (comma splices, wordiness, repetitive phrasing, etc.). It made me feel much more effective when working with the student because I could only monitor so many different variables at once.

I also found myself re-explaining concepts less because I was aware of what we had already discussed. We didn't have to start our lesson from scratch each time, instead we had a common jumping off point. It was also really cool to watch their papers improve as they moved through the class.

3

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[4] Yes! I think having worked with the same students repeatedly helped me understand not only their writing style, but also the mistakes they seemed to make most frequently. For example, one student that I worked with repeatedly would add extra commas when there was no need for them within that sentence. After seeing this student a couple of times, I knew that searching and working on this frequent mistake with the student would be one of the components of our time together. (It is important to note, however, that it is essential to not pigeon hole the student as "certain type" of writer.) Furthermore, I found that the student become more open and comfortable to ask questions and defend their writing style, rather than just looking for my feedback.

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[5] I remember very clearly working with one group of students on an analysis of the movie *Mulan*. First, it was very beneficial to meet with each student as they went through the writing process; if I remember correctly, this was a very important essay, so I met multiple

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[3]

times with each student and I was able to see their essays develop and take form. As an English/education major (then) and as a teacher (now) it's a very cool thing to see a students' writing develop as they put work into their writing. Every student has their own particular writing style, and I became familiar with everybody's style, so I was able to give advice and critiques that wouldn't interfere with their style. I believe it's important when helping students with their writing not to change *too* much of what they're saying; their writing has to be from *them*, and not the writing tutor. As I got to know each students' writing style, I was able to adapt how I helped them with their writing to ensure that the essays were from them, and not me.

[3,6]

[4]

It's difficult to explain exactly what I mean. But it may help to make the distinction that besides checking the accuracy of the grammar, spelling, etc., with these students I gave input on the content of their writing and the strength of their arguments. It's a much deeper level of tutoring than what I would normally do for a typical student in the writing center. It was so much fun for me to have a conversation about the students' ideas and how they would express those ideas in writing. This was a really fantastic program.

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[6] No specific examples come to mind, unfortunately. But in general, I felt as though seeing students multiple times a semester meant that my relationship with them was far more comfortable and consisted of more dialogue than monologue; they were more comfortable asking questions and responding to mine, and it often felt as though we were working collaboratively, rather than like I was just there to "fix" the paper and tell them where their writing needed improvement. I think it was really beneficial to have a baseline experience to refer to after the first meeting.

[3]

[4]

[7] While I hadn't worked with every student in Literary Analysis on an assignment, many of the students were my peers and personal friends, and so what I knew about them, their writing habits, and their work ethic allowed me to go to the "next level" with my suggestions. By this, I mean I knew I could make personal, pointed suggestions and comments about their work and thought process in their assignments. Tutoring them was not so much of a corrective/teaching process, but a two sided discussion of the ideas from the course and the assignment, and whatever piece of literature/pop culture they were also analyzing. Personally, I was never afraid to raise my hand and/or speak up during class. but I know that is not the case for every other student, and I think the ability to have individual tutoring sessions also allowed the ENG220 students to "lay it all out" without having several classmates also pitch in their ideas.

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[1]

[8] As a writing fellow, I had the pleasure of being able to see the students' writing change and develop as the semester progressed. This is something that a tutor is lucky to have the chance to experience—as a fellow, it's built into the job description.

One specific session I remember was influenced by my previous experiencing with the student wanting me to "rip her writing apart." I knew she was very open to any suggestions I had to offer. The surprising part of the meeting was that she lead the discussion, offering her own suggestions for improvement. Her assignment was a short homework reflection detailing parts of the reading that confused her. As a result, her writing was a little

[4]

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confusing, but she was sort of writing her way to understanding. We talked about ideas that needed to be fleshed out more. She pointed to sections where she was afraid she was rambling, but after discussion, we decided that pretty much everything in the sections was necessary to explain how she understood the text and why she was confused. the best part was, through reading and analysing her own reflection, she gained a better understanding of the text and was able to answer her own questions.

3. ANY OTHER OBSERVATIONS ABOUT YOUR WORK AS A WRITING FELLOW IN ENG 220 ?

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[1] I think overall, just like with regular tutoring this is a range of how helpful WFs are. We still rely on the students to meet us halfway and make/keep their appointments with us. When it was not required, sometimes I only saw a student once or twice over the semester. Then there were others who I met with multiple times, with them reaching out to me. I got the sense that they liked having a tutor that was knowledgeable about their class and professor and would be more likely to understand their assignments better than a regular writing tutor who might be a bio or business major (who obviously have the writing skills but perhaps not the specific knowledge of an English course). I think it's a great program to match WFs with a class so the students can have tutoring sessions tailored to their specific needs, and the tutor is better able to meet the student where they are. I think the WF program exemplifies what the tutoring center strives for--to make better writers. Of course, it doesn't always work for every single student, but I had a great experience being a WF and I hope the students liked having me as a WF.

