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Establishing the Writing Center's Educational Role in the Academy by Stressing Peer Tutor Development

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In higher education, writing center directors often view the role of their centers differently from how faculty and administrators see it. Directors know their centers are actively engaged in achieving vital educational goals by helping clients access higher education, by encouraging marginalized voices to be heard, by providing individualized assistance for writing in any discipline. In short, centers foster literacy. In addition to the clients, centers also develop their peer consultants, helping them become critical thinkers and writers. Centers, then, are actively engaged in fostering vital educational objectives.

However, the academy, more often than not, sees centers playing a much narrower role as part of what is called "a managed university" (Mahala 34). Simply defined, it is a world where colleges and universities primarily focus on retaining students and increasing revenues (Griffin et al.). This approach to higher education has arisen over the last quarter century as schools have seen less funding and have experienced a rise in economic pressures (Mahala 3). To survive, higher education has "accepted overtly business-oriented models of management" (Mahala 3) in which it is vital to keep "customers," serve them well, and have a useful product. In fact, a key tenet in the managed university is that it is "cheaper to retain students than to recruit new ones" (Mahala 7). A managed university also focuses on students' needs and goals, especially since dissatisfied students may go elsewhere (Mahala 7), and a managed university emphasizes offering a "product" (aka graduated students) useful to the marketplace. Unfortunately, centers have been seen through this limited lens. With their "we're-here-to-help" attitude, centers have

become places providing customer service to retain students. And, in the managed university, centers, supposedly offer a product, as well, ". . . since their special product, namely improved writing, has an increasing value relative to other academic skills and forms of knowledge in the job market" (Mahala 7). In short, on many campuses, faculty and administrators frequently see centers only as retention devices, as a form of customer service, and as preparing writers to be viable employees.

The managed university, with its enrollment management offices, marketing divisions, welcome centers, and recruiting offices (Mahala 6) is not going away. Nonetheless, in spite of the tunnel vision of "retain, serve, produce" so prevalent on many campuses, directors can stress the center's educational role. A prime means to effect a sea change in the faculty's and administration's attitude toward centers is for directors to emphasize the valuable part centers play in helping the "forgotten clients" (Devet, "Forgotten")—the consultants themselves. For them, centers are an educational locale where they learn as much (if not more) than their clients. Thus, one goal directors should emphasize to the rest of the academy is the centers' peer tutor development. This paper presents a framework for showing faculty and administrators about this seminal work so that centers may be perceived as a fundamental force for fostering and developing all students.

Defining Peer Tutor Development

To help the academy see centers as places for developing peer consultants, directors should first make sure faculty and administrators understand what directors do.. Sadly, faculty and administrators may see the directors' role as merely that of stewards, hiring student workers, making sure they are fluent with grammar and citation rules, and ensuring student workers show up on time. This view must change so administrators see directors not as supervisors but as educators.

Directors, in fact, carry out educational roles no different than those of faculty members. Like them, directors are authorities, experienced in their fields, who lead and foster others (their consultants) to produce flexible, adaptable citizens, open to new concepts. As Kenneth Bruffee stresses in his well-known "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind'," directors provide "a demanding academic environment and

make tutoring a genuine part of the [consultants'] own educational development" (97). Naturally, directors can point to their training classes (if they offer them) to show how they teach students to work in centers, and, as Dana Driscoll argues, such courses, if based on transfer of learning concepts, would "increase the importance, usefulness, and visibility of our work to broader audiences both within and outside academia, including within general education course work" (168). Because of scheduling problems, lack of funding, or local politics, not all schools (such as mine) can offer tutor courses as a prelude to working in centers. Instead, directors conduct intensive training before a new term starts, focusing on the centers' philosophy and goals, describing types of clients, explaining procedures to follow, and asking veteran consultants to role-play clients so the new workers gain experience. Whether offering a course or conducting intensive training before a new school year commences, directors—like faculty—are engaged in developing students.

This work of directors in fostering the growth of consultants should be called *peer tutor development*. To understand better this phrase, it is helpful to contrast it with *peer training*. Although it is common faculty and administrators think directors "train" consultants to work with students, directors need to stress that, in reality, they "develop" consultants. Let us examine, then, the key differences between *training* and *development*. *Training* refers to teaching consultants specific skills focusing on "current employee needs or [fill] competency gaps" ("Training"). In other words, what do consultants need to know to do the job? In *Human Resource Management*, Robert L. Mathis and John H. Jackson explain *training* means teaching workers to handle daily details (303), like tightening a screw on an assembly line or filing out forms. For centers, *training* means how to greet clients, fill out reports, and sit next to clients. These are repeatable duties, varying little from day to day. Most faculty and administrators view directors' training this way, where directors are simply giving consultants tactics for dealing with various types of clients or how to complete paperwork. Such a view, unfortunately, restricts what directors do for consultants and by extension what centers give clients seeking help with their writing.

Development embodies a different scope. It refers to preparing consultants for "future assignments and responsibilities" ("Training"). Because it is ongoing, *development* "emphasiz[es] conceptual,

theoretical knowledge" (Surbhi). When directors use the word *development*, they show that consultants learn to make judgments as well as to anticipate and solve problems (Devet, "Writing Center"). In short, "*Training*, . . . concentrates on the needs of the current job, while *development* helps workers prepare for any new ideas that the job requires" (Noe et al. 401, emphasis added). Directors *train* consultants to handle crying students, but they also *develop* them to understand all kinds of interpersonal relationships. To make visible to academic stakeholders the value of centers for consultants, directors should stress they are not just conducting *training* but they are *developing* their consultants. The phrase *peer tutor development* conveys this important objective of directors who are actively, deeply engaged in achieving educational goals.

Using the phrase *peer tutor development* does not mean directors should eschew the widely known phrase *peer (tutor) education* (Bruffee; Hall ("Problems", "Theory"); Zimmerelli) for describing the centers' good work. *Peer education* is an accurate phrase for describing what consultants do for clients where one student is assisting another and both are learning together (Module 1). *Peer education* also arises from several sound social theories about human behavior. Social Learning Theory, for instance, argues individuals can influence others when they are perceived as "models of human behavior" ("Module 1"; Bandura), a key point in peer education where consultants represent to their clients models of good student writers. Another foundation for peer education— The Theory of Reasoned Action—explains that those who are considered "important" to another can serve as role models ("Module 1"), a prime ingredient for peer education to work. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory also contributes to the theoretical foundation of peer education. This theory argues certain individuals in a group (like consultants) are agents for change by showing others in their group (the clients) how ideas are innovative (different ways to write, for instance) (LaMorte). Of course, there is also Paulo Freire's well-known Theory of Participatory Education, which, famously, argues change occurs if one feels he/she has power to contribute to a conversation with another (like a peer talking to a consultant) ("Module 1"). As Freire's theory indicates, central to peer education is that a dialogue between equals must exist so change arises; certainly this sense of equality is present in writing center consultations: "[W]hile students often cast their own teachers as sages on stages, consultants eschew this hierarchy, forming . . . a community of

cooperation with their clients" (Devet, "Redefining"). Thus, consultants are effective because peers "effect change among other members of the same group" (Module 1). Peer education does work.

Though directors should not drop *peer education*, they should realize this phrase best describes what transpires within consultations. If faculty and administrators are to understand better what centers do, directors should use *peer tutor development* in their discussions with the academy. Then, they more accurately convey they are actively, enthusiastically engaged in helping students (aka consultants) to grow as individuals, a prime goal of any university ("managed" or otherwise).

Creating a Framework to Demonstrate Peer Tutor Development to the Academy

Centers need a framework to describe what they achieve when claiming to foster peer tutor development. This framework consists of SLOs, mission statements/strategic plans, and demonstrating consultants' growth.

Representing Peer Tutor Development through Core Concepts (SLOs)

A keen method for showing the nature of peer tutor development is to employ the wording the academy uses to describe itself. Administrators are constantly engaged in assessment, leading to accreditation or even re-accreditation. It is rare if a college or university is not undergoing some form of self-evaluation, such as for regional organizations (like SACS—the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or NEASC—New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission). With accreditation a fact of life for the academy, directors can relate their centers to these same institutional concerns. As Lori Baker argues when describing accreditation, "[D]irectors can benefit from aligning writing center work with these processes [of accreditation], because the work done with external audiences of accreditors in mind can also help increase support and visibility for writing centers at their local institutions" (2).

Aligning with one's academy means using the same approach for accreditation as that of the institution: establishing core concepts or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Based on Benjamin Bloom's well-

known taxonomy of cognitive skills (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) ("Bloom's"), SLOs are "specific statements about the *knowledge*, *attitudes*, and *values* that are expected of students after successfully completing the program/curriculum" (Maki, no emphasis added). As Jennifer Lowman, Coordinator of Student Persistence Research at the University of Nevada-Reno, states, "If you tell students what you expect them to learn and how it will benefit them, they are more likely to learn" (5).

SLOs not only reflect the centers' status in the academy but represent the values central to peer tutor development. The SLO's list of outcomes usually states what students will *value*, *know,* and *do* (Lowman 18). For centers, this approach means directors look for what consultants should *know* to carry out their work; what they should *do* to enact consultations daily; and, finally, what they should *value* as a result of their work. These principles of *know*, *do*, and *value*, then, help directors report their educational work to administrators and faculty, showing peer tutor development in action but using terminology both faculty and administrators understand.

At the CofC center, the core concepts for peer tutor development entail consultants' *knowing* about the writing process, about theories for handling interpersonal relationships, about conducting research as critical thinkers and writers, and about referring students to the rest of the campus' services. They should also be able to *do* (apply) different theories of writing, reflect on their training and daily work, identify issues arising in their tutoring, and refer students to other campus resources like counseling centers or substance abuse offices. Finally, on a conceptual level, consultants should *value* the different ways writers approach assignments, the importance of being flexible during consultations, the ability to conduct writing center scholarship, and the recognition of students' different emotional needs. SLOs will vary from center to center. As a possible model, though, the ones for the CofC center are listed in the table on the next page.

Table 1: Core Principles for Consultants' Peer Development

KNOW	DO	VALUE
understanding the writing process	reading, writing, and applying theories of writing to consultations	appreciating the different ways writers approach assignments; the individuality of the writing process; reacting as readers; the role of creativity in writing:
learning theories about being consultants (do's and don'ts)	reflecting on consultations, attending staff training, becoming certified, writing for publication, making presentations at conferences	being flexible for each consultation; being able to improvise
conducting research in order to publish or present at conferences	identifying issues/topics based on personal experience	contributing to writing center scholarship
being knowledgeable about the college's other services	Referring students to services, such as those of the counseling and substance abuse centers	recognizing students' varying emotional needs

Although crafting such a chart may seem reductive, directors and consultants who describe a center's *know*, *do,* and *value* are characterizing peer tutor development as more than merely how to sit next to clients or how to recognize a comma splice. The chart conveniently describes for administrators and faculty the center's work, that is, the "conceptual, theoretical knowledge" (Blazer 27) on which the center's goals rest. For instance, the chart's *know*, *value*, and *do* concepts support a key part of my college's Strategic Plan of having a "student-focused community that embraces mutual respect, collaboration and diversity for the welfare of the individual and the institution" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic" 5). As a director, I can point out the center's "student-focused" operation of using peer consultants to work with other students as described in the chart. This SLO, then, connects the center to the institution. As Mary Lou Odom explains in her "Director's Column: 'Local work: Identity and the Writing Center Director,'" "Illustrating the role and reach of the Writing Center within its institution automatically situates its identity in a local context that audiences both understand and value" (28). These core concepts, reflecting peer tutor development, demonstrate consultants are learning skills that line up with the academy itself (Driscoll 169).

Using Mission Statements and Strategic Plans

To frame the work of centers for the managed university, directors should also write what almost every school has: a mission statement. At my college, the center resides under the umbrella of a learning commons comprised of accounting, math, science, speaking, and writing labs. The mission statement in our learning commons stresses, among other concerns, that all of its facets "provide comprehensive academic support programs for the [college's students] as they strive for excellence in learning . . ." ("About Us"). This part of the commons' mission describes, in general terms, the educational value of centers. It shows that even in a managed university, centers do more than just retain at-risk students; they support all students. The phrasing also echoes my institution's own mission statement: "This community [the college], founded on the principles of the liberal arts tradition, provides students the *opportunity to realize their intellectual and personal potential* and to become responsible, productive members of society" (Board of Trustees, "Mission," emphasis added). Thus, centers are more than locales to

rescue students and keep them around the academy. They provide an "opportunity" (a prime concept in the school's mission) to grow, an important goal for all centers.

The commons' mission statement has another vital feature. When it states the commons "promot[es] student leadership and development through peer education experiences" ("About Us"), it again picks up on the school's wording, even as it demonstrates centers provide more than a managed university expects. A central component of the school's Strategic Plan is the college should "provide students a highly personalized education based on a liberal arts and sciences core and enhanced by opportunities for *experiential learning*" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic" 10, emphasis added). The words *experiential learning* fit with the commons' statement so the commons and the school are both advocating students engage in leadership opportunities or hands-on work. To achieve this part of the Strategic Plan, the center encourages consultants to make conference presentations or to conduct staff training sessions, thus validating the center's role in peer tutor development and enhancing the center's educational role in a managed university, whose stakeholders often do not see the center functioning in such a broad way.

