

## **Introduction**

When I hand back a paper to one of my students, I--like many composition instructors--find the student frantically turning past the pages of comments, searching for the bottom line: the grade. For many students, the value of the grade supersedes the value of the feedback, the learning, even the students' own ideas in her writing. While the education system compels instructors to evaluate a student's skills with a mark, a student tends to view that mark as an indication of the amount of effort she must further exert to please her teacher, not as an indication of the quality or impact of her ideas. Although a low grade can motivate a student to work harder, a student must place greater value on what she learns and how she writes rather than what she scores. A writing center is the only place I have consistently encountered this type of attitude.

Writing centers offer a somewhat utopian learning space. A student may volunteer to go to the writing center and work with a tutor one-on-one to improve her individual writing process. Grades are not central to the conversation. A student receives formative assessment in the writing center whereas summative assessment occurs outside of the learning space. The writing center becomes a more "pure" learning space, where improving a student's writing process is the primary aim rather than improving a student's graded product. Most composition scholars and teachers agree that the one-on-one, collaborative tutorial--without the pressure of summative assessment--offers an ideal environment to improve a student's writing skills. Post-process theorist Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch argues that one-on-one, dialogic instruction, like that found in the writing center, is the

solution to the disillusioning fact that the three “codified phases” of the process paradigm do not accurately reflect the writing act (97). Breuch and other composition scholars acknowledge that writing centers “had it right all along”: the act of writing is a process unique to each student, and improving a student’s unique process is best suited to a collaborative learning environment.

The conversation between the tutor and the writer is the vehicle for producing “better writers, not better writing” (North 69). By working under the assumption that all writers can improve, tutors do not treat writing as some mysterious, “natural” gift for few to hone; tutors treat writing as a skill for all to develop. Muriel Harris, one of the leading scholars in writing center pedagogy, describes the three main roles of a tutor using a sports analogy: tutor as a coach, a commentator, and a counselor. Like a coach, a tutor acknowledges the weaknesses in a paper and provides exercises and strategies for the writer to improve her skills. Like a sports commentator who reports the play-by-play of the game, the tutor describes what the student “does” in the paper and gives perspective to help monitor the student’s progress. While the tutor remains on the sidelines as coach and in the press box as commentator, she must also sojourn in the locker room as counselor. Like a counselor, the tutor listens to affective concerns and offers encouragement, consequently increasing student “motivation to continue expending effort on a paper” (Harris, “Talking” 35) while decreasing student anxiety in completing future writing assignments.

While a writing center tutor may view her role as a coach, a commentator, and a counselor, the tutor actually serves as scaffolding, a temporary, supportive

replacement of the processes more experienced writers can manage alone without a tutor, namely, the metacognitive processes of self-assessing, self-monitoring, and self-motivating. Metacognition then becomes the essential factor in adapting writing center practices into the composition classroom. By re-conceptualizing the three roles of a writing center tutor and re-visioning the classroom into a more “pure” learning space, tutor-teachers improve students’ writing skills, increase their engagement, and redirect students’ focus toward the writing process rather than the grade. To demonstrate the efficacy of this adapted writing center approach in the composition classroom, I created an authentic, challenging project in which the pre-project activities, task design, work process, and reflection assignment enact my proposed theory. By adopting this approach, tutor-teachers ultimately empower students and design compositional tasks that act as a catalyst for transforming the way students understand themselves as writers and as students.

## **Literature Review of Metacognition in Composition**

### *History*

In the 1970s, psychologist J. H. Flavell set out to investigate the way people monitor their cognition so they may consciously and deliberately control their thinking to achieve their goals (Efklides, “New” 137). By 1979, he introduced the term “metacognition” when he published a model of metacognition, involving metacognitive knowledge and cognitive monitoring. The construct of metacognition became increasingly popular in education and psychology as the writing process was re-conceptualized (Harris, Graham, Brindle, Sandmel 132).

The leading composition theorists who incorporated metacognition into their models of writing are John R. Hayes and Linda Flower, Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia, and Barry J. Zimmerman and Rafael Risemberg (Harris, Graham, Brindle, Sandmel 139). Laying the foundation for the connection between writing and metacognition are Hayes and Flower, who are the first scholars to use a verbal protocol analysis to study cognitive processes of the composition process. Through their research, they delineated the recursive nature of writing and the sub-processes of the three major stages of composition. In their study, they pointed to the importance of “memory probes,” moments in which the writer calls upon her knowledge of the topic, the audience, writing conventions, etc. (“Identifying” Hayes and Flower 13, 16). These “memory probes” are a precursory concept of metacognitive knowledge. In their model, Hayes and Flower established several tenets of writing: (1) writing is a goal-oriented activity, (2) effective writing requires a variety of mental operations for the author to

achieve her goals and sub-goals, (3) the process of writing is “nested” rather than linear, and (4) skilled writers deal with many demands at once. In 1996, Hayes modified the original model to include two major elements of the writing process: the task environment (social and physical) and the individual (motivation, cognitive processes, working memory, and long-term memory).

Bereiter and Scardamalia focused on the critical differences between the writing process of struggling writers who engage in “knowledge telling” and the writing process of skilled writers who engage in “knowledge transforming.” In the knowledge-telling model, a struggling writer merely writes down the content stored in her brain. In the knowledge-transforming model, a skilled writer engages in repeated cycles of interaction with her notes, outlines, and text she has already produced. As the student continuously develops her text, she continuously reflects on her thinking, considers whether or not the text communicates what she intends, sets new goals, and solves new problems; consequently, the act of writing plays a key role in the development and evolution of a student’s thought and knowledge (Bereiter and Scardamalia, *Psychology* 11). In their knowledge-transformation model, writing comprises four main processes: (1) a mental representation of the task, (2) problem analysis and goal setting, (3) problem translation, and (4) resultant knowledge transforming. The two strategies Bereiter and Scardamalia recommend to improve writing—indicating the most significant difference between the knowledge-telling model and the knowledge-transforming model—are rhetorical and self-regulatory tasks (*Psychology* 6). In other words, regulating one’s own thinking to achieve a goal in a rhetorical situation is a metacognitive

process that is a key difference between these two models. In 1988, they modified their original theory after performing two studies: a student is not simply a struggling writer who always uses the “knowledge-telling” model or a skilled writer who always uses the “knowledge-transforming” model; real students lie somewhere on the continuum between less skilled writers and more skilled writers (Bereiter and Scardamalia, “Cognitive” 276-277). In addition, they conclude that developing expertise of writing requires students to go through several intermediate stages.

Working from social-cognitive theory and self-regulation theory, Zimmerman and Risemberg focus on writing performance rather than writing competence from the previous models. Zimmerman and Risemberg (1) offer an explicit explanation of the way writers exert deliberate control over the act of writing by identifying ten self-regulation processes; (2) describe the way a writer’s beliefs about competence influence self-regulatory actions and subsequent performance; (3) address the way writers introduce mechanisms of change to attain differing literary goals; and (4) attend to the processes of change as writers develop, showing that a writer’s goal is not simply to improve the text but also to improve one’s own performance as a writer.

#### *Definition of Metacognition*

Metacognition has two fundamental elements: (1) knowledge about thinking and (2) deliberate, conscious regulation and control of cognitive activity (McCormick 2003). The three types of metacognitive knowledge are declarative,

procedural, and conditional knowledge. Declarative knowledge includes “information about task structure and task goals” (Raphael et al. 347). Within the context of writing, declarative knowledge may include understanding the purposes of writing, the needs of an audience, the topic, the genre constraints, linguistic structures, etc. In other words, declarative knowledge is “knowing what.”

Procedural knowledge is “knowing how” to apply declarative knowledge. It is the “repertoire of behavior available from which the learner selects the one(s) best able to help reach a particular goal” (Raphael et al. 347). For example, a writer uses procedural knowledge when he inserts key words and phrases to signal to readers the relationship between two ideas or when he takes out or adds information in the revision process to clarify her point.

Conditional knowledge refers to the writer determining the appropriate conditions in which he may effectively apply procedural and declarative knowledge. Within a compositional context, conditional knowledge equips the writer to “critically consider a specific writing task, determine what skills and strategies will best scaffold achievement of the goals for that task, [and] identify when and why to employ various compositional processes” (Harris, Santangelo, Graham 228). While procedural knowledge is knowing how to implement many different strategies, conditional knowledge is “knowing when, where, and why” to implement a particular strategy for a specific writing task.

The second fundamental element of metacognition is self-regulation, the conscious planning, monitoring, and evaluating of cognitive activities. When writers self-regulate, they manage multiple facets of composing, such as goal-

setting and planning, record keeping, reviewing records, producing text, revising, and time managing. While self-regulation and strategic behavior are important to all domains, research has shown that self-regulation is a potent catalyst in the development of competence and performance in writing (Horning, 1997; Harris, Graham, Brindle, and Sandmel, 2004; Harris, Santangelo, and Graham, 2010).

### *The Role of Motivational Factors in the Implementation of Metacognition*

Motivation and self-perception not only influence the way students feel, but a growing literature indicates they also influence metacognitive processes. Because exercising control is an “effortful process” and “effort exertion presupposes motivation” (Efklides, “Interactions” 6), metacognition is dependent upon motivation. Philip H. Winne and Allyson Fiona Hadwin propose a model of self-regulated learning in which “internal conditions—psychological constructs such as motivations, beliefs, and self-appraisals—are factors that influence metacognitive monitoring and control on which SRL [self-regulated learning] pivots” (Winne and Nesbit 263).

Barry J. Zimmerman and Adam R. Moylan agree that motivation is integral to effective self-regulation. They argue that “any complete accounting of a student’s efforts to self-regulate should include not only metacognitive processes but also his or her motivational beliefs and feelings about learning at various points” (305). In their cyclical, three-phase model (see figure 1), Zimmerman and Moylan demonstrate the way motivational sources and metacognitive processes interrelate during ongoing learning experiences.



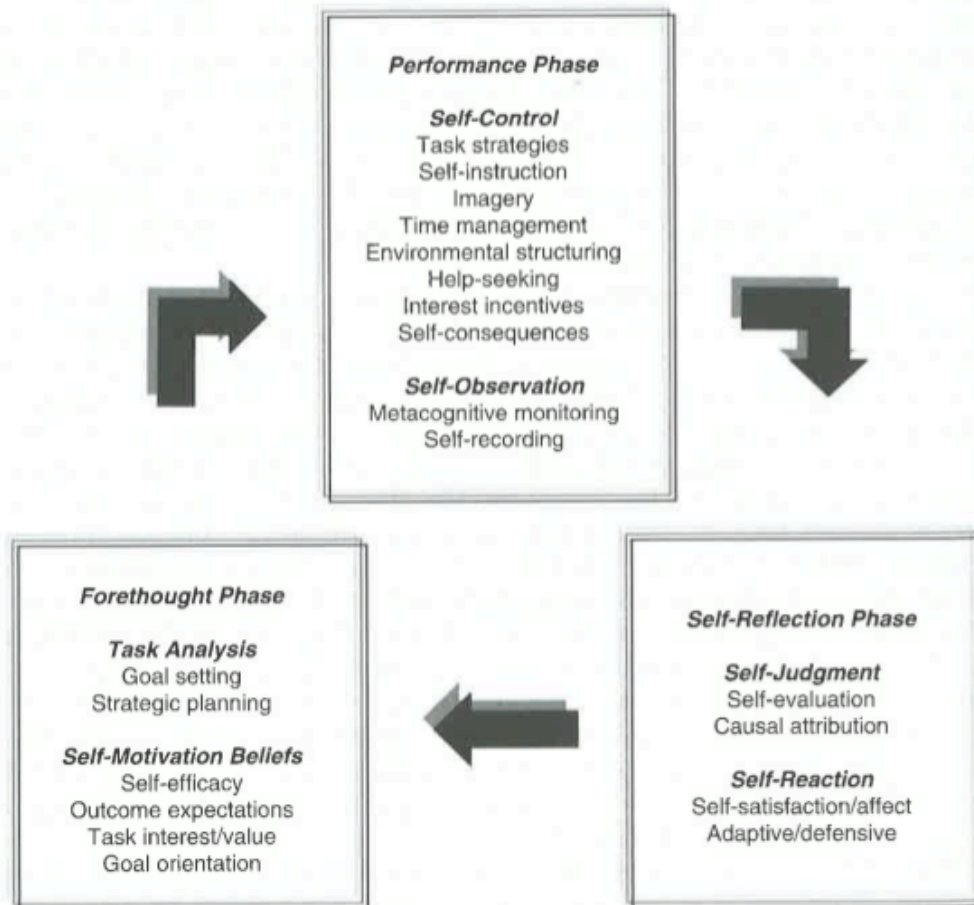


Figure 1. Cyclical, three-phase model of self-regulated learning from Barry J. Zimmerman and Adam R. Moylan, Hacker, Dunlosky, and Graesser 300, Print.

As a starting point to develop their model, they considered the role of the two most widely studied sources of motivation for learning independently: intrinsic value and outcome expectations. Both of these factors are part of the anticipatory phase of a learning experience: the forethought phase. Self-motivational beliefs and task analysis “influence students’ preparation and willingness to self-regulate their learning” (Zimmerman and Moylan 301). The

key motivational factors in the forethought phase are: (1) self-efficacy, beliefs about one's own capability to learn; (2) outcome expectancy, beliefs about the end results of one's performance; (3) task interest/value, liking or disliking the inherent properties of a task rather than its instrumental qualities; and (4) goal orientation, beliefs about the purpose of engaging in learning. These sources of motivation affect goal setting and strategic planning (Zimmerman and Moylan 301). Self-efficacy, for instance, may limit the type of goals a student sets and narrow the strategic choices she views as possibilities. The way a student understands her capacity to learn will also affect the amount of effort, persistence, and types of activities she will engage in during the performance phase. Thus, these four self-motivational beliefs influence a student's efforts to self-regulate her own learning.

The second phase of self-regulation includes the processes that occur during learning and affect concentration and performance. Zimmerman and Moylan highlight interest enhancement and self-consequences as the two factors that are focused toward increasing motivation in the performance phase. Interest enhancement makes commonplace tasks more exciting by increasing game-like qualities, such as competing with classmates. Self-consequences involve setting one's own contingencies for rewards and punishments. These two methods of self-regulatory strategies contribute to students' learning and performance in the performance phase.

The third stage involves processes after the learning efforts that influence the learner's reaction to the learning experience. A student reflects on her self-

satisfaction, her cognitive and affective reaction to her own self-judgments. If the student recognizes dissatisfaction in her reflection, she then deals with the dissatisfaction in one of two ways. Either she adapts by continuing to engage in and modify further cycles of learning or she becomes defensive, averting further efforts to learn and avoiding future dissatisfaction. Thus, the self-reactions in this third stage affect subsequent efforts in the forethought phase of the next learning experience. In other words, the motivational status of the student at the end of the third phase is “predictive of forethought phase motivational beliefs, such as self-efficacy and task interest regarding additional cycles of learning” (Zimmerman and Moylan 305). Therefore, this three-phase cyclical model illustrates that “motivational beliefs are both a cause and an effect of a student’s efforts to learn metacognitively “ (Zimmerman and Moylan 305).

## **What is Already Out There? Current Best Practices of Implementing Metacognition into Writing Instruction**

To uncover how instructors in the past have successfully integrated metacognitive knowledge, motivational factors, and self-regulated learning into their instruction, I consulted meta-analyses of writing instruction and studies in the individual fields of self-regulated learning, motivation, strategy instruction, and teaching adolescents. I discovered seven major practices that overlapped in at least two of the four fields and that repeatedly surfaced from one study to the next.

### *Practice #1: Using Strategy Instruction*

Perin recommends strategy instruction as the most effective instructional approach for teaching writing to adolescents (248). Teachers must focus writing development through targeted strategy instruction. When an instructor teaches students a variety of writing strategies, she equips students with different methods of successfully completing the parts of a writing task. In order to effectively enact metacognition with strategy instruction, a student must choose which strategy she uses rather than following an assigned strategy to complete a task. For example, an instructor may provide several ways a student may choose from to effectively introduce her argument. Strategy instruction also includes possible solutions that help a student overcome her own particular obstacles in her writing process. For example, if a student habitually struggles with “writer’s block,” the instructor may offer a number of techniques to help students begin a writing task. When students learn strategies, they begin “knowing what” they need to complete a writing task;

they begin developing declarative knowledge. When students employ one or more of these strategies, they begin “knowing how” to write, knowing how to use their declarative knowledge. Thus, strategy instruction helps students develop both declarative and procedural knowledge.

By promoting the generalization and modification of strategies from one writing task to the next, instructors develop students’ abilities to determine “when, where, and why” certain strategies are more effective than others in particular writing situations. For example, if an instructor gives the strategy of framing an argument as a response to something others have previously said, a student may learn to modify this strategy when faced with an assignment of writing a letter to a senator, writing a personal statement for an employer, or writing a campaign speech for a presidential candidate. According to Pritchard and Honeycutt, “the rationale behind explicit strategy instruction is that it purposely gives students the opportunity to learn to do independently what experts do” when writing (36-37). By assigning many types of writing tasks over the length of the course and continuously adding to a student’s range of strategies, instructors encourage students to expand their declarative knowledge, increase their procedural knowledge with practice, and develop their conditional knowledge by modifying different strategies for particular writing situations.

### *Practice #2: Demystifying the Writing Process*

Teachers must expose the misconception that writing is supposed to be a simple task; that it is supposed to be completed in three, regimented stages; and

that the text produced can eventually reach a state of perfection. These myths, which students are often quick to believe, create some of the emotional issues surrounding writing. Students form the concept of a “normal” writing process and at the very least become frustrated when they acknowledge that their process is “abnormal” in comparison. The resulting feelings can become detrimental to a student’s outcome expectancy, task interest, and self-satisfaction, all motivational factors that affect the efficiency of self-regulation. Graham and Harris agree that students must broaden their vision of writing to improve their regulation of the composition process (“Role” 224).

In addition to decreasing affective concerns and increasing efficiency of self-regulation, demystifying the writing process will increase students’ metacognitive knowledge. Students must first start with accurate declarative knowledge in order to develop procedural and conditional knowledge. For example, Sitko acknowledges that revision tends to suffer from misconceptions about the writing process. She points out that college freshmen tend to think of revision as changing sentences and words rather than changing global meaning. By correcting this misunderstanding of “what” revision might be, that is, to change students’ declarative knowledge of revision, instructors are more likely to see “deep revisions” in their students’ writing rather than surface-level editing. Once their declarative knowledge includes a more holistic understanding of revision and is accompanied by revision strategies, students will have a better starting point when it comes to actually revising a piece of writing. Sitko agrees

that explicit strategy instruction correlates with demystifying the writing process (106).

*Practice #3: Modeling and Direct Instruction of Self-Regulation Strategies*

Modeling and explicitly teaching self-regulation strategies improves students' procedural and conditional metacognitive knowledge (Pritchard and Honeycutt 34; Graham and Harris, "Role" 223; Paris and Byrnes 189). Self-regulation strategies include asking oneself questions, identifying strategies that have proven successful in the past, consulting a grading rubric or writing goals, referring back to a writing plan, rereading aloud the paper, identifying weaknesses or gaps in the writing, etc. To model self-regulation strategies, an instructor can complete a writing task while thinking aloud in front of her students, demonstrating how writers typically use a variety of different self-regulation strategies. By observing the self-regulatory techniques their instructor uses, students are exposed to more strategies to improve their writing skills and are likely to become more aware of their own use of these tactics in their individual writing process (Paris and Byrnes 189).

*Practice #4: Implementing Collaboration*

In her meta-analysis of writing instruction for adolescents, Dolores Perin recommends collaborative activities as one of the top three approaches.

Collaboration increases students' quality of writing as well as their ability to self-regulate. When a writer works in a peer response group, she not only receives

immediate feedback from a nonthreatening audience, but she also serves as the audience for her peers (Pritchard and Honeycutt 35). Her peers serve as a “practice” audience for the eventual audience—the instructor, presumably—who will evaluate her writing. Because her peers become a literal audience to write for, issues of audience in both content and structure will move to the forefront of the student’s mind during the revision process. Likewise, when the student listens to the writing of her peers, she inhabits the role of the audience, with all of the needs and expectations an audience has. By temporarily occupying this role for her peers, the student may learn how to better anticipate the needs of an audience during her own writing process. Thus, peer response groups function as a way to remind students of the importance of self-monitoring and self-assessing how well their writing meets the needs and expectations of an audience. In other words, a student’s increased awareness of the goal of the rhetorical situation activates self-regulation.

Judith L. Meece expands collaborative practice to include cooperative learning, in which peers function as important models and teachers of learning (40). Meece points to research that suggests cooperative learning activities have a positive influence on students’ motivation, ability perceptions, and goal orientations (40). These motivational factors affect self-regulation. Paris and Byrnes further expand cooperative learning to any dialogical learning, such as Socratic discussions, co-construction of learning strategies, monitoring the use of strategies with classmates, discussing constructed meaning, peer tutoring, etc. Collaborative practices help students “construct more articulate and organized



theories of their academic learning” while stimulating students to reflect and reconsider their own learning process (Paris and Byrnes 189; Sitko 111-112). That is to say, collaborative learning increases students’ awareness of how they learn and helps students articulate the three phases of self-regulated learning. If collaboration improves students’ self-monitoring, self-assessment, and self-regulation, then collaboration improves the quality of writing. Graham and Perin’s research confirms that collaborative arrangements yield a strong and positive impact on the quality of writing (463-466).

*Practice #5: Addressing Affective Concerns and Students’ Self-Perception*

Teachers must address the emotional issues surrounding writing (Pritchard and Honeycutt 31). When a student fails to understand how to apply appropriate strategies when composing, experiences confusion about the nature of the task, or lacks familiarity with features of the assigned genre, the student forms unrealistic expectations and negative perceptions of herself as a writer. Past experiences also contribute to a student’s affective concerns, forming a cyclical, motivational inhibitor to all three phases of self-regulation.

A student’s perception of her own competence plays a role in the motivational factors in the forethought phase, namely, self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, and task interest. To foster a positive perception of competence, teachers must design tasks that help students see themselves as “agents of their own learning who have control over the choice of strategies and volition to achieve their intended goals” (Paris and Byrnes 193). Graham and Harris suggest

another recommendation for achieving a growing sense of competence: have students monitor their own progress over time by keeping a portfolio and assessing strengths and weaknesses of particular compositions (“Role” 224). By tracking their own progress and reflecting on their strengths, areas of improvement, and habits, students begin to see themselves as writers.

*Practice #6: Prioritizing Student Agency*

Teachers must allow students to exercise their own volition. Zimmerman points to examples of tasks that effectively stimulate self-regulation, including ones where students exercise choice over strategies, use of time, outcomes of one’s performance, and physical or social environment (“Dimensions” 9-10). Researchers in the field of self-regulation agree that the task must allow students to initiate and direct their own efforts (Graham and Harris, “Role” 222; Meece 39). Thoughtful risk-taking activates and demonstrates motivation, creativity, metacognitive knowledge, and self-regulation.

Student agency must also extend into the way students treat teacher feedback. Sitko addresses the importance of students maintaining control over their own writing when they receive feedback from their instructor and/or their peers (107). If teachers want to support rather than seize students’ volition over their text and goals, then teachers’ feedback for revision should be treated as a suggestion, not a change that must be made. Rather than demanding a student revise her paper in the way others recommend, teachers must allow a student to choose which suggestions to incorporate or reject in her revision. Sungur and

Senler agree that teachers and students must share power. When students feel autonomous in their learning and realize their own progress over time, students enhance their own competence expectations (Sungur and Senler 57).

*Practice #7: Designing Authentic and Challenging Tasks*

**The Task is Authentic**

Graham and Harris suggest that students' writing tasks should be designed as authentic writing tasks. That is, writing tasks that serve purposes beyond or in addition to demonstrating competence to a teacher. Students are more aware of the social and communicative purposes of writing when purpose and audience are emphasized (Raphael et al. 345). For example, writing an editorial for the school newspaper to raise awareness of a community issue would help students "vividly and concretely see the relevance of otherwise abstract concepts and theories" of writing (Ambrose et al. 83). Knowing that the editorial will be read by others within the community and could potentially improve the community brings the concepts of audience and purpose to the forefront during the writing act. Taffy E. Raphael, Carol Sue Englert, and Becky W. Kirschner indicate that a keen awareness of the two interrelated concepts of audience and purpose are "critical to the development of skilled writers" (345).

Authentic writing tasks are foundational to students' motivation and help teachers reconstruct students' attitudes toward writing (Boscolo and Gelati 206, Kixmiller 33). An authentic writing task can reshape and influence the motivational factors in every part of the learning process: from the intrinsic value

of the forethought phase to the interest enhancement of the performance phase to the satisfaction in the reflection phase. Going back to the editorial example, a student would likely see more value in writing an editorial that could spark change in her community rather than writing an essay intended for the teacher only. With authentic writing tasks, students' active engagement and responsibility for their own work is likely to increase (Graham and Harris, "Role" 222).

Boscolo and Gelati expand the notion of authentic writing to include any writing in which a student expresses her point of view or feeling, expressing her "voice" (206). For example, each student in a class could write an account of her perception and understanding of an event, and then students could share their accounts and compare their points of view. In this exercise, students would express their point of view to their classmates with the purpose of sharing how they see the world and how they make sense of their experience. The audience of this assignment could easily expand from classmates to community if students wrote in a digital space, such as a blog or a public discussion forum. Whether the audience is inside the traditional classroom, out in the local community, or online, authentic writing ultimately helps students enact metacognition and understand writing as a "flexible tool through which many functions can be realized and goals achieved" (Boscolo and Gelati 206).

### **The Task Presents a Challenge**

When instructors present students with a challenge, they impel students to consider or incorporate something new into a familiar learning experience.

Sungur and Senler conclude that “as students deal with more challenging tasks, they become more metacognitively active in terms of knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition” (57). Case in point, after exposing students to discourse conventions of different mediums, an instructor could assign the challenging task of communicating an argument using three different mediums: a written argument, an editorial cartoon, and a collage. This type of assignment challenges students to adjust to the variability and limitations of each discourse while maintaining their perspective on an issue. This challenge serves as an impetus for students to use a variety of strategies to succeed in completing the task effectively. In other words, students must draw on their declarative, procedural, and conditional metacognitive knowledge while self-regulating their learning. Just as Sungur and Senler conclude this point in their study exploring the correlation between metacognition and motivation among high school students, Boscolo and Gelati recognize the correlation between presenting a challenge and stimulating a student’s will to engage in a task in their discussion of best practices in promoting motivation in writing (211).

## **The Seven Practices in Writing Center Pedagogy**

No single theoretical approach to teaching writing in the classroom has yet to consistently encompass these instructional recommendations and task characteristics. However, writing center pedagogy consistently enacts all seven of these practices. Triangulation and the roles of the tutor create a unique environment where metacognition, motivation, and self-regulated learning have the potential to thrive.

### *Goals of Writing Center Pedagogy*

In his seminal article “The Idea of a Writing Center,” Stephen North identifies the primary goal of writing centers: “our job is to produce better writers, not better writing” (69). Most tutors regard this goal as an axiom during their tutorial sessions. By working under the assumption that all writers can improve, tutors do not treat writing as some mysterious, “natural” gift for few to hone; tutors treat writing as a skill for all to develop. Rather than correcting the paper that incidentally lies before a student, a tutor provides strategies that help improve the student’s writing process.

### *How Do Writing Center Tutorials Typically “Work”?*

The training of the tutor, the “cultural situatedness” of the center, and the particular writer who the tutor works with factor in to how much a tutor must play coach, commentator, or counselor. Hobson agrees that scholars cannot view writing center pedagogy as a uniform monolith. The “sense of community that

binds writing centers” creates the base of the theory (Hobson 169). If the roles of the tutor are continuously in flux and are dependent on the tutor, the writer, and the particular center, then the underlying approach of collaborative learning creates the sense of community from one writing center to another.

Collaborative learning serves as the foundation of the writing center community. Collaborative learning in writing centers fosters an environment that encourages student agency. A student typically chooses to go to the writing center “when large-group instruction isn’t cutting it, when textbooks and classroom explanations evaporate into airy abstractions, when generalities fail to make connections to the specific writing task the writer is engaged in” (Harris, “What’s Up” 19). When a student seeks help at the writing center, he seeks help to make those connections between the “airy abstractions” and the specific writing task. When a tutorial begins, a student must become her own agent for change. Both the student and the tutor work together to set an agenda, resulting in individualized instruction that caters to the needs of the student. Thomas Newkirk emphasizes the importance of jointly setting an agenda to avoid “a conference [that] can run on aimlessly and leave both participants with the justifiable feeling that they have wasted time” (303). By contributing to the agenda-setting process, the student assumes some responsibility and gets involved with her own learning.

During the session, the tutor expects the student to not only get involved in her own learning but also to take ownership of the decisions she makes in revising her paper. The student’s decisions become more informed when she dialogues with a tutor. By prioritizing the student’s ownership of her work, the tutor

maintains her roles as coach, commentator, and counselor while avoiding the roles of co-author and editor. North emphasizes this point when he describes the role of the tutor as a participant-observer (70). As a participant-observer, a tutor primarily acts as an interested, educated, and engaged reader. The “practice audience” observes the writing process of the student and asks questions that help coach the student toward making effective decisions for revision. These questions differ from the typical questions current-traditional instructors ask. A tutor does not ask cognitive memory questions in which the student is asked to recall factual information; instead, a tutor typically asks questions that point the student toward improving her own writing. Thus, the tutor helps establish the student as “sole owner of the paper” and the tutor as “merely an interested outsider” (Brooks 223). By making student agency a priority, the tutor ensures collaborative learning in a tutorial and rejects collaborative writing.

### *Triangulation and the More “Pure” Learning Space of the Writing Center*

A tutor is “the middle person...who inhabits a world somewhere between student and teacher” (Harris, “Talking” 28). While a tutor is neither a student-advocate nor a teacher-advocate, she is someone who helps the student make constructive sense of the writing situation. Harris reports that writing center tutors who also teach in traditional classrooms “readily notice” that students respond differently to a tutor than a teacher, primarily because students view a tutor as someone to “help them surmount the hurdles others have set up for them” (Harris, “Talking” 28). Within the concept of triangulation, these “others”



become the third party, the “silent participant” in the writing center (Thonus 61). A third party might be an instructor who assigns a paper, a potential employer who demands a resume, a law school that expects a personal statement, etc. While this third party is not present in the writing center, they are constantly kept in mind by both tutor and student as the evaluating audience of the writing task (Practice #7).

The tacit participation of the third party strongly impacts the relationship between tutor and student as well as the agenda of the tutorial. The type of collaboration between tutor and student may vary based on the personalities of the two collaborators, the amount of time the student has to work on the paper before the deadline, the expectations of the instructor, the clarity of the instructor’s assignment, the student’s past performance in the instructor’s class, etc. Thompson et al. describes three types of collaboration that tutors and students may engage in: dialogic collaboration, hierarchical collaboration, or asymmetrical collaboration (Practice #4). Dialogic collaboration has a loose structure in which roles shift and goals may fluctuate. The tutor and student assume “peer” roles, and the focus is on process. On the contrary, hierarchical collaboration has a rigid structure in which the tutor must assume a more powerful role than the student. The conversation is focused on solving a problem or producing a product. In the study conducted by Thompson et al., they found that conferences in their writing center were “most satisfactory when an asymmetrical collaboration is maintained” (97). In asymmetrical collaboration, the tutor is the expert writer, providing support to help the novice writer achieve her goals. While the tutor has greater

expertise in the skill of writing, the novice has the power to initiate and set the focus and goals of collaboration.

Regardless of the type of collaborative relationship the tutor and student engage in, the tutor gives the student formative feedback that assists the student in improving her process and product. While the silent participation of the third party is a reminder of the eventual summative assessment, this final evaluation occurs outside of the learning space of the writing center. In this way, the writing center becomes a more “pure” learning space, where students and tutors can prioritize process rather than the graded product.

### *Deconstruction of the Roles of the Writing Center Tutor*

#### **Tutor as Coach in the Writing Center**

Like a coach, a tutor provides exercises and strategies to train a student to become a more skilled writer (Harris, “Roles” 63). In a writing center tutorial, a student reads her paper aloud, making the tutor a “practice” audience. The tutor is an educated, interested reader-writer who is “engaged and supportive, yet simultaneously [is a] critical audience for texts in development” (Hobson 166). When the tutor detects a weakness in a paper, she does not mark up the student’s paper in red pen pointing out the errors and prescribing corrections. Instead, the tutor might ask the student questions that lead the student to recognize her own area of improvement. Following the student’s acknowledgement of the weakness, the tutor may offer different possible strategies to emend the writing in this instance and in future instances. Like a coach who models how to kick a soccer

ball to hit a particular target, tutors often model strategies to show the student how to employ them effectively. The tutor, like a coach, is an expert who models and offers suggestions but cannot do the work to improve the writer. Like a novice-athlete, the writer must do the work herself to improve her skills (Practice #6). By providing strategies to improve writing skills in this “practice session,” the tutor prepares the writer for “future games” in writing.

This explicit strategy instruction (Practice #1) assists the student in demystifying the writing process (Practice #2). If a student comes to the writing center feeling paralyzed, with only the instructor’s prompt in hand, the tutor provides different brainstorming strategies that will help the student learn how to explore a topic while remaining within the parameters of the assignment. By modeling strategies and offering several different ways of exploring an issue, the tutor demystifies the student’s misconceptions about the way more skilled writers go about the process. Ultimately, because tutors focus on strategy instruction, which consequently demystifies the writing process, a student not only improves the paper she brings to the writing center, she improves her writing process and skills.

### **Tutor as Commentator in the Writing Center**

While the tutor plays the role of writing coach, she must also play the role of commentator. A sports commentator reports the play-by-play of the game, evaluates the situation, and gives a larger perspective. A tutor-commentator’s role is twofold: reporting and evaluating the progress of the tutorial session itself and

the progress the student makes in improving her writing skills. Harris suggests a tutor provides a running commentary at the beginning of each tutorial session to let the student “see what lies ahead, what they’ll be working on and what the goals are” (“Roles” 64). This way, the tutor keeps the session focused on the set objectives.

By reporting what the student “does” in the paper and informing the student when she starts to take the right track or a wrong turn in her attempts to improve, the tutor helps monitor the student’s progress in achieving her overall objectives. For example, the aim of Student A is to organize her analysis of a poem. During the tutorial session, as the student makes decisions about organizing her writing, the tutor provides a commentary and evaluation of the steps a student takes. The tutor narrates, “It looks like you are taking your initial analysis of the poem and searching for comments that are related to the first stanza. Now you are copying and pasting those comments into a single paragraph. You are repeating this process with the other stanzas of the poem.” As Student A organizes her ideas within the first body paragraph analyzing the first stanza, the tutor assesses the student’s decision and models self-regulation when she says, “You seem to have a split in your paragraph. In the first part of your paragraph, you analyze the images of adulthood in the first stanza, but in the second part of the paragraph, you analyze the childlike sounds of onomatopoeia words. When I see this kind of divide in my own writing, I ask myself about the relationship between the two ideas. Currently, the paragraph abruptly switches topics in the middle of the paragraph.” The tutor may then “take a step back” and give a global

perspective to help the student improve this specific section. The tutor asks, “Do you continue tracing these devices from one stanza to the next? How do they change over the course of the poem? Is there any other way to organize your ideas? Would it make more sense to analyze how the two devices increasingly interact and create tension, or would your interpretation be more clear if you dealt with the images in one paragraph, the use of sound in a second paragraph, etc.? Does the prompt provide any structural direction?” This type of commentary will not only improve the student’s writing skills by positively reinforcing effective writing choices and alerting the student to reconsider other choices, but it will also build her confidence in different areas of writing and assist the student in her ability to perform the skill next time.

According to Harris, “learners need to know when they are progressing (“Roles” 64) toward their goals; they also need to be cognizant of the level of mastery they have in particular areas of writing. The tutor in this scenario may end the tutorial by reflecting on the progress the student made over the course of the session but also informing the student that she might have had an easier time if she thought about the organization of her analysis before writing. The tutor may recommend Student A returns for a session in planning essays to help increase her mastery of organization.

This type of commentary and evaluation during the tutorial serves as an external checkpoint to help the student learn to regulate her own thinking. Ideally, Student A learned from the tutor’s commentary that: (1) she should consider at least two logical ways of organizing her thoughts and evaluating which

organizational method is more effective for a particular assignment; (2) she should consider looking at cohesion and transitions, which may affect content, when organizing; (3) she should think about how each paragraph functions in relation to the rest of the paper; (4) she should consult prompts, rubrics, and other resources provided by the instructor to help inform her decisions; (5) she should try planning her essay before writing to see if it helps her organize her ideas better; and (6) while she has made progress in her ability to organize, she still has more to learn. Now that the student understands the types of questions she could ask herself, the resources she could consult, and her knowledge of her own developing mastery of organization, she can more confidently move forward and begin to self-regulate during the writing process. The tutor's commentary then is an external scaffold, a temporary support to teach less skilled writers the types of questions and actions they can use to self-assess and self-monitor the way more skilled writers do (Practice #3).

### **Tutor as Counselor in the Writing Center**

While the tutor remains on the sidelines as coach and in the press box as commentator, she must also sojourn in the locker room as counselor. To welcome a student into the comfortable, non-judgmental environment of the writing center, a tutor typically establishes rapport with a student. Although this step may look like "small talk" in some tutorials, in others, a student may "unburden" herself from evaluation anxiety, find a "sympathetic ear" in the tutor (Harris, "Talking" 35), or unload the "sociolinguistic baggage" that might block student writing

(Cogie 81). Like a counselor, the tutor considers how affective concerns might hinder the learning process and how different students learn in different ways. By listening to affective concerns, offering encouragement, and guiding a student through a plan of revision, a tutor increases student “motivation to continue expending effort on a paper” (Harris, “Talking” 35) and decreases student anxiety in completing future writing assignments (Practice #5).

## **Relocating Writing Center Pedagogy**

If teachers want to integrate metacognitive knowledge, motivational factors, and self-regulated learning into a cohesive instructional approach, then they must learn to successfully adapt writing center pedagogy for the classroom. By re-visioning the more “pure” learning space of the writing center and re-conceptualizing the three roles of a writing center tutor, classroom teachers can incorporate all seven practices into their instruction to help improve students’ writing skills, metacognitive abilities, and motivation.

### *Maintaining Triangulation and the More “Pure” Learning Space in the Classroom*

One of the most glaring difficulties of bringing writing center pedagogy into the classroom is that instructors must evaluate a student’s performance whereas tutors do not. In the traditional classroom, the final evaluation comes from inside the learning space whereas in the writing center, the final evaluation comes from outside the learning space. In Robert Child’s study on the effects of tutoring on first-time and experienced classroom teachers, he observed that tutor-teachers illustrate similar teaching strategies between the classroom and the writing center; however, the inherent difference between these two environments proved to be the “teaching situations” (171). Summative assessment within the learning space is the major distinction between the teaching situations, pointing to the collapse of triangulation between student, tutor, and teacher. If triangulation is an essential component that makes the writing center a more “pure” learning



space, then a tutor-teacher must create triangulation to minimize the centrality of grades.

To make the classroom more like the teaching situation of the writing center, a tutor-teacher must frame her instruction as a way to help the student meet the expectations of an evaluator outside the classroom space. In a first-year composition course, an outside goal for a writer could take the form of publication or employment. In a secondary writing classroom, an outside goal for a writer could be to prepare for collegiate-level writing courses, to publish creative work in the school's literary and arts magazine, to publish an editorial in a community newspaper, to enter a writing contest, or to perform well on the writing section of an Advanced Placement exam or the SAT. Thus, the tutor-teacher now serves as a mediator between student and publisher similar to the way a writing center tutor serves as a mediator between student and instructor. Maintaining triangulation is one way to ensure the authenticity and challenge of a writing task (Practice #7).

By creating this triangulation, the tutor-teacher changes how a student perceives her teacher's authority and social distance, the two main points of distinction between teachers and tutors according to Dave Healy, Executive Board Member of the Midwest Writing Centers Association (20). By creating triangulation, the tutor-teacher shares her authority with the outside evaluator, framing her own expectations as derivative of the outside evaluator's standards and expectations. Triangulation also provides the potential to decrease the social distance between the tutor-teacher and her students. If the tutor-teacher provides feedback and speaks to her students as one writer to another writer, as a "fellow

traveler...on the road to understanding and enlightenment” (Healy 20), as a way to “get to know the student, her background and culture, [and] her strengths and weaknesses” (Severino 13), then the tutor-teacher can decrease the social distance between herself and her students. She may also choose to “interpret” “teacher-language,” such as coherence, idea development, etc. into “student-language” to further decrease the social distance most students typically experience in the classroom (Harris, “Talking” 37). By disclosing her own struggles in the writing process to her students as well as her methods of overcoming these obstacles, the tutor-teacher helps shape the students’ perception of her as an expert writer who shares similar goals and experiences as her students. The novice writer, the student, consults the expert writer, the tutor-teacher, for tips and strategies to gain success in the evaluation outside the classroom. The tutor-teacher refers to her own instruction not as requirements but as advice that has proven to be successful in the past with this particular type of evaluation. Thus, the interaction between the student and the tutor-teacher begins to more closely resemble asymmetrical collaboration in a writing center tutorial (Practice #4).

By having an outside “final” evaluator, a student will aim her writing toward persuading her real audience. Because the purpose goes beyond the grade, the student views her writing as more than just “student work” to share between herself and her teacher; she invests in her work. Depending on the task, the student’s *real* evaluation may come in any number of forms. For example, if students were assigned to write and submit editorials to the school newspaper for a composition class, the authentic evaluation would come in two forms from two

different authentic audiences: (1) the editorial is chosen by the student-editors to be published in the school newspaper with limited space, and (2) the community is affected by the ideas in the editorial. If the tutor-teacher frames these forms of evaluation as more authentic and more valuable than a grade, then the student is more likely to see the instructor's grade as secondary, a checkpoint indicating the student's progress toward achieving her greater goal outside the classroom. When a student's editorial is chosen for publication and it has an effect on the community, this is the *real* "A+" a student should aim for.

Some academic institutions hesitate to support composition classes in which the goals of the class include publication. Many fear that "edgy" writing for an alternative newspaper or a magazine does not prepare students for the type of writing students need in their other courses (Alexander 405). However, when students study, write, and explore several different discourse communities rather than only one traditional, academic community, student engagement with writing and critical thinking about discourse communities heightens. Students could then understand a variety of strategies for organizing and developing their ideas to cater to an appropriate audience. Isn't understanding the importance of audience one of the goals of traditional composition courses? And furthermore, wouldn't studying, writing, and exploring different discourse communities only help make students better writers and more prepared for a variety of writing tasks in other courses?

One example of a teacher who successfully incorporated the goal of publication into his composition courses is Jonathan Alexander, *Campus Writing*

Coordinator at University of California-Irvine. Alexander insists that a student must write to a real audience to produce authentic writing. In his article, “Digital Spins: The Pedagogy and Politics of Student-Centered E-Zines,” Alexander describes the scaffold assignments he assigns to students to guide them from “simple imitation and parody of discourse cues toward a self-directed development of invention, discovery, and rhetorical sophistication” (390). Alexander’s study demonstrates that by writing to an authentic audience, a student becomes more engaged in the writing process, becomes more self-directed, broadens the types of discourse communities in which she writes, and thinks more critically about the rhetorical situation and the audience of each community. Skeptical instructors and academic institutions must agree that these results from an authentic writing task are desirable.

*Reconstruction of the Roles of the Writing Center Tutor in the Classroom*

**Re-Conceptualizing Coaching in the Classroom**

*Tutor-Teacher as Coach*

One coaching technique that can be used in both the writing center tutorial as well as the classroom is modeling. When a teacher models the writing process in a “think aloud,” she demonstrates: (1) methods of choosing certain strategies over others (Practice #1), (2) the variety of choices a writer makes and obstacles a writer must overcome (Practice #2), (3) different ways of self-regulating during the process (Practice #3), and (4) the recursive nature of the writing process (Practice #2). In their account of a teacher’s “think aloud,” Santangelo, Harris,

and Graham praise the teacher for demonstrating problem definition, planning, brainstorming, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement, and coping (15). While observing an expert's "think-aloud," a novice writer may benefit from noting the consequences of the expert's efforts as well as the similarities and differences between the expert's writing process and her own.

