

Introduction

As an undergraduate, I had the opportunity to work in the University Writing Center (UWC) at IUPUI. This opportunity influenced my life in many ways, but none more important than my teaching. Looking back on my time in the UWC, I did not realize the connection between writing centers and composition classrooms. As a graduate student, I began to read literature that defined composition classrooms and writing centers as separate worlds. However, once I was an instructor, these two worlds were seamlessly weaving in and out of each other to the point that I couldn't separate them. In fact, I didn't understand how one could. I had read literature defining composition classrooms and writing centers as different worlds but was having experiences in the classroom that contradicted this perception, so I wanted to investigate how these experiences influenced my teaching. I sought out literature that explored the writing center-composition classroom connection to look at specific elements of my teaching and how they tied to UWC practices. This case study grew out of the initial challenges I faced as a new instructor, which led me on a journey to find my own approach to teaching composition. That journey resulted in the implementation of writing center best practices, that I learned as a tutor, into my teaching philosophy, and this background equipped me to approach writing instruction as a facilitator, *guiding* students to become better writers.

In my exploration I found literature that insisted practices in writing centers and composition classrooms are not as dissimilar as some scholars believe. In fact, several scholars affirm that the skills tutors acquire can augment composition instruction in the classroom. Van Dyke (1997) asserted that "much of what takes place in a one-on-one tutoring session can be applied by classroom teachers" (p.3). Van Dyke suggested transferrable practices: formative feedback on drafts, student-teacher one-to-one conferences, and collaborative conversation. Another tutor turned teacher, Jackson (1994), touted the impact writing center work had on his classroom teaching and professional outlook; Jackson (1994) encountered "a myriad of writing methods, assignments, styles, and tools that [he] could assimilate into [his] own classroom" (p.1). His experiences showed him student writers' anxieties, underscored the relationship between writer and reader, demonstrated the evolution of process to product, and exposed

him to tasks expected at different levels of English courses (Jackson, 1994). Jackson's experiences also led him to create a workshop format for his classroom. In addition to Van Dyke and Jackson, numerous other scholars (Alsup, Conard-Salvo, & Peters, 2008; Clark, 1988; Collins, 1982; Child, 1991; Gadbow, 1989; Jackson, 1994; Jacoby and Patten, 1991; Rottenberg, 1988; Simpson, 1985; Zelenak, Cockriel, Crump, & Hocks, 1993) have also advocated writing center experience to provide prospective teachers with empirical knowledge.

This case study examines which writing center practices, gleaned from my experiences in the UWC at IUPUI, I've incorporated into my classroom, why I've chosen these practices, and what student feedback reveals about these practices.

Background

As a student, teaching was a driving force behind many of my interactions with peers, whether it was helping classmates understand their assignments or mentoring fellow students. The appeal of teaching was so strong that I even briefly majored in Secondary Education. But after frustration with the program I was enrolled in, I changed my major to English, a subject that seemed to come naturally to me and one I thoroughly enjoyed. After I graduated in 2004, I started the traditional job hunt. During this time, a friend suggested that I apply to teach in IUPUI's writing program. On her advice, I applied, but did not really expect to be hired, because I was 23 and a recent graduate. To my surprise, I was offered an adjunct faculty position two weeks before the start of the fall semester in August 2004.

Given the short timeframe before classes were to begin, I was nervous. I had never taught 25 students, prepared lessons, designed writing assignments, or graded papers. My "teaching" experience was limited to an occasional one-on-one conversation with a friend or fellow student, small group conversations, and two years of experience in the UWC. Excited by the possibility of teaching, something I had always thought about, I accepted the offer. I was to teach one section of W130, the first semester of a year-long introduction to the demands of college literacy, not the standard Composition I class, W131.

Problem

My first few classes were rough. I struggled to fill class time (75 minutes) and to thoroughly address both the needs of the class and the individual needs of the students. I felt overwhelmed and underprepared. Was I really cut out to be an instructor?

Because I was hired late, I missed the new faculty orientation; however, I was required to attend a series of orientation meetings. At these meetings I was the only new faculty member teaching W130; everyone else was teaching W131. During these meetings, the W131 Course Coordinator led discussions pertaining to concepts, challenges, assignments, and questions pertaining to W131. Inevitably, because all of the instructors, except me, were W131 instructors; the conversations usually turned to discussing one specific W131 paper assignment rather than discussing general composition issues, which I thought was the purpose of these monthly meetings. The problem was that my students would not be completing these assignments until the spring semester. I felt I needed broader discussion covering techniques and strategies for developing the writer and moving writers through the writing process. However, what the meetings often covered was more product-oriented—how to get students to produce a particular type of paper (e.g., image analysis). While I took notes and tried to participate, I struggled to connect these discussions to my classroom context, because the information was not applicable to my classroom.

I sought help from veteran instructors and the W130 Course Materials provided to me, but I still felt inadequate to teach my students what they needed. As I struggled to push my insecurities aside, I found myself using UWC best practices and pedagogy to help me teach my students about the writing process and help them develop as writers. I used the knowledge I had accumulated during my writing center training and tutoring experiences to get me through that tough first semester. Without that knowledge, I am not sure I would have survived my first semester of teaching.

Solution

While an orientation experience that addressed my questions about W130 assignments might have helped me learn to manage my classroom and address the needs of my students, such training would have only helped me through that first semester. However, I gradually discovered that my writing center experience provided a foundation for a self-initiated framework that I could apply to the classroom in lieu of my lack of formal training. Writing center theory and praxis informs everything I do in the classroom. They have allowed me to develop a teaching style and philosophy that is student-centered and focuses on conversation as the primary praxis by which I support the development of my students as writers.

In the UWC I have had the opportunity to see the students' perspectives when they came in to work with tutors. I have been able to see what they are struggling with; understand what their concerns are; realize how they articulate (or not) their ideas; ascertain how they interpret the assignment requirements and the guidelines set forth in class; and observe their frustrations with the assignment, the teacher, or classmates. Having observed students' struggles, I have learned that assignment sheets containing complex sentence structures, large amounts of data or directions, unstated expectations, or assumptions of student understanding can lead students to easily misinterpret the content of assignment sheets or class discussions. Consequently, I have made a conscious effort to write my assignments in clear and simple language; walk students through each step of the assignment, while leaving room for them to explore and learn for themselves; be available for students to talk to; show patience with the questions and frustrations the students have and address those questions and frustrations to the best of my ability; respect my students' writing and backgrounds; and provide formative feedback on student drafts. Furthermore, as I have continued to work in the UWC, I have been able to reassess, reflect on, and modify the role writing plays in my life to have a greater understanding of my own writing and teaching processes. This reflection has benefited my classroom instruction because I have continually worked to improve my teaching. Overall, my time in the UWC has allowed me to be a more effective teacher.

While thinking about how the UWC has played a role in my teaching, I have read several articles in which scholars acknowledged that writing center experiences can be beneficial for prospective instructors. In particular, George (1988), in her article “Talking to the Boss: A Preface,” supported the notion that writing centers are “very useful as a context for...teacher training” and that prospective instructors (usually graduate students) “can get excellent ongoing training in a...writing center” (p.41). She advocated using the writing center for training instructors, because writing center tutors stress that after tutoring, they are better instructors (as graduate students) since they “[do not] rely on generalized lessons. [They]...face very particular problems with very practical solutions” (George, 1988, p.41). George (1988) further maintained that tutors must be flexible, sensitive, and wholly open in the acceptance of others. These skills also develop in graduate students who tutor and then teach. George’s statements echo my own writing center experiences, which have given me specific skills to address and adapt to the needs of my students and to become a successful instructor. These skills were developed from writing center practices.

The primary practices used in the UWC engage students in conversation and provide formative feedback during the writing process. Tutors act as practice audiences, adapting to each student’s unique needs by responding to drafts as experienced readers, asking questions about the students’ drafts, and inviting them to articulate their ideas. Additionally, tutors determine where to intervene in a student’s writing process by prioritizing the concerns within a student writer’s draft. Finally, throughout the entire tutorial session, tutors advocate student agency by encouraging students to take responsibility for decisions made during revision.

Evolution of a Writing Instructor

In my first two semesters teaching, I used conferences, group work, and formative feedback to help my students develop as writers.

Conferences

Exploratory talk. I held at least one conference each semester with my students to help them develop their draft ideas through exploratory talk. Exploratory talk allows students to talk through ideas rather than settling on an idea just because it seemed “correct”. Exploratory talk is often used in writing center tutorial sessions, because students often feel comfortable exploring ideas with tutors. Furthermore tutors do not assess student work, nor do they assess the student. Comfort and lack of assessment allow students to abandon the facade of appearing more knowledgeable than perhaps they are; they can ask questions of tutors and explore ideas they are formulating on their subject without risk of being judged. Students learn that tutors will invite student reaction, encourage student input, help the student personalize her session, and turn over the expert role to the student when discussing her topic. These actions further encourage a student to explore ideas that were originally dismissed because they were not viewed as “right,” “correct,” or “good” by the student. Because I was a tutor before I was a teacher, during those first two semesters I often approached teaching with my tutoring experience in mind. In the case of conferences, while I was aware that I was the evaluator and that may have caused some students to feel uncomfortable discussing ideas with me, I aimed to encourage a free flow of ideas and questions to help personalize the conference and establish myself as a resource for the students to use during all aspects of the writing process. Conference conversations allowed students to verbally brainstorm by helping them organize ideas or understand concepts involved with writing more clearly. It often was a catalyst for beginning the writing process (the brainstorming ‘stage’) and reflecting upon what the student knew and wished to communicate. I understood that it was important to embrace silence and let the student writer talk. Murray (2004) said,

If [instructors] expect [their] students to be able to say things that are true about their writing they will. They will be astonished, and in the beginning [instructors] will be too. But soon...astonishment will turn to perpetual delight. [Students] will see what [instructors] see in their texts,

and more...and [instructors and students will be]... able to talk about...writing with such perception and intelligence. (p.163)

Murray's belief that students have a lot to say and possess insightful knowledge about their writings is why conferencing is vital for developing writers. I wanted my students to perceive conferences as a place where together we could develop their ideas and where I would listen to their concerns, questions, and evolving ideas.

Inexperienced writers vs. experienced writers. Furthermore, during conferences, students became accustomed to the language writers use to discuss their writing, and the students slowly made the transition from inexperienced writers to more experienced writers. Students benefitted because they were allowed to affirm their power to discuss writing and make decisions (student agency) based upon our conference and classroom discussions. While tutoring, I regularly demonstrated (model) how an experienced writer discusses writing. I also illustrated how an experienced writer moves through the writing process and how I made certain authorial decisions. As a teacher, I continued to demonstrate how an experienced writer created writing, discussed writing, and moved through the writing process during conference discussions. Such discussions helped students understand the conventions of the academic discourse community and develop student agency.

Student agency. Encouraging students to make decisions about their writing independent of teachers was a key conference goal. Promoting student agency, which encompasses decision-making, responsibility, and voice, is stressed in the UWC, because tutors "cannot force writers to use...suggestions" discussed during the sessions focused on revision (Molinder Hogue, 2006, p.9). In conferences I fostered student agency by giving students options for revision, listening to the students' concerns and questions, and encouraging students to become the voice of authority in their papers, not simply regurgitate information from class or from sources. Additionally, I wanted students to understand that in order to improve in their writing, they must attribute their success to their own efforts/abilities, not the skill of the teacher. They needed to be active participants during conferences. Stressing student agency, a practice in which they (the students) assume responsibility for revision and other choices pertaining to the writing process, often helped students feel more comfortable making authorial decisions and

encouraged them to be more engaged/vocal. K.J. Topping (1996), a professor from the University of Dundee, Scotland and well-known researcher on peer learning, reinforced the importance of student agency stating “tutoring delegates the management of learning to the learners...seeks to empower students rather than de-skill them by dependency on imitation of a master culture” (p.325). Topping (1996) also stated, “Pedagogical advantages for the tutee [from tutoring] include more active, interactive and participative learning, immediate feedback...and greater student ownership of the learning process” (p.325). While Topping’s discussion focused on peer tutoring situations, the advantages he outlined are the reason I stressed student agency in my conferences, and why student agency is at the core of the UWC’s theoretical foundation.

Audience awareness. Considering the relationship between readers and writers was another praxis that students were repeatedly introduced to during conferences. In the UWC, tutors often provide feedback focused on audience, since writing is meant for others (an audience). Because initial drafts are best understood by the writer, tutors work with students to make drafts more audience-friendly, adding detail and elaborating on the thoughts put forth in an initial draft. For example, a tutor may ask a student to clarify a sentence, because the idea presented in the sentence is not clear to the tutor as a reader. Since the tutor is usually reading the draft as a cold read, the tutor can be a reflection of an audience viewing the draft’s content for the first time. Differences in perception between the writer and reader are thus brought to light during the cold read. Highlighting these differences helps students become aware of how an audience views the ideas that are conveyed in drafts. This practice is important since students are learning to tailor their messages for a variety of audiences.

In my conferences, I often framed discussions of writing in terms of the reader to help students understand that they were writing for an audience, since writing is a dialogue between a writer and her audience. For example, I sometimes started my feedback response with “As a reader...” to signal that I was a reader for the student writer. The technique of phrasing feedback from the reader’s perspective placed emphasis on the reader, and particularly on the relationship between writer and reader with the paper as a dialogue between the two. This phrasing helped me assist the writer in addressing matters of audience, genre, and purpose. Moreover, the conversation between

the reader (me) and writer (student) often helped the writer consider other viable perceptions to address in her paper. Readers bring world knowledge to a text and bring a great deal more information than the text itself supplies. That knowledge affects how that text will be understood or interpreted by a writer's audience. Writers must consider what sort of knowledge the reader is likely to bring to the text and whether they need to adapt their message for their readers.

Articulation. Not only did the students need to consider the reader, they needed to learn to verbalize questions and issues they had about their writing. This articulation was often difficult for them because it was new. In a classroom, a student's language develops first socially then individually. Thus, students "will be better able to make meaning if they are able to work in an atmosphere where they may interact with their teacher and classmates before going to their writing alone" (Everson, 1991, p.10). Social interaction facilitates movement from inner speech (speech for oneself), which is abbreviated and best understood by the speaker to a type of speech meant for others (writing). According to Vygotsky (as cited in Everson, 1991), "the essential difference between written and oral speech reflects the difference between two types of activity, one of which is spontaneous, involuntary, and nonconscious, while the other is abstract, voluntary, and conscious" (p.10). Because inner speech is abbreviated, there are often gaps in what is written down. These gaps, such as fragmented sentences, omitted words, unrelated details, and confused structure, are what appear in early drafts. When students then have the opportunity to discuss their ideas, the inner speech becomes more clear, voluntary, and conscious. Through the use of conversation, students can overcome writer's block or gaps in ideas by essentially giving themselves permission to talk through their ideas before putting them on paper or clarifying unclear ideas already presented in a draft. During conferences we discussed ways to refine their thoughts through conversation and develop the vocabulary to discuss their writings. Conferences gave students the opportunity to practice articulating questions and issues they had about their writing, which aided in understanding how they created writing and how they should approach revision.

Flexibility. Conferences also provided me the flexibility that I had become accustomed to during tutorial sessions. This concept is essential in a tutorial session, and

tutors use it to shift their thinking and techniques to tutor any subject, any stage in the writing process, any class standing (freshman, sophomore, etc.), any cultural background, and any writing concern. Such flexibility “provides [writers] with the opportunity to make discoveries for themselves” (Gitterman, 2008, p.61). Thinking on my feet, which I learned as a tutor, prepared me to help students discover, via conversation and questioning, their potential as writers. I also adapted my approach to address individual students’ needs. What’s more, I was able to give each student my undivided attention for the duration of the conference and tailor the feedback. The immediate feedback students experienced through the conference helped them become aware of issues with audience or clarity, and gave them a path for moving forward in their writing.

During student conferences, I knew it was essential to maintain flexibility. I learned at the tutoring table to address each student’s needs, because I had a limited amount of time with each student. A further hurdle, as Murray (2004) said is that an instructor “must always remember that many conferences won’t work—and the [instructor] will probably never know which ones do work” (p.160). Since many factors that influence conferences can be unpredictable, I tried to anticipate potential problems. Consequently, I learned that conference times, rules, or techniques may need to be adjusted, which required an instructor who was comfortable with flexibility. When I started doing conferences, I had difficulty maintaining a strict timeframe. Due to the structure of the UWC, I had become used to a thirty minute session, but I knew that if I wanted to see all my students in the three days of class time I had scheduled for conferences, I needed to adapt my conference time to about ten minutes. However, if a student started to ask a multitude of questions or raised numerous concerns, I was hesitant to cut the student off when time was up. As a result, I let the conference run longer. I ended up being behind schedule and had to arrange an extra day of conferences. In the end, even though I was not able to meet with my students for as long as a UWC session, the students seemed excited and interested in their work and had a great deal to say.

Prioritizing concerns. Prioritizing concerns, in which the tutor differentiates between High Order Concerns (HOCs) and Low Order Concerns (LOCs) during the earlier stages of the students’ writing processes, was another best practice incorporated

into conferences. HOCs guide students as to what concern(s) should be addressed first. The value of HOCs is keeping students focused on assignment sheet requirements and focused on the message (content) being communicated. Additionally, HOCs help students discern when to address content and when to address editing and proofreading (LOCs). This discernment is especially important in college writing. In conferences, I often asked students to voice their top concerns. However, I prioritized concerns based both (1) on what the students said, and (2) on what I saw in drafts during the session. I did this because students sometimes are not sure what concern(s) should be addressed first. That is when I stepped in and suggested a direction/priority. Furthermore, I often explained to students why I prioritized concerns so that they understood why I didn't only focus on what they chose to focus on, such as a LOC vs. a HOC. For example, if a student came to a conference wanting to work on a thesis statement for a narrative essay that inappropriately had an argumentative structure, I would suggest we review the assignment sheet rather than focus on the thesis and discuss ways to revise the paper from an argument to a narrative. In such a case, fulfillment of the assignment was a higher priority than revision of a thesis statement, because even if the draft had a concise and focused thesis, the assignment requirements would not have been met.

As students' writing processes progressed, their concerns shifted. Once organization, purpose, content clarity, and audience are addressed, students moved onto LOCs, such as grammar and formatting. Prioritizing concerns also allowed students to refine their writing processes to create drafts that were focused and had a clear message in addition to being punctuated and formatted "correctly".

Use of questions. Another best practice taken from tutoring that I incorporated into my teaching was the use of questions. In the UWC, asking questions helps draw out students' ideas who experience the difficulty of transferring ideas from their heads onto paper. Tutors "learn to read the student and determine what kind of question to ask by analyzing where she is in her writing process" (Molinder Hogue, 2006, p.61). Additionally, tutors understand how different kinds of questions can be used to achieve different goals. During conferences I used my knowledge of questions and how to use them to help students "spark understanding, new ideas, or [challenge] view points about a given subject, and...lead students to new ways of understanding writing principles that

may have been difficult for them to grasp” (Molinder Hogue, 2006, p.61). Additionally, I used questions to “lead students to offer information they didn’t know was needed and to clarify their answers through further questioning,” and permitted students to think through the writing process and reach their own conclusions (Harris, 1995, pp.28-29). Furthermore, questions often helped students discover that they were knowledgeable on their subject, that they had valid opinions, and that they were capable of articulating those ideas to an audience.

Benefits of Conferencing on the Classroom

The implementation of UWC practices in conferences during my first semester teaching led to a deeper connection with my students. Through conferencing they became individuals with specific needs instead of faceless entities. My focus on conferences allowed me to realize a student-centered classroom. Based on our conversations, I could adjust lessons based on students’ actual needs. For example, if I noticed during conferences that numerous students had trouble writing thesis statements, I adjusted my lesson plan to address that need, instead of forging ahead with the prepared schedule. Furthermore, conversations with students in my office informed subsequent conversations with those students. I could follow up on individual concerns as students moved through the writing process. For example, if a student struggled with organization in the office conference, I could check that student’s progress in class or in an additional conference and could help the student identify new issues to address as the student continued to draft or revise. Using conferences as a multi-dimensional tool is a direct result of my UWC experience where as a tutor I learned to adapt to the specific needs of the students sitting with me in a session.

Conference Revisions

As I continued to teach, conferences remained a constant in my classroom. Tutoring best practices have also continued to be at the forefront of my approach to conferencing. I have made several changes to the way I conduct conferences to maximize the power of conversation with my students. These revisions are the approaches I use in the classroom today. One way I have revised my early conferencing approaches is by using class time to conduct in-class conferences with students. I circulate around the room during group or individual work time and talk to each student as they work on their

writing. I view such discussions as conferences because the student and I have a face-to-face, one-on-one discussion concerning his writing. I often start the conferences by simply asking the students what they are working on, and if they have any questions or concerns. I try to accomplish as many conferences as possible within the allotted class time (about 50-60 minutes), because many students have schedules that do not always mesh with my office hours. I want to make myself available to them for questions or conversation, and I want to check on the progress of each student and the assignments they are working on. This type of conference starts very early in the semester and precedes the longer conferences that take place in my office. I start early and use conferencing often, with the intention of reducing the apprehension students might feel when they eventually meet with me in my office. The last thing I want to do is stifle any chance of conversation with my students.

The second way I've revised conferencing is by holding two or more office conferences during the semester (at least one before midterm and one before finals). These conferences are longer than those that take place during class time, usually lasting ten to fifteen minutes. I use the time to check on students' progress as they make decisions about assembling portfolios before. Additionally, some students are shy while in class, but they may feel more comfortable discussing issues or questions away from the ears of their classmates.

It is very important to me that I try to conduct the bulk of my conferences in a face-to-face, one-on-one capacity; however, as faculty with heavy teaching loads know, it is often difficult to schedule frequent office conferences. Therefore, I've taught myself to circulate around the room during class time to talk briefly one-on-one with each student. Even these brief conversations allow me to value their contribution to the class; feedback from students indicated that these in-class conferences are appreciated by students. My focus on one-on-one conferences also harks back to my experiences as a tutor. I learned to value hearing a student's voice connected to the draft; adapting this practice in the classroom gives me a sense of how he is progressing in his writing. Non-verbal signals indicate to me places where the student feels unsure or excited about his writing.

I've revised conferencing a third way: via email. As Murray (2004) said, "Writing conferences, of course, do not need to take place in a classroom with a formal structure.

A writing conference occurs whenever writers discuss their writing. This can take place anywhere, and there are other variations that can work for both student and teacher” (p.159). There are times when face-to-face conferences are not possible to conduct and technology allows a fairly quick exchange between me and the students when students need to ask questions or have concerns outside of class. I encourage students to send me drafts with specific questions or concerns that I can try to answer or respond to after reading their drafts. I read the draft and use Microsoft comment function to provide formative feedback. Often students email me a draft, I respond, then they send it back with changes and more questions or concerns, and I respond. This recursive sending and responding creates a digital conversation.

I am aware that there are limitations to conferencing via email, and I am also aware that email conferences are poor substitutes for face-to-face conferences. For example, I cannot observe students’ facial expressions or hear their voices discussing their writing. Consequently, if I find that a draft needs more discussion or questioning than I feel comfortable providing via email, I suggest that the student meet with me to discuss the draft face-to-face. However, if students are comfortable with technology, they may feel more comfortable sending emails than talking to me. These students may resist opening up during face-to-face conferences, but may instead open up in an email. Through our email conferences, I can often show students that conferencing is fairly non-threatening and encourage candor during face-to-face conferences.

Group Work

Conversation. The notion of using conversation to foster ideas and develop writing is another UWC practice I implemented during the first semester. I knew that writing center interactions are based on the theory of Social Constructionism, which emphasizes “the importance of the context or community for which the text is being written” (Clark, 1998, p.14). The principle idea of this theory is that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their surroundings. This is true with writing. As Kenneth Bruffee (2008) stated, “Writing is a personally engaging social activity... [writers] never write alone. Writing opens doors into worlds of conversation with other writers, with readers, and with yourself [as a writer]” (p.8). Bruffee’s emphasis on writing as a social activity reminds me of Clark (1998) who stressed that writing is an activity through

which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constructed systems. Writers participate in a discourse community wherein they share common assumptions, goals, methods of communication, and conventions. One place students learn the conventions of the academic discourse community is in the writing center (Clark, 1998). Tutors and students participate in conversation to develop interdependence among people who might initially see each other as strangers, but who work together to “negotiate with, communicate with, and coordinate with each other” (Brown & Duguid as cited in Bruffee, 2008, p.9). This interdependence helps students realize that writers often create pieces for a community and are members of a discourse community. Since “student essays are often flawed because students do not understand what is meant by an academic argument or how to support their arguments plausibly,” tutors help students become aware of these conventions through their conversations (Clark, 1998, p.15). Tutoring taught me that conversation is a powerful tool for students to learn, because conversation prompts students to articulate ideas in order to reach the specific audience they are writing for. Therefore, conversation in my classroom was and still is foundational. However, I didn’t want to be the one doing all the talking. Consequently, I used groups and group work to encourage students to participate in conversation about writing and reading.

Collaboration. I know that as a student I learned best when I was actively participating in conversation or an activity. Learning theorists support this, arguing that students learn best when they are active participants in the learning process, not passive recipients of information (Jerome Bruner as cited in Clark, 1998). This learning theory is the foundation for the writing center practices involving conversation and collaboration. Tutors want the students to attribute successes or failures to “the internal element of ability and effort, rather than to the external element of luck or change” or tutor assistance (Clark, 1998, p.9). In other words, students must understand that relying solely on others for successful learning can lead to dependency, even impede learning. Tutors’ work with affective issues, such as identifying successes or encouraging confidence in writing skills can carry over into a composition classroom. Instructors can also encourage students to build personal resources and confidence. Equally important, composition instructors can emphasize that writing is socially constructed, not a solitary activity.

Participating in conversation or collaborating with peers or faculty can help students through the writing process as they build confidence in themselves as writers.

Moreover, learning theory, particularly Piaget's work, emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process, and advocates that the responsibility for learning resides with the learner. Thus, emphasis turns away from the instructor or tutor and the content and turns toward the learner (the student). This emphasis switch is a foundational idea for why tutors work *with* students, but don't do the work for them during tutorial sessions and why groups are an important construct in the classroom.

Vygotsky's work emphasizes conversation with others as an essential means for learning to communicate effectively. Essentially, talking in groups enhances writing capabilities, because social interaction is a "‘motivating force’ for the transition to higher mental functioning" (Everson, 1991, p.9). During such social interaction, students order and sort information to produce an effective response. This sorting process also helps students conceptualize ideas in written discourse, because students' language develops first socially then individually.

Therefore, the writing communities created in my classroom helped students develop as writers by offering them frequent opportunities to talk about their ideas with me and their peers as they move through the writing process. In fact, "when...young people form a community—however temporary it may be—they become more aware of themselves, they profit from the [feedback] of their peers and they learn new ways to claim their experience" (John-Steiner as cited in Everson, 1991, p.10). Creating collaborative writing communities tap into Vygotsky's notion of "zone of proximal development." Collaboration or cooperation, according to Vygotsky, increases a student's learning potential and provides a student the capability to do alone tomorrow what he can do in cooperation today (as cited in Everson, 1991, p.11).

Group work in class. Because writing is social and students need to be active to maximize learning, I often put students into groups to do reader response on drafts, brainstorm and discuss paper ideas, work on purpose and audience, or discuss selected readings. The group work aspect removed the focus from me and allowed the students to take responsibility (agency) for their learning. I became the facilitator rather than the

director. Plus, I found that the students enjoyed talking to each other and seemed more enthusiastic about their writing. It seemed that group work provided a trusting and encouraging way to share writing. Thus, group work, for these developing writers, became a place that fostered confidence and exploration.

Group Work Revision

As my teaching has evolved, group work has remained a constant aspect of my classroom. One revision that I've made to group work is to assign 'home groups'. Within the first few days of class, students naturally group themselves based upon comfort and affinity. I usually ask the students to make groups of four and label this grouping a "home group". In a home group students are asked to exchange email addresses and phone numbers. Because students work with their home groups for the entire semester, the home group becomes a mini community within the larger classroom community for students to rely on, connect with, and work with. Moreover, home groups help students enact agency. For example, if a student is sick and misses class, he can contact members of his home group for information on what he missed. Additionally, home groups provide students with the opportunity to develop trust and friendships. Trust, particularly, is helpful when students participate in reader response. When students trust one another, they are more willing to take formative feedback and use it to revise. I use home groups regularly for class activities. Even though I ask students to use their home groups for most activities, I do occasionally switch the groups to allow students to interact with other peers. This switch is important, because students form their own groups based on comfort levels. Thus, exposure to diverse people and ideas could be diminished. The new audience members offer fresh perspectives for students during the writing process. Furthermore, these fresh perspectives can push discussion in new directions and stimulate new ideas for writing.

Formative Feedback

Another best practice from writing centers I used in my classroom that first semester was formative feedback. Formative feedback is generally defined as in-process commentary that offers guidance and analytical critique, helps writers understand where they are in relation to the learning goal, and increases student knowledge, skills, and understanding in some content area (Boston, 2002; Brookhart, 2008; Covic & Jones,

2008; Law & Murphy, 1997; Shute, 2008). More specifically, McGarrell and Verbeem (2007) stated that formative feedback consisted of taking an inquiring stance toward the text. This feedback addresses the particular needs of the individual writers and often consists of questions intended to raise awareness of the reader's understanding of the meaning of the text. Such qualities of formative feedback are why writing centers use it in sessions. On the other hand, summative feedback is the evaluation *of* learning. Unlike formative feedback, that monitors learning in-process and adjusts for the learner on an ongoing basis, summative feedback evaluates the overall success of a product, the product efficacy. Summative feedback asks did learners do what they were supposed to do.

Formative feedback is more valuable to a developing writer because the feedback occurs while a student is writing rather than after a piece is graded. Comments on a piece that is graded are often less useful or ignored by students. Formative feedback has the intention of enhancing learning for the student so that the student not only produces a better piece of writing, but has the opportunity to learn strategies for writing effectively.

First semester feedback experience. From my first semester to now, I initially approached a student's text from the perspective of a non-judgmental yet interested reader and audience member. Freire (1970) supported this perspective, advocating "The teacher cannot think for his student, nor can he impose his thought on them" (p.64). This "non-judgmental yet interested reader" perspective guarded against imposing my thoughts onto a student's text and facilitated student agency. In the UWC, this perspective taught me to read for HOCs (and LOCs) even when I'm not familiar with a paper's subject (reading outside my discipline) or personally disagree with the paper's stance. The non-judgmental reader perspective allowed me to provide formative feedback by asking questions of the writer to show the student places in his draft where the audience might be confused or need more information and offer other guidance to the writer as appropriate. For example, to convey a reader's reaction, I may have used statements such as *I do not understand this question/statement/sentence*, or *as a reader, I am surprised by the change from your introduction to your text summary; can you help me make that move more smoothly?* Such statements showed writers where gaps in their drafts impeded reader comprehension of their message. Furthermore, since I used very

little directive commentary when providing feedback, students could not just make small LOC corrections, like adding a period or correcting a misspelled word. Many times the feedback prompted students to think beyond LOCs and engage in deep revision.

When I first started giving formative feedback on drafts, I think I took forty minutes per student paper to read and provide feedback. Like many other teachers, I marked up student drafts with comments and corrections. I had seen my teachers mark up my papers, covering the pages with red pen, so reading and responding in such a way seemed like the “standard, responsible, professional way of responding to a piece of...student work” (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988, p.205). Even though the pages were covered in ink, I felt that my feedback would be helpful to students because most of my feedback was not directive (or summative), but formative, providing guidance on how to organize thoughts or clarify thoughts. Yet as the semester progressed I noticed that some students were not always taking my revision advice and that their final drafts still had unaddressed issues with organization, documentation, clarity, thesis, and so forth. So I tried writing in-text comments and questions as well as a small paragraph on the bottom of a checklist/progress report evaluating the students’ drafts in process. Again, mixed reviews; some students took the feedback and used it in their revisions and others seemed to completely ignore my feedback. This sense of indifference or disregard left me frustrated, because I spent so much time reading and carefully crafting my feedback.

Feedback Revision

However, it wasn’t until I took W500 Teaching Composition: Issues and Approaches in the summer of 2008 and read Chapter 16 in *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School* by Zemelman and Daniels that I realized intensively marking up a student’s draft teaches very little to most students. Students will only learn when they are involved in the revision process, not when the teacher corrects everything for them. In fact, most students are overwhelmed by the plethora of circles, scribbles, lines, or comments, even if those markings are interested questions and comments and truly trying to help the student. Furthermore, intensive marking can cause students to question their abilities and if they perceive that they cannot write, they may not try to write. They may lose confidence. Additionally, intensively marking a student’s draft can undermine what an instructor teaches in class. Such

intensive marking teaches students that instructors value perfection rather than developed critical thinking and clear content, even if that is not the intended message. Students do not need to be constantly monitored and corrected in order to learn. Rather, students need encouragement to grow and they need to be allowed to make mistakes in order to develop as writers. Moreover, students often struggle with knowing what to do with feedback received from the instructor. This is especially true if a draft comes back to the student intensively marked. Students may struggle to see through the mass of marks to notice instructor comments on patterns they are seeing within the draft.

Because of my frustrations with students and feedback, in later classes I decided to try modifying my formative feedback via a UWC method. In the UWC, tutors are not allowed to mark on student papers. Tutors want students to take responsibility for their papers and the decisions involved in revising their papers. There is also an aspect of respect that is nonverbally communicated to the students when tutors refrain from marking on their papers.

I have taken this practice into my feedback activities. I provide feedback on another sheet of paper, limiting my comments to three praises, three questions, and three suggestions. By limiting my comments, I am less tempted to comment on every single grammatical error or misspelled word (LOCs) and am more likely to make comments that focus on content and structure (HOCs). Furthermore, I am less likely to overwhelm a student, which allows the student to process the comments and decide how to approach revision. By providing suggestions or questions that pertain to content and structure, rather than grammar or mechanics, I am helping students know what to work on first when they revise. The students can see how to use the feedback.

Even though students have an easier time digesting the comments since there are only nine total, some students may not be able to discern what to do with the comments. In conferences I can monitor whether students understand and use the feedback. I can help students learn “how to interpret feedback, how to make connections between the feedback and the characteristics of the work they produce and how they can improve their work in the future” (Sadler, 1998, ¶ 4). This assistance is important, because it allows students to observe feedback interpretation strategies. Observing how I break down

feedback helps students gain the confidence to apply strategies discussed in a conference to future papers. This confidence may also create motivation for revision.

A bonus to limiting my feedback is that my responding time was cut from forty minutes to fifteen minutes (maybe twenty for a longer and more complex draft).

Questions and feedback. Questions are a central element of formative feedback because questions are used to probe and prompt students to think more critically about the content of their drafts, thus driving forward revision. In the UWC, questions are used regularly to draw out specific details, ask for clarification and elaboration, and build off of what students say in their writing. Additionally, a tutor can use questions to learn what a writer knows and does not know about her subject. By asking questions tutors help writers explore their thoughts and possibly discover something that they had not previously considered. Furthermore, questions allow tutors to act as the interested readers to help writers more fully develop insights and connections between ideas. When students are given the confidence that their work will be treated seriously by their intended audience, that the intended audience will respect their authority, and that their intended audience is interested in what they have to say, students will be motivated to revise their writing (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007). The use of questions helps students take the initiative in revising their drafts.

Because of the power of questions, I use them often, when providing feedback, to help students elaborate on their ideas, create new ideas, see opposing viewpoints, and create new understandings. Furthermore, my questions prompt students to go beyond their initial statements to fully develop the content of their drafts for the intended audience, purpose, and occasion. For instance, a student wrote the following statements in his draft:

I learned that it was all about the confidence in how you spoke to people not what you said to people. Needless to say they helped break me out of my little shell. (Ryan, 2009, p.2)

My questions to him:

How did they (your friends) help you do this (break out of your shell)?
Was there a particular moment this happened or did it happen over time?
Is this important to your narrative of how language affected your life?
How?

This student wrote two sentences that only scratched the surface of why his experiences with his friends and his friends' use of language changed him. He needed to make concrete connections between his friends' language and how his observations of their language usage brought him out of his shell. My questions asked him to elaborate on his statements so that a reader did not have to guess or assume what the writer means.

Feedback via email. It is also possible to provide feedback via email, even though I prefer providing feedback face-to-face during conferences. When I provide feedback via email, I use the comments feature in Microsoft Word. I highlight portions of the student's text and click the new comment button under the review tab. I will add specific questions or comments in the comment bubble. Students like the comment function because it is a visual way for students to connect the feedback to the section of text that prompted the feedback. My intentions remain the same, to provide feedback that initially focuses on HOCs. One bonus to providing feedback via email may be the immediacy. Students can send me drafts; I can respond and send the drafts back usually within a twenty-four hour period. Many times my students and I will repeat this pattern creating a sort of virtual conversation between a reader and a writer.

Continued Evolution

As time has passed (I'm now in my fifth year teaching composition at IUPUI), I have continued to integrate writing center best practices into my classroom. In addition to keeping the conferences, group work, and formative feedback practices from my first semester teaching, I've continued to revise my classroom practices based upon writing center praxis, as well as what I've learned during my MA studies and what I've continued to learn as a faculty tutor in the UWC. Reader response and classroom structure are the latest portions of my class to undergo revisions.

Reader Response

Early reader response experience. Like most composition instructors, I use reader response (also termed peer review or peer response) in my classroom to help students revise drafts. For about three years, I had students bring in drafts of papers to class, exchange drafts with each other, sit silently to read each others' drafts, fill out a peer review form consisting of questions that assessed the format and content and maybe grammar, and hand back the drafts to their authors. Students often left the reader response class without a word said to each other. This reader response set-up often resulted in feedback lacking in content. For example, my reader response form may have asked the reader, *does the conclusion effectively wrap up the paper? Why or why not?* The student usually answered either yes or no. Such an answer did not give the writer any useful feedback. How was the writer supposed to know what was effective or ineffective if there was only a one word response?

About two years ago, I was unsatisfied with the results of reader response. Student responders often did not understand that a simple yes or no does nothing for the writer. Thus, I had frustrated students who found reader response to be a waste of time.

I started to think of my experience in the UWC. Students and tutors foster a relationship with conversation and collaboration. Moreover, tutors frame discussions of writing in terms of the reader to help students understand that they are writing for an audience, since writing is a dialogue between a writer and her audience. Students trading papers and silently writing brief one-word comments on a piece of paper negates any notion of interaction between a reader and a writer. Through this lack of interaction,

students are taught that readers and writers only interact through writing. Furthermore, students may not feel that they are qualified to provide feedback beyond yes or no, or they may not know what to say besides yes or no. Thus, many students dislike peer review and believe that it is not helpful. However, in the writing center, the reader (tutor) and writer (student) interact throughout the entire session. During sessions, writing center tutors become experienced readers for students and their work. Tutors give writers critical feedback on portions of the writing where they are confused or pleased. The student's paper becomes the catalyst for conversation, not a conversation deterrent.

Reader Response Revision

Based upon the principle of conversation used in writing center sessions, I decided to try integrating a writing center tutorial structure into a traditional reader response structure. While reading *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in a Junior and Senior High School* by Zemelman and Daniels (1988), I read "the most frequent problem teachers encounter [with reader response] is that students tend to give one-line comments at one of two unhelpful extremes: either 'It's perfect the way it is' or 'It stinks.'" (p.188). Many times these problems are because there is very little instruction on what formative feedback consists of or how to provide it. Reading the passage in Zemelman and Daniels made me think of Elbow's and Belanoff's eleven different ways of responding to writing, which I used in the Hoosier Writing Project's Summer Institute. These responses were used by the teachers in the Institute respond to each other's pieces in a variety of ways. The responses educated the responders by giving them ways to articulate their perceptions of the writing beyond one-line comments. In *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*, Elbow and Belanoff (1989) also provided procedures for giving and receiving reader responses. These procedures suggest reading drafts aloud, allowing students to find trust in consistent readers, and responding aloud in conversation. Because of these influences, I have designated three days for teaching and modeling reader response.

On the first day of a three-day reader response lesson, I introduce students to the idea that they are readers. This may seem like a foolish notion to discuss with students, but students are often unaware that because they are readers of text they can participate quite effectively in reader response for their fellow writing peers. Besides introducing the

idea that they are readers, there are several other concepts that I address on day one that illustrate how students can refine their reader ability to produce effective commentary for the writers whose work they are reading. First, as a class, I allow students to discuss horrible reader response experiences. Students need to release their fears and apprehension about reader response, especially if students have had a bad experience with reader response, in order to see that reader response can be rewarding for them as readers and writers. I want my students to understand that having a reader read their papers can be one of the most rewarding processes in writing if they work together. Furthermore, I discuss my definition of reader response, and stress to my students that reader response is most effective when they aren't just hunting for surface errors (LOCs) in one another's papers. Third, I discuss both the reader's role and the writer's role during reader response. Exploring roles is important, because writers often feel as if they just have to sit passively while readers read silently through their drafts and make comments on them or questionnaire forms. I want both the reader and writer to understand that reader response, and even writing, is social. Moreover, I want the students to know that readers and writers must work together (collaborate) to help writers produce the most concise piece to present to their audiences. While readers may not initially see the reward in helping their fellow writers; I stress that they, too, will need readers for their pieces and if they want concrete feedback from their future readers, they will need to provide concrete feedback to their writers. Thus, I present the following information to my students on day one:

For a reader, his/her role changes as his/her writer moves through the writing process. When brainstorming, you are co-workers, encouraging each other onward. Your peers need good listeners. When reading first drafts, you serve as an interested audience; you focus on ideas, discuss the subject itself, ask questions, tell writers what needs to be worked on, where you are confused, and what you'd like to hear more about. Later in the process, you are proofreaders and editors, helping your peers polish their pieces.

Readers, be sensitive to the writers.

Readers:

- You should give 'I' messages. *You know your own reactions but you can't be certain that's what the writer intended.*
- Try to respect the writer's aims and help the writer achieve those, rather than trying to rewrite the paper as you see it.
- You can summarize ideas for the writers.

Writers, accepting feedback is part of reader response.

Writers:

- It is really up to you as to what to do with the advice from the readers. On the other hand, keep in mind that you are writing for a particular audience, so you'll need to listen to your readers. For example, if several readers are saying the same or similar things you should consider taking the advice.
- Writers, you can specify and request the sort of feedback wanted from the reader.

After I present what the roles of the reader and writer are, as a class we discuss whether they (students) would change or add anything to the roles of the writer or reader. If they change or add to the roles, they have to tell the class their rationale behind their addition or change. By analyzing the roles, students enact agency because they are contributing to the activity and structuring reader response to be beneficial to them. They also learn the importance of these roles and learn what appropriate or inappropriate actions are for them as writers and readers.

Day two's reader response lesson models reader response for my students. I have two anonymous narratives (usually the first type of writing I assign to my students) that I hand out to the students. I ask students to read silently through the first draft and if they want to make notes or jot down thoughts to do so on another sheet of paper. After the students have read through the drafts, I open with a question. *What did you like about the first narrative and why?* The responses vary, but students can usually come up with several positives comments. My next question is *what confused you in the first narrative?* Students, again, can usually come up with several questions they have for the writer. My third question is *what suggestions do you have for the writer?* Once more, students make several suggestions. Then as a class we repeat the pattern with the second narrative example. After moving students through the second narrative, I reveal to them that they

just completed two reader response sessions. Often, I note shocked faces and ripples of laughter. *Wasn't that simple?* They nod emphatically yes.

Day three of the lesson guides students through reader response with their own drafts. Students are asked to bring a typed copy of their drafts to class for reader response. I emphasize that the drafts do not have to be complete, but they should contain enough drafting to receive feedback from their readers. For example, if the final paper is to be four-to-six pages, I ask for one-to-three pages for a draft. Many of my students have never written more than three pages and drafting even one page can be difficult for them. The goal for the students is to bring something to class so they can participate in reader response and learn the value of a reader. I ask students to show me drafts so that I know who doesn't have one. The students with drafts are asked to pair up. Students without drafts are also paired up. I ask these draft-less pairs to discuss their progress on their drafts, talk out problems they are having with their drafts or ideas, ask questions of their partners, and write down what is discussed. I find it important for these students to participate in the activity even though they lack a draft. I don't want these students to be shoved into the corner and ignored. They too need to understand that they can use their readers to brainstorm. What's more, having these students participate keeps them from just opting out of the activity because they don't have drafts. In the writing center tutors need to maintain flexibility to adjust for students' needs. I've carried this practice into my classroom, and adjust my class as needed for the students.

After students have exchanged drafts, they see the following on the board:

First:

- Writers, create five questions (try to exclude yes/no questions) for your readers about the content of your paper. For example, *how can I refine my opening scene/setting to more vividly create the start of my narrative?*

Second:

- In this reader response we are going to address only the *content/meaning/message* of the narrative piece.
- We will not write on the drafts.
- Any writing/comments should be written on a separate sheet of paper.

Reader Response Directions:

1. Pair up with a tablemate.
2. Writers, write at the top of your paper: My name is _____ and my reader is _____.
3. Exchange drafts.
4. Reader, fill in your name.
5. Reader 1—read Writer 1’s draft aloud to them.
6. Writer 1, take notes on what you are hearing or what you would like to ask of your reader.
7. Reader 1, after you are done reading Writer 1’s draft address the following in conversation:
 - a. Summarize the story’s significance.
 - b. Identify one part that’s good and explain why.
 - c. Ask at least one question.
 - d. Indicate one place where you’d like to hear more (and perhaps why).
8. Writer 1, take notes as Reader 1 discusses the above content. After Reader 1 is done, Writer 1, you may ask two questions of the reader.
9. Reader 1, respond.
10. Then Reader 1 and Writer 1 will switch and repeat numbers 2-9.

The reader response set-up for day three guides students to address and perform four tasks, none of which focuses on grammar or mechanics. This set-up is valuable for students because it helps them focus on what is key during a first reading, comprehension; essentially, does the student reader comprehend the content the writer is attempting to convey. During the reader responses, I continuously travel around the room to observe the students and listen in on their conversations. I monitor the students to make sure they are adhering to the rules. For example, if a student reader is not reading a draft aloud, I will ask them to do so while once more supplying the rationale behind the task. After my encouraging spiel, I will stand close by to ensure that the students are following directions. At the end of the class, I ask students to share their thoughts on reader response. Most of the time students have positive reactions, but the value only becomes apparent to them after several reader response sessions; because as the students become more comfortable talking about their writings, they become more comfortable with giving and receiving feedback. Within this comfort, students begin to realize that readers are offering constructive feedback that assists them as they make decisions about their papers, thus assisting with the quality of the papers’ content.

As the semester progresses, the reader responses also progress. The set-up essentially remains the same, but I ask students to perform more complex tasks with each successive draft. As drafts develop the writers' focuses change from content, organization, and coherence (HOCs) to sentence structure, formatting, and editing (LOCs). Thus, the reader responses must also change focus to help the writers achieve their goals. As reader responses progress, I also encourage student writers to specify what kind of feedback they want on their drafts. For example, a writer may know that he is having difficulty with his thesis statement. He can ask his reader to focus feedback on the quality and content of the thesis in relationship to the content of the draft. By guiding the reader to the type of feedback he needs to revise his draft, he takes responsibility (agency) for his writing by requesting particular kinds of feedback. Furthermore, a writer has the choice of whether or not to take notes during the reader response discussion, and after the reader response is concluded, the writer can choose what feedback to use while revising. This choice helps the writer maintain authorial control over the content within the paper, while refining content for the audience they are writing for, the genre they are writing in, or the guidelines of the assignment. The writer demonstrates responsibility through the development of his voice in each progressive draft. Such decisions mirror those made by writers daily and at every point of the process. Readers also have responsibilities when participating in reader response. Readers are to use "I" statements when they discuss writers' drafts. A reader takes responsibility for what she is stating about the writing, which is important so that the writer understands that the reader is going to respect his writing goals, and so that the writer understands the reader is conveying what she is seeing in the draft, that she is not attacking the writer in any way.

The problem I had before my reader response revision was that students struggled to provide feedback that went beyond "yes" or "no" responses. During initial reader responses, students sat silently and filled out reader response forms. There was no conversation, no discussion of writing or ideas or ways to revise content. On the other hand, conversation is fundamental to the revised set-up of my class's reader response. The perceptions of writing are formed and reaffirmed by the practices and language students use during conversation and everyday interactions. Student writers need to interact with an audience, with readers, something I learned during my time working the

UWC. During my reader response activity, students interact with readers at every step of the process starting with the reader reading the writer's draft aloud to them. Molinder Hogue (2006) stated, "reading a draft aloud can allow [the reader] to become familiar with the paper and second, it allows the writer to hear his/her ideas, which is a difference experience from writing, reading, and rereading" (p.57). In class both the reader and writer benefit from this read aloud, because they both experience the paper in a new way. Moreover,

By externally voicing the writing (instead of reading it silently) the writer is able to step away from [the] personal, abbreviated inner speech to the external social speech. This affords a more objective view of the writing, it makes trouble spots more apparent, and corrections easier to complete. (Everson, 1991, p.10)

When writing is read aloud a writer "hears" his ideas differently. The writer's draft reflects his inner thoughts, which are usually fragmented. Reading aloud helps the writer hear the "abbreviated inner speech" and begin to flesh out those fragments, filling in gaps in content for his audience.

Also, conversation is powerful for students, because most students feel more comfortable conversing about writing than writing about writing. In fact, conversation can allow most students to discuss writing in a nonthreatening way. Unlike the difficult task of providing constructive written comments expected of students in a traditional reader response, conversation alleviates that pressure by allowing them to provide feedback in a way that is more like a discussion of opportunities and less like graded course work. Based on the addition of extensive conversation, students seem to provide feedback that goes beyond "yes" or "no" and invites both readers and writers to explore opportunities for revision.

Class Structure

Early class structure. My early classes often contained lectures, group work activities, discussions of the assigned readings or writings, and reader responses on drafts. These activities are usually also found in most other FYC classrooms. However, my early classroom structure did not allow me flexibility to adjust the structure to address the needs of my students. I was rather rigid in what was done and when. For example, I would always start class asking the students what questions they had about the paper

assignment or reading, move onto a discussion summarizing what they were to have read for class and what was important from the assigned reading, conduct a group activity, and wrap up with a discussion of the homework assignment. Because there was very little flexibility in that set-up, I probably moved from one concept to another without adjusting for the needs of the students. I didn't always consider whether students understood the concepts and assignments. I figured it my job to regulate and task the class, assign papers, grade the papers and the homework. Furthermore, I didn't always give them time to practice writing. However, as I started to become more comfortable teaching and I began to think about my writing center experience, I began to realize that I needed to revise my classroom structure.

In the UWC, flexibility is a key concept used in tutorials. Tutors need to be flexible to address the concerns of the students within the thirty minute timeframe. Tutors are able to start where the students are in knowledge, understanding, writing abilities, and language fluency and adjust the session accordingly.

Based on what I learned in the UWC, I tried to give students more time to ask questions and work on developing their writing, even if that meant that my class schedule often did not adhere to its original structure. Furthermore, as I read Murray, Zemelman and Daniels, Fox, Lamott, Goldberg, Elbow, and other articles or books on writing and teaching writing; I decided once again to revise my classroom structure.

Class Structure Revision

To help me maintain some structure, I have divided my class time into Lesson days and Workshop days. By giving each day a particular purpose, students understand what is expected of them each day. However, within this structured set-up, I adapt class activities and discussions to suit the students' needs.

Lessons. Some instructors function on the assumption that they must teach parts of the writing process in a step-by-step method to help students create the whole—the assigned piece of writing. However, learning cannot be scheduled, which means students do not progress in their writing or writing processes in the same way. Thus, teaching students the writing process step-by-step will not suit most students. Additionally, since writing is not linear, linear instruction can stifle the development of the writer. Therefore, I teach students skills, via lessons, that help them develop their writing, rather than

develop an assignment. By teaching skills, the students learn how experienced writers create writing. And many students find a writing process that works for them.

Learning requires understanding of the material and simply lecturing rarely helps students understand important concepts in writing. Students must understand how experienced writers create writing to transition from inexperienced to more experienced. Lessons are crafted not to overwhelm the students. We discuss one or two ideas and then they practice that skill to aid in understanding as they develop their drafts through writing, reading, and conversation. For example, we discuss invention strategies in class. After the discussion, I guide students through one specific invention strategy, like free writing, to help them understand that skill. Last, the students practice free writing on their own and then share in groups the results and where to go next in the writing process. Participation in class activities maximizes their comprehension of the skill. My lecturing is minimal, but learning transpires through the interactive aspect of the lesson.

Furthermore, during lessons I concentrate on HOCs, which involve audience, purpose, logical structure, and content. Addressing HOCs, as the most important part of writing, follows the UWC praxis of prioritizing concerns. While LOCs (such as spelling, vocabulary, mechanics, and conventions) need to be addressed, I do not address them until students have had plenty of time to brainstorm, draft, revise, and discuss their writing. In my class, low order concerns are dealt with as one of the last steps before presentation/publication.

Another advantage to teaching lessons via skills is that as an instructor I can be flexible. If students need a lesson on integrating sources, I can offer that in the next class we have together, rather than waiting for that lesson to come into rotation on the syllabus. If a lesson is not getting through to students, I can switch gears and adjust the lesson to try another tactic without worrying about ruining my syllabus. Such flexibility allows me to give students what they need when they need it.

Workshops. In past classes, most of my class time was spent having students work in groups or giving small lectures, leaving students little time to actually work on their writing. In this new class structure, I aim to give my students more time to work on their writing, actually writing and talking about writing. It is important that students get a chance to write during class, because there are times when students have questions or

concerns or need a reader. Having the opportunity to ask questions, voice concerns, or request a reader helps students discover what they want to say, because most writers have only a partial notion of what they want to say when they start writing. Students' ideas develop, intuitively, not methodically, in the process of writing; therefore, I set aside one class period a week for students to work on their writing. A workshop is "a regularly scheduled, substantial chunk of class time when students work on self-chosen pieces of writing" (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988, p.89). Workshops are conducted in a similar fashion each time, unless there is scheduled reader response time, which occurs once every few weeks for each major paper. Students come into class and write for ten minutes. After prompt writing, students are given a purpose or completion goal for the workshop. This completion goal is given based upon where I feel students should be in their writing processes (according to the deadline) for a particular assignment piece. For example, the first major assigned piece is usually a narrative. During the first workshop session for the narrative piece, I will suggest that by the end of workshop they should have a free-write or character map completed. The suggested completion goal helps the students learn to stay focused on a task and helps them progress their writing. Furthermore, a completion goal stresses the deadline, which most experienced writers are working against. Students need to understand how to move a piece through the writing process to accomplish a deadline. A second workshop on their narrative pieces may have the completion goal of a page or two of drafted text. I stress that if they have not reached their completion goal, they may need to log extra time working on the piece to reach the goal. Giving students completion goals allows them to begin to shape their agency and also helps promote prioritizing concerns.

Additionally, workshops aid students in agency development, because they must decide how to progress a piece of writing. The goal of the workshop is to help students learn when writers ask for readers or when to move from brainstorming to drafting. Since most students, initially, are unsure of how to progress a piece of writing, I facilitate the movements and decisions for the students through guided activities such as reader response sessions or conferences. But I also allow time for students to practice such movements and decisions on their own to develop their agency. Student writers need to know that making decisions is part of the writing process, even in writing outside

academia, and experienced writers make many decisions about purpose, genre, audience, tone, etc. as they craft a piece. Additionally, decisions of audience, purpose, genre, etc. are important to the piece's final presentation and some students have never had the opportunity to enact student agency where their writing is concerned. Furthermore, students select the piece they would like to work on in the workshop. At any given time students are working on about three pieces of writing. They can choose which piece needs the most attention and work on that piece during workshop. Such a decision permits students to enact their agency.

Prioritizing concerns also aids in a writer's development. As writers learn what concerns are of upmost importance (e.g. a student must have a purpose and audience in his paper before worrying about correcting grammar), they will develop a more effective writing process. Additionally, students have to choose which piece needs the most work. Since students are working on developing several pieces at a time, they must prioritize which piece needs the most development in relation to the deadline.

Another aspect discussed in workshops is the idea that papers do not have to be perfect the first draft out. Many student writers enter a composition class with the mindset that experienced writers write a perfect piece in their first sitting. But experienced writers know such a notion is hardly true. I help students understand that experienced writers move back and forth among the different operations involved in writing through drafting and revising multiple times before a piece is polished and published. To emphasize the need for revision, I have them read "Shitty First Drafts" from Anne Lamott's book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. In this chapter Lamott (2004) proclaimed, "For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts" (p.21). Lamott's words strike a chord with student writers and reiterate what I continually convey; most experienced writers spend a great deal of time with a piece of writing before it is considered a finished product, and many writers write draft after draft or revise constantly before their writing is ready for publication.

Moreover, workshops provide students with time, something many of them (at least the students at IUPUI) have little of outside of class, to work on their pieces. They

can draft, ask for feedback from me or other readers, or ask for one-on-one time (a conference) with me.

In the fall of 2009 I added to the workshop format. I had students in groups of four. During a workshop, these groups completed particular tasks and worked together to progress the group member's writing and papers. One such activity was assigning two students to be discussion leaders for the other two member's papers. These discussion leaders would read the drafts aloud to the rest of the group, and then lead a discussion based on the contents of the draft. The discussions might contain dialogue of what the discussion leader liked, didn't like, wanted to see more of, etc. Then the discussion leader would open up the dialogue to the other workshop group members. Other times, I would pair students to complete reader responses. And yet other times, students worked individually for a time and then gathered with their groups to discuss progress on their pieces. These discussions became an opportunity for the students to talk out ideas.

Writing Prompts

After a 2008 summer internship with the Hoosier Writing Project's (HWP)¹ Summer Institute, I decided to integrate writing prompts into my classroom structure. During the institute, participating teachers were provided a writing prompt to help them with their writing time, which occurred in the afternoon portion of the Institute. Prompt writing is one way to help students (and in this case teachers) with invention (getting started). I enjoyed receiving the prompts and found them useful for starting my writing for the day. Therefore, I've developed instruction and usage of prompt writing based upon the writing center praxes of student agency and conversation to help my students with invention and to help my students become more comfortable with writing.

Many students struggle with getting started when writing. There could be a variety of reasons for a student struggling to write, and there may be a lack of confidence and frustration that follows. This lack of confidence and frustration could be devastating to a developing writer. A student may not see his potential as a writer or even see himself as a writer and thus may shut out the instructor who is trying to help him.

¹ The Hoosier Writing Project (HWP) is an affiliate of the National Writing Project (NWP). The HWP is a not-for-profit professional organization and is one of 200 sites of the NWP in the nation; these sites have promoted best-practice writing instruction to over 2 million educators since 1973's initial project.

Because I view invention as an important aspect of the writing process for writers, I set aside the first ten minutes of each class for writing. When they write I ask them to free-write, a technique made famous by Peter Elbow, for the entire ten minutes. When I describe free writing to my students, I use notions similar to Goldberg's (1986) in *Writing Down the Bones*: Keep your hand moving; don't pause. Don't cross out; don't edit as you write. Because student agency (choice) is an important part of my teaching, I provide students with four writing prompts instead of one (see Figure 1), because providing a single writing prompt eliminates student agency. I provide the first three and the last is always open for their own choosing. I leave the last open to their preference, because I know that the prompts may not always appeal to the students on that particular day. I want to give them the freedom to write what they would like to write.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. If you were a crayon, what color would you be and why?2. Yesterday I caught a 27lbs. catfish...3. Using each letter of the alphabet, create a 26-line poem.4. Choose your own topic [perhaps from your topics list]. |
|--|

Figure 1. A writing prompt given to students early in the semester.

I use multiple prompts to help students understand that as writers they have choices to make, and choosing which prompt they would like to write with during the ten minutes of writing helps students develop their agency. It is important that students develop their agency, because choice and decision-making are a large part of what writers do. Writers are constantly faced with a multitude of choices from the moment they decide to write to deciding what to do with a piece of writing during every step of the writing process. Students need to practice writing and if they do not get the opportunity to practice choice in a First-Year Composition (FYC) classroom, then when will they practice it? This is an especially important question if students have never had the opportunity to enact agency in their writings and writing processes.

Furthermore, at the beginning portion of the semester the prompts are creative in some way, because I've found that creative prompts allow students to feel comfortable with the concept of writing for ten minutes. Now, that's not to say that the first few classes students struggle with ten minutes of writing, but the topics are usually not

threatening to them, especially ‘choose your own topic’. Students, who struggle with writing or writing confidence, seem to find comfort in the freedom to choose their own topic. The pressure they might feel to conform to an assigned topic disappears and they can write from what they know or what they are curious about or even what angers them. Freedom to choose (student agency) allows writing to become relevant and therefore more interesting to the student. Having the choice to draw on their own resources, what they know and what they care about, students may find that writing may not be as rigid as they might have thought; a passion for writing and reading may even emerge. As the semester progresses, I begin to change the prompts from creative to prompts that are based on current news and their assigned readings (see Figure 2).

1. What is your favorite quotation from *Deep Economy*? Why is it your favorite?
2. This was a headline from CNN.com: “Blame Genetics for Bad Driving, Study Finds.” Do you think genetics could explain why some people are bad drivers? First of all, what is a bad driver? Do you think that in the future, people containing the particular gene variant (30% of Americans) identified in the study could lose the opportunity to drive? On another note, what are your thoughts on restricting elderly people from driving? Is there a certain age for restriction? How would you test and decide?
3. You arrive at an annual Halloween party only to discover that someone else is dressed in the same costume as you. Bad things start happening to you throughout the night and you suspect this person has something to do with it. What happens?
4. Choose your own topic [perhaps from your topics list].

Figure 2. A writing prompt given to students later in the semester.

Not only do I provide multiple prompts, I always leave the last one to their choosing. I do this for two reasons. First, as developing writers, students must learn how real writers collect information and develop ideas. On the first day of class I ask students to take about five minutes to list as many topics as they can. These topics should be things/ideas they are interested in writing about. Then I ask students to sit in a large circle, which I join with my own list, and share at least two topics from their lists. If a topic appeals to a student, he can add it to his “topics list”. This listing and sharing activity demonstrates to students that ideas come from inside and outside the writer. This “topics list” helps students collect information to generate writing. Students have the

opportunity to choose a topic from their ‘topics list’ for the free choice prompt option. Second, having a topics list is the start of freeing students from the dependence on external assignments, such as those assigned by the instructor. Often, students are dependent upon the instructor assigning a topic in order to write. The “topics list” provides students with the ability to enact their agency and begin to create writing as real writers do. I further the notion of developing ideas by conversing with my students as a writer talking to other writers.

Another important concept to writing prompts is an idea that Donald Murray (2004) advocated in his book *A Writer Teaches Writing*; teachers of writing must also be writers. The repetition of this notion by Murray suggests that allowing students to see a writer in action is vital to a developing writer. Because of the importance of writing with students to show a writer in action, I participate in the writing prompt activity. Students must see that I, too, am a writer, not just an instructor of writing. Writing with them establishes an understanding within the classroom that I find writing important. Writing with them demonstrates that

Writing isn’t a magic trick to be mastered, but a craft that is continually explored. It is a skill that is alive, ever changing, ever challenging, not the boring old English that so many...students think it is, not a matter of etiquette but of meaning, of discovering...meaning with...voice.
(Murray, 2004, p.76)

Furthermore, it is “important for students to know that their work is a valued part of the curriculum” (Lovejoy, 2009, p.82). If students feel that their writings are valued by me and a valued part of the class work, they will want to work harder to produce a product to show what they can accomplish. A way to convey that student work is truly valued in the course curriculum is how students and their writings are addressed within the classroom. Therefore, I talk with students as writers. In the UWC, students and tutors are both discussing writing as writers. By the end of a session with a tutor, a student usually understands that conversation is important to developing ideas and that the tutor is another writer who becomes a resource for the student. The tutor is seen less as the corrector or instructor and more as a type of collaborator. In addition to conversation used for collaboration, conversation conveys how a writer talks to other writers, how a writer thinks about writing, or how a writer talks about her writing.

During classroom conversation, I stress to my students that we (my students and I) are a community of writers and writers need other writers to help them develop. To emphasize the idea that we are a community of writers, I address my students by calling them writers. For example, I might say “greetings writers” upon my entrance to the classroom or at the start of class. The title of writer is often a new concept for students to apply to themselves. Many students don’t think of themselves as writers, yet I stress, through calling them writers, that they are indeed writers. The students write every day, whether it be text messages, emails, blogs, or love letters. I am just asking them to expand their definition of a writer to include what they do every day with what they produce for my FYC class. I think this mind frame is important for students as they develop as writers.

Another way that I converse about writing with my students is after the completion of the writing prompt for the day. After the ten minutes has expired, I ask if any student wants to share his writing. Through this request, I am modeling the sharing of writing among writers and the fact that writers have conversations about their work. I stress that writers share their work, often with other writers no matter the stage or quality, to receive feedback from an audience. It’s also empowering for the students to feel that their writings are valid and interesting to others. At first, students are reluctant to share, so I share my writing. I read my draft aloud and then comment on ideas I would like to revise. I speak to the students as a writer sharing her piece with other writers. I reveal what I like about my piece, what I would change and why, and what my next step in my writing process would be. I invite students to share their ideas for revision with me.

Within this same conception of sharing my work, I model to students how to use their free writing and turn it into a more focused piece of writing for one of their portfolios. However, there was a time when I took for granted that students would know what to do with their free-writes. One day I was discussing free-writing in one of my W131 Composition classes. Students were to have a free-write completed for their first paper, a narrative. Working on the assumption that this task had been completed, I gave the students guidelines for the next step—what to do with the free-write. I put the directions on the board and asked them to take a few minutes to review their free-writes, circle words or phrases that stood out to them, and either list or free-write on the

identified words and phrases. As I got ready to turn them loose, a student raised his hand and asked, “What is a free-write?” My assumption had come back to bite me. “Well, a free-write is writing without stopping for about ten minutes. The idea is to produce text that isn’t polished, that doesn’t worry about grammar. The goal is become comfortable writing without attention to self-censorship or self-editing, to essentially make writing a habit. You know, let’s just scrap our plans and let’s all free-write for 5 minutes on your first assigned paper’s topic. I’m going to write and project my writing on the screen so you can see it in process.” For five minutes the students wrote and I wrote. At the end of the five minutes, I demonstrated/modeled where to go next. I highlighted words or phrases that jumped out at me, made a pros/cons list, and talked through every decision I was making as a writer on my journey to deciding what I was going to focus my narrative on. After I had finished, I asked the students to model what I had done and I would walk around if there were questions. The students worked for the last few minutes of class. I now know that I have to be continually conscious of taking students through the writing process so that they can develop to be the best writers they can be.

Self Directed Writing

In the summer of 2008 I also took a graduate class (W500) with Kim Brian Lovejoy, a professor of writing at IUPUI, and decided to integrate an assignment we discussed in class called Self-Directed Writing (SDW) into my own classroom practices (see Appendix A for my modification of Lovejoy’s SDW assignment). My decision to incorporate SDWs stems from the impact technology has on the quantity and kind of writing in which students engage. Yancy (as cited in Keller, 2009) observed that “New technologies are driving a greater number of people to compose with words and other media than ever before” (§ 10). In fact, the percentage of writing that students often do outside class far outweighs the percentage of writing done in the classroom (Keller, 2009). Students use technology to write on a daily basis, from Twitter, Facebook, and blogs to texting. What they write on these social sites is personal and expresses their interests and current frames of mind. One way to join in-class writing with what they compose out of class is through SDWs.

Self-directed writing is writing that verbalizes the speaker’s immediate preoccupations and mood of the moment and embraces expressive writing, as defined by

James Britton's theory of development in student writing, to include a student's home language or natural language as well as Standard English (Lovejoy, 2009). In his 2009 article "Self-Directed Writing: Giving Voice to Student Writers," Lovejoy further explained that self-directed writing "always communicates something meaningful and employs language effectively...is often creative and inventive, and is always clear and coherent—all the features that [teachers] expect in good writing" (p.82). The key to Lovejoy's assignment is to give students opportunities to choose their own topics, genres, and language to create writing that is meaningful and interesting to them. Giving students this opportunity, to write pieces that are more like those they write for themselves, can help avoid creating a wall between in-class and out-of-class writing. Furthermore, students are able to become part of the curriculum and part of a community of writers by conveying their interests and views through writing. This assignment also incorporates the writing center praxis of student agency and ties to the concept of writing prompts.

In my class, Self-Directed Writings are pieces of writing that often start out as a writing prompt response, a free-write. Over the course of the semester students probably create about thirty responses. Their goal is to select four responses (two for midterm and two for the final) to turn into a piece of writing for presentation or publication in the portfolio. The progression of the pieces is entirely up to the students. They get to choose the genre, the purpose, the content, the voice, and the audience of these four pieces. The SDWs allow students to enact agency in all aspects of a piece's creation, revision, publication preparation (editing), and distribution (publication/presentation). Even though the pieces are completely driven by the students, they often present SDW pieces to me during conferences or email me to receive feedback, and they usually participate in at least one reader response for each piece selected for the portfolio.

In Lovejoy's (2009) article, one of his students reflected on self-directed writing, "I have never had a class where I can just write about anything" (p.85). This student enjoyed the self-directed writing because he or she was able to enact his or her agency, which was new to him or her. The student testimonials expressed in Lovejoy's article demonstrate that self-directed writings are "one way to engage students by giving them choice and the freedom to write on topics important to them" (Lovejoy, 2009, p.85). When students are interested in what they are writing, they become invested in the pieces

they create. Such an investment is often reflected in the quality of writing submitted in portfolios.

Significance

The purpose of implementing UWC praxis into my FYC classroom was to assist students in improving their writing skills and develop an effective teaching style. What has emerged from this implementation is a focus on conversation between writers. My students are repeatedly exposed to the idea of the role of conversation in writing, which is a vital component of UWC activities and literature. Through conversation students discover how writers talk, invent, compose, revise, share, edit, and learn. The result of this crucial discovery for students is that writing is no longer a mystery. They learn that writing, which is present in all facets of their lives, can be improved with practice, and they learn how to accomplish that improvement. For FYC instructors, using conversation can help students improve their writing skills, not just improve their papers.

My integration of UWC praxes into my classroom has created a classroom that is student-centered. At first, my integration of writing center praxes was non-intentional. It was more of a survival instinct that caused me to rely on these praxes; however, as I grew as an instructor, my integration became more intentional. In fact, I find it important to build bridges between the classroom and the writing center because this link “results in...enhanced learning opportunities for the students” (Masiello and Hayward, 1991, p.73). Moreover, “the writing center is also a resource for faculty for various kinds of writing assignments (outside of the traditional paper) that...effectively improve student learning” (Bodmer as cited in Turner, 2007, p.47). Faculty, who tutor in addition to teaching in the classroom, are exposed to new options for assignments written by colleagues as well as how the students of their colleagues react to those assignments. Because writing center experience provides faculty with opportunities to encounter student perspectives outside of the classroom, writing center faculty come away with transferable skills that inform classroom practices. Essentially, “writing centers [are] helping to redefine what it means to teach writing...In tandem with the...theories of composition that emphasize process, the teaching practices of writing centers are influencing the way writing is taught in the classroom” (Hawkins, 1982, p.xii). This experience coupled with previous theoretical scholarship often redefines how an

instructor approaches teaching writing—assignments, activities, evaluation, conferences, and so on.

For beginning writing instructors, UWC praxis implementation in FYC classrooms gives these instructors a pragmatic foundation for addressing the needs of their student writers. This foundation can help prospective instructors develop collaborative, student-centered classrooms, which according to Stephen North is one of two powerful contemporary perspectives on writing instruction. North (1995) maintained that “writing curricula needs to be student-centered” (p.76). By stressing conversation among a community of writers, beginning instructors can create that desired student-centered classroom.

Furthermore, student feedback indicates a positive response to the integration of UWC practices into the classroom. The feedback I’ve received is from portfolio reflections (both Final and Midterm), from conference discussions, and from surveys handed out to students at the end of the semester designed to improve my teaching or refine my classroom practices. The subsequent discussion is a sampling, while limited and informal, of student responses that are testimony to the success of these practices.

Student Responses

Reader response. In a recent conference conversation with a male student, he revealed that he did not enjoy the guided reader response, because he had trouble ignoring grammar mistakes. He admitted that, usually, grammar mistakes were so distracting that that’s all he saw when responding to a peer’s paper. By following my rules, he learned the value of ignoring grammar mistakes in early drafts. He said, why should I waste time correcting grammar mistakes in a draft that might change and might not appear in a subsequent draft. This student clearly learned the value of responding to Higher Order Concerns (HOCs) before addressing Lower Order Concerns (LOCs), something I hope all my students learn by the end of their semester with me.

Another student wrote at length about her reader response conversations in her Midterm Reflection:

Using [the] peer perspective is the only true way to be able to explore the various sides of your writing...My partner and I read our papers aloud to each other so we could hear the faults we had made. It allowed me to hear how [she] perceived my paper just from reading it...some

parts she stumbled and lost the wording, which gave me a clue to maybe rewrite that part and make it clearer. (Lacey, 2009, pp.2-3)

She said these conversations pushed her writing to a new level. Furthermore, there was a sense of excitement in her writing as she discussed learning to trust readers while watching her writing develop.

During a conference students also raised concerns about responses they received from their classmates during reader response activities. One student raised the concern that his reader wanted him to define every word she didn't know. Ryan felt it interrupted the fluency of the narrative, which covered the language (particularly acronyms) used in the military and police departments. This language is jargon rich, so his reader, who was not a member of that discourse community, was confused. I discussed with Ryan the decisions that writers make to get address their audience's needs. In this case, defining every single word was not necessary. The jargon that was common knowledge to most readers would not need to be defined. In our discussion we found that much of the language was known to most readers. Additionally, I took our discussion into the following class meeting and used it as a teaching moment. I opened the floor to conversations between readers and writers about responding to writing from different discourse communities.

Student conferences also provided opportunities to encourage productive conversations about reader response. And in fact, reaffirmed my decision to move away from having students fill out response sheets to using conversation as the focal point of my reader response construct. Sometimes these conversations were so dynamic that students waiting for their conferences often jumped into another student's conference to contribute to the discussion in progress. One particular exchange turned particularly lively between a male and a female student as they discussed how my conversation format allowed them to focus on content and ideas rather than grammar/mechanics. Students gain an awareness of the possibilities and usefulness of reader response, which is often evidenced in Final Portfolio Reflections. A female student disclosed that

Through the peer...responses, my writing has been influenced. I am not sure why I never fully participated in peer editing or getting others' inputs about my writing in general. I was over confident in my work and never thought I needed someone else's wrong input to critique my work,

or I was too afraid and nervous about someone else reading my work and not liking it. Now I see that my work is not as great as I think it is, and I am able to take the criticism and improve my work. (Daisy, 2009, p.4)

Yet another student observed that a correlation between reader response and students' development as writers:

I think that my peers and I have come to realize that peer reviews are getting easier to do. It is not because we are getting lazy, but it is because we are all developing as writers. I can tell that my classmates are doing better in their writing and I am sure that they can tell I have improved as well. (Samantha, 2009, p.2)

Another student recognized how reader response helped her understand the related concepts of audience and purpose:

[Peer review] feedback gives me information that can help me make my paper more effective for an audience. In high school I had trouble understanding what teachers meant when they said, "keep in mind your purpose and the audience." Wasn't it obvious I was writing [the paper] for the grade? Then I read in our textbook that the audience isn't just the teachers for who you want to get a good grade, but also your classmates or even an audience of your own choice...The paper was no longer filled with sentences made only to impress a teacher; the sentences had emotions that brought the paper to life...[In high school, w]e did peer editing, but we only focused on grammar. This class redefines the idea of reader response; we focused on content and the interpretation. Focusing on content is useful because grammar means nothing if the ideas behind it aren't understood. (Lisa, 2009, pp.3-5)

In the surveys I conducted, independent of university mandated evaluation, students' comments again testified to the advantages/efficacy of a UWC infused reader response (see Appendix B for a list of student comments from the semester end survey).

Feedback. In a spring 2009 class, a student named Jacob often requested my feedback on his drafts. He was a student who, throughout the semester, went through numerous revisions and drafts before turning in each portfolio. And because he was so invested in his writing and revision, one or two (peer) reader responses were not enough. We agreed upon draft exchanges through email so that he could have more access to me than just my office hours. He would send me a draft and I would use the Microsoft Word comment feature to highlight portions of his text and ask him questions or make revision

suggestions before sending it back. Jacob told me several times that he really enjoyed and benefitted from the feedback he received via Microsoft comments, because he said he felt it was the start of a conversation about his writing with me (see Appendix C for a sample of my Microsoft comments to Jacob). I had always found our conferences productive, but to him these email exchanges were like another type of conference. I could ask questions, he could answer them, he could ask more questions, and I could answer them. The recursiveness created a virtual conversation. What was even more exciting about my conversations with Jacob was that they could continue in office conferences or in-class conferences. Jacob shared his enthusiasm for Microsoft comment feature and soon I had several students exchanging their drafts via email and using the Microsoft comment feature to create similar virtual conversations (see Appendix D for a sample of a student draft with a peer's Microsoft comments).

Conferences. During a fall 2008 conference, Antwon, who was writing an Autobiographical Narrative (ABN) essay, admitted he was “stuck;” essentially he did not know what to draft. First, I asked Antwon to list the important turning points in his life—the purpose of the paper was to convey a story in which the student tells readers about an important turning point in his life. He listed several on a sheet of paper. Second, I asked Antwon to pick the four most important turning points from his list. He circled four turning points on his list. Third, I asked Antwon which of the four was the most important for him to convey to readers and why. He discussed two that were important to him. Based on Antwon's discussion, I asked him to narrow his top two to one topic. He circled a topic on his list. Last, I asked Antwon to try drafting about a page on the topic he has selected. I also asked him to think about why he chose that topic; what was the importance of the topic that he wanted to convey to his readers. Antwon was so excited that he had some direction for drafting, and thanked me. He did all the work and it was his ideas, and I told him this. By asking an open-ended question to get him thinking about the purpose of the paper and then a few probe and prompt questions to help him narrow down his topic, I helped him discover and articulate what he held inside of him. Antwon's confidence in writing grew from that moment as he realized that he had ideas he could write about.

Student comments on the end of semester surveys also revealed how the students felt about attending conferences:

- [Conferences] allowed me to ask questions...that I may not had in class.
- I liked the one-on-one time and I didn't feel embarrassed to ask a question. If I had a question, you didn't tell me I was wrong, but still told me HOW I could fix it. I never felt dumb.
- I really liked conferences, because it was time for me to fully grasp what needed to be done and how to go about it.
- [Conferences] made me feel more in tune with the class.
- You make yourself accessible to students. I felt that I was able to ask any questions regarding the papers and structure thereof.
- The best thing about this class was the conferences. There were really helpful. The conferences were helpful [;] they helped me understand exactly what was expected of me and how I could change things to [meet expectations].

Writing prompts. Many FYC classrooms employ writing prompts at some point during the progression of class; however, many do not, as evidenced by the following comment Chris (2009) put in his Midterm Reflection essay:

Writing has always been one of the most difficult things I've had to do in school and in life. I believe this is my fourth time in W131 and this will be the first time I've made it far enough to turn in a mid-term portfolio...I have always struggled with what I was trying to say in a paper, and many times I never even got started because I didn't know what I wanted to get across to the audience. (p.1)

During a conference, I learned that in previous W131 classes Chris did not feel that he received instruction or guidance on invention (or time to practice writing) and was so stressed at the thought of creating a perfect paper with his first draft that he never wrote anything, thus dropping the class a total of three separate times because he felt he could not write; he felt he had nothing to say and nowhere to start. However, he signed up for composition a fourth time, because the FYC class is required for a degree, and this time he did not drop. His fourth FYC class experience was in my class. What made this W131 experience different for Chris? Chris believed the difference, for him, was the writing

prompt activity students complete at the start of each class. By writing every day, he said he became more comfortable with writing and the prompts gave him a point of invention. This student's response re-enforces my belief that students can benefit from a UWC infused approach to writing invention.

Other students found writing prompts just as useful as Chris did, as evidenced by the following comments gleaned from the end of semester survey:

- I can see that [writing prompts] have helped me in my writing.
- I thought that it helped me translate some of my thoughts onto paper.
- It helps me get ideas for future writing.
- It was a nice way to get us writing. It got my mind turning.
- I like [writing prompts]; they helped with forming ideas
- [Writing prompts] actually began to help me as I noticed I had an easier time writing.
- [HS Senior]: I found that my writing portion of the SAT was easier after having done [writing prompts].
- I really enjoyed hearing what you wrote.
- I liked writing at the start of class because it got my thoughts going and it helped to get me focused.

Revision. One of the biggest struggles for FYC instructors is to get students to move beyond surface error revision into deeper revision, addressing issues with content and organization. While reading Final Portfolio Reflections, several students discussed their views on revision. Lisa (2009) wrote, "I used several drafts for each of my papers" (p.3). An instructor rejoices when a student realizes that revision sometimes involves writing several progressive drafts for each assigned essay. What's more, to instructors, the realization of the importance of multiple drafts often means that a writer's perception of revision is evolving. Daisy (2009) showcased an understanding for the need of revision,

Reflecting on myself as [a] writer, I am a better reviser now. I did not ever revise in class; I used to write a paper and turn the paper in as is. Now, though, I see that regardless of how confident I am of my work, I still have little bits and pieces of my paper I could improve to overall considerably improve my paper. (p.2)

While understanding that the need for revision is important, a display of what revision entails is even more important. In Emily's case, she realized that revision involved decision-making:

When revising papers, I had to make some important decisions. These decisions included taking into consideration the questions that my peer readers had. Sometimes I did not use their questions merely because I felt it didn't work for what I was doing. (2009, p.2)

Emily's decisions required knowledge of her audience and insight into herself as a writer.

Additional survey feedback. In the surveys students also commented on Self-Directed Writing (SDW) and what they learned in class, as well as provided general feedback on the class and class activities. Generally, SDW comments were positive. Students voiced an appreciation for being able to select their own topics, because they could write about and explore their interests. Comments also revealed that students felt their writing and writing skills were affected in a variety of ways, ranging from specific skills learned, such as "revision is important," to global issues, such as "I learned to become a better writer." This range illustrated to me that many students left class having learned writing abilities that translate into other classes and life. Furthermore, this range of responses affirmed the value of integrating writing center praxis into a composition classroom. Additional comments varied in their subject matter. Some students commented on how the class and class activities were structured, while others commented on the teaching style or approach. In general, most of the feedback was positive. The only negative feedback focused on programmatic expectations that were beyond my control, such as the type of writing assignments required (see Appendix E for a sampling of the additional survey feedback).

East Central Writing Center Association Conference

In spring 2009, I attended the East Central Writing Center Association (ECWCA) conference at Purdue University. At the conference I went to a presentation titled *What You Bring and What You Take: Classroom Teachers in the Writing Center* by Kenzie, Krol, Love, and Seltz, which discussed writing center pedagogy in the classroom. As I sat in the presentation, I was struck by what the presenters were saying about how they used writing center pedagogy in their English classrooms (the classroom levels ranged from middle school to college). Their points echoed my own experiences and affirmed my

understanding of the connections between writing center and composition classroom pedagogy that I found in existing writing-center-in-the-classroom literature. While the presenters' discussion highlighted three important pedagogical concepts² that they transferred to their English classes, they only briefly touched on how a teacher might implement these concepts into her own classroom.

My thesis augments these conference and literature conversations. However, it offers one distinct difference. Unlike the conference and existing literature conversations, which offer general discussions of pedagogy (the "why"), my thesis focuses on the marriage of the "why" with the "how" (praxis) based on practical and professional experience. As a new instructor, I used existing practices learned as an undergraduate to problem-solve the issues I confronted and revised what did not work in addressing the concerns of my students. The strength of this case study is that I have successfully been able to explore and communicate specific transferable pedagogical praxes from the writing center to the composition classroom, which strengthens my belief that writing center experience is valuable for all faculty, particularly new instructors.

² Three pedagogical concepts: (1) writing centers provide practice in talking about writing, learning the language of writers, (2) writing centers address writing holistically, rather than focusing on elements of writing, and (3) writing centers assess the needs of each student and tailor the sessions for each student.

Future

Reflecting on the ECWCA conference, I feel that my own experiences only begin to address the conversations that need to occur between both writing center personnel and composition instructors as well as writing center personnel and writing program administrators. Writing center experience is a valuable resource for prospective instructors that can supply them with pragmatic knowledge on teaching writing. While prospective instructors in their graduate classes acquire theoretical knowledge and apply that theory in written assignments or other class activities, the opportunities to apply this knowledge are limited. These prospective instructors need more opportunities to practice their theoretical knowledge on their future audience: students. Writing center experience can also provide beneficial insight for current instructors that may help them improve their teaching, envision new class activities, adjust to students' needs, learn how to shift feedback emphasis from LOCs to HOCs, or converse about writing. Writing centers can also learn from composition instructors. Composition instructors can teach writing center personnel about instructor expectations in regards to their students' work and tutors' understanding of the pedagogical rationale behind decisions about classroom approaches: how assignments build upon one another, what assignments mean, how a tutor should interpret the instructor comments, and clarification of how the writing center can support instructors.

I call upon other tutors enacting writing center pedagogy in their classrooms to make public how their experiences as tutors impact their classroom pedagogies, thereby articulating the diverse ways writing center and classroom praxis can be entwined. This writing center-classroom connection contests the misguided assumption that writing center and composition best practices differ. This connection also challenges faculty to reflect upon their teaching practices, question those practices, and ask whether those practices shape a student-centered classroom.

I know as I continue to teach, I will further integrate UWC praxis into my classroom, a process that requires continued research. Personal future research might include investigating how to incorporate a Teacher Assistantship (TA), internship, class, or practicum into an existing Masters curriculum for prospective instructors that includes

writing center experience. Research indicates that writing center experience is beneficial for preparing prospective instructors for the classroom. In a recent article, Alsup, Conard-Salvo, and Peters (2008) contended that such experience prompted teachers to learn, practice, and develop collaborative, student-centered classrooms. Writing center assignments or internships provide tangible experience for students where they can enact the theories and methods they learned and read about in their courses (Alsup, Conard-Salvo, & Peters, 2008). “If these theories hold true, transferring the experiences gained as a tutor to the teacher role, then, can help inexperienced teachers and teaching assistants teach writing as a process to students in their classes” (Zelenak et al., 1993, p.29).

In many universities the writing center exists as a resource for prospective teachers but is underutilized because of the misguided perception that writing centers and composition classrooms are two separate worlds. However, as a tutor turned composition instructor, I know that these two worlds are not as separate as many scholars and professionals believe. My background clearly illustrates the value that tutoring in a writing center can have on the teaching philosophies and practices of both new and veteran instructors. The opportunity to experience what a writing center has to offer needs to be made available to prospective teachers as part of their education. Every program should embrace the knowledge that these two worlds have to share with one another and unite composition programs and writing centers to mold/craft instructors (and tutors) the best they can be for students. Providing prospective instructors with a theoretical and pragmatic knowledge base will create well-rounded faculty who teach writing, not just papers. Ultimately, creating a student-centered classroom where students learn to become better writers.