An institution's strategic plan furnishes other ways to demonstrate a center's importance. My school's plan stresses the goal of "pursu[ing] and shar[ing] knowledge through study, inquiry, and creation in order to empower the individual and enrich society" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic" 5). As advocated by such scholars as Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta, consultants should conduct research, write up the results, and publish findings, as often found in the *Writing Center Journal* or the *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*. "[S]haring of knowledge," as the Strategic Plan states, also occurs within centers. During staff meetings, consultants report on writing center scholarship, such as that all-too-well-known essay "The Idea of a Writing Center" (North) or other vital articles from Writing Center Studies. Doing so illustrates how the center, like other parts of the academy, produces knowledge that can be shared with other scholars, again stressing the center's educational role. My school also encourages faculty to engage with the local area to share ideas. To enact this outreach, I have taken consultants to other colleges' centers where they have made presentations about their work to fellow consultants. Such exchanging of ideas meshes with the school's goals. When my center's

training focuses on working with different student populations, such as those described in Mandy Suhr-Sytsma and Shan-Estelle Brown's essay "Theory In/To Practice: Addressing the Everyday Language of Oppression in the Writing Center," the consultants' development fits with yet another strategic value of a "study-focused community that embraces mutual respect, collaboration, and diversity for the welfare of the individual and the community" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic," 5). By creating an atmosphere where consultants learn from the field of Writing Center Studies, the center aligns itself with my institution's Strategic Plan, attesting to the essential role the center plays in developing its consultants. Centers are more than mere "helpmates" in the managed university; they are "initiators of inquiry" (Isaacs and Knight 58).

Beyond the staffroom and its discussions, directors can do even more to relate their center's goals to academy's. A strong value espoused by my school is that faculty and students should conduct research together. The center achieves this goal when consultants tap into their experience to co-write articles with the director and other consultants. As one consultant at my center described the benefits,

> Co-writing with [the director] is tantamount to a ship's crew working alongside their captain. The captain possesses the knowledge and experience to direct and maintain an organized working environment, which ultimately allows the team to work efficiently and successfully. In essence, I learned what kind of organization is required when developing a project and co-writing an article that involves a diverse set of individuals. (Cinense)

It is true sometimes that such research is not always considered "hard core" like that produced by scientific studies. It is, supposedly, *only* the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL), in spite of the fact the research uses vital methodologies like case studies, ethnographic investigations, and surveys. Just the same, administrators should know the consultants conduct research, for such work "develops an ethos of scholarly inquiry and objectivity" (Ervin 51), key features of any academy. After the paper is published, directors should inform administrators, like department chairs, about the consultants' publication. After all, chairs like to present news about their majors'

successful activities in annual reports, thus enhancing both the center and the departments in which consultants are majors.

Demonstrating to the Academy the Results of Peer Tutor Development

Determining the effect of any endeavor is difficult, but directors can demonstrate the results of peer tutor development through several key methods: transmission of knowledge among the consultants, the use of certification, and engagement in self-reflection.

It is a standard practice that experienced consultants help other, less experienced ones to grow (Boquet; Capossela; Devet, "Untapped"; Fitzgerald and Ianetta; Gillespie and Lerner; Klauza; Ryan and Zimmerelli). In my center, for instance, consultants who have undergone one or two years of peer tutor development have written questions new consultants answer by using the center's handouts and books (Devet, "Treasure"). These questions are the same ones experienced consultants have heard repeatedly from their clients: "What is Chicago style?" or "What is passive voice?" or "I don't know how to write a good title for my paper. Can you help me?" The experienced consultants also supply the answers so new consultants can check their responses. This treasure hunt is a sure way to demonstrate to administrators that peer tutor development has occurred, with experienced consultants transmitting their wisdom to new ones.

No discussion of peer development is complete without referring to certification, a process by which consultants meet nationally established standards of training in order to confirm their growth as consultants. Here, directors validate the center's achievement, affirm the values of the academy, and uphold the center's educational status because certification through national organizations, like the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the National Peer Tutoring Association (NPTA), or the Association for the Tutoring Profession (ATP), impresses faculty and administrators with a center's professional nature (Devet and Gaetke). Although CRLA, NPTA, and ATP do differ in their details, overall, they stress the standards by which directors train and develop consultants. Consider, for example, those listed by CRLA: "definition of tutoring and [a] tutor['s] responsibilities; basic tutoring guidelines; techniques for successfully beginning and ending a tutoring session; some basic tutoring do's and don'ts; role modeling; setting goals/planning for each

consultation; communication skills; active listening and paraphrasing; referral skills; study skills; critical thinking skills; and compliance with the ethics and philosophy of the tutor program as set by each lab" ("International"). Consultants meet these standards in order to demonstrate their growth.

