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“Conversation at the Boundaries Between Communities”: An Examination of Tutor and Peer Review Effectiveness Based on Commenting Practices

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Introduction

Stephen Kwame Dadugblor writes that “the concept of collaboration in writing center work is as old as the inception of writing centers” (75). Yet collaboration in the writing center is far from a monolith. For example, tutorials and peer response groups are both student-centered approaches that utilize collaboration as a robust tool for learning, encouraging dialogue between reader and writer to improve writers and their writing. However, tutorials and peer response groups differ in their theoretical underpinnings, goals, and methods, and these two forms of collaboration must not be conflated.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the distinction between tutor and peer collaboration is further blurred by undergraduate programs such as the Writing Fellows Program and the Rose Writing Studio, both of which engage undergraduate students in discussions with other undergraduate students about ways to improve previously penned essays. Participants in these programs exist in a nebulous space between uninformed students assigned to peer review and proseminar-trained graduate writing center instructors. Members of the Writing Fellows Program and Rose Writing Studio alike grapple with some information regarding tutoring best practices—a semester of instruction for Writing Fellows and a mere few weeks for members of the Rose Writing Studio—yet neither group is completely immersed in the world of writing center studies and best practices. Nonetheless, both groups are expected to comment on other undergraduate students’ work, thus offering ideal populations to explore questions regarding comment effectiveness from tutors with varying levels of education and experience. In light of such differences, I am prompted to ask: Does feedback vary from undergraduate tutor-to-peer review versus peer-to-peer review, and if so, how does such variation impact the effectiveness of collaborative learning to write?

I hypothesize that, though both programs are premised on the value of undergraduate peer review, in general, the comments offered by Rose students will be less effective—operationalized in terms of higher-order focus and level of specificity—than those offered by Writing Fellows. This difference likely stems from the fact that members of the Rose Writing Studio learn less about writing center pedagogy in the three weeks before they begin commenting on drafts and assume a reciprocal relationship with their peers, in which each student both shares their work and critiques that of others. In contrast, Writing Fellows encounter knowledge of tutoring best practices for a semester in English 403, a required seminar for new Fellows in tutoring writing across the curriculum, and develop a more nuanced ability to guide tutoring sessions. My findings

corroborate this hypothesis but also offer evidence that the comments elicited by both kinds of review offer thoughtful ideas on improving a student's draft.

Contextualization

Locating the Writing Fellows Program and Rose Writing Studio in Writing Across the Curriculum and Curriculum-Based Peer Tutoring Practices

Entering the twenty-first century, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) was increasingly influenced by the work of writing centers, which engage with WAC concepts such as using writing as a tool to learn and recognizing that all students can benefit from draft review. As a result of the interaction between WAC and the writing center, peer tutoring is now the linchpin of many WAC programs (Soven 200). Such peer tutoring often assumes the form of curriculum-based peer tutoring (CBPT), in which tutors from all disciplines become emissaries for WAC programs by providing oral and written feedback for students in "tutor-linked courses" (Soven 200). At UW-Madison, the Undergraduate Writing Fellows Program is closely connected to the principles underlying CBPT; tutors undergo an intensive one-semester seminar on tutoring writing across the curriculum, English 403, before being assigned to read and comment on two pieces of writing by between ten and fifteen students in a single class each semester. Fellows also engage in two conferences with their students throughout the semester to discuss their comments, thus reinforcing the program's underlying philosophy that student collaboration is "an especially effective mode of learning" ("Writing Fellows"). Despite this collaborative nature and the fact that Fellows are undergraduates, the discussion of writing between Fellows and students tends to assume a tutor-to-peer review structure, as Fellows guide conferences based on writing center pedagogy and practice learned in English 403.

In contrast, the Rose Writing Studio adheres to some tenets of CBPT while lacking time to meaningfully engage others. The Rose Writing Studio is a one-credit workshop in which students, traditionally freshmen, from a variety of classes and majors residing in the Chadbourne Residential Learning Community present drafts and receive constructive feedback from their peers (Detry and Rentscher). Two experienced members of the Writing Fellows Program serve as the Studio's co-facilitators. During the first three weeks of the semester, students read articles detailing the various elements of the writing process, personal revision strategies, and recommendations for giving written and oral feedback (Konrad). These readings reiterate WAC and CBPT approaches. In each of the following weeks, students workshop two or three of their peers' drafts, providing constructive feedback guided by the previous readings (Konrad). In that manner, the Rose Writing Studio and Writing Fellows Program affirm many of the principles of CBPT that highlight the importance of collaboration. However, the structure of the programs differ. While the Writing Fellow Program emphasizes tutor-to-peer review, the Rose Writing Studio encourages students to take advice from their peers, thus assuming a collaborative peer-to-peer review format.

My Positionality

I am prompted to compare the comments made on students' drafts by members of the Rose Writing Studio and experienced Fellows based on my experience with both programs. As a member of the Rose Writing Studio during Spring 2022, I was introduced to the rich scholarship informing writing center pedagogy. The field's emphasis on drafting as an opportunity to discuss ideas rather than fix errors was completely new to me; my high school papers had been marred with red marks indicating where to add a comma or fix "awkward" wording, most of which failed to engage with concerns such as the thesis's logic and the organizational flow. In the Rose Writing Studio, as I discussed higher-order concerns with my peers each week, I watched my writing improve, both on the weeks when my papers were being workshopped, as well as the weeks in which I instead offered others comments.

Recognizing the power of collaboration and my passion for talking about writing, I applied for the Writing Fellows Program. As I engaged with writing center pedagogy in English 403: Seminar on Tutoring Writing Across the Curriculum and continue to work as a Fellow, my revision skills have become much more nuanced and further informed by writing center pedagogy. In turn, I believe my effectiveness as a reader and commenter has increased. Hence, based on the improvement of my skills from my time in the Rose Writing Studio to my work as a Writing Fellow, I hypothesize that comments written by Writing Fellows are more effective than those written by members of the Rose Writing Studio due to their varying degrees of knowledge of writing center practice and different levels of experience.

A Review of Existing Scholarship

Distinguishing Between Tutor-to-Peer Review and Peer-to-Peer Review

> "In colleges and universities today, peer tutors as a group, acting collaboratively, are potentially among the most powerful agents for educational change, because peer tutors learn the most important tool for effecting change, the art of translation—the art of conversation at the boundaries between communities" (Bruffee, "Lost in Translation" 1).

In his keynote address "Lost in Translation: Peer Tutors, Faculty Members, and the Art of Boundary Conversation" at Brown University's first national peer tutoring conference in 1993, Kenneth Bruffee highlighted the seemingly precarious position between teachers and peers that peer tutors are asked to assume. The peer tutor's role encompasses a variety of tasks: offering a reader's response, leading the student toward their own answers, listening while the student articulates their goal, pinpointing possible underlying problems, suggesting strategies, and supporting the writer throughout the composing process. To do this, the tutor must be selected and trained, in the process becoming "a hybrid creation—neither a teacher nor a peer" (Harris 371).

While Writing Fellows and members of the Rose Writing Studio alike are asked to assume this role, their levels of training vary significantly. As a result, two distinct dynamics emerge: tutor-to-peer review, operationalized in this paper as a non-reciprocal writing tutorial between and an undergraduate familiar with writing center pedagogy and practice and an undergraduate, and peer-to-peer review, operationalized as a reciprocal writing tutorial between two relatively untrained undergraduates. The asymmetry between tutor and writer in tutor-to-peer as compared to peer-to-peer review elicits three significant differences between these types of writing reviews, including different theoretical foundations (Hansen and Lui) and distinct agenda-setting structures to define goals and methods (Harris).

In “Guiding Principles for Effective Peer Response,” Jette G. Hansen and Jun Liu establish the theoretical frameworks that support the various kinds of peer review. Ultimately, they argue that the theoretical approaches that support writing center pedagogy diverge slightly from that informing the peer-to-peer work, as tutor-to-peer review is more closely informed by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development theory. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development theory asserts that a student’s cognitive development results from social interaction in which students extend their existing learning through the guidance of a more experienced individual (Hansen and Liu 31). Scaffolding writing is a Vygotskian-based technique developed to support and investigate writing (Bodrova and Leong 3). The technique of scaffolded writing is encouraged by Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald’s writing tutor pedagogy, which stresses that “tutoring is scaffolding,” for “tutors…use their authority and the asymmetry of their relationships with writers to make sessions more productive than they would have been had the tutors been on equal footing with the writers” (65). Hence, Writing Fellows utilize their knowledge about writing center pedagogy and tutoring best practices and experience from previous sessions to encourage deeper reflection from the writer, fomenting the development of an asymmetrical relationship between tutor and student.

On the other hand, Hansen and Lui assert that peer-group work discourages such asymmetry by assuring that each student has the same level of received knowledge and, by extension, authority. As such, peer-to-peer review is more clearly informed by collaborative learning theory, which holds that learning is a socially constructed activity that takes place through communication with peers (Bruffee, “Collaborative Learning” 635). This theory stresses the importance of discussion with peers, rather than the imbalance reproduced by tutors through “scaffolding” practices. Of course, Writing Fellows’ tutorials integrate collaborative learning theory in their discussion-based conferencing formats, but the information gap between tutor and student and the one-sided nature of tutoring produces an asymmetrical association that more closely aligns with Vygotsky’s theory.

That said, these asymmetrical relationships are far from inherent. Indeed, writing center scholarship increasingly highlights the importance of training tutors in inclusive practices that counter colonized ways of knowing. In *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call*

for Sustainable Dialogue and Change, editors Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan identify inclusivity in the writing center as existing at multiple levels, including, but not limited to, attentiveness to the tutor's lived experiences and understandings of power, awareness of literacy education in a global context, and attention to the writing center as a material space. This last point, in particular, has received increasing attention as a focus on inclusive practice has led to the problematization of the material space the writing center occupies (Reynolds, McKinney). In that manner, writing center scholarship increasingly recognizes the importance of inclusivity—in terms of both practice and space—and heeds the necessity of deconstructing colonized knowledge. This means that tutors trained on recent writing center pedagogy will be increasingly effective at dismantling the asymmetrical tutor-to-peer relationship. Furthermore, it is important to note that asymmetry can also exist between peers who lack knowledge of inclusive practices; this is particularly true of peers with disparate literacy backgrounds due to social factors such as class. As a result, asymmetry in tutor-to-peer and peer-to-peer review is far from a monolith. Nonetheless, it remains true that the information gap between tutor and student and the one-sided nature of tutoring typically produces a power asymmetry in tutor-to-peer review.

The asymmetry between peer and tutor in the tutorial relationship is further distinguished by the practice of agenda-setting, which sets out to create specific goals for the reviewing session. Muriel Harris describes this difference in "Collaboration Is Not Collaboration Is Not Collaboration: Writing Center Tutorials vs. Peer-Response Groups," which compares the goals tutors seek and methods they employ to offer the advantages of tutoring in the writing center over peer review in the classroom. Harris explains that writing center staff are taught to focus on the long-term development of the writer. However, this emphasis is sometimes at odds with the desires of the student, who may come to the tutorial with different, perhaps more short-term, goals for the tutorial (Raymond and Quinn). This is the central difficulty that Writing Fellows must face, as they are in the precarious position of "leading them [students] to become better writers" while also avoiding perpetuating a "model of dependence" (Raymond and Quinn 76). Nonetheless, Writing Fellows—and, historically, writing center tutors more generally—receive instruction to focus on one or two higher-order concerns in a draft (Harris 374). As such, tutors confront multiple goals, generally aimed at improving ideas, organization, development, and overall clarity over lower-order concerns, which must be reached through several layers of compromise with the student in the agenda-setting process.

By comparison, Harris points out that the agenda of students in peer-response groups involves reading and responding to each other's writing, stressing the equal relationship between peers and the benefits accrued to both reader and writer through critical assessment. In the Rose Writing Studio, for example, the student whose paper is being discussed exercises more power over the agenda based on their intake form. Furthermore, comments aim to improve both readers and writers through the unique recognition that each can learn from the other. The fact that this relationship exists on a more level playing field is further established by the discussion of the Rose Writing

Studio as a community: “The Rose [Writing Studio]…emphasizes the immeasurable value of a larger community of writers: a place where students share their work, think critically about their peers’ writing styles, and contribute to an ongoing conversation about forming, reshaping, and communicating one’s ideas through the written word” (Detry and Rentscher). Detry and Rentscher’s emphasis on the Rose Writing Studio as engaging an “ongoing conversation” corresponds to Harris’s recognition that “the underlying similarity in peer-group work is the assumption that [readers]…sharpen their own critical reading skills” (375). Hence, while the tutor-to-peer review and peer-to-peer review alike aim to improve student writers by moving the writer from the traditional stance of receiving knowledge from an authority figure to an active involvement that makes discussion integral to writing, Harris’s scholarship and the characterization of the Rose Writing Studio highlight that the process of commenting is perceived as benefiting both reader and writer more explicitly in peer-group discussions.

To aid in the initiation of discussion, Harris points out that tutor-training manuals frequently discourage tutors from using a directive approach. Such manuals emphasize the tutor’s role in helping the writer find their own answers and guiding the student through questioning rather than by telling or explaining. The importance of helping the writer do their own work is evidenced by the title of Jeff Brooks’s “Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Student Do All the Work,” which encapsulates the nondirective, question-driven pedagogy often stressed by writing center practitioners. Indeed, the importance of questions appears at the very outset of commenting, when Writing Fellows consider a student’s intake form discussing their concerns and hopes for feedback. Ianetta and Fitzgerald’s *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors* highlights that the scaffolding approach “starts from the beginning of the session, when [the tutor] asks the writer about what [they’d] like to work on. Such questions are crucial in recruiting the writer’s interest in both continuing the writing process and in making best use of the session itself” (68). Hence, tutorials with Writing Fellows are intended to emphasize the student’s discovery. Even so, the relative merits and deficiencies of directive and nondirective tutoring remain one of the great writing center debates. Peter Carino compellingly argues in “Power and Authority in Peer Tutoring,” for example, that there are ways in which “directive tutoring is not plagiarism, but help” (113). Steven J. Corbett similarly asserts that, in the “real world” of the writing center, it is sometimes acceptable to offer a pointed suggestion, provide examples of alternate wordings, or explain how to properly cite a source. Thus, while it is important to note that recent scholars have problematized the perhaps false binary between directive and nondirective tutoring, writing center pedagogy, including that which informs UW-Madison’s Writing Fellows program, traditionally encourages a nondirective approach.

Contrastingly, Harris concludes that peer review likely assumes a more directive form, as students lack knowledge of writing center pedagogy concerning directivity. For example, readings in the Rose Writing Studio syllabus from Spring 2022 included scholarship mainly on writing processes and linguistic justice, and only in the last week before commenting on peers’ papers did students read one source that discusses the importance of prioritizing higher-order concerns, namely Dan Melzer and John C.

Bean's "Providing Effective and Efficient Feedback." Furthermore, scholarship confirms that peer review tends to assume a more directive approach: Harris cites the study of peer response groups by Anne Ruggles Gere and Robert Abbott, who observe that the second most common comments on student drafts offer directives about writing (362). Thus, without instruction in nondirective practices, peer review tends to be directive, thereby shifting closer to joint authorship.

Concerns about Peer Review

My hypothesis that the comments made by Rose members will be less effective in terms of higher-order emphasis and specificity than those made by Writing Fellows is in line with prior research on the difficulties associated with peer review. Indeed, authors have expressed meaningful concerns about the effectiveness of comments made by untrained peer reviewers, such as those in the Rose Writing Studio. Carol Berkenkotter concludes her study of the response of three students to peers' comments by asserting that "students who write for peer readers…might not necessarily reap the advantages [one would] like to imagine" (318). This is because untrained peer editors are likely inexperienced in critically reading text (Flynn 120). While such concerns are mitigated in the Writing Fellows Program by the training of new Fellows in English 403, the relatively little education that members of the Rose Writing Studio receive before beginning to comment on the work of others suggests that these concerns may appear in comments made by Rose members. This idea will be explored in the following evaluation of the effectiveness of comments made by Writing Fellows and members of the Rose Writing Studio.

The Gap in Existing Scholarship

My research is a continuation of Harris's examination of the differences between tutorial and peer review. Harris's comparison of the goals sought by tutors and the methods they employ utilizes existing scholarship to paint a compelling picture about all that tutoring in the writing center can offer compared to peer review in the classroom. However, in discussing the goals sought and methods utilized in tutor and peer review, Harris fails to concretely examine the effectiveness of each. Indeed, while other work has touched on the benefits (Schneider and Andre, Lundstrom and Baker, Yalch et al.) and drawbacks (Berkenkotter, Flynn) of peer review, none have systematically compared both. I do so in order to concretely grasp the differences in comments made by peers and tutors, thus suggesting the way in which the education that a reviewer receives informs their ability to productively comment on the drafts of other students.

My research also explores two programs that occupy a liminal position, existing "at the boundaries between communities" (Bruffee, "Lost in Translation" 1). By examining the comments made by Writing Fellows and members of the Rose Writing Studio, two groups of students with some knowledge of writing center pedagogy but without the

more intensive training of writing center tutors, I contribute to the conversation about the value of CBPT and its by-products, such as the Rose Writing Studio.

Methodology

I evaluated the comments made by Writing Fellows and members of the Rose Writing Studio informed by Nancy Sommer's notion that comments should prioritize the writing process, not its product (156). The stress on improving writing more generally, rather than the paper presented for discussion, prompts tutor-training manuals to emphasize the value of commenting on higher-order concerns such as ideas, organization, development, and clarity over lower-order concerns such as sentence structure, style, mechanics, and spelling. In "Providing Effective and Efficient Feedback," Melzer and Bean develop a hierarchy of questions to be asked when examining a student's draft. These questions begin with "Does the draft follow the assignment?" (303) and end with "Is the draft carefully edited?" (309). Hence, the topic of discussion in a comment must be considered.

Furthermore, a comment's content and wording matter. As such, I take into account Daniel B. Willingham's apt assertion that specificity is important: "The goal of feedback on papers is assumed to be the improvement of future drafts and the improvement of the writing ability of the student. The specificity of comments is a critical variable in providing effective feedback" (10). This is compounded by Sommers's finding that students experience difficulty interpreting vague marginalia. Therefore, acknowledging that comments should be specific, I define a comment's specificity as meaning that it is adequately particularized to the context of a student's draft so as to guide them when editing their work.

Score	**1: Very Ineffective**	**2: Ineffective**	**3: Neutral**	**4: Effective**	**5: Very Effective**
Higher-Order vs. Lower-Order	Concerns a lower-order issue, including sentence structure, style, mechanics, and spelling.	Concerns a lower-order issue.	EITHER concerns a higher-order issue but lacks particularity and specialized explanation in the context of the draft OR concerns a	Concerns a higher-order issue, including ideas, organization, development, or clarity.	Concerns a higher-order issue.

Score	1: Very Ineffective	2: Ineffective	3: Neutral	4: Effective	5: Very Effective
			lower-order issue but points out a particular concern and explains it in the context of the draft.		
Specificity	Suggestion lacks particularity and/or the explanation of the suggestion is not particularized to the context of the draft. Suggestion fails to relate the lower-order issue to a larger problem within the draft.	Suggestion may lack particularity and/or the explanation of the suggestion is not particularized to the context of the draft, but the suggestion relates the issue to a larger problem within the draft.	See above.	Suggestion lacks particularity and/or the explanation of the suggestion is not particularized to the context of the draft.	States a particular suggestion and explains the reasoning behind that suggestion in the context of the draft.

Table 1: Comment Evaluation Scale

In formulating my method of comment evaluation, I followed Melzer and Bean's systematic structure and Willingham and Sommers's emphasis on specificity to develop a Likert scale rating a comment's effectiveness from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective). I then applied the scale to each of the comments made on a student's paper.

These papers include three drafts voluntarily provided by former members of the Rose Writing Studio. They contain comments made by both a peer reviewer, who was another member of the Rose Writing Studio, and an experienced Fellow, who functioned as a co-facilitator of the Studio. Each comment made by the respective groups, peers and tutors, was rated according to the scale, and the scores of each comment on the paper were added up and divided by the total number of comments. This produced an average numerical value of "comment effectiveness" for those made by peers and tutors and allowed the comments made by the two groups to be compared systematically.

I chose this method to analyze the comments in an unbiased manner. Because I was aware of whether the comments offered on each draft were written by a Writing Fellow or a Rose Member, adhering to the structured scale above encouraged a degree of impartiality as I judged the effectiveness of each comment. The scale also allowed me to analyze the data comparatively, examining the average scores for tutor and peer review on each draft to determine larger trends within the limited data.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Findings

My analysis of comment effectiveness confirms my hypothesis that comments made by Writing Fellows are generally more effective in terms of higher-order emphasis and specificity than those made by members of the Rose Writing Studio, tending to point out specific higher-order issues and explaining the reasoning that warrants reconsidering the issue. For two out of the three drafts, the experienced Fellows' average comment effectiveness score was higher than the respective Rose member's score. In the two drafts where the Writing Fellow scored higher, the score of the Rose member was approximately one point lower than the Fellow. In the comments made on Sydney's draft[1], the Writing Fellow, Claire, received a score 0.77 points higher than the student in the *Rose Writing Studio*, John, and in the comments made on Dave's draft, the Writing Fellow, Sam, received a score 1.23 points higher than the student, Penelope. In contrast, in the one instance in which the *Rose Writing Studio* member received a score higher than the Writing Fellow, the member's score was only 0.15 points higher than the Writing Fellow's score. This emphasizes that, in general and among my small sample size, the Writing Fellows' comments were more effective, though both kinds of review offered generally helpful suggestions and, in particular, prioritized higher-order concerns. Even so, the scores of the two Writing Fellows and among the Rose

[1] Pseudonyms are used for all parties involved, including the authors of the drafts being commented on, the Writing Fellows, and the Rose Writing Studio commenters.

members varied considerably, highlighting that review is a highly individualized process for both writer and reader.

	Writing Fellow and Score	**Rose Writing Studio Member and Score**
Sydney's Draft	Claire: 2.737	John: 1.964
Dave's Draft	Sam: 3.909	Penelope: 2.684
Anna's Draft	Sam: 3.60	Jill: 3.75

Table 2: Average Comment Effectiveness Scores for Each Draft

Higher-Order Concerns and Specificity

Writing Fellows and members of the Rose Writing Studio alike were apt to point out issues with higher-order elements of the drafts, underscoring the value of both forms of review. In Anna's draft, for example, both the Writing Fellow and the Rose member recognize that the argument is lacking a "so what," highlighting that her thesis, a higher-order concern, is underdeveloped. Sam, the Writing Fellow, comments that a "so what" would be good to include, perhaps by "discussing the ramifications of those examples in the present day." A Rose member, Jill, similarly comments that "the 'so what' could be strengthened" to demonstrate why the topic "continues to matter today." Just as both the Writing Fellow and the Rose member highlight a specific higher-order concern in Anna's draft, so too in Dave's draft do both Sam and Penelope recognize that the thesis fails to incorporate important elements of Dave's argument that he engaged with earlier in the introduction. Sam, the Writing Fellow, asks Dave, "Are technological determinism or social constructionism important parts of your argument as well? Could you incorporate those ideas into your thesis?" Similarly, Penelope encourages Dave to "make it clear in this thesis that you do not support the idea of technological determinism." Both reviewers recognize that the thesis is missing crucial elements and prompt Dave to edit the thesis, a higher-order concern, in his next draft. However, Penelope notably fails to address her concerns with Dave's thesis in her end note, whereas it is the first element for Dave to address on Sam's end note. This suggests that, while both forms of review tend to stress higher-order concerns, the Writing Fellow ultimately engages with higher-order concerns more effectively than the Rose member. This also reinforces the importance of end notes, which synthesize the marginal comments, making it all the more important that they emphasize higher-order concerns.

Though Writing Fellows and Rose members alike engage with higher-order concerns, the comments made by Writing Fellows adhered more consistently to Willingham and

Sommer's findings that comments must be specifically applied to the writer's situation. In Sydney's draft, for example, one lengthy paragraph lacked proper development, inundating readers with information and evidence without applying it to her larger argument. The difference between comments made by the Writing Fellow *and Rose Writing Studio* member are characteristic of the Writing Fellows' general use of specificity: Claire comments that the paragraph "raises a really interesting point," but it requires expanded analysis on "why HBO Max is not global," the argument made in Sydney's paper, and "what this means." In contrast, the Rose Writing Studio member, John, asserts that Sydney provides "great examples" but that "adding some of your personal input (like your thoughts, reflections, and evaluations) can add immense value to your work." While both comments make an effort to reinforce the positive elements in Sydney's work, an important goal when working with student writers, Claire more efficiently ties the discussion to specific elements of Sydney's argument, thus providing effective specificity to "guide [her] when editing [her] work" (Willingham 10). In contrast, John understands that Sydney's paragraph lacks analysis but fails to engage with her specific argument, thus falling short of providing her with enough information to guide her editing for the next draft. Thus, Writing Fellows are more likely to offer the student-writer the "why" of their comment, helping the writer understand the "process" and not merely mend the "product," to use Sommers's terminology (156).

Lower-Order Concerns and Directivity

Though Rose members lacked specificity in their comments addressing higher-order concerns, they were notably meticulous when addressing lower-order concerns. In that way, members of the Rose Writing Studio acted as grammar and citation "convention informants" for their peers, a role that Writing Fellows comparatively avoided. The lower-order concerns addressed by members of the Rose Writing Studio involved wide-ranging grammar usages that they perceived as issues, from period placement to the use of prepositions. When citing a source in MLA, Penelope frequently encourages Dave to place his periods after the parenthesis; she also comments that his use of quotation marks is "somewhat distracting here." John similarly informs Sydney to use prepositions such as "in" rather than "within" and "since" rather than "by," as well as points out phrases in which the verb tense is incorrect, spelling is wrong, and spaces are needed. On Sydney's draft, this results in John commenting eighteen times about grammar and usage out of his twenty-eight total comments. In both cases, comments made by Rose Writing Studio members stress grammar and citation convention at the expense of addressing higher-order concerns, instead inundating the writer with suggestions that point out genuine mistakes but fail to increase the draft's readability overall. Based on this pattern, it appears that Rose members view themselves as convention informants for their peers; as freshmen, each of the members of the Rose Writing Studio has some knowledge of collegiate writing but is far from an expert. Thus, when the students find an aspect of convention that they believe to be true, they inform their peers of it, even when it detracts from their comments' more nuanced engagement with higher-order concerns.

In contrast to the Rose Writing Studio members' roles as convention informants, Writing Fellows tended to assume a more nuanced approach toward criticism, especially employing the use of questions. On average, Writing Fellows asked six questions throughout their comments, whereas Rose members only asked one; throughout the course of their comments on the three drafts, Claire and Sam asked eighteen questions, while John, Penelope, and Jill only asked four. Both groups used similar phrases when offering suggestions, such as "I would consider…" or "I suggest…", but Writing Fellows seemingly viewed their comments as a form of discussion, offering inquiries that the writer might answer while moving forward with revision.

Addressing the Outlier

Though trends such as the use of questions and specificity emerged while analyzing the difference between comments made by experienced Fellows and Rose members, that is not to imply that the comments made across each group were similar in every way. Such difference materialized most prominently in the finding that one Rose member, Jill, received a higher comment effectiveness score than the experienced Fellow commenting on the same paper, Sam. Both scores, falling above 3.5 points, highlight that the commenters made overarchingly productive comments on Anna's draft. Jill's comments were more productive because, while she only commented eight times, five out of the eight times the comments included a very specific reference to the draft's content, a higher-order concern that emerges, and the reason why a change would be helpful. For example, in regard to strengthening the draft's "so what," Jill relates the prompt to her recommended alteration to the thesis based on the paper's topic, encouraging Anna to demonstrate "why colonialism continues to matter today, even if 'the continent went from being under colonial rule to facing widespread independent movements,' as the prompt describes." While Sam offers Anna much more extensive feedback, it does not all relate to higher-order concerns, fomenting his lower overall score. For example, Sam comments extensively on word choice concerns, such as the improper use of the word "mocking" in one paragraph and the order of the words "markets" and "land" in one sentence in Anna's introduction. In these instances, Sam's comments address lower-order concerns and ultimately hinder his comment effectiveness score, prompting the peer reviewer, Jill, to achieve a higher score than the experienced Fellow.

As evidenced by the comments on Anna's paper, a commenter's effectiveness hinges on the individual and their response to a specific draft; just as comment effectiveness tends to vary from person to person, so does the effectiveness of comments by the same individual vary from draft to draft. The comments offered by the experienced Fellows, Claire and Sam, differed from one another, as did the comments made by Rose members, John, