5-2016

Global-to-local-to-global: A model for tutoring ESL students in the writing center

David Aguilar
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

GLOBAL-TO-LOCAL-TO-GLOBAL: A MODEL FOR TUTORING ESL STUDENTS IN THE WRITING CENTER

A Thesis

by

DAVID AGUILAR

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

Major Subject: English

GLOBAL-TO-LOCAL-TO-GLOBAL: A MODEL FOR TUTORING ESL STUDENTS IN THE WRITING CENTER

A Thesis
by
DAVID AGUILAR

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Lyon Rathbun
Chair of Committee

Dr. James Frost
Committee Member

Dr. Christopher Carmona
Committee Member

May 2016

ABSTRACT

Aguilar, David, Global-to-Local-to-Global: A Model for Tutoring ESL Students in the Writing Center. Master of Arts (MA), May, 2016, 83 pp., 46 references.

Since its inception, the writing center has always focused on traditional students, and today that tradition is continued in such a way that the overwhelming amount of research dedicated to writing center theory and practice addresses the concerns of those students. However, universities with unique student populations, such as the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with its majority of Hispanic students, require novel practices within their writing centers. Moreover, much of the linguistic, social, and cultural factors of the region are not well documented and therefore are not addressed by the mainstream theory and practices of other universities. With the needs of our students in mind, the Writing Center in Brownsville, TX, must adapt to better serve the ESL and non-native English-speaking students of UTRGV. This thesis proposes a model of tutoring intended for these students.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Karina, without whom I would have collapsed into the endless void where new ideas go to die. I also want to thank Dr. Lyon Rathbun and Dr. Jim Frost for their much needed guidance and wisdom. Special thanks to my family—Gabriela, Hermelinda, Claudia, and John—for their support. And a final thanks to Taj and Xiomara for the many smiles and laughter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER I

CONNECTING LANGUAGE AND THE WRITING CENTER IN BROWNSVILLE

Cultural Factoids about Brownsville

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley—Brownsville is located in the southern-most border city of Texas. In fact, if I look out my office window, I can see the Rio Grande, the river that separates the United States and Mexico. The university is still relatively new. It was created in the fall of 2016 and occupies the space that two previous universities had called their own. Brownsville's campus, formerly known as UTB, has a rich history, but in the last three years there have been significant changes. Up until the spring of 2013, The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College were one institution offering various degrees and certificates; the student population included traditional and non-traditional students, some of whom required remedial or developmental coursework, which at the time was provided through TSC, and some of whom were bilingual international students. However, by July of that year, both institutions had signed off on property rights and accreditations. Students, especially those who were completing developmental and remedial coursework, were shocked that their acceptance to the university was essentially rescinded and were to attend TSC—not that it's a bad school. It seemed all but upper administration were dazed by the decisions, and just when students, faculty, and staff had acclimated to the idea of a separate UTB and TSC, more news reached our ears that UTB and UT Pan American (Edinburg) would be dissolved, and from the

rubble a new university would be created. All this to say that I write this thesis now in the midst of drastic revision and planning during a crucial time in our city's history.

To say that Brownsville is culturally rich would be an understatement. It's no Los Angeles, but it certainly has the vibe and charm of a bilingual and bicultural region, and the people of Brownsville reflect this aura. The local culture prioritizes family, religion, wealth, and language, usually in that order, which leads to complications when it clashes with the popular American culture from central Texas and farther north. Where Mexican, Mexican-American, and Hispanic people pursue a life dedicated to the advancement of the family, Americans[1] pursue the advancement and ultimate success of the self.

In Brownsville, many citizens are bilingual—in some cases English is their first language, and Spanish is the second, yet in others it's reversed. Others, particularly Americans born farther north, are monolingual. Strictly speaking, they are not completely literate in both languages. I, for instance, have mastered English, and I can understand, read, and speak Spanish, but I cannot write in it. Therefore, I cannot claim to be literate in Spanish, and many citizens of Brownsville fall into this category: growing up around two languages but never truly mastering both, if even one.

Brownsville's proximity to Mexico also accounts for various characteristics of the university, the first of which is that the university does not have an ethnically diverse student body. According to the UT Brownsville's homepage section "Fast Facts," approximately 8,500 students attend UTB, 91% of whom are Hispanic.[2] The same can be said of the city's population;

[1] I use the word loosely to mean "born and raised solely in the United States."
[2] "Fast Facts" also claims that only 1.3% of the student body (approximately 90 students) reside in Mexico. This seems unlikely given the number of students I know personally who live in Mexico and attended UTB, now reimagined as a part of UTRGV. It's possible that many students have family who live in the United States and list their families' addresses. There are a

according to the 2010 U.S. Census, 93.2% of Brownsville's citizens are Hispanic.[3] And as one would expect, ethnicity has a strong connection to language. According to the same census, of Brownsville's citizens, 87.2% speak a language at home other than English. To give an idea of what this implies, consider the definition of ESL.

Defining ESL (in Brownsville)

ESL literally means 'English as a second language,' so individuals who learn English after they have acquired their native language fall under this label. Obviously ESL has more connotations than that, but for the moment, we can suspend those attachments. Now consider what ESL means to a faculty member from a popular or typical university. If a nameless, faceless student was to contact such a member for help with writing and claim to be ESL, what can the instructor assume? The student is certainly not a native English speaker, but (s)he may have lived in the country long enough to become fluent; the student was labeled—accurately or not is another matter entirely—at one time or another by someone during her education; and the student clearly identifies with ESL enough to associate it negatively with writing. The question of the student's first language is impossible to answer without more information. But even with that information, there is no guarantee that a tutor or writing consultant can address the student's concerns. Many tutors who are trained to tutor ESL students avoid the student's first language altogether because it would be virtually impossible to cater to every linguistic background on campus.

---

plethora of reasons for doing this, none of which are discussed in this paper, but researchers would do well to investigate this phenomenon.

[3] For the sake of consistency, I use the word 'Hispanic' in lieu of 'Latino' only because current government documents have adopted 'Hispanic' for its demographic data. Currently, the term is under scrutiny within the community and should be handled delicately.

At UTRGV—Brownsville (and when it was formerly UTB), however, such implications are largely irrelevant and do not have to be considered because—UTRGV's athletics notwithstanding—the university lacks diversity. When a student enters the writing center and claims that (s)he is an ESL student, a tutor can safely assume that the student's first language is Spanish. On rare occasions, a native Korean or Mandarin speaker will visit the center, but the student's phonetics and physicality offer hints about the student's background. A tutor can also identify most errors in a student's paper based on a student's language which again is typically Spanish, making it easier to catalog various errors and train future tutors to recognize and address such errors. For example, a typical language-related error is pronoun-subject omission. In Spanish, it is acceptable to begin a sentence with a verb because each pronoun has its own verb conjugation, allowing the hearer/reader to identify the implied subject based on the verb's morphological case ending: *yo soy* ('I am'); *tú eres* ('you are'); *él/ella es* ('he/she is'); *nosotros somos* ('we are'); *vosotros sois* ('you [formal] are'); *ellos son* ('they are'). As illustrated by these examples, every pronoun has a different conjugation, so certain constructions like *Está lloviendo* (literally 'is raining') are acceptable and easily understood to mean 'it is raining' without using a pronoun. As one can imagine, this difference in construction leads to various problems, one of which is the omission of the pronoun-subject: writing 'Is raining' in lieu of 'It is raining.'

Though this problem is simple to address, there are other, more difficult language-related issues that are compounded given the specific dialect of Spanish spoken in Brownsville. The examples listed above are taken from Standard Spanish spoken in Spain, but northern Mexican Spanish is different in its definition of certain words and certain verb constructions. For example, in Spain, a speaker may say, "*Vosotros sois cansados*" ('you [formal] are tired'), but a Spanish speaker in Brownsville will say, "*Ustedes están cansados*" for the same expression. Both the

pronoun and the verb are remarkably different, but this is not one of the difficult language-related issues mentioned earlier in this paragraph. Our students' issues stem from the model of bilingual education employed in local public schools and from a specific dialect of northern Mexican Spanish which the local speakers call Mocho (the speakers of which are usually referred to as Pocho). Often, valley residents will extend the word 'pocho' to the dialect as well.

Because literature on the language is so scarce, I have included a brief overview of the dialect and its speakers. Pocho's literal definition refers to a fruit that has become rotten or has spoiled. Today, however, the word extends to both people and language. It can refer to a Mexican national who became a citizen in the United States, to an American citizen who attempts to speak Spanish, to a Mexican national who has assimilated to the American culture and abandoned the Spanish language, to an individual who resides on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border and frequently crosses the bridge, or to the language that such an individual might speak. The last definition is perhaps the most interesting. Some speakers of standard Spanish in Mexico treat Pocho as an inferior language, void of traditional grammar and filled with English borrowings. Others treat the language as a popular mode of speaking that attempts to join two cultures, and still others believe the language is a dialect of English spoken only by uneducated Spanish speakers. Examples include *pacón* (Standard Spanish: *palomitas de maíz* or simply *palomitas*) meaning 'popcorn,' *parquiar* (SS: *estacionar*) meaning 'to park [a car],' *troca* (SS: *camioneta*) meaning 'truck,' and *turnear* (SS: *voltear* or *girar*) meaning 'to turn.' There are clear similarities between the English words and their Pocho counterparts, namely in their phonetics.

Most Brownsvillians speak this variety of English-Spanish, which categorically would be closer to a creole than a stabilized interlanguage—the politically correct way of saying 'pidgin.'

This suggests that though these speakers have not mastered the standard forms of English or Spanish, they have developed and established a working grammar for the local dialect. None of this, by the way, is a problem when applying for a job that requires English or Spanish fluency, but it does become a problem when they are required to write in English. Therefore, our job at the writing center is more difficult because while there is plenty of research and practical knowledge on how to help ESL students with a Spanish/Mexican background, there is little research, if any, on how to help students who have not yet mastered true literacy in either language. Essentially, the specific type of ESL students in Brownsville presents a challenge for the writing center. During my first semester working as a tutor, I realized that the best way to help my students was to understand how their language developed and the sort of education they received—though not necessarily in that order—and change the way they viewed language. Perhaps then I could begin to address the core of their problems and not just feed them a fish and watch them starve later.

Brownsville's State of Second-Language Acquisition

The most interesting implication of Pocho is the acquisition process. Ideally, a native Spanish speaker who wants to learn English enrolls in a bilingual program that either teaches English synthetically, such as formal grammar instruction that one would experience with Latin, or analytically, such as content-based instruction that focuses on fluency. Either method can be successful given the learning environment, but there are a handful of methods that have been unsuccessful and are still used today, especially in the public school sector. Immersion programs by definition are not bilingual programs: their mission is to take a speaker of any language and immerse him/her in the target language. During the mid-1960s, these programs were widely employed because teachers required no training in cultural or linguistic awareness; any English

instructor could, in theory, teach the language to anyone, and research from the field of bilingualism that would later discredit the effectiveness of such programs had not yet emerged. Only until the late '80s did educators establish actual bilingual programs.

Today, however, some remnants of these programs exist, especially in regions that have a dense population of foreign language speakers and few resources to train a steady workforce of bilingual education teachers (e.g., Brownsville). These programs, which at the time were commonly found in high schools, were run poorly and failed to develop any true bilingual students. In fact, many students who graduated from these programs were not fluent in either English or Spanish but were labeled 'college-ready' because the teachers had prepared students for standardized college-entrance exams, such as the Compass and TSI, which hardly measure language fluency, let alone college readiness (Scott-Clayton 37). As a result, a flood of underprepared and linguistically deprived students enrolled in college courses and needed help with reading and writing skills, and it fell to the writing center to 'fix' these students' problems.

But these students weren't typical ESL students. They were not learning English as a second language because they barely had a first, and the first language was not Standard Spanish; rather their first language was Pocho. Therefore, the ESL training that some of the tutors had undergone was insufficient because it addressed the more holistic language-related issues, such as cultural awareness and tutor directiveness, but hardly focused on more immediate problems, such as grammar instruction and reading comprehension: problems that our students, who at the time were labeled remedial/developmental, needed to tackle before they could truly compose anything. Given the lack of training, the writing center faced many problems, both in and out of the office.

The History of Brownsville's Writing Center

As with many writing centers across the nation, UTB's center—at the time the center was called 'the Writing Lab' and belonged to both the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College who had an open admissions policy—started out with a small budget and less than stellar expectations. Many ESL students enrolled in remedial and developmental courses aimed at preparing them for their first college composition course. When certain students proved to be too much of a challenge, instructors for these courses sent these students to the Writing Lab. Tutors at the time were hired from a small pool of applicants, none of which had a great deal of experience tutoring writing as a subject or working with the students of Brownsville. I've heard only stories and rumors about the management of the center—after all, I was still in elementary school, learning about grammar for the first time, when the center first began—but none of the stories were good. The center was apparently housed under a different department then, one that focused more on student services than learning assistance. The director of the center had next to no qualifications to run what one expects a writing center to be and established a precedent that others, myself included, would have to fight to change many years later. The center viewed itself as a place for remediation, intended only for those students who really struggled with writing. The tutors there, being untrained and unqualified to help Brownsville's specific type of ESL students, resorted to editing, going so far as to include marginalia on student papers. Faculty from various departments, especially the English department, caught wind and turned students away from the service, for not only was it a violation of tutoring ideology to edit and write on student papers, but the tutors' comments were incorrect, discrediting the writing lab entirely.

Since then, UTB and TSC split, delegating the responsibility of remedial/developmental courses to TSC. After nearly a year of restructuring, the writing center was then overseen by Learning Enrichment and the English department. As a result of the split and the departmental changes, the writing center has always had an English faculty member employed as a half-time director, which began the alliance between the center and the department: tutors were trained by faculty, first from the English department and then by faculty from other disciplines; tutors held workshops designed for freshmen writing students that catered especially to Composition courses; and tutors were held to a much higher standard by faculty who truly cared about what students were receiving from the center. Unfortunately, though, the stigma of remediation still haunts our office, even after changing locations—twice. My first encounter with the stigma was two weeks after I was brought on as a tutor, when it was the Writing Lab and belonged to UTB/TSC. Late one evening a student and his girlfriend stopped by the center to ask for assistance. I greeted them and asked what they needed help with. The student asked, "Is this where I can drop off my paper to get edited?" I immediately but gently corrected him, assuring him that we were a tutoring service, not an editing one. His reply still makes me shudder: "How does that help anyone? Does it look like I need tutoring?" The student became upset and promptly left, and I never saw him again, but it wouldn't be the last time I heard something like this.

Recently, I ran a table as a representative of the Writing Center at our university's first Graduate Fair in Brownsville. I passed out flyers announcing our newly added online service and explained to interested students the various services we offered. At least three students, however, expressed their surprise to see us at the fair: "Isn't the writing center only for undergrads? Why would a grad student need tutoring?" But perhaps the most striking question came after I

mentioned that we extended our services to faculty: “Oh, wow. I don’t mean to embarrass anyone, but who was the professor who needed help?” Such myths about the writing center plague many centers around the nation, but it has been particularly deplorable on this campus. Who are these graduate students who do not, or rather should not, need help with writing, and why would it be embarrassing if they received such help? More importantly, though, where do such myths originate?