Still, directors should be aware certification poses some drawbacks. The CofC center, certified through the CRLA since the late 1980's, labors to produce the vast paperwork needed to track each consultant's progress towards certification. Then, too, the CRLA's origins as a way to validate remedial reading programs may not mesh with a center's desire to dispel the developmental image still often associated with centers (Devet, "The Good," 334). However, even with some possible disadvantages, certification helps to demonstrate a center that fosters consultants' development so it is, indeed, a "center" for education.

Another means to determine peer tutor development is the use of self-reflection, a well-known means to develop consultants (Bell; Hall, "Theory"; Mattison; Okawa et al.; Smith; Yancey). Although self-reflection takes many forms, my center asks departing consultants to write a one-page "Advice to the Future" essay that provides new consultants with two or three survival tips. These essays, collected for over twenty years, sit in a notebook for all to read, offering golden words of advice, such as "This job is bi-directional: we assist students and help them to become confident writers while, at the same time, we become more confident in our own abilities" (Wallace), or "The clients have all of the answers to the questions they ask; they just need a sounding board to confirm their ideas. . . . . This method has transferred to my own writing process. I ask myself these same questions and [have] gain[ed] confidence in my own writing" (Bacon). Directors can show these advice pieces to faculty so they understand consultants have made their consultations a part of themselves as workers and as writers—a sure sign the center is, indeed, fostering development of the peer tutors and supporting the college's Strategic Plan "to pursue and share knowledge through study, inquiry, and creation in order to empower the individual and enrich society" (Board of Trustees, "Strategic" 5).

In addition, directors can demonstrate peer tutor development by having face-to-face meetings between consultants and faculty. This technique helps faculty see first-hand the center is achieving the institution's goal of

producing literate, articulate consultants. When meeting a center's staff, faculty can ask consultants questions about their work with clients, while consultants, in turn, can seek information from faculty about their teaching of writing, thus encouraging an atmosphere of professionals talking to fellow professionals. After visiting with consultants, faculty carry back to their departments how consultants are helpful and knowledgeable. Here is how a Communication professor describes his recent meeting with my consultants:

> Day after day, semester after semester, and year after year, [the] lab's peer consultants continue to make a positive difference in the learning outcomes of students representing a wide range of academic disciplines. . . . Based upon conversations with my advisees and students, past and present, as well as faculty colleagues in and outside the Department of Communication, I know that my sentiments are shared by a great many others on campus. (Westerfelhaus)

Listening to how consultants discuss their work with clients, faculty learn peer consultants are knowledgeable, committed workers who implement the school's goals.

Conclusion

It may be argued directors will have little impact on administrative decisions or may even be expressing values antithetical to those of the managed university when directors show how their centers develop consultants. It is not necessarily the case. Essentially, directors must educate faculty and administrators about the *full* value of centers. With everything is "out on the table," the academy can grasp the complete scope of centers far beyond the managed university's view of them just as places for retaining students, providing customer service, and producing workers for the marketplace.

It might also be argued that when directors present their centers' values in the same terms faculty and administrators use to define academic outcomes, directors are sacrificing their principles. I would argue, however, that directors and their centers are experts at upholding their core values even as they "appropriate dominant institutional rhetorics and contradictory institutional goals and turn them to serve the less

powerful" (Mahala 5). A prime example is found in how centers handle faculty's assignments. Sometimes the prompts limit students' options, thus hampering the center's role of helping students discover their writing processes and develop their own voices. Centers deal with this problem by consultants' trying to find "openings where [students'] own needs and interests can be engaged" (Mahala 9) even while satisfying the faculty's requirements. Centers also have to adjust to administrators' visions. Stanford University's center, for example, effected a compromise when it and administrators conceived differently the role of a Peer Tutor Coordinator (PTC). The director wanted the PTC to be used only in the center, but administrators thought the position should serve the entire university, exclusively. To accommodate both views, the PTC position became an intermediary, "translat[ing] the values and ideas" between the tutoring staff and the administration (Bleakney et al. 52). When visions are not identical, centers are skillful at making adjustments, without compromising their substance…a tough position to be in, but one where most centers find themselves. So, describing peer tutor development with the terminology faculty and administrators are accustomed to employing is not "selling out." Just the opposite. It is an effective way for centers to establish their educational value.

It is also true directors already carry out a Herculean number of labors, yet directors must also undertake another vital mission: showing centers, as ambassadors of writing, are venues for education as exemplified by centers' peer tutor development. Fostering the consultants' growth—as revealed in SLOs, mission statements, strategic plans, and demonstrations of the consultants' development—emphasizes the center's critical work of creating a cadre of consultants who are intelligent, articulate, and mature. Thus, through peer tutor development directors show the managed university that centers are not mere "adjuncts to courses" but "central parts of the academic enterprise" (Isaacs and Knight 58).

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