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[2] I really enjoyed revisiting ENG 220 as a writing fellow after taking the class as one of Dr. Case's students! I think my prior experience with the class made sessions easier for not only me, but the students as well. Compared to my work as a regular writing tutor, I felt that the ENG 220 students were more open and eager to talk about the ideas in their papers without me prompting them to "dig deeper." I am presuming that this experience was due to the fact that they knew I had already successfully completed the class, so our joint familiarity with the material perhaps made them feel more confident that they were clearly communicating their ideas.

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I also found it useful that we were helping students adhere to a specific instructor's directions. As I mentioned in my first response, we don't not always have this ability as regular tutors. While it is undeniably important to help with more general writing skills, I believe that being able to handle the more focused, instructor-specific guidelines is also an important skill that will help in both future classes and extend beyond the classroom (for example, if one does not adhere to the specific instructions when applying for a job, the application may be discarded over a simple error).

2

4

[3] I felt like I learned almost as much about literary analysis when I tutored ENG 220 as when I took it. Most of our sessions ended up being discussions of the concepts they were learning rather than discussions of grammar or even of the organization of their essays. It

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was a great chance for discussion, and it made me (and I would assume them) consider ideas I hadn't thought of before.

[4] I have no other observations at this time.

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[5] Doing this program helped my writing, as well. The writing techniques and styles that we discussed helped me to reflect on my own writing practices and helped reinforce the devices that strengthen writing. It was also a lot of fun. I had a blast in ENG 220, and being a writing tutor for the course helped me to almost re-live it, in a way. Also, everybody had such cool analyses about their chosen topic that really made me stop and think.

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Writing this reflection makes me think of another important topic, too. For an English major, going to classes and discussing cool ideas and concepts for a few hours is so important, as is doing the independent reading outside of class and writing essays, etc. etc. But I feel that English majors don't do enough discussion outside of class in one-on-one or small group settings about those literary topics. This program gave me and other students the chance to put on our English hats outside of when we would typically wear them and discuss cool ideas and concepts without any sort of guidance or enforcement from a teacher. The discussions were really authentic, comfortable, and always super interesting. This was really a great program. Bravo!!

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[6] I do want to mention that it really did a lot more than I realized to prepare me for actually teaching my own classes! I teach the mandatory composition course sequence at UC Riverside right now; my classes are usually capped at 23 students, and run for 10 weeks. My experience as a writing fellow laid the groundwork for a teacher-student relationality that I find intensely valuable and generative for both myself and my students, many of whom have schedules full of other lecture-sized classes with hundreds of other students. They're often grateful to have access to someone willing to take the time to walk them through ways of improving their writing and their grades, and I've found that I enjoy this kind of teaching -- seeing my students improve over time, and being able to start off with that "triage" and, in time, move towards fine-tuning things -- more than the quick bursts of instruction that I provided as a writing tutor.

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[7] Even though I thoroughly enjoyed my classes and fellow students during the course, I looked forward to meeting with ENG220 students because they applied their own ideas to the various literary theories. Being able to look at something in popular culture through the lens of literary academia is endlessly fascinating, especially when I remember the ideas later on in life (especially rewatching my favorite movies). I also cherished the thought that I was trusted enough to help other students within the class; during my junior year I worked with Zach Lyon during Dr. Robinson's *Shakespeare* class and even though I thought for sure I was going to fail, he was a huge relief and someone to look to when I was having trouble. The thought that I could be on par with him, in that I had such a solid understanding of a concept to the point that a professor could trust me to tutor, really meant a lot to me.

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[8] It is certainly possible to help someone improve an essay written about a book you haven't personally read; in fact, I must have done it 100 times working as a writing tutor. In some cases, it's even helpful to read an essay with this outsider perspective, because it can

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make it easier for the tutor to recognize when important details are missing from the essay. It can also be limiting, as the tutor is dependent on the knowledge that the student shares.

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In contrast, if the tutor is familiar with the book being examined and the theory being applied, they have a major advantage; this was the case, working as a writing fellow. I was able to make specific suggestions and point out, for example, "In this chapter, remember when this character did this? That's a great example of what you're talking about here, and I think it could really strengthen your paper if you discuss it." This was the basis of some of the most exciting conversations that took place during my writing fellow meetings. Sometimes the student had a great original idea, and knew there was evidence to support that idea, but was having trouble pointing to that evidence in the text. They knew it was there, but were too close to see it. I was able to help point out the evidence, because I was familiar with the text.

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