I was shocked to discover that many instructors, though certainly not the majority, told their students that the writing center edited and proofread student papers. I recall one occasion when a professor sent his class of twenty-or-so students to have their papers looked at by someone at the center, which was reasonable but odd since such large visits are planned well in advance. About two days later, I received an email from the professor, who was outraged at the quality of the papers: “This [the quality of the students’ writing] is unacceptable. Their papers were full of errors…I’m surprised that your tutors let my students believe they had written passing papers.” I responded by explaining that our job was to tutor, not edit, and that more time would be needed before any significant improvement could be seen, but the professor was not pleased with my response and claimed that students were clearly not benefitting from our service. I calmly but firmly replied that tutoring was a slow process that required students to be motivated and dedicated to improve their writing out of their own volition; coming to the center for one assignment the entire semester would not fix in 30 minutes what so many instructors before had not been able to fix in ten years. I also added quite frankly, “And if you think their writing was poor when they submitted their assignments, you should have seen them when they visited our center.”

From the difficult conversation, I arrived at four conclusions. Firstly, myths about the writing center are not limited to students. Secondly, besides the myths about editing, many believe that tutoring has immediate results for all students regardless of previous experiences. Thirdly, students and some faculty members use tutoring as a last resort rather than a gradual process. And lastly, students believe tutoring is something to be embarrassed about, and by extension, editing is the best and most appropriate solution for college students. Each of these conclusions proved that regardless of the progress I had made in the writing center, there was still much to do outside of it. But perhaps there was some truth to be found from these expectations; perhaps students and faculty recognized that our students do not need as much help with development, organization, or structure as what they need with grammar and mechanics. What they need is an approach that addresses their immediate concerns about their writing while grounding them in a process.

My Experience at the Writing Center and What I Learned from It

As the Assistant Director, I have interviewed many students who applied to be tutors in the writing center. One of the questions I always ask is, "What is the writing process?" I've received mixed responses: this applicant will list the five typical stages but never elaborate on what each stage means, that applicant will claim that there is no concrete process to follow, and the other applicant will ask, "There's a writing process?" The sad truth is that even students who want to tutor students on writing are not great writers themselves, and if these students don't know what the writing process is, it's unlikely that the rest of our students know either. However, the question that always receives the same response is, "What do you think is the biggest problem that students face in their writing?" Applicants tend to say, "Grammar." It may

be coincidence or popular stigma, but that response reveals an underlying lesson I had to learn when I first began tutoring.

Before I was the Assistant Director for the Writing Center, I was a tutor—untrained, unqualified, and under-prepared. I began working at the Writing Lab in the fall of 2010 when UTB was still merged with Texas Southmost College. I was a sophomore undergraduate confident in my writing ability, but less confident in my ability to tutor. I had never tutored anyone before except for my brother Johnathan, and I had tutored him for a multiple-choice exam for AP History in high school, quite different from tutoring writing or tutoring a stranger. When I was hired, I had only recently received an A in English Composition II. I had yet to take the mandatory English Grammar course or any of the other English courses that would shape my tutoring style. And above all, I had no clue what to expect during a tutoring session. My very first session was with an international student from China, who I could only imagine was the *only* Chinese student on campus, and in my humble but accurate opinion, I performed horribly. My immediate inclination was to proofread and edit the paper in front of me. I did not know that I had to somehow teach the student how to identify his errors, and more importantly that I had to shape the student to become an improved writer, especially given the differences in cultural backgrounds.

After that first disaster, I slowly improved my tutoring style on my own, implementing techniques as I acquired them from courses, textbooks, professors, and writing center directors, and I learned the importance of connecting the writing process, the writing, and the writer. All three had to work in tandem to create good, strong writing. But when applying this connection to tutoring, extra care had to be taken: essentially, a tutor has to keep the student on task, focusing on whatever problem or issue the tutor felt was most egregious in the *writing*, while creating a

lesson for the *writer* in the context of the *writing process*. So if a student needed help with sentence-boundary issues, the tutor must first demonstrate for the student a model for identifying the errors, then offer strategies for remedying the errors, and finally remind the student that this process was the final stage of the writing process.

About one year ago, I worked with a student whose first language was Spanish and who had begun learning English just two years before. Her assignment was to write a literary analysis on Kate Chopin's "The Storm." She asked that I "revise her paper for grammar mistakes," so I read the draft she brought aloud, and since it was only two pages, double-spaced, I read it in roughly two minutes. I realized, however, that her essay was a summary of the short story, not a literary analysis. But before I brought this problem to the student's attention, I asked her if she had any trouble understanding the assignment. When she said she wasn't sure what a literary analysis was, I briefly explained the assignment. She knew immediately that what she had written didn't follow the instructions. Up to this point, I had only discussed one global issue, but what drew the student's attention was my reading. She said that what I said aloud did not match what she wrote on the page, so I explained that I read exactly what I saw on the page—words and punctuation alike. As she revised her thesis statement to address the prompt, she asked that I read her newly written sentence. As I read, she recognized areas that needed serious revision (in terms of mechanics) and others that needed refinement.

This process was repeated about three more times before I stopped the session briefly to summarize what had been accomplished and to explain why reading aloud triggered her proofreading. In this way, she was able to both revise her paper at a global level and revise individual sentences at a local one. Today, as the Learning Specialist for the UTRGV Writing Center in Brownsville, I believe this approach of reading aloud to students, allowing them to

revise as needed, creates two opportunities. Firstly, the student recognizes that careful reading reveals mistakes in mechanics, clarity, and cohesion that would otherwise have remained hidden. Secondly, as the tutor reads aloud and the student revises, the tutor can gauge what the student is capable of revising on his/her own and whether the student addressed the prompt. This example best represents the whole picture of tutoring, attending to both local and global concerns, tackling two (very separate) issues without forcing the student to reevaluate her immediate needs. It creates an opportunity to show that editing and revising are connected within a larger process and that this process depends on the student's individual needs.

The Need for Focusing on Lower-Order Concerns in Brownsville

More often than not, however, a student cannot recognize errors on their own, and some are not prepared for certain assignments. Every semester I have at least two students who must critically evaluate an article based on its arguments but have not had enough exposure to rhetoric or enough time to study fallacious arguments to complete the assignment. These students, by the way, struggle with academic writing and write unacceptable constructions that are nearly impossible to read. I am forced to make a tough choice between guiding them through argumentation or showing them the rules of usage and academic writing. Either option will likely result in failure of the assignment, so I tend to choose the second option and help with mechanics because at the very least, the student will one day have to write for another class or for a job and will need to demonstrate collegiate-level writing. The same cannot be said for argumentation, not to take away any credit from its importance (i.e., not all students need to identify fallacious arguments for their careers).

Yet not all writing centers concern themselves with local issues, especially if it means proofreading. In fact, the Writing Center at UNC, Chapel Hill specifically states on its website,

"The Writing Center is not a proofreading or editing service, although we are happy to help writers learn these skills." Other centers might also run into problems with specific departments and classes. For instance, the webpage for the Writing Center at UWM provides a list of restrictions, one of which states, "While we wish we could help every student, we have had to make it our first priority to serve students whose classrooms are not primarily focused on the teaching of writing." The webpage later provides a list of classes for whose students the center cannot provide tutoring. Thus, all writing centers create policies that cater to their individual needs. The same goes for my center.

Though I do not advocate proofreading during every session, there is some value in identifying errors with and for the student. In the example above, the student already had some knowledge of writing mechanics and was both fluent and literate (to a degree) in both languages, but many students—and in the case of Brownsville's center, most students—do not have a firm grasp of the rules for commas or the rules for preposition-stranding or other similar rules, most likely because they have learned English as a second language, have not had enough exposure to writing in it, and have been exposed to Pocho for most of their lives. In these cases, tutors must at least provide a foundation on which to build students' knowledge so that when they return, tutors can employ the reading-aloud strategy with more effectiveness. Susan Blau and John Hall agree:

> [T]utoring NNES [non-native English speakers] students who have little experience writing in English is a different proposition from tutoring NNES students who are relatively fluent in English. Tutoring strategies that work for native speakers seem to be equally useful with the more fluent students. However, students who are struggling with English may require more flexibility and often

> require more direction and instruction. These students often need sentence-level language instruction before they can work on global issues like focus, organization, and development of ideas. If each sentence has significant sentence-level problems, local issues such as incorrect grammar, syntax, vocabulary usage, idiomatic expression, or mechanics, it becomes difficult for a tutor to find the writer's focus, no less discuss it immediately. (35)

Therefore, Brownsville's unique student demographic requires more immediate attention because what may work for ESL students in writing centers around the United States does not work for our students, creating a unique paradox: tutors cannot edit papers and are discouraged by mainstream research to avoid proofreading, yet tutors cannot ignore local issues since they are perhaps the biggest problem that our students face. Therefore, an approach must be outlined that resolves this paradox, but such an approach would likely contradict relevant writing center literature. In light of the various peculiarities for our students, the following chapter will review the literature surrounding writing center pedagogy by examining theory, analyzing studies from other writing centers, and incorporating relevant literature from composition studies, and it will discuss how the literature concerns ESL student practices and pedagogy and why such research generally falls short of Brownsville's needs.

CHAPTER II

THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE WRITING CENTER

Yet Another Paradox

There is no such thing as Writing Center Theory; ask any writing center director. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the theories that governed composition reflected the practices in the writing lab in a supplementary way (Mullin and Wallace). Writing labs were seen as fix-it shops where students were prescribed rules of grammar and usage in the hopes that they would master the rules and carry them into composition courses. This relationship changed, of course, during the late 1970s and 1980s when composition and rhetoric adopted theories that focused on writing as a process. Writing centers did not keep up with the trend and could not continue to maintain their then outdated practices with no real theory to act as a foundation. Thus, many at the helms of their individual centers adopted theories from psychology and sociology, molding them into their center's practice. Theories like positivism, minimalism, cultural relativism, and subjectivism all played roles in different centers across the country. While successful at first, such differences created rifts between centers and in some cases among academic departments because there was little agreement on what the ideal writing center ought to be and how such a center ought to support composition curriculum, let alone the curricula of the rest of the university (Hobson; Fitzgerald; Adams and Adams; Gillam).

Unlike most academic disciplines, techniques and practices in the writing center led to the development of its theory. Principles and guidelines manifested into theoretical frameworks, and these frameworks established theory which was then applied in the center. Previously, tutors were urged to fix errors and prescribe rules, but the current traditional premises on which this practice relied no longer served its purpose in the academic circles of composition. Theories from psychology and education then changed how writing centers viewed tutoring, but the rest of the university had no idea what the center's purpose was, so writing centers took it upon themselves to serve students without the oversight of composition or rhetoric departments. Therefore, in lieu of prescriptive practices wherein the writing center's goal was to improve a student's writing based on the needs of composition instructors, centers now used practices that focused on the student as a writer.

Still, none of these practices were ever truly based on theory. In fact, certain practices contradicted the theoretical framework upon which centers based themselves (e.g., in theory, collaborative learning, based on a constructivist approach, expects a tutor to be a peer or a coach, but all too often the tutor must be an authority on the subject which contradicts one of the tenets of social constructivism and follows more of a behaviorist model). Some theories fell out of favor only to be recalled when certain elements within them served a purpose for a writing center's practice. Over the last decade and a half, nearly all writing centers have revised their practices to better suit the needs of their students, but let us examine some of the theories upon which writing center practices are based, the theories that have been reconstituted from the practices, and the implications these have for writing centers.

Theory in the '60s: Behaviorism

At the close of the 19th century, Ivan Pavlov observed a phenomenon in his famous experiment involving hungry dogs, some food, and a bell. He could not have predicted at the time that his discovery of classical conditioning would later sprout the most recognizable branch of modern psychology. Behaviorism began as a movement to ground psychology as an objective, observable science by ignoring the events that took place in the mind and observe only the behaviors they constituted. Behaviorists, such as B. F. Skinner, argued that an individual learns by observing another's behavior and imitating it. Thus, desired behaviors could be rewarded and unwanted behaviors could be punished, reinforcing an outcome. Educators quickly adopted the theory for several reasons. Firstly, it allowed for objective measures to be implemented in the curriculum where it was previously subjective and laborious to identify student progress and measure student learning. Standardized testing, learning objectives, learning outcomes, and state-assigned textbooks can all be traced to behaviorist models (Tomic). Secondly, the theory reinforced the teacher-centered model of education which at the time was widely accepted because it gave authority and freedom to the instructor with little recourse if students failed. After all, not everyone is prepared for higher education, so *clearly* the instructor must not be responsible. Thirdly, students now knew what was expected of them and could prepare for any course with the appropriate strategy, such as memorization or cramming.

The negative effects of behaviorism are still felt today. Texas alone employs standardized testing in the form of TSI, STAAR, and the national SAT/ACT, not to mention the GRE. As a result, students enroll in universities underprepared because their high school teachers were pressured by their school board directors to have as many students pass these tests as possible, sacrificing genuine learning for drilled instruction for a test that has little importance in college.

Consequently, students develop skills that are meant for immediate success (e.g., memorizing a review to pass end-of-semester exams before enrolling in the following course to repeat the process) rather than learning how to think critically (Scott-Clayton)—I was one such student. Yet, standardized tests are used because in a competitive society, it is not *how* you achieve success, it is *that* you achieve success, and what better way to determine success than looking at numerical results?

Continuing the theme of standardization, the state or governing institution assigns textbooks to meet learning objectives and to have some continuity across the board. Unfortunately, the people who determine which textbooks to assign are political figures with corporate interests who serve on such committees, and they are preoccupied with their interests and rarely consider the interests of educators, students, or relevant research on the subject (Haney).

On the bright side, behaviorism has its positive uses. Although behaviorism is not concerned with learning in terms of cognitive processes, it can still help a student perform a skill. For example, a student walks into the writing center and requests help with editing a paper. First, I regretfully inform the student that the writing center is not an editing service, but still offer strategies for editing. Then I sit next to the student and read the paper aloud and jot down mental notes about the kinds of errors I see, never pointing to an error or acknowledging that an error exists. Most students naturally begin to correct errors as they see them, so my job is to demonstrate how reading aloud can offer a sort of spotlight on their writing that reading silently doesn't quite offer. Consequently, I ask students to read aloud on their own and find their errors, imitating what I had just performed, reflecting a behaviorist approach. Nevertheless, there is a limited number of practices that revolve around behaviorism that tutors in the writing center

consider effective, namely the one exemplified here. Writing centers today rely mostly on later theories that focused less on behavior and more on cognition.

Theory in the '70s: Cognitivism

Where behaviorism valued teacher-centered classrooms and relied on input-output models as effective tools for student learning, psychologists developed cognitivism in response to some of behaviorism's shortcomings: namely its inability to explain cognition. Under the old umbrella of behaviorism, students could write a proto-typical, five-paragraph essay, but could not write a 100-word abstract. Students could read an excerpt from an article and answer multiple-choice questions about what they understood from it, but could not write a critical response to what they read. Students could write complete sentences in English, but could not vary them. Clearly, students were not learning anything that wasn't skill-based, and true learning is not about developing a set of skills; it's about thinking and adapting to our natural surroundings (Tomic).

Consider the human capacity for language. I could write at this very moment any new and original sentence: 'Tomorrow the grapes will settle into their homes in the mountains of the Pacific Ocean and take their sharks out for a walk.' Under the behaviorist model, it would be impossible for me to create this nonsensical sentence without having heard or read it first. I could only replicate sentences that I was taught. This, of course, is ridiculous since humans are fully capable of casting new sentences every day. In his 1957 publication *Syntactic Structures*, Noam Chomsky, one of the leading psychologists who championed cognitivism, wrote the following sentence exemplifying this ability: "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously." Though void of any meaning, the sentence demonstrates that there is an innate ability to understand functions of

words (lexical items and parts of speech) and place them into a working system of constructs (grammar).

The same is true for other types of categorization. Take, for instance, an example of a child going to the zoo. She may see a parrot, a dove, a grackle, or an eagle and call them all birds, but if she were to see a penguin—if the Brownsville zoo had any penguins—she is less likely to call it a bird. Is the child wrong to think that a penguin is not a bird? As adults, we have developed complex categories based on proto-typical functions that we have observed over many years (and with much reinforcement), so when we think of birds, we think of certain physical traits that they exhibit: wings, feathers, beaks, talons, and small oblong bodies. We also think of actions that are exclusive to their category, such as flight and chirping. But how does a penguin factor into the category? It may not fly or have distinct plumage, but it lays eggs, has wings, and is born with a beak and a small oblong body. It is up to the child and her cognitive processes to reevaluate her mental constructs to fit the contradictory functions. This, in a nut shell, is learning. Observing the world around us, creating a construct of meaning from our observations, and reacting to the world based on our constructions act as a cyclical pattern of computation and thinking (Ertmer and Newby).

Educators adopted this model of cognition—internalizing functions that create and develop mental constructs—for their classrooms, and the results were fascinating. Instead of the typical teacher-centered classroom where students repeated the desired behavior exhibited by the instructor and where students were measured based on their ability to produce a desired output, classrooms under the cognitivist model were student-centered. These new progressive classrooms focused on developing students as thinkers and problems solvers, and although certain standards carried over from behaviorism, less stress was placed on assessment and more

was placed on student development. The terms ‘critical thinking’ and ‘problem-solving’ became staples at conferences and departmental meetings around the country, both characteristic of a cognitivistic model (Ertmer and Newby). Writing centers today still pride themselves on their ability to train tutors who can address critical thinking during their sessions and suggest strategies for analyzing and synthesizing information unique to the students’ needs.

Theory in the ‘80s: Constructivism and Social Learning

Stepping away from the teacher-centered and student-centered classrooms, later theories expanded on cognitivism and focused instead on the community of learners. Collaborative learning, as it was later termed, discovered its roots from social constructionism. This theory claims that all knowledge is constructed through social interaction, not by the individual. For example, if one person observes a phenomenon—say, for instance, a car crash—that person may claim to know that Vehicle A hit Vehicle B, but if another person observes the same phenomenon (obviously from a different viewpoint), then this other person may claim to know that it was in fact Vehicle B who hit Vehicle A. Their disagreement sparks a debate, and once they come to an agreement—either by persuading the other, or if another party weighs in on the discussion—they all know the truth. Only be achieving consensus can either person truly know something, even if their consensus does not reflect the actual events that transpired.

Though this example is elementary, its implications are complex. Social constructionism affected philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education, giving rise to localized debates about human interaction, semantics, and language in general (Gergen; Murphy). Social constructionism contrasted positivism in that the world, at least according to the theory, does not exist objectively and therefore cannot truly be measured; instead, societies construct the world and interpret its systems, presumably based on their conceptual frameworks and cognitive

processes. For psychology and education, social constructionism was not enough. Though psychologists and educators agreed on the theory's validity, they were concerned with the individual's construction of these conceptual frameworks and cognitive processes, asking such questions as, Is an individual's thinking completely natural or is there an external cause that leads to certain conceptual constructions? How are such constructions embedded and consequently revised? How does a group of individuals share its models?

From social constructionism came two kinds of constructivist theories: cognitive and social. The key difference between the two is that cognitive constructivism posits that any individual learns best by interacting with the world *independently* of others while social constructivism deals more with how the individual learns from his interaction *with* others. Primarily defined by Piaget, cognitive constructivism led to the first contemporary student-centered models of education (based on cognitivism, of course) but had greater success in early childhood education (von Glasersfeld). These models were based on Piaget's principles: every student is capable of learning through experience; every student must be self-motivated; and every student is an individual, not a product; therefore, the goal of education is to improve a student's thinking not the student's product. There are still traces of cognitive constructivism in our educational system today, such as the focus on student thinking and individualized learning, but the greatest criticism of Piaget's theory is that students can develop at a higher rate if given ample attention and direction, something he condemned since he believed that students ought to work at their own pace.

Social constructivism, first established by Vygotsky, led to a more holistic approach in education, encouraging instructors to employ the zone of proximal development (Daniels; Murphy). Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky claimed that students could learn difficult concepts, which

previously could not be learned individually, with the help of an adult or peer using the zone of proximal development. To oversimplify, this concept implied that an individual learns when he improved his ability to solve a problem with the help of a peer or adult to match his ability to solve a problem on his own. Vygotsky's contribution is still used in classrooms today, including writing centers.

Based on the premises of social constructivism, collaborative learning generally posits that students learn by discussing their work with a peer to reach a higher level of understanding than what would have been possible without guidance. The peer must demonstrate some mastery in the discipline so that the student can construct new meaning by interacting with the peer. Most centers follow this principle while avoiding some of the pitfalls of directive, or authoritative, tutoring (e.g., taking the responsibility of writing an assignment away from the student). Muriel Harris discussed the key difference between collaborative writing and collaborative learning, pointing out that tutoring was more like the latter because the tutor is never a writer; he is only ever a reader who knows either more or the same about writing as the student and offers advice about what the student can do to improve his writing (376). Collaborative writing, on the other hand, is the equivalent to co-authorship, something all writing centers do well to avoid as it could easily be interpreted as cheating. Therefore, collaborative learning sustains the philosophy of the academic departments on campus who hope that their students maintain their academic honesty.

According to Mackiewicz and Thompson, collaborative learning also allows for rapport building and motivational and cognitive scaffolding by simultaneously holding the tutor at the same level as the student and giving the tutor free reign to advise the student without the disassociation one would recognize between a professor and a student. This peer-to-peer dynamic comforts many students because most of them are already aware of the issues they

have, and some feel shy or even embarrassed about asking for help, especially from a stranger who has never seen what some would argue is the most intimate activity one can do in school. Furthermore, with collaborative learning, tutors focus more on helping students learn the craft of writing than guiding the student's content in the writing.

Other Applications of Constructivism

Besides its obvious application with students, social constructivism has also been effective in developing better tutors as employees. One of the challenges of managing a writing center is preparing tutors for that very first session, the one that leaves the biggest impression. That first session usually determines how well a tutor will adjust to the writing center and how much the tutor is likely to improve. The first opportunity I have to ease a tutor into that session is the interview: during the half-hour or so that I sit with a potential employee, I have to gauge the individual's personality, dedication, and motivation. If there isn't an even distribution of qualities suitable to tutoring, then the individual will likely run into problems from the start. The second opportunity is during training, before the first week of classes, but no matter how many scenarios are run or how much advice I give, there's always something that's missed. Therefore, I must rely on the tutors themselves to build on each other's experiences, which is the essence of both social constructivism and social learning.

At times, business can be slow and tutors find themselves waiting for the next student to walk into the office. In typical working environments, this idleness would be considered detrimental to the functions of the office, but in the writing center, every moment is an opportunity for learning. More often than not, tutors share stories with the others about their best (and worst) session. While a few of these stories can be humorous or phatic in nature, each one reveals newer understanding of tutor-student relationships, of why some students have certain

preconceptions about tutoring, and of the individual practices that work (and fail). Tutors thus work socially and constructively even when they aren't working at all.

The same can be said of tutors' individual experiences with students and themselves. During an exit interview with one of my tutors, a graduate student of counseling, she claimed that before she worked at the writing center, she had little experience working with a diverse population. "After working here for two years," she said, "I've learned how to gauge clients' attitudes, which is invaluable in my field." Another tutor, an Engineering-Physics undergraduate, said that her own writing improved after training herself to focus on one issue at a time when looking at a student's work. In fact, every single tutor has learned more, not just about tutoring but about their own writing and professional development.

Theory in the '90s: Humanism

All the theories discussed so far have one important aspect in common: the importance of having an adult instructor or guide. Every decade, however, it seems that this role becomes less and less necessary to achieve the same if not higher level of student learning. This phenomenon may be attributable to a movement of inward education, but that seems too broad. It's far more likely that education, at least recently, has become less concerned with pedagogy and more concerned with andragogy. Focusing on how adults learn, the andragogy movement of the late 20th century gave rise to self-directed learning (SDL). Advocates reasoned that people become more self-directed as they mature and require less direction from an instructor (Merriam). Therefore, previous theories that focused on the role of the teacher were not as relevant or applicable to adults who were becoming or already were self-motivated and autonomous.

The key goals of SDL require learners to direct their own development, to reflect on what was learned, and within a humanist framework, to apply what was learned to the self in the hope

of bettering society through social action. One of the ways writing centers accomplish these goals is by creating an environment that promotes self-direction. Obviously, writing center directors train their tutors and consult on different matters, but such direction is infrequent since most directors are occupied with administrative duties. It is then up to the tutors to take what they have learned from the brief training sessions and apply it to their own development. In fact, during my first semester as a tutor, I had many questions that could not all be answered at once, and if they had been, I would've missed out on an excellent learning opportunity. I learned small but invaluable lessons each time I sat down with a student and created rules for myself based on them. I would later revise the rules once I tested their effectiveness, and now here I sit at my desk writing about my experience to inform the public about the need for change in the writing center, all of which follows the goals of SDL. But how does SDL benefit students?

For many years, writing centers had adopted models that worked in the classroom setting and revised them to fit one-on-one instruction. Though there were some advantages to this approach, such as a seamless transition from classroom to tutoring and continuity in research and development, those models fell short because they were aimed at children, adolescents, and young adults—primary and secondary schooling. These students needed, or at least were accustomed to, typical models of instruction. Adult learners are a different matter entirely. Most adults enrolled in college courses, especially adults who have families of their own, understand the importance of time management and prioritize effectively. They seek tutoring as a means of improvement and not as remediation, and they are, in my opinion, more realistic with their expectations than younger students. So when adults enter the writing center, they have similar expectations of themselves as the tutors have of them. In my experience, if an 18-year-old student asks for tutoring, (s)he usually expects a quick session that will improve the quality of an

assignment; on the other hand, if an older adult asks for tutoring, (s)he expects slow progress aimed at improving his/her writing, not the product. In fact, the regulars who frequent the writing center during a semester are statistically older than students who only visit the center once.

Therefore, my goal recently has been to transition students from the high-school mindset of instruction to SDL. To do this, I studied one of UTB's programs called Link2Success (L2S). The Writing Center, the Foreign Languages and Social Sciences Learning Center, and the Math and Natural Sciences Learning Center—the main tutoring offices within Learning Enrichment—all collaborated to create this program. The description from the Learning Enrichment Center follows:

> Link2Success (L2S) is an embedded academic support model that encourages active learning in a structured manner and involves mandatory attendance for all students below a predetermined cutoff. Unlike tutoring, L2S targets courses rather than students. L2S workshops are strategically paired with courses that have historically high failure and high student withdrawal rates. These courses include gateway courses and courses offered in a sequence. Therefore, L2S is available to all students from freshmen to seniors.

As one of its developers for the university, I along with several others from the Learning Enrichment Center designed trainings for the tutors, one of which involved implementing soft-skills during tutoring sessions. These 'soft skills' were distinct from 'hard skills' which included content-based development, such as writing, proofreading, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Soft skills were everything else a student needed to succeed in college, such as time management, planning, and studying. Implementing these skills would effectively have students assume responsibility for their continued development as learners and as professionals.

Because the program has since been successful, I chose to implement these soft skills in my own sessions before I later developed trainings on them. Ultimately, based on a humanistic approach, the goal of the writing center is to assist and guide students to become better, independent writers and to prepare them for their careers and the types of writing that those careers demand. Therefore, one of the first soft skills I focused on was contextualization. It seemed many students that visited the Writing Center believed that their essay for Comp II would be the last writing project they would ever submit, but obviously that's not true. Whether it's a report, a memo, an email, or even a text message, writing is embedded in all disciplines. I have since made it a point to mention this to nearly all my tutors I train, but even they are in better shape than students who don't recognize the value of writing conventionally. One student this semester asked defensively, "Why does my professor even grade on grammar? My last professor didn't care, so why does it matter now? And if she understood what I meant, isn't that enough?" It became clear to me that the student viewed writing a college-level paper as an extension of personal writing: since the student understood his own writing, everyone else should, too. So I provided some context. I told the student that outside of college, few people are as forgiving of grammatical errors as his previous professor. In fact, only in educational institutions are students' written assignments read carefully, or read at all. If someone were to write a poorly written email to a professor, the professor will respond as politely as possible and will look past any glooming errors because they have the student's interests in mind and understand that they are growing as writers. But if someone were to write a poorly written email to a potential employer, the employer only has his or her company or business in mind, so (s)he may not respond at all because the writing reflects someone who is uneducated.

By implementing soft-skills tutoring, there are plenty of opportunities to encourage students to look past their immediate goal of passing a course or simply receiving a passing grade on an assignment and establish long-term goals for their own professional development. Yet this is not the biggest problem that students in Brownsville face. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Brownsville has a unique student demographic that requires its own brand of tutoring. Therefore, before examining how to cater to our students' needs, let's first examine the tutoring process as accepted by the majority of writing centers.

The Tutoring Process (for Writing)

Many tutoring handbooks have lain down the stages of tutoring: greet the student, establish a goal for the session, employ Socratic questioning, and so on (Soven; Bruce and Rafoth; Ryan and Zimmerelli). These are all the typical steps that my tutors follow, but those steps generally apply to all tutoring. Tutoring writing is more complicated and is not easily summarized in four or five steps. Here are two short descriptions from two different writing centers about what goes on during a tutoring session. The first is taken from Princeton's Writing Center website:

> The Writing Center Fellow will ask what you would like to work on during the session. He or she will also ask to see the assignment and to hear about or read any comments you have received on your writing from your professor or preceptor. You and the Fellow will then spend 5-15 minutes together reading the parts of the draft that you have both agreed to focus on. The Writing Center Fellow will discuss your writing with you, which will frequently involve asking you more questions about your ideas and getting you to talk through problems arising in the draft. If you haven't yet written anything, the Fellow will help you

> brainstorm and organize ideas. You can expect to take copious notes. You will spend the last part of the session developing a plan for further writing and revision. ("Frequently Asked Questions")

Here is what the University of Notre Dame's WC had to say:

> When a student writer comes into the Writing Center, the tutor greets the writer and starts a conversation about the assignment, working to identify the writer's concerns and needs before examining any notes or draft material brought to the session. The tutor and the writer decide on a game plan for the session, setting goals about what might reasonably be addressed during the 45-minute session and establishing a plan for how to accomplish those goals. If the writer has brought a draft, the tutor will ask him/her to read the draft aloud while both the tutor and the writer make notes. The tutor will seek to identify both strengths and weaknesses in the draft. The conversation that follows the reading of the draft is guided by the tutor, who asks questions to help the writer identify for him- or herself the most pressing needs for revision. As the conversation progresses, the tutor helps the writer to discover strategies for revision that will help address the writer's concerns and needs. At the end of the session, the tutor will help the student identify a concrete set of steps to take next in the revision process. ("Student FAQ")

Clearly, both excerpts have several elements in common: greeting, identifying a problem, creating a goal, discussing strategies, and establishing a plan for revision. All of these steps are similar to another process, writing. The process that tutors use when sitting down with a student is the same process students should use when sitting down with their papers. When tutors

emulate this process, they provide a standard for students to follow as far as planning and dedication are concerned.

Another way of looking at tutoring is through triage. Though usually limited to use in emergency rooms and disaster zones, triage can be used when prioritizing which writing disasters to help first. Under this outlook, tutors are faced with certain decisions like whether to focus on a student's misuse of quotes or on his lack of textual support for his claim. An old professor of mine said it best, "If a student's paper is riddled with errors, whether they are grammatical or not, always look for the one that is most egregious, easiest to teach, and easiest to learn. If something satisfies all three, that's your biggest problem." In the example above, the biggest problem would be the lack of textual support. After all, even if the student learned how to use quotes properly, he would still have quotes that didn't support his argument.

Each method here is best suited for different circumstances. The first approach, conversing, is ideal for exploring global issues: issues like structure, organization, argumentation, and style. Conversing, as the word implies, allows a tutor to discuss writing issues with a student outside of any one assignment because global issues are closely related to one's thinking. Conversing then is a sort of psychotherapy, and the tutor's job is to seek an origin for a student's writing problems. The second method, triage, is better suited for local issues: issues like documentation, format, punctuation, and proofreading. Unlike global issues that are subjective to the student, local issues are based on universally established rules. Tutors are familiar with these rules and convey them and their importance to students. However, students may be overwhelmed by all of them at once, so tutors slowly reveal them and gradually assess students' usage. Thus, tutors must make a decision first and foremost about the type of issues to

cover during a session—either global or local. But as history has proven, one has always been given preference over the other.

Why Global? Why Local?

The reason for such a push for both local and global tutoring stems from a more goal-oriented problem between writing centers and other academic departments. In "Let's Talk!" Lucie Moussu, the Director of the Writing Center at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, discusses an evolving problem at her center involving ESL students. ESL students attending universities in Canada and the United States have typically received instruction for English and Composition at the grammar level, usually focusing on form rather than content, so when faculty identify mechanical problems in these students' papers, they send them directly to the writing center (56). Unfortunately, most writing centers, in the tradition of the process movement, embrace the tutor philosophy that global issues are examined prior to mechanics, and tutors are trained respectively. Thus, ESL tutors who attend tutoring sessions are likely helped with global issues, contrary to what faculty expect.

The problem does not only lie in this divide; it also lies in the interpersonal communication with non-traditional students. In "Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing," Heather Robinson claims that because university curricula do not address 'lower-order' concerns (i.e., local issues), the writing center takes the burden. According to her study of 49 different students who attended different numbers of sessions at the writing center, 63% requested help with grammar and usage, supporting what Lucie Mousso would echo in her article published in 2013 (84). Unlike Mousso, however, Robinson extends her findings to conclude that students' attention to grammar reflects their motivation. She claims that basic writers have a different expectation not only of the purpose of the writing center, but also of their

professors than who we might consider traditional students. While traditional students visit the center to be advised on global issues—because they believe professors give importance to their ideas than the mechanics on the page—basic writers seek affirmation that their grammar is correct because they believe, generally speaking, that they can be best understood if the surface level of their papers can be accessed. Robinson's article gets to the core of ESL students' relationship with the writing center. Essentially, she builds—or at least recognizes—the bridge between ESL students' local needs and their motivation. Her findings, then, suggest that Brownsville's Center should focus on local issues because its students are non-traditional and require affirmation that their grammar is correct and because to some degree they must be motivated to join the other category of student who seeks help on global issues.

However, there is a looming danger when tutors give advice on global issues. If the extreme of helping a student with local issues is proofreading and editing a paper, then the extreme of helping a student with global issues is providing an argument for the student, whether it is correct or not. In "The Role of Disciplinary Expertise in Shaping Writing Tutorials," Sue Dinitz and Susanmarie Harrington discuss the results of their study in which seven tutorials were video-taped for examining how tutor expertise in a discipline—that is, the tutor understands how to write in the discipline—leads to a successful session. Four of the sessions dealt with a student writing a paper for a History course; the other three dealt with Political Science. In the first three sessions—History, Political Science, and Political Science, respectively—the writing tutors lacked disciplinary expertise: they had little to no knowledge of the History or Political Science classes or how to write for them. In fact, the tutor in the first session majored in Environmental Studies and English, the second tutor in English, and the third in global studies. The sessions

were then reviewed by the directors of the center and at least three faculty members from the respective disciplines.

Dinitz and Harrington found that all three sessions followed a similar pattern: tutors focused on mechanics and sentence-level issues rather than global ones; when students revealed points of view that were poorly formed, tutors accepted them as-is; tutors proofread papers item-by-item; and at no point did tutors attempt to summarize the problems within the paper or generate a lesson from them. Dinitz and Harrington argue that these characteristics reflect the tutors' reluctance to engage in the students' writing, a reluctance born from a lack of expertise in the disciplines. They even reference comments and notes from faculty (who reviewed the session), which echo their claim (80).

The other four sessions—Political Science, History, History, and History, respectively—were conducted by tutors with expertise in the disciplines, all of which followed a much different pattern than the former: tutors tackled global issues, rerouted the session's agenda when they thought necessary, asked questions when students' points of view were "limited and/or limiting" and asked questions "to extend discussion" (85), reviewed material and related the material back to a larger scope, and formed lessons based on the issues covered. Dinitz and Harrington argue further that these characteristics can be attributed to tutors' recognition of faulty content and misguided arguments (on the students' parts) and that faculty embrace these sessions, but there is the issue of tutor directiveness, "a quality that leads tutors to appropriate writers' ideas and texts" (89), which is perhaps the principal reason for writing centers' refusal to employ disciplinary expertise. In the seventh session, a tutor majoring in History helps a student working on an assignment, which is "to explore the challenges faced by the Allies as they began the occupation of Germany in the spring of 1945" (90). Although the tutor focuses on global issues as in the

previous three sessions, a professor—in response to reviewing the tape—comments that the tutor is impatient, constantly re-questions the student, and in one instance gives advice that deters the student from answering the prompt. Therefore, the authors' argument that disciplinary expertise is invaluable to tutors backfires.

Consider: if a student were to ask for help with a Biology paper, the tutor's responsibility is still to nurture the writer, but Dinitz and Harrington suggest it is likely that the tutor will take over the paper. Moreover, according to Dinitz and Harrington, there is only one pitfall to disciplinary expertise—"it leads tutors to take over the session, focusing more on the evolution of the *paper* than on the nurturing of the *writer*" (75)—when in fact there are a plethora of missed opportunities if such a model is followed. For instance, a writing expert in a given discipline is less likely to take a minimalist approach, an approach which helps students learn to help themselves, and is more likely to "jump to an evaluation of a proposed thesis … inadvertently sending all sorts of negative messages to the student" (qtd. in Dinitz and Harrington 75). Disciplinary-expertise notwithstanding and provided that faculty support the writing center and understand tutoring philosophy, it is always the writing center's responsibility to address the needs and concerns of students while working collaboratively, which can prove difficult when students are not motivated or, as in the case of our students, don't speak the language.

Politeness and Cultural Awareness

My first tutoring session with the Chinese student revealed that I had a lot to learn if I wanted to be an effective tutor. One of the lessons I had to learn was how to be empathetic, which might seem trivial, but given that many students are from a different country entirely, it is important for tutors to understand linguistic and cultural differences. In "Motivational

Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring," Mackiewicz and Thompson argue that tutors' use of politeness and motivational scaffolding encourages students to take ownership of their writing and thus shapes students' affect. The authors examine 51 tutoring sessions in their Writing Center—then called the English Center. Using Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's model of politeness[4] and Wood, Bruner, and Ross's definition of motivational scaffolding[5]—which has since been revised and re-adapted to fit pedagogical contexts—Mackiewicz and Thompson claim that tutors can best help students by establishing a connection between tutor and student, reinforcing student motivation, and using positive politeness strategies, such as "avoiding candid disagreements with students" and "directly expressing concern and sympathy" (66). They support their claim by analyzing conversations during two tutoring sessions reflecting two different scenarios—both scenarios were recorded on video: one involving an unconfident student and the other, a complaining student. In the first scenario, the tutor uses hedges and minimizers to begin the session to ease the student into the tutor's criticism because the student lacks confidence and bluntly honest comments would only serve to drive the student away. In the second, the tutor uses sympathy at the outset to build a rapport with the student to not seem like a figurative enemy. For each scenario, Mackiewicz and Thompson tease apart the transcriptions for tutors' use of politeness, either in the form of positive or negative acts, and motivational scaffolding— "the feedback that tutors use to build rapport and solidarity with students and to engage students and keep them engaged in writing center conferences" (48). The authors then ask both the tutors and the students to fill out a survey about their satisfaction with the session to confirm that the strategies employed were effective.

[4] See Brown and Levinson's *Some Universals in Language Use* published in 1978 by Cambridge Press.
[5] See Wood, Bruner, and Ross's article "The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving" published in *Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology* in 1976.

The authors found that when tutors use these strategies effectively, students—who may or may not have the writing ability for class or the standard expectations of tutoring—left the session feeling confident that their concerns were addressed and that some rapport was established inasmuch that they would be likely to return for another consultation. They also suggest that their findings are a stepping stone for future training: "we can help tutors to become more aware and make more conscious choices about what they say to students. Research has shown that without training, tutors are not likely to use strategies that attend to students' motivation" (68). Their study supports Heather Robinson's claim that basic writers—in this case, ESL students—need support before they can move on to global concerns.

Implications for Tutoring ESL Students

As the literature here suggests, Brownsville's students—many of whom are ESL—must be tutored differently than traditional students. Where traditional students seek help for global issues, ESL students seek help for local issues. Yet many writing centers suggest that the same tutoring process is effective for both types of students but claim on their websites that their tutors are trained in second-language teaching, as if to say, "You aren't different, but we're prepared to help you if you are." Some centers never address the issue and simply post "helpful links" to ESL resources on their websites. To their credit, those writing centers have triple the number of students Brownsville has, and their ESL students come from different backgrounds and prove more challenging to help as a result. In our case, however, we have a small enough student body and predictable demographic to adapt our methods to serve our students but little to no research to support such methods. In the next chapter, I outline the kinds of ESL students in Brownsville, how the Writing Center serves them, and the various obstacles that both face.

CHAPTER III

WRITING CENTER PRACTICE REGARDING ESL

Contemporary Research and Practices on Tutoring ESL Students

Every writing center director has access to a plethora of research and discourse on writing center literature. One such collection is *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, soon to be *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, founded by Muriel Harris among others. The newsletter began in 1976 and was a mash-up of contributors' type-written texts, responding to questions that now seem elementary. Today, though, the newsletter has grown into a prestigious forum where writing center people can share their research, innovative ideas, and materials for growth; there's even a section for contributing tutors who share their experiences at their writing center. Only recently (in the mid '90s) has the newsletter began regularly publishing information on ESL practices. This is no fault of the newsletter; after all, the editors can't force people to contribute on a given subject. But it is telling that only twenty years ago, writing centers paid particular attention to a demographic that has existed in institutions like Brownsville over a much longer span of time. Based on early practices for teaching and tutoring ESL students, tutors 1) spoke slowly and clearly when addressing a problem so that the student could decode the message at their own pace, 2) were aware of cultural differences such as mannerisms and eye contact, 3) were especially careful to avoid editing or proofreading, and 4) treated them as any other student,

barring these exceptions. Today, some of these practices are still maintained, but have also undergone serious revision as a result of extensive research.

One of the key methods for tutoring, as discussed in the previous chapter, is collaborative learning. Many directors have championed and continue to champion this method for its Socratic approach and success in realizing the mission of writing centers: to help writers help themselves. Yet not all ESL students respond well to collaborative learning. Occasionally, tutors must move away from the favored, non-directive approach and take a didactic, authoritative approach, at least when dealing with local issues (lower-order concerns). One of my tutors, who is an international student from Mexico, made an excellent observation about this: "I know those students. Many of them are my friends. They come to the lab because they *know* their English is poor, and they *know* the tutor's English is better. They expect one of us to sit down and show them the rules because that's really all they need." It's been three years since then, and her observation is still spot-on. To most directors, this would be a cry for help, a sign that our center has regressed into a fix-it shop. But this is not the case. Several ESL students respond just the same to collaborative learning, moving from discussing their writing as a process to addressing a recurring comma problem. Therefore, some ESL students cannot move past their reservations about language and writing conventions because it runs so deep into their psyche that their language proficiency is somehow responsible for all of their writing problems, even the ones unrelated to language. To address this, tutors tend to use a directive approach. This approach establishes them as authorities on the subject and relieves pressure from the ESL student. In essence, the tutor is using a zone of proximal development to build the student's confidence. Once the student has reached a certain level of confidence and proficiency, the tutor can then move towards collaborative learning and eventually leave the student to work on his or her own.

Other methods of tutoring include cultural informing and non-directive focus on rhetoric specific to various disciplines, where tutors guide ESL students towards the realization that correct or good writing is unique to its cultural or academic context. I recall one student from Mexico who asked for help and, upon showing me an earlier draft that had received feedback from the professor, remarked that he apparently struggled with wordiness and plagiarism. I read through the draft with the student and agreed that those were indeed his problem, but added that 'wordiness' and 'plagiarism' wasn't the most accurate diagnosis. The student's paragraphs all followed a similar pattern: each began with a topic sentence that was tied to the thesis, followed by a series of quotes and cited paraphrases from relevant sources, and concluded with a generalizing statement (e.g., "As one can see based on this information, this argument is supported by many scholars in the field and thus proves my thesis"). To the professor's credit, wordiness and plagiarism were symptoms of the student's limited range of discursive patterns, but they were not the cause of this pattern. If a pattern exists, there is always an underlying system at work, and in the student's case, that system was culturally grounded. Instead of giving the student a number of templates on quoting (e.g., the author tag, partial sentence quoting, paraphrasing, etc.), I asked him, "Do you agree that what you're doing in these paragraphs is plagiarism?" He said he did not because he had cited everything correctly. I then asked, "Why do you use so many quotes in each paragraph?" He replied, "Because my teachers told me to always refer to people who know what they're talking about since I'm new to the subject." The student wasn't attempting to plagiarize; he was trying to build credibility, a perfectly reasonable rhetorical move.

Upon further investigation, I discovered that the student had worked for a small company where he had to write technical reports, and it was a common practice to quote and cite previous

documents, so much so that the report would largely be summarized or paraphrased material. I eventually showed him the pattern for using sources and the amount of work that's involved to establish his own credibility within the paper. It was clear, though, that the student had not acclimated to his new academic environment where critical thinking—thinking that is original and has value—is sought after more than one's ability to produce a formulaic text. It would have been nearly impossible for the professor to make this discovery, let alone address the student's individual needs. Tutors, on the other hand, have the opportunity to probe for patterns and underlying causes. Yet beyond collaborative learning and cultural/rhetorical directiveness, there aren't many techniques that have the same success with all ESL students, primarily because these techniques do not factor any one particular culture or language into their model. Therefore, different practices are implemented with different ESL students depending on their linguistic biographies. Some students need perspective into academic discourse while others need grammar support.

At the end of the first chapter, I had touched briefly on Brownsville's unique paradox: that tutors cannot edit papers and are discouraged by mainstream research to avoid proofreading, yet tutors cannot ignore local issues since they are perhaps the biggest problem that our unique ESL students face. Obviously, it would not be tutoring if tutors simply proofread students' papers, but tutors must know how to proofread if they plan on helping students find their own errors. This is especially true with ESL students since they typically visit the writing center for local or language-based issues. I've sat down with many students over the years and discussed the pressures and anxiety of what the students have referred to as fear of discrimination. Their immediate concern is to mask any trace of their first language from their professor and be treated as a native writer of English. Only then, they claim, will they feel like their writing is "good

enough." So these ESL students wish nothing more than for a tutor to sit down with them and clarify any mistakes that would reveal their non-native roots. But it's not fair or logical to paint ESL students with a broad stroke, so let's consider the different kinds of ESL students on Brownsville's campus and the appropriate, sometimes unorthodox methods of instruction that have been successful with them.

"I Have Just Start to Learn English"

Every week it seems I meet a student who claims to have just started learning English. Unfortunately, and in some cases impressively, their claims are true. An influx of students enrolled at UTB/TSC, which at the time had an open-admissions policy. Admissions finally became closed only two years ago, so many students enrolled were grandfathered into UTB regardless of their academic performances on entrance exams. Open admissions required students to take the Compass, a college-placement exam. However, even if students failed the test, many were accepted into the college on a conditional status: students had to pass their remedial or developmental courses to continue their education. Many students failed or withdrew from these courses, so besides causing problems for financial aid, students opted to retake the Compass in hopes of passing and placing out of the remedial courses. As a result, Learning Enrichment put together a workshop program designed to help students pass the exam. The responsibility of providing workshops for the writing portion naturally fell to the writing center.

I was assigned to several of these workshops over the span of three semesters, where I met this first type of ESL student to be discussed. So new to English were the students, during two sessions, I required a translator to conduct the workshop with me—my Spanish was at best conversational. In sessions I did not use the services of a translator, I resorted to code-switching. When I introduced new terminology, I repeated the word in Spanish; when I posed a question, I

posed it again in Spanish; I even spoke Pocho to create a relaxed environment. But my resorting to code-switching was a concern. After all, this was a workshop for students ready to enroll in college courses. Surely they must possess some fluency in the language. How else do they plan on passing courses that are taught in English? It was possible they all wanted to be Spanish majors, but after taking a quick, informal poll, I discovered most wanted to be engineers, computer scientists, nurses, or teachers. Could you imagine a teacher in a public high school who can't write in English? Unfortunately, I don't have to imagine; I know some by name. Such is the reality of working as an educator in Brownsville.

And it isn't the students' fault.

The students I met in those workshops all had similar backgrounds. They grew up in this region, either in Brownsville, Matamoros, or the surrounding cities. They attended public schools and, in the case of those who attended Mexican schools, transferred to an American public school when they finished primary school.[6] Both the American and Mexican students were persuaded, and inevitably forced, to enroll in the school's bilingual program, and as mentioned earlier, these programs failed to make students truly bilingual. Instead, students were exposed to immersion techniques that were never successful or were altogether rejected by the students, who felt connected to their first language and thus refused to abandon it. A few students described these programs as "kind of like reading flash cards where one is in Spanish and the other is in English, but the Spanish doesn't make sense, so the English doesn't either." Teachers assured the students that their language skills, and by extension their writing, were up to par, so the students

[6] Mexican public schools are in a state of chaos at the moment. Teachers, and even principals, are not held to any standard, and bribery is a common practice that allows students who are not ready for college to graduate. In other instances, students can't attend school since the violence on the streets is too dangerous to risk passage (Nieto).

were baffled when they discovered that their English proficiency was unsatisfactory. After many devastating realizations, they came to those workshops demoralized and afraid that whatever I taught was doomed to fall short of their needs. And in some cases, it was. As a tutor, there was very little I could do to fix what the bilingual programs had overwritten, but I was presented with an opportunity to at least expose the students to the education they needed: traditional grammar instruction.

The NCTE published research in the 1950s claiming that teaching traditional grammar had negative effects on students' writing (Mulroy; Kolln and Funk. To an extent they were right. Teaching traditional grammar to students who are already past the optimal age for language acquisition is useless and even detrimental, but the students in these studies were traditional, native English speakers. The students I tutored were far from traditional. They had not been given a better foundation for language save their innate capacity for it, so during these workshops I taught elements such as the parts of the speech, clauses, modifiers, verb forms, tense, mood, and aspect (avoiding the complicated terms as much as possible). Before my first attempt at teaching traditional grammar for the workshops, I debated its effectiveness, but there wasn't much else I could teach in the span of a few days that would accomplish much more, so I decided to take the didactic approach. I was pleased to discover that even though many of the students would not go on to pass the Compass, most went on to enroll in the developmental courses they had originally avoided. Over the past two years, a few of those students have stopped me as I walked on campus and told me that what they learned during those workshops was exactly what they needed. What I had taught created a foundation for them that the remedial courses built on, and it gave them hope that although pursuing a college education would be challenging, it could also be rewarding. Granted, such students are now designated to TSC and

are largely out of the university's hands, but all too often, a student who was either grandfathered in or who passed the remedial courses (and should not have passed) and transferred to the university will visit the writing center. Nothing in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* prepares tutors to help students like ours, but traditional grammar instruction may be the answer for these types of ESL students.

"I'm Here Because English is My Second Language," She Said in Perfect English

Occasionally, some students who visit the writing center claim to be ESL but show few characteristics of one. These students fall into two categories: one represents Mexican international students who come from the upper or upper-middle class and who have received an excellent education which prepared them for being bilingual in Spanish and English; the other represents native English speakers who were incorrectly labeled ESL. Public schools received more funding for every ESL student that enrolled, and as a result, these students were given a misnomer and a poor education. The international students visit the writing center with near-perfect drafts with the intent of polishing their writing. The incorrectly labeled ESL students visit the center based on a perpetuated stigma that because they are ESL students, they will need constant remediation or inevitably fail. Unfortunately, this stigma is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, so these students do in fact require tutoring at every stage of the writing process, but most request help only after they have already drafted. Although they are starkly different in terms of education received, both kinds of English-proficient students need similar help when they visit the writing center.

Writing centers typically train their tutors on how to perform during a session, various techniques and strategies to use in different contexts, professional habits, and other content-based areas, such as rhetoric, composition, and literature. Seldom, though, did writing center directors

tackle issues within cultural rhetoric, at least up until recently. The international students who simply need polishing are good writers, inasmuch that their essays are free of grammatical errors and adhere to standard writing conventions, but their writing is noticeably different. Where a native English speaker is direct and chooses sentence length based on coherence and a reader's expected ability to digest material, the international students tend to digress and vary sentence length based on aesthetics, rhythm, and a reader's comfort. On the other hand, the misnamed ESL students, who have been exposed to learning methods that were not designed for them, have yet to be exposed to academic writing and all its inherent structures. Some still use the elementary five-paragraph model, which in a master's hands could be developed effectively, but in the hands of these students seems less of a tool and more of a restriction. In each case, form needs the most attention.

Fortunately, traditional writing center practice is gauged towards these kinds of students, the aim of which is to create an open dialogue between student and tutor to reexamine the ways in which the student journeys through the writing process and thinks about the rhetorical elements. From these conversations the student hones her critical thinking skills and overall writing ability. For the international students, this dialogue creates an opportunity to discuss the typical assumptions that American/English readers have as they read different kinds of texts (e.g., etiquette in emails, the importance of citations, and the establishment of one's own credibility rather than the reliance on the credibility of others). This was highlighted for me in the Spring 2014 semester. A graduate student from the College of Education asked me to help her with a journal-length paper that was due the following day. In the student's defense, she had already completed the draft and had apparently shown it to the professor early in the drafting stage who confirmed that she was on the right track. It was a typical APA style paper, following

the traditional organization that APA papers follow: introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. I was surprised, however, to find that the literature review took up far more space than I had expected. Usually, if a paper is fifteen pages long, the literature review can take up anywhere between four or seven pages (25 – 50%), usually not more or less. In the student's case, her literature review constituted 75% of the document. Initially I told myself that since the paper was not being considered for publication, the lengthy section may just have been a byproduct of the student's attempt to convey her understanding of the research to her professor, but upon reading the instructions for the assignment, I discovered that the professor was asking for a publishable document since it was the final project for the semester. The professor even provided a template which confirmed my suspicion. Moreover, the student's literature review borrowed heavily from the source material; virtually every sentence was either paraphrased or quoted (and therefore cited). So I asked the student about how she approached that section. She said that she had read all the articles and took the information that was pertinent to her study. When I asked her what her professor had said about the section, she said that she had only shown her professor the introduction, methodology, and results sections. I proceeded to explain my concern about the literature review—since she had some of her sources with her, I eventually asked her to look at the sources and study how the articles' literature reviews were written. We arrived at the conclusion that, although unintentional, she was committing a rare form of plagiarism but could avoid it by simply summarizing the texts, paraphrasing and quoting only when necessary. Towards the end of the session, she said she hadn't known that she could summarize the sources, that she was convinced that because she was a student, she had to cite everything. She learned that in order to

write academically, she needed to emulate the writing style of published scholars and that the line between student and scholar is not as difficult to cross.

I later discovered that the student's assumptions about academic writing stemmed from her education in Mexico. Several of her professors instilled the practice of regularly quoting from established scholars because "they know more than you do." I've had similar experiences with the other type of ESL student, many of whom follow the so-called rules of writing that their teachers had passed down to them from what I could only imagine was a tablet given to them from the Mt. Sinai of outdated practices and institutionalized behaviorism. All joking aside, I realized that these teachers had taken shortcuts to avoid problems of their own. For instance, when I've provided handouts to students on how to combine sentences, many of them remark that one shouldn't begin a sentence with 'because,' to which I always ask, "Why not?" I've received mixed responses. Some students say it is bad writing, others say that it creates a fragment, and one student told me bluntly that I shouldn't have been a tutor if I didn't know the rules, to which I asked, "What's the rule?" but he never gave me an answer. Of those three, the only response that seems to make sense is the fragment argument since many students do in fact write fragments when beginning a sentence with a preposition or subordinator, but the fact that some students avoid it altogether suggests that they were never shown the proper way of writing in that structure.

As someone who has tried teaching basic sentence construction, I am all too familiar with the challenge of complex structures. After all, grammar is a lot like math in its universal rules, formulaic constructions, and complexity, but they are taught quite differently. The first elements any one person learns in math are numbers, followed by the first equation 1 + 1 = 2. Similarly, when learning grammar, students learn the basic elements of letters and words, followed by the

categories they fall into (the parts of speech). The difference, however, is that later in their education, the equations students learned in primary school hold true, but the rules of grammar seem to change. When I was in middle school, I learned that 'because' was a subordinating conjunction, but when I enrolled in my linguistics courses, I discovered that 'because' was a preposition and that there were no such things as subordinating conjunctions. Even so, never has it been my experience that students could not learn these new concepts, and from my dealings with secondary school teachers, I've learned that their haste in providing false rules is a consequence of being required to meet state standards for correct usage. Nevertheless, these students come to the writing center expecting two different outcomes while the tutors provide similar help that addresses the common denominator.

"*¿Puedes Revisar Mi Ensayo*?"

So far I have highlighted two types of ESL students. Although they differ in terms of the kind of assistance they require, both have some fluency in English, making it easier for the tutors to guide them one-on-one. However, this isn't always the case. Sometimes students walk in asking in Spanish, "*Puedes revisar mi ensayo?* [Can you review my essay?]" These students don't usually feel comfortable enough to speak English throughout a tutoring session and thus require a tutor who is bilingual. One such student was Olivia. A regular to the writing center, Olivia enrolled in college as the type of ESL student who had just begun to learn English, so she came to the center for help with grammar and language issues rather than help with writing itself. Her first visit almost three years ago was strange. Olivia brought her essay and asked (in Spanish) to have it reviewed by a tutor. I sat down with her and asked which concerns she wanted to address. She looked quizzically at me, so I clarified that we provided help with things like outlining, thesis statements, writing organized paragraphs, clarity, and so on. She said,

"*Es que, no necesito ayuda con eso. Sólo necesito ayuda con mi gramática.* [It's just that I don't really need help with that. I just need help with my grammar.]" I decided to respect her request and move on to the essay. I found many language-related problems throughout the first paragraph, so much so that it was difficult and distracting to read, and she isn't alone in this regard. Many students have visited the center who have needed help with similar issues. Here is an excerpt from one such student's summary of an article:

> This article is about one of the most controversy theme in these moments; Syria and its chemical weapons. Everything started whit the use of chemical weapon in Syria against civilian, creating interest to the U.S. interest to helping Syria's future, but this may create a conflict between this two countries that can be the start of a war…Therefore U.S. the only thing that they are doing by my view is trying to helping others persons, like turkey and even Syria Civilians because in not their fault.

Interestingly, most of these students are highly proficient in Spanish but for one reason or another have yet to become proficient in English. And between 2010 and 2013, 1 in 3 students who visited the Writing Center had similar writing problems that could be attributed to linguistic factors, specifically to an English-Spanish barrier.

Every writing center deals with situations like this one differently, and some don't deal with it at all since few universities allow students who are not yet proficient in English to enroll. Centers who have a variety of ESL students do not have the luxury of hiring tutors with a range of linguistic backgrounds to address every language that walks into their offices. Instead, directors of these centers train their tutors to create an atmosphere where an ESL student is treated much like any native English speaker: sessions focus on global or higher-order concerns

while tutors attempt to decipher the students' underlying cultural preconceptions about writing (as with the students mentioned in the previous section). Centers that have a specific population of ESL students with similar backgrounds but that are located in a separate region from the origin of most of its ESL students do not have the luxury of hiring tutors who know the language (e.g., TAMU). Directors for centers like these train their tutors to recognize recurring patterns in language and writing, but if an ESL student cannot understand what the tutor is telling them, there is very little that (s)he can do at that point. Our Writing Center, however, has a concentration of specific types of ESL students with similar backgrounds *and* has the luxury of hiring bilingual tutors. So when students who do not possess English fluency or at least the proficiency needed to maintain an in-depth conversation about their writing visit the writing center, tutors are encouraged to switch between English and Spanish as they see fit. Unfortunately, this has created a few problems between the center and faculty.

For some faculty, speaking Spanish with students is enabling students' indifference towards learning English, but this claim is based on several assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that Spanish speakers do not want to learn English, which I can say first-hand is untrue. Learning any language, especially as an adult, takes time and effort—time and effort that most of our adult learners don't have given that they are full-time students, full- or part-time employees, and full-time parents or guardians, making it doubly difficult for them to learn the language at the same rate as a young student who has only his education to worry about. Secondly, this claim assumes that the writing center tutors are consciously helping students cheat themselves out of learning, which is also untrue for the simple fact that if a student visits the writing center (or is even enrolled in college), there must be some desire to learn, and nearly all of our ESL students know all too well that learning English and becoming proficient are necessary for their careers.

Besides, using a native speaker's language to help him learn is no different than using a dictionary while reading. At some point, context clues fail—I once submitted an assignment containing the word 'haecceity' for a literature course and had it returned with the word highlighted with corresponding marginalia: "Is this a word?" Moreover, regardless of the language used, certain concepts are notably more difficult to explain, so tapping into an alternative medium for discourse is an advantage, not heresy. Lastly, the claim assumes that the preferred, successful method of tutoring ESL students is immersion. This is also untrue for a slew of reasons, all of which are supported by modern research in second language acquisition and ESL studies (Fromkin and Rodman; Krashen; Scarcella & Krashen). In its inception, immersion was a technique largely promoted by monolinguals who had no interest in preserving the languages of internationals. These immersion programs still exist today but have gone under much revision based on research. More importantly, these programs are aimed at children and young adults, but college-aged students do not benefit from such programs because they have passed the optimal age for language acquisition; this does not mean they cannot learn new languages, only that learning a language is much more arduous, and immersion at their age is not an effective route.

As for UTRGV's writing center, we encourage our tutors to do whatever seems to help the student learn, yet there is no one method that addresses the individual problems of these three kinds of ESL students. The reading-aloud strategy mentioned in the first chapter has potential to work in a variety of contexts, but given that UTRGV has a substantially large student body that is ESL or bilingual and that these students range in writing ability and English fluency, not all tutoring sessions in the writing center will be as conducive to learning with this method. In many instances, a student who struggles with the language becomes frustrated usually because the tutor

who is helping her does not speak the student's first language, and the tutor cannot be blamed for that. Tutors must take the opportunity to review any information that they feel the student can understand and practice within a reasonable amount of time. On the other hand, tutors who do speak a student's first language are welcomed to switch between the two languages as long as the student does not become dependent on the first language—or worse, on the tutor. As always, though, tutors must employ a method that stresses the connection between the writing process, the writing, and the writer. The next chapter of this thesis explores this paradigm and outlines the core argument by describing the global-to-local-to-global model of tutoring.

CHAPTER IV

THE GLOBAL-TO-LOCAL-TO-GLOBAL MODEL

There are two basic models that tutors have followed when sitting down with an ESL student: the tutor can focus on higher-order concerns, such as organization, structure, and argumentation, before moving on to lower-order concerns, such as mechanics and format (global-to-local), or the tutor can focus on lower-order concerns before moving on to higher-order concerns (local-to-global). The former is generally effective because educators typically care more about the content of an assignment than whether a comma is inserted in the right place and because students typically need feedback on the "big picture" items. The latter is only effective when the student either has regularly and successfully demonstrated his ability to organize, structure, and implement rhetorical techniques and only needs help with lower-order concerns, or has such a poor grasp on the mechanics and structure of words, phrases, and sentences that it is impossible to address the higher-order concerns without first tackling the lower-order concerns.

Tutors rarely find themselves in situations as neat or as clean-cut as helping a student who only needs help with mechanical issues. It is far more likely that a student brings his final draft—which is really his first draft—to the center a few hours before the assignment is due. It is likely that the student asks for help with grammar, which the tutor immediately can decipher from the quality of writing. And it is likely that the paper's content does not address the prompt

or make a valid argument, even though the paper's thesis statement is clearly strong, perhaps too strong for the student to have written it without some assistance. In such scenarios, tutors are trained to tackle issues that meet three criteria:

1. The issue must be egregious.
2. The solution to the error must be easy to teach.
3. The solution to the error must be easy to learn.

Such a rubric supports a local-to-global approach because local issues typically follow a formula (e.g., comma errors can be remedied with a few rules and practice). But global errors require more thought and planning, so they usually are left for later sessions, especially when the student is in a rush and cannot spend more than one session on the paper before he must submit it.

However, if students visit the center with instructions for the assignment, ample time, and a positive attitude, tutors can focus on the writing process and other global issues that must be addressed first. After brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising, students will have written and revised a draft that addresses the prompt and is critically organized even if the draft has some mechanical errors, which most professors prefer over a grammatically flawless paper whose argument is not only incoherent but also off-topic. Whether following a global-to-local or local-to-global model, tutors have an approach to follow for a given scenario. Nonetheless, each approach has a weakness at which the other approach excels. Where local-to-global cannot tackle global issues in time, global-to-local remedies any issues that could immediately warrant a failing grade (e.g., not answering the prompt, relying on fallacies to forward the argument) at the expense of grammar and usage.

Every tutor wishes for the golden student: the student who visits the center with more than ample time; the student who wishes to discuss all of his writing problems but remains fixed

on one problem at a time; the student who regularly visits and yet does not depend on the tutors; the student who follows the tutors' sage advice to the letter. It has been my experience that no such student exists. Students inevitably seek help with little time left before their deadlines. They rarely come prepared with all their necessary material. And they almost never follow tutors' advice, especially if their cousin's friend whose mother works as an English teacher at the middle school across town said otherwise. Therefore, tutors must always work with some time constraint, and since neither of the aforementioned approaches covers all writing problems, there must be a better approach.

In the last chapter, I touched on UTRGV's ESL student population and the different types therein. Though they range in ability and the attention and focus required from a tutor, there is still some overlap to consider. The following section examines two cases representative of students who visit the Writing Center—their background and needs—and discuss the shortcomings of L-G and G-L to determine common characteristics that traditional approaches do not effectively address.

The Shortcomings of Local-to-Global and Global-to-Local

From my experience as a tutor, assistant director, and learning specialist at the Writing Center, I know firsthand that neither the L-G or G-L methods are optimal for our ESL students. Both methods are based on the assumption that the writer is a traditional student, and as mentioned in earlier chapters, research in ESL writing and language studies had not yet made its mark on the writing center stage, so naturally many methods had not included or accounted for ESL strategies. Perhaps now is the perfect opportunity to highlight those shortcomings. Consider two such students: both are not yet proficient in English and prefer to speak Spanish as often as possible, both have a short, three-page writing assignment due in two weeks, but one—we'll call

her Luz—visits the writing center immediately after receiving the instructions for the assignment, and the other—we'll call him Luis—visits the center after he has already written a draft, presumably with little time to spare before the deadline.

A typical session with students like Luz usually begin by understanding the instructions—an added step for most ESL students. Language-related issues can manifest themselves in many ways as demonstrated by the most frequent request ("I want to make sure that my ideas make sense"). So when students' language interferes with their writing, it tends to affect both the local and global aspects. For some assignments, there is an additional cultural veil that needs to be gently lifted for students to understand what their professors are asking (e.g., rhetorical analyses of popular advertisements). Once the instructions are made clear, tutors guide the student to begin brainstorming and outlining. During sessions like these, very little writing is actually done; the focus of these sessions is to flush out a topic and hopefully create a thesis and supporting material. Tutors are aware that students like Luz may need grammar support later on, but it would be difficult to know with which grammatical issues Luz needs help without a writing sample. Luz leaves the session with a plan for her draft and a strong hint that she may have to return to focus on local issues. Essentially, the tutor used a global-to-local approach with Luz based on triage: because Luz's goal was to begin the writing process, the tutor focused on the content rather than the form, but this only perpetuates egregious language errors that will manifest themselves again, which can just as easily inhibit Luz's reading ability for later assignments.

Students like Luis, with their drafts in hand, rarely think to bring their instructions to a tutoring session. Instead, they sit with a tutor expecting feedback on local issues, making requests like, "My professor says I have problems with comma splices and verb forms" or "I got

points taken off last time for tense shifting." Though tutors have been trained to ask for the professor's instructions when beginning a session, several students insist on not needing help with the prompt and simply want to focus on mechanics, which is perfectly acceptable, so tutors respect the students' wishes and conduct the session with their goals in mind. Unfortunately, students like Luis have returned to the writing center, complaining that they received a low grade for not addressing the prompt or following parts of the instructions. Moreover, the various language problems tackled during one or two sessions are usually not true indicators of the bigger issues that the student faces, so what may be covered during the course of one assignment may not extend to related problems for other assignments. Furthermore, focusing on local issues inadvertently condones the infamous image of the writing center as a fix-it shop when instead our goal should be to facilitate the writing process and the craft within.

The inherent problem with both of these methods (global-to-local and local-to-global) is that our ESL students, and our students in general, do not tackle their language-related writing problems linearly (Harris, "Individualized"). Most of our students feel overwhelmed by the pressures of writing academically after years of getting through secondary school having written only a few pages a year with relatively little feedback for development, not having been taught how to plan and draft a significant body of work within a short span of time. More often than not, students do not visit the writing center with two weeks to spare, so any help they receive from a tutor is muffled by the overwhelming pressure of producing a paper. Therefore, language issues are only marginally addressed at the writing center when following either approach.

Even other issues independent of language are not wholly addressed with either approach. Though difficult and sometimes counter-productive to tackle, language issues are at least feasible inasmuch that there is a plethora of research in second language acquisition and

strategies for addressing them. Motivation, on the other hand, is unique to each individual, and it is not always feasible. It can be influenced by a multitude of cultural information, such as age, language, and economic status, so it is difficult to identify. Fortunately, Brownsville's demographic lends itself to patterns in cultural values and beliefs. That being said, there are essentially two kinds of motivation for our students, which I will explore through the examples of Luz and Luis as each is tutored using either approach.

Luz represents the ideal student in Brownsville. She prioritizes her studies and is willing to make additional time for her academic success, and although she struggles with writing in English, she makes every effort to meet the standards for her courses because she was raised up believing that a proper education could unlock opportunities. Her motivation for visiting the writing center is mostly self-regulated; therefore, it is the tutors' responsibility to scaffold Luz's motivation during the session, implementing various techniques for building rapport and establishing a pattern of sustained academic improvement.

Luis, on the other hand, represents the typical student from Brownsville. For him, enrolling in college courses is a reaction to the industrial demand for higher qualifications for positions that previously required lower qualifications. The only classes that are important to him (and his degree plan) are those that are specific to his field of study, which does not include freshman writing courses. His motivation for visiting the writing center, then, is based on necessity or obligation, so the tutors' responsibility is to discover or even invent motivation and later build upon that foundation. This is more difficult to accomplish given the added step and the expected hesitation from these students to rethink their intentions and goals for visiting the writing center.

In both cases, neither global-to-local or local-to-global match the needs of Luz and Luis. While global-to-local seems like an appropriate strategy for assisting Luz, it is not always the most effective strategy, given her ESL background, and although local-to-global fits Luis's immediate concerns, it is inherently a poor strategy for helping with a student's writing because a session held under this method inevitably addresses only the local issues and ignores the global issues altogether due to time constraints and other contributing factors.

Given their individual motivations for visiting the center, Luz and Luis have related expectations for the tutoring session. More often than not, students' expectations conflict with the mission and policies of the writing center, and proofreading and editing seem to be the most common requests made by students. "Tutors are supposed to help, and editing papers is helping," as one student put it. But rather than discouraging students from making such requests, our tutors subtly redefine these terms during tutorials.

Students like Luz seldom have these kinds of requests, but then again, the majority of students aren't like Luz. Luis and other students like him have grown accustomed to a culture that fosters learning by direct feedback, modifying behavior, and corresponding rewards. It follows that proofreading and editing are the likeliest method for improving writing. However, contemporary discourse on second language acquisition and the research based on it have proven that such behaviorist models are obsolete and to some extent wrong—not to suggest that behaviorism itself is obsolete or wrong.

Instead, social theories guide second language acquisition (Harris, "Individualized"; Murphy; Mackiewicz and Thompson; Gergen; Fitzgerald). Theorists in the field, as discussed in the second chapter, posited that although behaviorism could account for how information is received (input), it could not account for the internal, inherent structures in the brain, how the

brain stores information, or how the brain retrieves the information. Fortunately, studies supported various models within this school of thought and suggested that there was, in fact, a system of computerization that controls language use, language acquisition, and language learning (Garcia-Sierra et al.; Hinkel).

This had many ramifications. Firstly, because language and writing are interconnected, these structures in the brain must also affect how a student uses, acquires, and learns writing. Secondly, the findings changed the expectations of educators (including writing center staff). Rather than treating students as children who needed the proper role model to emulate, writing center people had to revise the tutoring process and aligned their practices with the theories. Lastly, because students are naturally the last to know about changes in curriculum or recent advances in educational theory, their expectations of teaching and tutoring differed from the realities within those spaces. Students like Luis are products of a generation before these theories.

Nevertheless, tutors who were accustomed to employing global-to-local and local-to-global models operated under the expectation that students were comfortable receiving help regardless of the method, yet some students feel that they "can only learn a certain way" and "just need someone to show [them] how to do it." But how can tutors adjust their methods when students expect help that could potentially encroach on the mission of the writing center?

Global-to-Local-to-Global (GLG)

Given the various shortcomings of both the global-to-local and local-to-global methods, at least in the terms I have outlined above, a method that addresses these concerns for our students is necessary. The proposed method is the recursive sequence of global-to-local-to-global, a model that above all else serves the unique students in Brownsville, who require

localized feedback, and pursues the goal of the writing center, which focuses on global issues. Such a model draws connections at the writer's level to focus first on how the writer in question approaches the activity of writing, then on local issues that prevent the writer from writing confidently and inhibit the process in general, and finally on global issues that previously would not have been able to be addressed without first dealing with local issues. Essentially, rather than following a global-to-local model, wherein tutors prioritize issues like structure, content, and organization, tutors must implement a GLG model, wherein tutors focus on the writer's process, how this process affects the writer's local issues, and what global issues the writer encounters as a result.