While modeling the process certainly benefits a student's knowledge and understanding of the writing process, a novice writer typically needs scaffolding assignments to advance her writing skills. An expert writer uses scaffolding assignments as a way to support and challenge a novice to perform at higher levels. For example, the task of writing an introduction to an argument can be broken down into more manageable steps for a novice writer. A tutor-teacher may begin by providing the student with several basic structures or templates of successful introductions (Practice #1), building the student's declarative knowledge. The expert writer may further break down the task by asking questions that will help the novice address one part of the structure at a time. In their popular, first-year composition instructional book *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein agree that providing a less skilled writer with templates and scaffolding activities will help the student develop her writing skills. Specifically, scaffolding assignments assist the student in the initial steps of applying declarative knowledge. Moreover, the scaffolding activities become a method for students to develop procedural and conditional knowledge, resulting in the student's perception of her increasing competence.

Coaching students also takes the form of providing feedback that will help students “become fully engaged in their own writing by allowing them to retain authority over and responsibility for their own work” (Zelenak 32). One way to provide coach-like feedback is to carry over questioning strategies directly from writing center tutorials into classroom instruction. Rather than writing prescriptive, abstract comments on papers—such as, “Your thesis is not clear. Your conclusion is weak”—tutor-teachers could pose questions, such as, “What is your thesis? How could you have made your conclusion stronger?” By asking these open-ended questions, the responsibility of exploring, composing, and revising is placed on the student (Van Dyke 3). Amy S. Gerald agrees that an approach that is “beneficial to both writing center and classroom work” is to respond to papers with “focused, limited, and guiding feedback,” encouraging students to take responsibility and think critically about their own writing (11). Irene Lukis Clark concurs with this view that open-ended questions promote student agency and “lead students to discover the answer for themselves” (350). This type of feedback also reassures students that there is no “right” or “wrong” answer or single, correct way of writing (Practice #2); rather, students have control over the risks they take by choosing from a variety of possibilities (Practice #6). Instead of focusing on surface-level concerns of spelling, grammar, etc. with the markings of a red pen, the comments and questions of a tutor-teacher prioritize higher-order concerns (Zelenak 29) and keep the ownership of the writing in the hands of the student.

### *Text as Coach*

The source of strategy instruction expands beyond the tutor-teacher; a student can also learn successful strategies from texts she critically reads in class. Once a student views herself as a novice writer who can learn from professional writers' texts, then she begins to search beyond the content of a newspaper column, looking for structures and rhetorical strategies professional writers use. Learning strategies in this way will not only increase a student's declarative knowledge, but it will also develop a student's conditional knowledge. Since the student learns the strategy in context, she begins to understand "when, where, and why" a writer would use the particular strategy. Students then may adopt, modify, and integrate these strategies into their own writing (Practice #1). In this sense, students can learn how to frame an argument from George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language." They can learn how to call an audience to action from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Reading like a writer not only expands students' sources for learning writing strategies, but it also teaches them how to continue building their repertoire of strategies long after they graduate.

### *Other Students as Coach*

With different educational and experiential backgrounds, students bring a multitude of valuable perspectives to the classroom. As a "practice audience" for a peer, a classmate serves as a physical reminder that the student's writing eventually needs to persuade a *real* audience, an audience who bring their own

values, biases, and preferences to the table (Practice #7). In this sense, the physical presence of the class serves one of the functions of the tutor when the student shares her writing with her classmates.

### *Coach for Oneself*

A student takes on some of the tutor's coaching role when she self-assesses her writing. By reading her writing aloud, a novice writer will more likely "hear" issues of clarity, coherence, and surface-level errors (Graham and Harris 213). Reading her writing aloud will help the student detect her own areas of improvement and address them in revision accordingly (Practice #6). As the student becomes more skilled and builds her declarative knowledge of the elements of "good" writing, the student will coach herself by comparing her own writing with her understanding of these elements. This practice will help the student identify her strengths and her areas of improvement.

One way to develop a student's confidence in her ability to assess her own work is to have the student assess her own work before receiving any feedback. By initially withholding any feedback of the instructor, the student's peers, and the outside evaluator, the student must first assess her writing against her developing understanding of "good" writing. Once the student reflects on the quality of her writing, she can then compare her own assessment with the constructive criticism and feedback from these sources. The instructor must encourage the student to view the criticisms and feedback as informative to her understanding of "good" writing and informative of possible future goals she



might consider. The student is not to discount her own evaluation if it differs from others' evaluation (Practice #6); rather, this difference may indicate to the student her ability, or lack thereof, to detach herself from her own writing to assess its quality. From first-hand experience, I have witnessed this process improve my students' ability to self-assess their work and to hone their understanding of the elements of "good" writing. As my students repeat this process with every paper that is returned over the course of the year, they begin to anticipate this step by integrating this skill into their writing process. Ultimately, self-assessment not only refines a student's ability to self-regulate, but it also "undergird[s] academic accountability in the classroom...[and] promote[s] self-directed learning" (Desautel 2012).

### **Re-Conceptualizing Commentating in the Classroom**

#### *Tutor-Teacher as Commentator*

Modeling her own writing process in a "think aloud," once again, is an effective method a tutor-teacher should consider. She can commentate on one expert's writing process, that is, her own. By reporting her own "play-by-play," the tutor-teacher reveals her self-regulating strategies as steps in achieving a particular goal (Practice #3). A tutor-teacher can further increase the bank of self-regulating strategies by commentating others' writing processes. For example, a student could project her essay so that her instructor and classmates could observe her writing process "in action." The instructor could then take on the role of

commentator and hold a tutorial-like session while the class observes, cultivating more strategies and further demystifying the writing process (Practice #3 and #2).

### *Other Students as Commentator*

Students can play commentator for each other when they collaborate (Practice #4). Collaborative assignments increase engagement, motivation, and critical thinking (Romeo 37). One form of collaboration that solicits commentary is peer response. In a peer response group, students share their writing and respond to each other. One way to focus a student's response, and more specifically focus the response as commentary, is to create a set of questions that the reader answers as a response to the writing. The questions may range from identifying the overarching organizational structure of the paper (cause and effect, problem-solution, etc.) to identifying the thesis and transitions. When the student receives her completed peer response feedback, she will know—according to her readers--whether or not her global organization was clear, her thesis was evident, her transitions effectively showed the relationship between one idea and the next, etc. While a critic might argue that peer response is advantageous only in terms of the feedback, students must practice their analytical skills and use their declarative knowledge to respond accurately to the questions. Harris agrees students benefit “from the responses they receive about their writing and from the practice they get as critical readers of the discourse of other writers” (“Collaboration” 373).

While students commentate on a draft in peer response groups, they commentate on the writing process itself, from start to finish, when they write collaboratively. Amy S. Gerald recommends collaborative writing because the activity combines writing, speaking about writing, active learning, and a sense of community (12). Collaborative writing is not only a scaffolding activity to build students' experience and confidence to eventually write independently, but it also provides students an opportunity to externalize self-regulation and metacognition. For example, as students write a group essay, the group collectively self-regulates itself as some members of the group ask questions of their teammates, the types of questions students must learn to ask themselves when writing. Students may also remind their team of alternate strategies, audience awareness, structural patterns, etc. Thus, collaborative writing externalizes metacognition and self-regulation, the purpose of commentating (Practice #3).

After completing a collaborative writing assignment, students can reflect on their writing process, describing their group's "play-by-play." They may want to go beyond describing the steps they took and include the problems they faced, their methods of coping or overcoming those problems, and listing the questions they asked each other during the writing process (Practice #3). By sharing this reflection with the other groups in the class, students begin to view each other as sources of knowledge and skills. Students may then examine other groups' process and self-regulating questions to see if their group omitted important aspects they should have considered. Individual students may also learn of

particular questions they now will ask themselves during the writing process that perhaps they had not considered in the past.

### *Commentator for Oneself*

Tutor-teachers can devise ways to help students learn to commentate on their own writing. An tutor-teaching may request a student to perform a “think aloud,” or she may provide a checklist of open-ended questions or a rubric to consult at different points in the writing process. By prompting or “reminding” a student of elements she could consider while writing, the checklist and rubric serve as scaffolding to improve the student’s ability to self-regulate. Ideally, the student will eventually internalize this practice and will shed the need for a physical reminder to self-regulate. Students may also describe their writing process at the end of each writing session to become “more aware of their preferred approaches to writing” (Horning 4). To sidestep the difficulty of describing the writing process while engaged in a given task, a student may find it easier to direct someone else through the same steps (Desautel 2015). A student not only benefits from the ability to report one step at a time, but she can also consult her description to consider alternative approaches, to make modifications, and “to take risks to try new and more productive strategies” for future writing tasks (Horning 4).

If a student continually describes her process and makes modifications to the process, she will see differences in the products she produces. By examining the description of the process and the products together, a student can evaluate

whether or not her process needs more modifications. She can also use the products and the descriptions of the process as a portfolio to reflect upon the advancement of her writing skills over time and the achievement of her writing goals. By tracking her own progress and evaluating the efficacy of her efforts, the student builds confidence and perceives her increasing competence. Ultimately, this practice encourages a more satisfying reflection in the third stage of self-regulated learning, which theoretically will positively affect subsequent efforts in the forethought stage of the next learning experience.

### **Re-Conceptualizing Counseling in the Classroom**

#### *The Collective as Counselor*

The tutor-teacher and the students must work together to create a comfortable, non-judgmental atmosphere of a community of writers. Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels, authors of *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School*, discuss the importance of building a sense of membership among a group of writers. They agree that “sharing power and authority” is a necessary part of creating the psychological membership in which students feel they are known and valued in the group (60). A tutor-teacher can help foster this type of environment by inviting students to share their feelings toward writing: the good, the bad, and the ugly (Practice #5). For example, in their very first writing task of the course, I ask students to write why they want to become better writers beyond this course, beyond college, etc. I ask students to think about the value of writing outside of the academic sphere, so when they

struggle to overcome obstacles over the course of the year, they can return to their own thoughts about the value of what they are learning and persist. By inviting students to read their writing aloud, I try to immediately foster an environment where their opinions and feelings are valued and respected.

To further decrease the “authoritative distance” of teacher and student to help create a community of writers, a tutor-teacher can also share her own struggles with writing, past and present. She may also complete some of the writing tasks the students complete, so she can share her experience with the assignment as well. When students turn in a piece of writing, I ask a general, open-ended question, such as “How did it go?” or “How do you feel about it?” to invite students to share their struggles. When students share together their struggles in the writing process, they may be able to offer better strategies than the expert writer to help problem solve or to cope with the difficulty. This practice helps students view each other as sources of information, strategies, and skills, which consequently debunks the misconception of the instructor as the “reigning” source of knowledge. A community of writers not only supports each other in times of struggle, but they also celebrate when someone makes significant progress or has a breakthrough in achieving her goals.

While students may feel comfortable “unloading” their baggage about writing, tutor-teachers need to respond with empathy and flexibility (Practice #5). If students vent about the difficulty of an assignment, a tutor-teacher needs to provide encouragement and reflect on whether or not her expectations and time allotment are reasonable. She also needs to be aware of struggling writers who do

not participate in the group discussions concerning how they feel about their writing progress. These students may not be comfortable sharing their feelings with the group and are more likely to benefit from a one-on-one conference with the tutor-teacher instead. Novice writers improve self-regulated learning and gain confidence in themselves as writers by attending to their affective concerns (Harris, “Talking” 40)—whether in a group setting or in an individual conference setting.

### *Counselor for Oneself*

To counsel oneself, students may find it comforting to express their frustration on paper to “talk themselves through” the problem. Students might find it more useful to reinvigorate their efforts by (1) revisiting their goals, (2) reminding themselves why the assignment is worth persisting through, (3) acknowledging what they are learning by completing the writing task, (4) self-imposing a system of rewards or punishments for completing the goal of the writing session, or (5) adding game-like qualities, such as competing with someone else or trying to complete the goal before a certain time. Ultimately, to become successful learners, thinkers, and writers, students will need to learn how to keep themselves motivated.

## **The Hallmark of Adapted Writing Center Pedagogy: Reflection**

Reflection is an essential practice for adapted writing center pedagogy for the classroom. In the classroom environment, a successful student must make a long-term investment to learn and improve whereas in the writing center, a successful student may come to only one tutorial over the course of her studies. To tend to a student's continuous efforts in a semester-long or year-long course, self-reflection bonds one learning experience to the next. More specifically, reflection affects subsequent efforts in the forethought phase of the next learning experience. For example, if the student acknowledges satisfaction with her own self-judgments, then she will begin the next learning experience that is similar with high expectancy outcomes, self-efficacy, and task interest. In other words, if she is satisfied, she will have a high level of motivation and engagement in future assignments that are similar; if she is dissatisfied, she must either modify further cycles of learning, or she will avert further efforts to learn, avoiding further dissatisfaction.

Guiding students' self-reflections will help steer dissatisfied students toward modifying their writing process and away from the possibility of ceasing future efforts. Tutor-teachers can ask questions, such as "What are two strengths in your writing? What are two areas of improvement? How can you modify your writing process for the future to improve in the two areas you named?" These questions compel students to react to dissatisfaction in a favorable way, advocating the student expend effort in the future.



The seven practices within the adapted writing center pedagogy that promote and develop metacognitive knowledge, self-regulation, and motivation lay the foundation for a student to ultimately understand herself as a writer. When a student reflects on her strengths, weaknesses, and habits as a composer of a discourse, her cogitation becomes a way to observe her own progress as a novice writer and to shape her understanding of herself as a composer. Self-reflection then wakes part of the dormant self.

## **Theory in Action: Web Redesign Project in an Advanced Placement Language and Composition Classroom**

To demonstrate the efficacy of this transformative approach in the composition classroom, I created an authentic, challenging project in which the pre-project activities, task design, work process, and reflection assignment enact my proposed theory. To truly examine the impact of this approach, I chose to have students compose within a discourse most had not composed within before this project: a website. Although students “consume” websites everyday, most of them have not yet ever produced one. In teams, my Advanced Placement Language and Composition students were to redesign pages of the school’s website to accurately reflect the identity of the school and the value of the student experience at Park Tudor, a college-preparatory independent school in Indianapolis, Indiana (see Appendix A). Before a student was to embark on this project, she must first establish a sense of her own competence in composing within a digital discourse. Because the pre-project scaffolding activities integrate the seven best practices of metacognition and motivation, a student not only develops her skill set but also her metacognitive knowledge, resulting in an increased sense of competence crucial to her success. In addition to interweaving the seven best practices throughout the pre-project activities, task design, and the work process, I used the elements of adapted writing center pedagogy-- maintaining triangulation, reconstructing the three roles of the tutor, and incorporating reflection--as a foundation for the project. In the final phase of

reflection, each student takes the culminating step of transforming how she conceives of herself.

### *Task Design*

While students were interested in suggesting a redesign for the school's website, the task value of the project greatly increased when the students became aware that they were fulfilling a real need of the school's Communications Department (Practice #7). The department told the students that the school would be redesigning the website over the next year, and they needed to know what prospective students want to see on the Upper School main page and the Admissions main page. Because the students would ultimately pitch their ideas to the Communications Department, who would potentially use and incorporate the strongest suggestions into the school's new website while discarding the weaker suggestions, the students approached the team project as a competition. The Communications Department became the outside evaluator of the students' work. By engaging in a task where the evaluator's judgment or endorsement of the strongest ideas is visible to the public, students became more self-directed, more engaged in the composition process, and thought more critically about the rhetorical situation. Thus, the design of the project cultivated student engagement through the task value and the interest enhancement.

Maintaining triangulation and valuing the outside evaluation were not the only important factors to implementing this adapted Writing Center approach. Instructors must ensure students perceive the task to be one that (1) will benefit

them in some way, and (2) calls them, with their specific skill set, to fulfill a real need. According to the New London Group, “there is ample evidence that people do not learn anything well unless they are both motivated to learn and believe that they will be able to use and function with what they are learning in some way that is in their interest” (85). While a student serves the Communications Department by fulfilling a real need, she also must feel she is serving herself—be it bragging rights, experience in a field in which she is interested, or the residual feeling of self-worth after helping others. With an authentic audience, this project brings the potential “real world” benefits of becoming adept at using rhetoric to the forefront of the classroom. Students know that if the director, her assistant, and the graphic designer found an idea useful from their team’s redesign, then that idea could potentially appear on the school’s new website within the next year. The adoption of a team’s ideas for the new website not only gives students “bragging rights”—which, with the competitive nature of the teams, becomes a significant benefit—but it also gives students the knowledge that their ideas are valued by professionals outside the classroom.

If students do not perceive themselves as the most qualified to complete the project, they will sense a “phoniness” that may obstruct the success of the project. When the director of the Communications Department, her assistant, and I introduced the project to the students, the students asked for an explanation as to why we would ask them—instead of the students taking the Web Design computer course or the Graphic Design fine arts course—to complete the project. The director of Communications and I explained that the project requires a strong

understanding of the way rhetoric works and first-hand experience of thinking like a prospective student. Since my students, as eleventh graders, are currently prospective students for universities, they have an intimate understanding of the mindset of a prospective student leaving one school to attend another. After this explanation, the students understood that they were the most qualified to complete the project and were honored to be part of it (Practice #5).

Although the technological aspect of the project breached unfamiliar territory for most students, certain elements of the project reduced stress and anxiety, resulting in foundational, positive feelings toward the project. For example, students worked in teams (Practice #4), had flexibility with their time, and had access to supporting materials. They were not worried about being correct or incorrect; they focused instead on making thoughtful decisions for their proposals. According to the study of Gerard Van de Watering, David Gibels, Filip Dochy, and Janine van der Rijt, students prefer this type of low stress, low anxiety assessment (648). Consequently, students reacted more positively to the project itself because they preferred the inherent properties of its design (Practice #5). The design of the project ultimately helped to establish a positive outlook in the forethought phase of self-regulated learning.

#### *By Design: Student Choice in the Process and Product*

To increase the degree of authenticity, the students' step-by-step process mirrored professional web designers' process. The director's assistant assured me that professional web designers typically work in teams and go through a loosely-

structured process, usually including the following three steps: (1) hearing the clients' needs, (2) researching competitive websites, and (3) presenting the suggested redesign in a formal presentation and proposal. After I reminded the students of the technical, artistic, and rhetorical dimensions of redesigning a website as well as the need for students within a team to regulate themselves and hold each other accountable, students chose their teammates and took control of the process from there. On the project handout (see Appendix A), I broke the process down into three recommended phases: (1) dream, (2) research, and (3) present. Instructors should not only parallel the typical process for the specific project (steps professionals usually take as well as whether or not the project is completed in teams or individually), but instructors should also be certain students have the freedom and/or limitations that simulate the professional process. Students thus must be able to have the freedom to make some choices in both the process and the product (Practice #6). Although I strongly recommended the teams complete each of the three steps, students did not have to follow the suggested order nor complete all of the steps in phases one and two. Teams set their own deadlines in order to meet the one externally-determined deadline: the day they hand in their proposal and present their redesign to their client, the Communications Department. In addition to making choices about the pace and process of their projects, students were told to start with a "clean slate" for their redesign. The client did not specify any limitations or requirements for the redesign, other than to "dream big" and design with the prospective student in mind.

When students make choices about the process and the product, they feel they have control over how they are achieving their goals as well as the outcome of the final product; however, in every choice they make, they exercise some degree of risk by choosing one option over another. According to Larry Beason, “risky writing involves choices—both linguistic and rhetorical—that push the writer to his or her limits; the writer seems compelled to go beyond the minimum, the easy, the safe” (116). For students to embrace these elements of control and risk, they must feel confident that they have the skills and experience to make wise decisions.

Students’ motivation is at its highest when their expectancies for success are positive and when they value the goal they are trying to achieve (Ambrose et al. 79). To promote a positive outcome expectancy, instructors must build students’ confidence. One way is by practicing the skill set. If this type of project is the first time encountering a whole new set of skills, students may feel unprepared and burdened rather than equipped and empowered. Tutor-teachers must first build students’ declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge before they can feel confident and competent in their decision making. Jan Herrington and Lisa Kervin point to the necessity of past experience when they describe an authentic learning environment as one that “requires students to reflect upon a broad base of knowledge” in order to “solve problems, and to predict, hypothesize, and experiment to produce a solution” (227). Another way of building confidence is to help students become *aware* that they have the knowledge and experience to make effective decisions. When an instructor invites

her students “to become increasingly aware of their complex literacy practices,” she addresses a “significant part of our work as compositionists” (Alexander 59). In other words, when students become aware of their declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge, they develop their confidence and their perception of their competence, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of thoughtful risk-taking during the process.

#### *Pre-Project Activities to Build Confidence through Metacognitive Knowledge*

In the context of the course, students already learned, practiced, and applied their foundational knowledge of Aristotelian rhetoric as both consumers and producers. Students composed several arguments and completed an authentic assignment—an editorial for the school newspaper--prior to this project. Thus, students approached the pre-project activities, a number of scaffolding assignments to help support and develop the skill set necessary to complete the project, through the lens of rhetoric (see Appendix B).

To build students’ declarative knowledge of academic institutions’ websites as a discourse, they must understand the trends and conventions of the discourse and consider which strategies they as readers find effective (Practice #1). Of their ten characteristics of authentic learning environments, Herrington and Kervin point to the importance of discourse analysis in their fourth principle when they recommend that students investigate multiple sources from multiple perspectives (226). When students analyze the discourse, they may consider: (1) the choices the author made and her intent, (2) the effect of certain sections of the



composition, (3) the way the examined composition relates to other compositions within the same discourse, and (4) the way the examined discourse relates to other discourses.

To coach students to slowly build up their skill set, I designed a set of scaffolding activities that began with discourse analysis (see Appendix B). First, students revisited the concept of visual literacy (see Appendix B, Activity 1), which they had practiced earlier in the year. They read an article that analyzed the visual rhetoric of posters (Practice #1 and #2), followed by a discussion of the relevance of visual literacy in their own lives and the lives of professionals. Next, students closely analyzed my instructional website, evaluating whether or not the interface reflected the class dynamic, the curriculum, and my identity as a professional (see Appendix B, Activity 2). Instructors may supplement the discourse analysis with overt instruction, particularly in teaching students metalanguage and helping students interpret design elements of different modes of meaning (New London Group 88). In their seventh principle, Herrington and Kervin identify the critical role of students articulating, negotiating, and defending their understanding using the vocabulary of professionals in the field (229). Students need overt instruction in the specialized language of a domain and benefit from observing an expert analyze the characteristics of the specified discourse. To extend their knowledge of rhetoric from Aristotle into the digital domain, I provided overt instruction of three metalinguistic terms in analyzing websites: interactivity, transparency, and hybridity (see Appendix B, Activity 4). Discourse analysis and overt instruction will develop students' declarative,

foundational knowledge that will establish the standards and conventions of the domain. In this sense, each website the students critically “read” coaches them, providing strategy instruction for digital compositions (Practice #1).

While familiarizing students with the conventions of the discourse and its metalanguage will build their declarative knowledge, students need to know they have experience successfully functioning and maneuvering within the domain. By building this procedural knowledge, tutor-teachers embolden students, specifically “in taking risks and trusting the guidance of others—peers and teachers” (New London Group 85). After discussing issues of different purposes, audiences, contexts, assumptions, and values when working in a digital domain, students redesigned my instructional homepage with the purpose of effectively communicating the class dynamic, the curriculum, and my identity as a professional (see Appendix B, Activity). The day the students needed to turn in their proposed redesigns for my instructional website, several students volunteered to share their work. Presenters described the step-by-step process they took (Practice #2 and #3) and explained why they made particular choices (Practice #6), playing the role of commentator. When their classmates and I asked the presenters follow-up questions regarding their rationale for certain design elements, students learned the importance of making thoughtful decisions they can support. They also learned that using a computer program, though sometimes more time-consuming, was worthwhile in the presentation of their redesigns.

Students repeated the process they used to redesign my instructional website for the redesign project: students began with their understanding of the

identity of the school (see Appendix B, Activity 5), they designed a website that they believe reflects the school's identity, and then they presented the rationale of their redesign in front of a group. While the scale of the scaffolding assignment and the redesign project differed, the process was the same. Ultimately, discourse analysis and redesigning my instructional website provided the knowledge and practice students needed to feel the redesign project was a challenge within their reach.

## **The Transformative Results of Adapted Writing Center Pedagogy in the Web Redesign Project**

After students presented their projects and handed in their proposals, they wrote reflections in which they self-assessed their composition process and considered what they learned. Margaret Portillo and Gail Summerskill Cummins also used reflection in their study of a collaborative project to “make the students aware of [their] creativity and their own creative processes to better realize their potential” (172). To raise students’ awareness of the skills and knowledge they developed by completing this redesign project, I provided a few guiding questions: (1) What did I learn about rhetoric and how it “works” by completing this project? What new skills have I learned by completing this project? (2) What were the challenges I had to meet during this project? How did I overcome these challenges? (3) What did I learn about my value to my community? (4) What did I learn about myself by completing this project? In these guided reflections, almost every student increased the scope of her self-concept. While I expected students would understand themselves as web designers, I did not anticipate their transformative self-perceptions. After the project, students viewed themselves as social critics, simultaneous consumers and producers, process-oriented risk-takers, problem solvers, and agents of positive change.

### *Students as Social Critics*

In the project and scaffolding activities, students took on the role of social critic, questioning different facets of technology, including institutional forces and

design culture. After students familiarized themselves with the discourse conventions of educational institutions' websites, they considered the way website interfaces indicate a school's priorities. For example, one student wrote, "I noticed that I could tell from a website how much attention any given university puts on its undergraduate program. Princeton's site, for instance, is shoddy overall, but the main page for undergraduate admissions is eye-catching and well-designed." By acknowledging that the website may carry political or economic meaning about institutional forces, this student demonstrates her critical literacy. Additionally, students learned the expected conventions of the discourse, and they considered the meaning of breaking some of these conventions in their designs (Practice #7). One student reported, "While we wanted to represent the school in a qualified light, we also wanted to break some of the rules and demonstrate Park Tudor's creativity." When part of the goal of the school is to "stand out from the crowd," students considered the benefits of conforming to "tried and true" conventions to show the school's stability while still breaking with convention in some ways to show the school "stands out."

### *Students as Simultaneous Consumers and Producers*

While students learned to be critical readers and social critics of academic institutional websites, they also learned to think like producers in the very same moment. This project afforded students the opportunity to stand on both the audience side and the creator side of the rhetorical composition. One student

wrote specifically about this double positioning as the reason her input was useful to the school:

Because of our unique perspective of knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the school from personal experience and knowing what the ideal school looks like from the perspective of incoming families, I enjoyed providing the service of designing a website for Park Tudor. Because I knew that our input was valuable, our project had a purpose outside of simply teaching us what visual rhetoric is.

Because the students in my class have one foot in the school as “insiders” and one foot out of the school, as either recently prospective students to Park Tudor or current prospective students to colleges, their straddled position lends itself to the nature of the project.

This double positioning not only increases a student’s awareness of good compositional practices, but it also yields a more insightful understanding of the inner workings of rhetoric and the potential power of each part. James Paul Gee points to the importance of understanding the inner workings of a domain in order to innovate within a discourse. He writes:

For learning to be critical as well as active...the learner needs to learn not only how to understand and produce meanings in a particular semiotic domain but, in addition, needs to learn how to think about the domain at a “meta” level as a complex system of interrelated parts. The learner also needs to learn how to innovate in the domain--how to produce meanings that, while recognizable to experts in the domain, are seen as somehow novel or unpredictable. (25)

If a student wants to innovate in a domain, a student must consider both the consumer-audience understanding of conventional expectation while at the same time thinking in a producer-like way of novel change. This skill requires a student to not only understand the interrelated parts of the domain but to also consider

how modifying, adding, or deleting parts will change the way an audience understands the meaning as a whole. In her reflection, one student wrote about her newfound understanding of this “complex system of interrelated parts” that grew out of this double positioning:

One of the most important things I learned from this project was how to think about the way different elements/types of rhetoric work together. When viewing a webpage, we notice things like the way pictures enhance the text, or how the method of presentation affects our understanding of the speaker—the medium of a website brings to the forefront not any specific feature of rhetoric but rather the interaction among all the features, and creating pages forces us to think about how we can make everything interact in a way pleasing to an audience. I also became very aware of several layers of focus: the layout is seen first by anyone who visits a website and gives a crucial initial impression; the visual appeal is noticed second and contributes to a page’s feel; and the content is third, being both the least important and the most, since it is examined last but is also what “sells” the user on the quality of a website.

By simultaneously thinking like a consumer and a producer, this student became aware of the domain on a “meta” level. That is, she realized the importance of the complex interaction between different parts. She observed the paradoxical position of written text in the digital domain, claiming it is the least important since it is the last element the consumer considers and the most important since it is the strongest selling point for an academic institution. Her description of the way some “layers of focus” have more impact than others confirms that thinking like the consumer-audience can arm a student with the necessary “meta” level knowledge and critical understanding to innovate in the domain. In the future, the student can apply this double positioning tactic to learn about the inner workings of any communicative discourse, giving herself the essential foundation to innovate in a domain.

### *Students as Process-Oriented Risk-Takers*

As students brainstormed, planned, executed, and presented their redesigns, they became much more aware of their process than they typically are during independent activities. In collaborative projects, students need to articulate their rationale in order to persuade their teammates to go along with their proposed idea (Practice #3 and #4). While this discussion slows the process from the typical individual worker's pace, the deliberation ensures a higher quality product. For instance, one student wrote, "Before working on this project, I thought that I could just make a cool ordinary website." He said that once he and his group "got going," he realized he did not like the direction the webpage was headed in. He reported voluntarily "going back to really think" about the kind of message they as a group wanted to send (Practice #2 and #3).

While about half the students commented on the difficulty of making choices and coming to an agreement within their teams, the other half described their gratitude for having partners who had a complementary skill set (Practice #4). Some students reflected on this connection and sense of trust among the students on their team. For example, one student wrote, "I learned that sometimes you have to take a chance and do what you think makes sense rather than follow others. Most websites were very modern and looked professional but our website had meaning to the school, and I had to trust myself and my partners that we made a decision that we thought would benefit Park Tudor." This student's team (Team 1) reported their struggle with the technical aspects of creating a website. While they are one of the only groups who decided to use Microsoft Word instead



of a program that is designed for image manipulation and integration, Team 1 decided to use a tree motif since the school is located on the same land as the former Lilly Apple Orchard (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Upper School main page and Admissions page (Team 1)

During the presentation of Team 1, the director and her assistant pointed out that this team’s design stood out from the rest because it was more “place-oriented” than any other design. That is, the design integrated a location-specific feature of Park Tudor, connecting the appearance of the campus to the images of the website.

While the student from Team 1 indicated the connection and trust among her teammates, other students reflected on the competitive spirit between the different teams. Teams of students wanted to keep their designs a secret from the other teams, and several of the males enjoyed feigning intimidation tactics on their friends in other groups. While the competition remained friendly, I thought it

was interesting that this concept of needing to “outperform” the other teams surfaced, increasing students’ engagement. Businesses compete for clients all the time, and the students in my class enjoyed this element of “friendly competition.” But does the desire to outperform peers transfer to the quality of work? According to one student, “the potentially significant application and somewhat competitive nature of this project propelled us all to new creative heights.” Apathetic students who turned in mediocre work were now crowded around computer screens, engaged in deliberations, planning to design more than the two required pages of the project (Practice #5). Members of Team 2 transformed from apathetic students to engaged, process-oriented risk-takers, creating one of the most innovative, contemporary designs in the class (see figure 3).



Figure 3. Innovative, contemporary design of Admissions page and Upper School page (Team 2)

In this team’s design, the Admissions main page offers the computer user a choice: navigate to the students’ section or the parents’ section of Admissions.

While other groups also offered this choice within a more conventional format for an academic institution (see figure 4), the contemporary elements of the design above reflect atypical choices for an academic institution. For example, the color images of a student and a parent with his child contrast a black and white background, indicating the school's primary focus on the experience of each student, the involved role of each parent, and the excellent customer service the school offers. The top bar with the unique signatures of several students furthers the impression that the school focuses on the individual rather than focusing on the tradition of the school as a "tried-and-true" organization with a more conventional image.



Figure 4. Homepage, Admissions parent page, and Upper School page (Team 3)

The members of Team 3 contributed to the competitive spirit between teams. One of the features they were most proud of was the interactive map of the United States on the Admissions parent page, which showcases the different universities and colleges Park Tudor students attend. The students also noted that they were the only group to fully integrate social networking into their redesign. The layout of the Upper School page mirrors a twitter feed or a Facebook news feed. The

members of Team 3 pointed out that the news feed can be customized with personal settings to include certain types of events (fine arts) and not others (parent meetings) depending on the user's preferences. The students made their redesign useful to not only prospective students but also to current students and families. By redefining the primary audience to include both current and prospective families, the students took a calculated risk at the beginning of their process, and in the end, the results were fruitful (Practice #6).

### *Students as Problem Solvers*

One of the points of interest of this project is the way students handled the technical aspects of web design. While a tutor-teacher may be an expert writer, she most likely is not an expert in several digital design programs. As a composition instructor who designed an instructional website, I was very familiar with iWeb, but my knowledge of Photoshop and Illustrator was nascent at best. I advised students to use a program they were familiar with. If they came across a technical problem or were uncertain how to execute an idea, they would need to problem solve rather than rely on me as the expert. I told the students that in my limited experience designing websites, I—as a novice--typically “played around” on the program, exploring possible avenues that may yield a solution. If this play did not yield the result I was looking for, I used the internet, particularly user forums, to find solutions for any obstacles I encountered (Practice #1, #2, #3 and #7).

Some scholars disagree with this approach of playing-to-learn, claiming that “digital natives” need to treat technology as tools to use rather than toys to play with (Shepherd and Mullane 60). However, scholarship on the pedagogy of play is growing, outnumbering the dying sentiment of technology as “the elephant in the classroom that everyone is trying to ignore” (Shepherd and Mullane 59). But is the play-to-learn approach responsible for an instructor to use with a class of composition students? Should a teacher leave functional literacy, the ability to use a program effectively, for the students to figure out by themselves? Professor Daniel Anderson would say yes. In his article “The Low Bridge to High Benefits: Entry-Level Multimedia, Literacies, and Motivation,” Anderson argues that this approach promotes “opportunities for play and experimentation that can lead to new learning. [...] Unknown technical things create ideal situations in which literacy-enriching problem-solving activities might play out” (43). Entry-level “low-bridge” software programs not only make it easy for users to play-to-learn and learn to problem solve, but they also increase experimentation, which “can facilitate a sense of creativity that can lead to motivation” (Practice #5) (Anderson 44).

Anderson advises instructors to carefully consider the balance of the degree of difficult, challenging tasks with the skill level of students when designing a project that uses technology. If the project is too challenging, the project may burden and block students’ creativity; likewise, if the project fails to present an adequate challenge, students may not be motivated to initiate a creative spark (Practice #7) (Anderson 44). For one of my students, the balance was just

right. He taught himself iWeb because no one in his group was familiar with any design programs. He wanted a slideshow of photographs on the main page, so he taught himself Garageband. These were the first signs I had seen all year of this student taking initiative to lead in the classroom (Practice #6). In his reflection, he said this was the first time he thought of himself as a leader in the classroom, expanding his perception of himself as a strong student who can problem solve. This transformative “self-as” knowledge confirms Anderson’s claim that “bringing low-bridge technologies into the classroom yield[s] personal benefits of identity growth and motivations” (44).

While some students were intrigued with this type of challenge and this style of learning, other students expressed their frustration. One student reported, “Overcoming this [technical] challenge was tedious and time consuming but with the effort we put into the creation of our page, I thought that our vision was achieved.” Gee also reports frustration in his struggle to learn a technological domain he was unfamiliar with: games. Gee writes that being confronted with “a new form of learning and thinking was both frustrating and life enhancing...[after having] routinized” his ways of learning and thinking (3). By pushing himself to become literate in a new domain, Gee learns a necessary, lifelong skill as the modern world continues to create and transform domains. Though playing to learn functional literacy may feel frustrating, tedious, and time-consuming, the lifelong benefits of becoming a problem solver and a creative thinker outweigh the drawbacks.

### *Students as Agents of Positive Change*

In their reflections, students expressed how this project produced feelings of empowerment in a number of ways. Some of the teams limited their audience for their redesign, narrowing the type of student they wanted to attract to the school. One student concluded, “This project is pretty profound in that we designed a medium that indirectly controls who will come to Park Tudor in the future. By targeting a certain type of students [*sic*], we were in effect, building the Park Tudor community.” Another student considered the way the project itself changed the way he understood his role within the community. He wrote:

I learned that I’m very important to my community because I have a say in a lot more than I think, along with all my other classmates. This project showed the class that we are very respected by our faculty. It also shows the students that the faculty trusts in our choices and knows that we can help them because we have completely different viewpoints than them, in being [*sic*] that we are students and we see what goes on every day. It’s pretty special when you think about it. We go to a school where there is so much trust and respect shared between the faculty and the students.

With this new perspective of the asymmetrical collaboration between his tutor-teacher and himself, this student became an empowered member of the school community. He began to understand that respecting and integrating different perspectives is foundational to the success of a community. Taking this attitude of acceptance and respect with him outside of the classroom will certainly benefit any community he is a part of (Practice #4).

Some students intuitively considered the way the skills, knowledge, and feelings of empowerment they experienced through this project could be transferred to their lives outside of school. One student wrote, “As completely



cliché as it is, I realized I have the ability to make a difference in my community, school, and city.” Maintaining triangulation and fulfilling a real need of a real audience is part of the source of this empowerment; the act of designing is the other. Students made choices, took risks, and took control of communicating, and in some cases, created a new school identity (Practice #6). The New London Group agrees that “designing restores human agency and cultural dynamism to the process of meaning-making...Workers, citizens, and community members are ideally creative and responsible makers of meaning. We are, indeed, designers of our social futures” (88-89).

## **Conclusion**

By maintaining triangulation and adapting the tutor's roles in asymmetrical collaboration, a tutor-teacher can create a learning situation ripe with transformative potential. In the web redesign project, students were remarkably engaged in the composition process, exploring possibilities of the discourse and anticipating feedback from their outside evaluator. By integrating the seven best practices into the pre-activities and project, a tutor-teacher helps build students' metacognitive knowledge and develop the habit of self-regulation. Thus, when tutor-teachers use the framework and practices of this transformative approach, they empower students by increasing their skills, strengthening their confidence, and expanding their self-concept. While the change of students' self-concepts may differ from one project to another, students will nearly always expand their sense of self-reliance as they learn to depend on their own competence to make sound decisions and take thoughtful risks as lifelong learners.

The results of this web redesign project suggest this transformative approach is well suited to guiding students into a new age of composing practices; nevertheless, future scholarship should further explore other factors of compositional theories and practices that lead to transformation, empowerment, and skill development. In her overview of classroom-based research, Vivian Zamel suggests that "students change as writers, adopt positive attitudes toward written work, and demonstrate real growth in writing performance" when they are "in classrooms in which risk taking is encouraged, trust is established, choice and authority are shared, and writing is viewed as a meaning-making event" (707-708).

In their theoretical approach, Jean E. Brown and Elaine C. Stephens propose a new paradigm: Writing as Transformation. They identify intuition, metacognition, and change agent as the three elements of transformative practice; however, their theory does not provide any practical suggestions for implementation, nor does it cross into different modes of composition. While I suggest the adapted writing center approach with a focus on metacognition is indispensable to the transformative potential of a project, other factors may play a role as well: competition, student demographics, and the impetus of forming the school's identity in an online environment. To identify the necessary elements of transformative practices, future research should probe the significance of the features named by Zamel and Brown and Stephens, the transformative features suggested in my project, and the factors that surfaced in my project but were out of the scope of this project.

By completing this type of project, students use the skills and knowledge they learn inside the classroom to positively change what lies outside the classroom. By positively changing the school community, students feel empowered and know that they can take the next step and enact social change outside of their school community. In my student's words, "the fact that my school believes I am capable of doing big things for it has made me realize that I should strive to do big things outside of school. If Park Tudor is willing to give me opportunities to improve the school, my community will surely be open to anything I could do to better it as a citizen as well." When a tutor-teacher uses this transformative approach in her composition classroom to fulfill a need out in the

school community, out in the surrounding community, or out in the global community, she asks a student to discover who she is and how she will make positive change.

## Appendix A: Web Redesign Project Handout

### PT Redesign of Upper School and Admissions Internal Main Pages An Authentic Assessment Collaborative Project

#### Recommended Process

##### Stage 1: Dream

Imagine you have been hired to redesign PT's website, and you have assistants who can do all the work for you. All you need to do is come up with some brilliant ideas. What would you tell your assistants to do to the PT website if you could completely start from scratch? What would you include to appeal to prospective students?

During this stage, don't edit your ideas. Don't discount them as "dumb" or "too complicated." Write down as many as you can think of. Enjoy the lack of limitations. You're dreaming, remember?

##### Stage 2: Research (and continue dreaming!)

1. What is the mindset of a prospective student?

Visit college websites you're interested in attending. What are you looking for? What are you hoping to find? Did you find anything specific that surprised you that you liked...something you wished other school's websites had? What elements on the website are "giving you a feel" for the school? What is your impression of the school? its identity? its sense of community? What can you point to on the website that has led you to come to this conclusion?

2. Now, research "competitor" websites, namely independent schools and college websites. You should also check out the following websites that rate designs of educational institutions: [Edustyle.net](http://Edustyle.net), [Whipplehill.com/creative/portfolio](http://Whipplehill.com/creative/portfolio), and [Silverpoint.net/design/portfolio](http://Silverpoint.net/design/portfolio). Take notes on your analysis of websites using Aristotelian, visual, and digital rhetoric. How do these websites appeal to ethos, pathos, and logos? How do these websites use visual and digital rhetoric? How do they convey a sense of identity/community/appeal of the school? Be certain to consider the following elements:

##### Visual appeal

Colors, fonts, graphics, movement/animation, transparency

##### Content

Text, photos, videos, news, calendars, social media integration, hybridity, interactivity

##### Page layout

Header, footer, area for content, areas for navigation, and functionality

3. Do you see any trends among websites? Do you see any websites taking interesting risks that would appeal to you as a prospective student?

4. Now look at the Admissions and Upper School sections of our website. If you were building those two sections, how would you do it? What would you include? What would you cut out? What would you change? How would you make it visually appealing? Your primary audience is prospective 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Your secondary audience is parents of prospective 9<sup>th</sup> grade students.

### Stage 3: Creating a Design and Presenting

#### 1. Visual Aid

A. Make a mock-up of your new design for the main page of the Upper School section and the main page for the Admissions section. You can draw if you'd like, but you should also consider using a website design tool (ex. iWeb, Illustrator, Wordpress, etc.). The image of your design will assist in your presentation. You may present your images as a storyboard or project them onto the screen.

B. You want your client to leave your presentation with a copy of your design. Decide as a group if you want to create a binder/folder or if you want to e-mail your designs.

#### 2. Written Proposal

Write a 1-2 page proposal for your design. Include a summary paragraph of your research from Stage 2. Then describe the choices you have made and why you think they are important to prospective students. Start with the visual elements, then content, then pull it all together in the layout.

#### 3. Presentation

Make a 5 to 10 minute presentation showing your design mock-up and explaining your proposal. Try to sell the "client" on why this proposal fits their needs.

Appendix B: Description of Pre-Project Activities

Activity	Brief Description
<p>Activity 1: Read and Discuss Article</p>	<p>Hanno H. J. Ehses, in her article “Representing Macbeth: A Case Study in Visual Rhetoric,” introduces elements of visual rhetoric and analyzes the visual rhetoric of posters from the play <i>Macbeth</i>. Class discussion centered on the relevance of visual literacy in their own and others’ lives.</p>
<p>Activity 2: Critique Instructor’s School Website</p>	<p>Students critiqued the interface of the instructor’s website from a rhetorical perspective, reflecting on the way the interface did or did not reflect their understanding of the class dynamic, the curriculum, and the identity of the instructor as a professional. Students considered issues of purposes, audiences, contexts, assumptions, ideologies, etc.</p>
<p>Activity 3: Redesign Instructor’s Website</p> <p>Share with Class and Reflect on Task</p>	<p>In this low-stakes assignment, students redesigned the instructor’s homepage. Students could draw the homepage or use a program they were familiar with.</p> <p>Students volunteered to share their redesign and explained their choices, from content to design elements. Classmates asked presenters questions and gave some feedback on the redesigns. Students reflected on difficulty of designing an interface for someone other than themselves and self-assess their process and product.</p>
<p>Activity 4: Identify Limitations of Aristotelian Rhetoric, Learn Supplementary Concepts for Digital Rhetoric</p>	<p>Students discussed the uses and limitations of the Aristotelian approach to rhetoric for interface design. Instructor gives short lecture on Mary E. Hocks’s supplementary concepts of interactivity, transparency, and hybridity for digital rhetoric.</p>
<p>Activity 5: Write about Identity of the School</p>	<p>Just as students reflected on the identity of the instructor and her course before redesigning her homepage (in Activity 2), students write about their understanding of the school’s identity.</p>

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