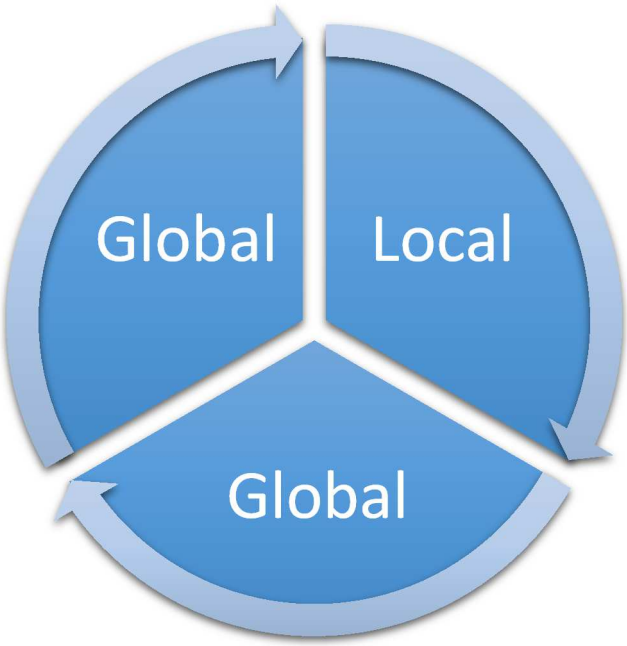

Fig. 1. Visual Model of GLG.

To do this, tutors must recognize the three stages of the model. Each stage falls somewhere along the global-to-local spectrum. The tutor does not simply move from one stage to the next as in typical models. The entire sequence is recursive; that is, during a session the tutor decides where and how to guide the student based on his or her needs. Nevertheless, the first global stage is, in a sense, the most important stage. Therefore, during every tutorial, the

tutor keeps salient global issues in the back of his mind, placing the issues discussed during the session into the context of the writing process to remind the students that their language/writing issues are founded on the process and to encourage students to treat tutorials as a process as well.

The recursive sequence enables tutors to contextualize the overwhelming amount of lower-order concerns addressed during a session to relate the discussion to the writing process and still answer any questions the students may have about their writing assignments, preferably at a later time. Ideally, students who come early on for their assignments begin by addressing the actual writing. Like in most writing centers, tutors focus first on higher-order concerns. This primarily involves talking about organization and structure and making sure that the writing follows the instructions. Most handbooks and manuals already explain how tutors can help students with these topics. However, some students (as in the case of ESL students) require localized feedback first. The trouble is that tutors may not know how to transition from one stage of the tutorial to the other or whether students should begin with the lower-order concerns (LOCs) or the higher-order concerns (HOCs). To the tutors' credit, some students have visited the center with essays that not only were difficult to read due to their usage, but whose ideas were also disconnected and whose argument was riddled with fallacies. In such cases, tutors ought to follow standard procedure and address the most pressing problems.

The problems that ESL students usually face can be divided into global and local issues. Most global issues are shared among traditional students, but there are a few kinds of errors unique to our ESL students. For example, it has long been established by scholars such as Robert B. Kaplan and Edward Sapir that every culture has its own rhetorical patterns. In his landmark essay "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," Kaplan demonstrated five different approaches to writing based on five cultures. English, for instance, is direct and

methodical while Spanish and other Romance languages are poetic and digress. Many of our students exhibit similar patterns of both writing styles, attempting to be methodical to a fault or including points that do not support the main idea, but instead are tangential and offer elaboration on minor points. Of course, ESL students may also need assistance with other global issues such as incorporating sources to support an argument, avoiding fallacies, and developing a coherent draft.

Only certain local issues, on the other hand, are particularly unique to ESL students. These include verb form errors, especially those related to subject-verb agreement; incorrect prepositions; malapropisms; misused articles, although 'the' is most often cited as the problematic article for Spanish speakers; sentence-boundary issues, which are tied directly to the rhetorical means by which Spanish writers produce their work—Spanish writing prefers that writers continue an idea by using a comma, which in English results in a comma splice; and spelling, which is especially daunting since Spanish speakers have strict phonological rules reflected in the spelling of a word whereas English has so many linguistic roots that it is nearly impossible for new speakers to spell a word upon first hearing it.

In practice, the GLG model has the potential to fit the needs of these ESL students. Consider an essay submitted by Marco, an ESL student (See Appendix). The essay was submitted to the Writing Center's online submission form. The essay, entitled "The Mexican Drug War," is a research paper submitted for a Comp I course. An examination of the essay quickly reveals that the writer struggles with language-related issues, such as spelling,

prepositions, idiomatic expressions, syntax, various agreement problems, and sentence-boundary issues—all of which can be traced to an English-Spanish barrier.[7]

Yet the essay (and its writer) has its unique issues that require serious attention. It is characteristically methodical: the thesis is developed, the structure and organization reflect the thesis, each paragraph is self-sustaining, and each sentence contributes to the essay. But its primary weakness is the incorporation of quotes, a significant global issue. Though each quote is relevant to the topic discussed in the corresponding paragraph, the student mishandles the

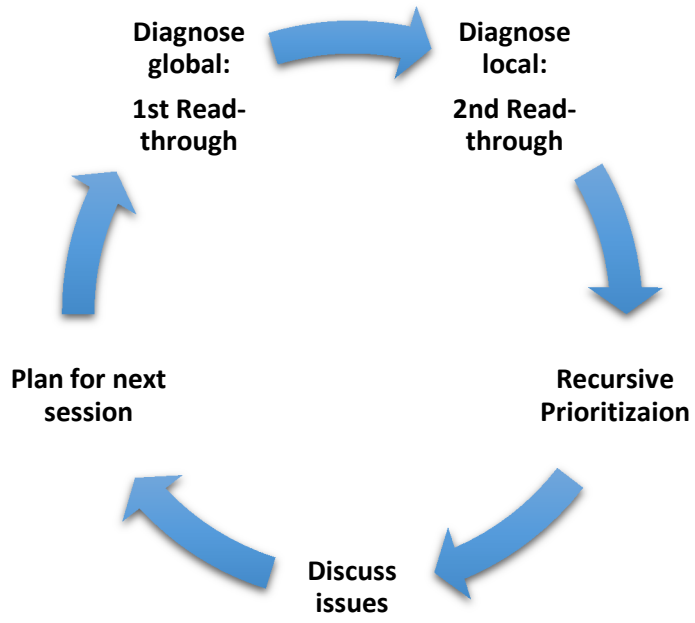

Fig. 2. Detailed Model of GLG's Recursive Process

[7] Spelling errors occur because lexical items in Spanish phonetically match their spelling, and English is quite infamous for being just the opposite; preposition misuse is common among individuals learning a second language—the essay presented here frequently uses 'on' which translates to '*en*' in Spanish, which can also translate to 'in'; idiomatic expressions are obviously unique to one language, so many expressions are not executed accurately; syntax-related errors occur because Spanish is flexible with its syntax—some adjectives precede the noun they modify, and sentences can be written in SVO-, VSO-, or OSV- order; subject-verb agreement and demonstrative-noun agreement errors are due to English and Spanish nuances with verbs, especially auxiliaries like '*ser*,' '*estar*,' and 'be,' and with nominative-accusative case marking; and sentence-boundary errors occur because Spanish writing styles frequently employ syntactically complex sentences that in English would violate sentence-boundary rules.

information and uses the quotes as reflections of what was already said rather than as support for the claims.[8] But how can tutors apply the GLG model to these essays? Let us consider a typical session using "The Mexican Drug War," as an example.

Let us assume first that this student comes into the Writing Center with a week or more to revise his already written draft. After reading the essay aloud with the writer, the tutor first asks a few questions about the writing process. For example, the tutor could ask, "How long did you spend on research, drafting, or editing?" or even "When is the deadline for this paper?" The first kind of question reveals the student's process and informs the tutor about any preconceptions the student might have about writing a college paper. The second question, besides obviously revealing the time left for writing and tutoring, hints at which stage of the writing process the student is. In my experience, students are more comfortable divulging information about when something is due and what their goals are for the tutoring session when asked the second question. Frankly, some students are not sure how to answer the first because they do not know what drafting and editing are or do not think it important to assign a specific amount of time to either. Based on the information the student provides from the first set of questions, the tutor then informs the student of the various problems found in the writing, usually by listing the problems on a separate sheet of paper and coding the errors in terms of its hierarchy (global or local) and severity. The problems listed may vary in frequency and egregiousness, so the tutor may have to read through the writing twice: once for content and once again for mechanics and format. In some cases, it is not possible to understand the content because the writer's command

[8] Sample from student essay in appendix:

> Due to the proximity of the Mexican war it has caused several problems ranging from inside Mexico's walls into the U.S border walls. Now the Mexican drug war is basically "[a] war [that] is raging in Mexico's border towns as rivals drug cartels battle for control" (National Geographic).

of the language is still in its developing stages. In the case of this essay, the mechanics are not so egregious that the essay cannot be read, so the tutor's coding sheet may look something like this:

Table 1

Sample Notes and Recursive Prioritization—Global Focus

First Read-Through	Second Read-Through	Recursive Prioritization
• Thesis is supported but one of the key points is not • Some quotes do not fit the sentence • Some claims are impossible to prove ("everywhere you go…") • Includes violent crime stats but not drug crime stats	• FS – 2 • SP – 2 • APOS – 7 • MC – 3 • WW – 2 • PREP – 4 • Garbled • Topicalization – 4	• Avoiding confusing claims • Quoting • Commas • Strategies for editing

During the first read-through, the tutor makes comments on a separate sheet of paper about higher-order concerns, such as argumentation, organization, and structure. Then during the second read-through, the tutor lists and tallies any salient errors that distract the reader. Finally, the tutor prioritizes the issues that need to be addressed for the session, explaining the comments written down, giving at least one example of the issue in the student's writing, and guiding students through discussion to a possible solution. Notice that upon prioritizing the issues to be addressed, the tutor first addresses global concerns.

The tutor can now schedule appointments with the student to tackle issues that may not have been addressed during the first session, such as lower-order concerns or other higher-order concerns that were not prioritized, even those that are unique to ESL students. However, not all students will have time to schedule a second visit, and as mentioned before, some students treat the center as a one-stop-shop. Rather than lecturing them on the importance of managing time effectively and the purpose of the writing process, tutors can modify a session to fit the needs of the students without compromising the mission and philosophy of the Writing Center.

Let us assume now that this same student has less than a day to revise his already written draft. Let us also assume that the tutor has never seen this student up to this point. The writing and the problems found within are still the same, but the timeline changes the scope of the session. For this all-too-familiar scenario, the global-to-local-to-global model is appropriate. As in the previous scenario, the tutor should ask the student some important questions before reading the paper—this is the first step of the proposed model: addressing the writing process, which will be recalled at the end of the session. When asked when the assignment is due, the student says that the paper is due tomorrow and that he "really just needs the paper to be proofread." The tutor, in the interest of maintaining his tutoring style, reads through the essay with the student and makes notes on a separate sheet of paper, but something changes:

Table 2

Sample Notes and Recursive Prioritization—Local Focus

First Read-Through	Second Read-Through	Recursive Prioritization
• Thesis is supported but one of the key points is not • Some quotes do not fit the sentence • Some claims are impossible to prove ("everywhere you go…") • Includes violent crime stats but not drug crime stats	• FS – 2 • SP – 2 • APOS – 7 • MC – 3 • WW – 2 • PREP – 4 • Garbled • Topicalization – 4	• Commas • Strategies for editing • Avoiding confusing claims • Quoting

During the recursive prioritization process, the tutor prioritizes the lower-order concerns over the higher-order—this is the second step of the proposed model. This is done for two reasons: 1) the student requested proofreading, and although tutors in the Writing Center do not proofread papers for students, they can discuss strategies for dealing with specific grammatical or other mechanical issues, and 2) both the tutor and the student recognize that not much can be revised in less than a day, especially when so much can be improved, but the simplest and most helpful

advice a tutor can offer at this stage of the writing process is regarding grammar and usage. An obvious question, however, arises concerning the tutor's note-taking: why include the higher-order concerns if only the lower-order ones will be addressed? This is also done for two reasons: 1) the tutor does not want to compromise their tutoring style or philosophy to cater to what amounts to the student's procrastination, and 2) at the end of the session, the tutor can share the notes with the student, and hopefully, upon seeing the other issues that have gone unaddressed and unsolved (and upon receiving feedback from the instructor), the student will feel compelled to revisit the Writing Center to talk about those other issues and within a more reasonable timeline. With more time, tutors can enter the final step of the proposed model: addressing higher-order concerns.

In this scenario, the tutor addresses various aspects of the student and his writing at different stages of the tutoring process and with appropriate flexibility. As mentioned before, the shortcomings of traditional models, at least for our students, are that the culture has reinforced directive feedback, has stressed lower-order concerns due to linguistic factors, which in turn has changed students' rationale for seeking help with writing, and has limited the writing center's ability to effectively help students in the manner that most writing centers follow. With this model, however, a transitional period is created—ironically—for students to adjust to the most prevalent model of writing tutoring. Students who visit the center for linguistic support or in some cases who procrastinate can have their needs met within a context conducive to the Writing Center's mission. At the very least, this model improves the relationship between our students and the center by targeting their needs and shifting their priorities to fit the writing process.

Appendix

The Mexican Drug War

War is never pretty it claims the lives of countless of people and damages the psychology of the living who have either survived, witnessed, or heard about that sed war. Whether its a war being fought in a different country such as the war in Iraq or terrorists groups threatening with a possibility of war it leaves devastating results to everybody including the people who are not even remotely close or are being directly effected by these war zones. Now due to the fact that Mexico's drug war is occurring right besides the United States, it has caused tension which has led to panic and fear of the destruction leaking into the United States despite insufficient evidence to prove that it will even spread to the border cities.

Due to the proximity of the Mexican war it has caused several problems ranging from inside Mexico's walls into the U.S border walls. Now the Mexican drug war is basically "[a] war [that] is raging in Mexico's border towns as rivals drug cartels battle for control" (National Geographic). As the Mexican government has declared war in the drug cartels itself it has led to imminent violence and bloodshed. Not to mention the intense corruption in Mexico where as government officials even school age kids are being bribed with money or power to either join the drug cartels or face certain harm or even death to themselves and or their family members. Proven with an estimated 22,732 homicides are reported not including bodies that were never found, 22,000 suspected kidnappings, and a whopping rise in the number of reported cases of torture at the hands of officials which is topping the 600 percent (Gorats). This war in it's entirety has claimed the lives of countless of Mexican citizens, has had a devastating blow to

Mexico overall and has even had some impact to the citizens of the United States mentality for those dangers and horrors just lie a border away from their homes.

Mexico's drug war has caused panic amongst the frightened citizens of the United States who believe there will be a leak of destruction that will flow into it's border cities. This panic is inflicted by the conditions of the situation in Mexico that is directly tied to the U.S. which it was noted that "when you're fighting an enemy you can't see and you don't know where they are, how are you going to fight against that?" (Johnson par. 20) . It is also publicized everywhere you go by "[a]merican public discourse and the mass media [which has] increase [Mexico's] concerns, generating fear among the population by suggesting the possibility that extreme drug violence in Mexico could spill across the U.S.–Mexico border" (Correa-Cabrera par. 4). These dangers are listed clearly whether its from the result of public opinion or mass media it has caused uneasy tension amongst the U.S population whether there will be collateral damage that will be dealt due to Mexico's drug war.

However, there is no clear evidence that the drug war occurring in Mexico will actually spread to the United States in fact there is evidence to prove there is a decline of crime throughout the years. By gathering information it was found that "the combined number of murders in the 14 counties fell 33 percent, from 97 in 2006 to 73 in 2010. Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics also show a decrease of 11 percent in violent crime and a drop of 19 percent in the number of homicides between 2005 and 2010 in Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas" (Correa-Cabrera par. 36). While there is a decrease of crime people still tend to believe there are certain risks that will come with the drug war and how badly it will effect the U.S.. Not to mention the panic that is inflicted due to the conditions of the situations in which it was noted that "when you're fighting an enemy you can't see and you don't know where they

are, how are you going to fight against that?". This has to do with human psychology in which ‘’[p]eople [tend to] climb mountains and expose themselves voluntarily to all kinds of risks, but they don't like risk inflicted upon them that they don't understand or have control over" (Johnson par. 3). Clearly, this is the case and the real danger here is not the Mexican drug war and it's entirety but the concept of such a thing going on so close to the U.S. that has caused fear and a lack of reasoning.

While the Mexican drug war is clearly dangerous there is no proof that it will even spread to the border cities at least not anytime soon and the only place it is really effecting is Mexico itself. However, despite clear evidence people might have right in front of them there will always be fear of the war. That tied together with the proximity to the United States leaves a negative impact resulting in panic and once again fear of the war spreading to the cities and then ultimately to the United States as a whole.

CHAPTER V

THE ROLE OF GLG WITHIN BROWNSVILLE'S WRITING CENTER

As I have reiterated throughout this thesis, our student demographic defines the goals of the Writing Center. Because most of our students have learned English as a second language and may be perceived as culturally other-ed, the traditional models of global-to-local and local-to-global prioritization during tutoring sessions fall short of addressing the immediate and long-term concerns for the students. The global-to-local-to-global model proposed in this thesis and explained in the previous chapter addresses these concerns.

For years the traditional models have tackled the normative perception of writing to which native English speakers and traditional college students have been accustomed; more often than not, higher-orders concerns, such as structure, organization, and argument, were prioritized because lower-order concerns, such as grammar and usage, were unlikely to be a problem and were assumed to be associated with remedial or developmental students. For these students, the writing center became a center for remediation, a one-stop fix-it shop where writing was treated as a product and the writer was simply the hand that produced it. This perception of the writing center was later extended to non-traditional students, such as ESL students, whose progress as writers was inhibited by the predominant view that was only recently revised to fit these writers into the larger discourse on writing. The revision of the predominant view has yet to be reflected, in my opinion, to writing centers, which has been the case with theoretical frameworks in the

field of rhetoric and composition studies; while pedagogical and andragogic changes have been implemented in the classroom as a result of research regarding non-traditional students, many writing centers do not keep up. Moreover, the review of literature included in this thesis is indicative of the need for more scholarly work for Brownsville's Writing Center, the dialect of the area (Pocho/Poxo), and the ramifications of past, current, and future bilingual programs.

This thesis attempts to close this gap by including ESL students as the target recipient for tutoring in the writing center. Doing so has revealed some essential advantages for our students that the traditional models do not offer:

1. GLG assumes that our students are not included in the cultural norm and therefore require individualized feedback related to linguistic backgrounds.
2. GLG revises student perception of the writing center so that the center is seen as a recursive learning experience rather than a center for remediation.
3. GLG adjusts non-traditional students toward the academic norm—which may change but has not.
4. GLG improves the relationship between students and the center because students feel that the tutors attempt to establish a connection with students and become peers rather than authorities.

The GLG model is tailored for Brownsville's student demographic, but there is more that can still be done.

The theories, practice, and experience synthesized in this thesis reflect a significant transitional period when UTB and TSC split, the effects of which are still being felt on campus today, and reflect the various students who visited the center before and after the split. Now, only two years later, another transitional period is on the horizon. UTB and the University of Texas –

Pan American are now reimagined as a new university, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. As seen with the first transition, some things are clear concerning the Writing Center.

One of the primary concerns for the new university is the implementation of new curricula and programs, especially a long-awaited medical program that would advance the former university's nursing program. Students pursuing these degrees are expected to be prepared as professionals in the field upon graduation, and one of the demands is that they must write well and appropriately for the field. These students will have to be familiar with medical writing, AMA style, technical writing, and in some cases, legalese. At the moment, the Writing Center is not fully prepared to assist all these students, but it is taking steps to train tutors for this influx. I myself have purchased related style manuals and handbooks and have studied small collections of medical writing, eventually to be shared during training for the tutors. But more is required if we are to meet the demands of professional development.

Another concern for UTRGV is bilingualism. In its mission statement, the university pushes a B3 initiative: "UTRGV will produce state, national and world leaders who are bicultural, bilingual and biliterate" (UTRGV "History" webpage). This is perhaps more important for the Writing Center. Because there are so few writing centers that cater to a large population of students who are bilingual—or students who are preparing to be bicultural, bilingual, and biliterate—the Writing Center must now become a true writing center, not an English-only writing center, which frankly most writing centers in the United States are. At the moment, writing centers across the country are in a movement towards the multi-literacy center, a center aimed at providing feedback in the context of multi-modal rhetoric. Our writing center has not yet joined this movement due largely in part to the curricula, faculty, and student needs on campus. Few students, if any, have requested assistance with multi-modal projects like

PowerPoint or Wikis—there are probably many newer types of software that require multi-modal rhetoric, but the fact that the students and faculty have not requested any kind of writing in them suggests that there is no need. Therefore, the Writing Center can go in either direction: the multi-literacy route, which may or may not be employed by the medical faculty, or the bilingualism route, which has yet to be flushed out in the curriculum.

In either case, faculty, students, and the writing center staff will eventually need to come together. To echo the concerns of Lucie Moussu, Sue Dinitz, and Susanmarie Harrington, it is imperative that the Writing Center and faculty agree on a vision to better help students. At the moment, staff from the Writing Center and faculty from its English department meet regularly to discuss collaborative projects from as small as student workshops to as large as tying the writing center into entire courses. Ms. Karina Stiles-Cox, the former director of the Writing Center, and I have changed policy concerning language use during tutoring that before was frowned upon, but after discussing the problem with faculty, it has been a smooth transition that is supported on all sides.

We must then work with faculty to understand student motivation as they visit the center. The strategies I have outlined reflect an emphasis on tutor quality and a smaller emphasis on product. However, as Heather Robinson, Jo Mackiewicz, and Isabelle Thompson stress in their articles, motivational scaffolding is just as important to our students, but unlike the sessions these women describe, the writing center in Brownsville is different in its student demographics, tutoring approaches, and culture. Therefore, motivation must be redefined, and perhaps even researched, to better help the students. Perhaps then, students who once felt discouraged because of their language issues can feel motivated to write within a process.

REFERENCES

Adams, Katherine H., and John L. Adams. "The Creative Writing Workshop and the Writing Center." Mullin and Wallace 19-24.

Bahrainwala, Lamiyah. "'Should I Take Notes as You Brainstorm?' Examining Consultants' In-Session Notes." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* [Online], 11.1 (2013): n. pag. Web. 18 Sep. 2014.

Balester, Valerie, Nancy Grimm, Jackie Grutch McKinney, Sohui Lee, David Sheridan, and Naomi Silver. "The Idea of a Multiliteracy Center: Six Responses." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* [Online], 9.2 (2012): n. pag. Web. 15 Sep. 2014.

Blau, Susan and John Hall. "Guilt-Free Tutoring: Rethinking How We Tutor Non-Native-English-Speaking Students." *The Writing Center Journal* 23.1 (2002): 23-44.

Blau, Susan, John Hall, Jeff Davis, and Lauren Gravitz. "Tutoring ESL Students: A Different Kind of Session." *The Writing Lab Newsletter* 25.10 (June 2001): 1-4.

Block, Rebecca R. *Reading Aloud in the Writing Center: A Comparative Analysis of Three Tutoring Methods.* Diss. U of Louisville, 2010. Louisville, KY: U of Louisville P. *Google Scholar.* Web. 13 Jan. 2015.

Bruce, Shanti and Ben Rafoth. *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Tutors*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2009. Print.

Daniels, Harry, ed. *An Introduction to Vygotsky.* New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Dinitz, Sue, and Susanmarie Harrington. "The Role of Disciplinary Expertise in Shaping Writing Tutorials." *Writing Center Journal* 33.2 (2013): 73-98. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.

Eckstein, Grant. "Implementing and Evaluating a Writing Conference Program for International L2 Writers Across Language Proficiency Levels." *Journal of Second Language Writing* 22.3 (2013): 231-9. *Science Direct*. Web. 15 Sep. 2014.

Ertmer, Peggy A., and Timothy J. Newby. "Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism: Comparing Critical Features from an Instructional Design Perspective." *Performance Improvement Quarterly* 26.2 (2013): 43-71. *Google Scholar*. Web. 13 Apr. 2015.

Fitzgerald, Sallyanne H. “Collaborative Learning and Whole Language Theory.” Mullin and Wallace 11-18.

Garcia-Sierra, A., et al. “Bilingual Language Learning: An ERP Study Relating Early Brain Responses to Speech, Language Input, and Later Word Production.” *Journal of Phonetics* 39.4 (2011): 546-57. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

Gergen, Kenneth J. “The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology.” *American Psychologist* 40.3 (1985): n. pag. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

Gillam, Alice M. “Collaborative Learning Theory and Peer Tutoring Practice.” Mullin and Wallace 39-53.

Haney, Walt. “The Myth of the Texas Miracle in Education.” *Educational Policy Analysis Archives* 8.41 (2000): n. pag. *Google Scholar*. Web. 20 Dec. 2015.

Harris, Muriel. “Collaboration is Not Collaboration is Not Collaboration: Writing Center Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups.” *College Composition and Communication* 43.3 (1992): 369-83. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 May 2015.

---. “Individualized Instruction in Writing Centers: Attending to Cross-Cultural Differences.” Mullin and Wallace 96-110.

---. “The Writing Center and Tutoring in WAC Programs.” *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs*. Eds. Susan H. McLeod and Margot Soven. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1992. 109-22. Web. 19 Mar. 2015.

Hinkel, Eli, ed. *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Hobson, Eric H. “Writing Center Practice Often Counters Its Theory: So What?” Mullin and Wallace 1-10.

Krashen, Stephen. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988. Print.

Knowles, Malcolm. *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. New York: Cambridge Books, 1990. Print.

Lape, Noreen. “The Worth of the Writing Center: Numbers, Value, Culture, and the Rhetoric of Budget Proposals.” *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 10.1 (2012): n.pag. Web. 20 Mar. 2015.

Mackiewicz, Jo and Isabelle Thompson. “Motivational Scaffolding, Politeness, and Writing Center Tutoring.” *The Writing Center Journal* 33.1 (2013): 38-73. *Google Scholar.* Web. 14 Sep. 2014.

---. *Talk About Writing: The Tutoring Strategies of Experienced Writing Center Tutors*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Kindle file.

Matsuda, Paul Kei and Michelle Cox. "Reading an ESL Writer's Text." *Studies in Self-Accessing Learning Journal* 2.1 (2011): 4-14. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 17 Sep. 2014.

Merriam, Sharan B. "Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning: Pillars of Adult Learning Theory." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 89 (2001): 3-13. Web. 17 May 2015.

Moussu, Lucie. "Let's Talk! ESL Students' Needs and Writing Centre Philosophy." *TESL Canada Journal* 30.2 (2013): 55-68. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 15 Sep. 2014.

Mullin, Joan A., and Ray Wallace, eds. *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994. Print.

Murphy, Christina. "The Writing Center and Social Constructionist Theory." Mullin and Wallace 25-38.

Nieto, Nubia. "Political Corruption and Narcotrafficking in Mexico." *Transcience* 3.2 (2012): 24-36. *Google Scholar*. Web. 12 June 2015.

North, Stephen M. "The Idea of a Writing Center." *College English* 46.5 (1984): 433-46. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 Mar. 2015.

Nowacki, Jessica. "An Ongoing ESL Training Program in the Writing Center." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* [Online], 9.2 (2012): n.pag. Web. 15 Sep. 2014.

Pexton, Valerie. "Sometimes It's Okay to Meddle: Or, How to Encourage First-Year Students to Visit the Writing Center." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal* 9.1 (2012) n. pag. Web. 18 Mar. 2015.

Powers, Judith K. "Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer." *The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors*. Ed. Christina Murphy and Steve Sherwood. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995. 96-103.

Robinson, Heather M. "Step Away From the Text: Introducing and Supporting Innovation in the Writing Center." *DisCover* 3 (2011): 29-42. *Google Scholar.* Web. 14 Jan. 2015.

---. "Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing: Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery." *Journal of Basic Writing* 28.2 (2009): 70-92. *Communication & Mass Media Complete.* Web. 16 Sep. 2014.

--- and Johnathan Hall. "Connecting WID and the Writing Center: Tools for Collaboration." *The WAC Journal* 24 (2013): 29-48. Web. 19 Mar. 2015.

Ryan, Leigh and Lisa Zimmerelli. *The Bedford Guide For Writing Tutor*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2009. Print.

Scarcella, Robin C. and Stephen D. Krashen, eds. *Research in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1980. Print.

Scott-Clayton, Judith. "Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?" *CCRC* [Working Paper No. 1]. (2012): 1-40. *Google Scholar.* Web. 20 Dec. 2015.

Severino, Carol, Jeffrey Swenson, and Jia Zhu. "A Comparison of Online Feedback Requests by Non-Native English-Speaking and Native English-Speaking Writers." *The Writing Center Journal* 29.1 (2009): 106-129. Web. 10 June 2015.

Soven, Margot I. *What the Writing Tutor Needs to Know*. New York: Cengage Learning, 2006. Print.

Tomic, Welko. "Behaviorism and Cognitivism in Education." *Psychology, A Journal of Human Behavior* 30.3-4 (1993): 38-46. *Google Scholar*. Web. 12 June 2015.

von Glasersfeld, Ernst. "Cognition, Construction of Knowledge, and Teaching." *Synthese* 80 (1989): 121-140. Web. 15 May 2015.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Aguilar received his Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Texas at Brownsville in 2012 and his Master of Arts in English from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2016. David Aguilar worked as the Assistant Director for UTB's Writing Center and as the Learning Specialist for the Writing Center at UTRGV. He also worked as the editor of *JOSTES* (*Journal of South Texas English Studies*), which publishes academic articles on a wide variety of areas related to English Studies (literature, rhetoric, composition, linguistics, theory, and pedagogy). His own research focuses on writing center theory and pedagogy, bilingualism, and composition and rhetoric. He can be reached at aguilardavidh@gmail.com.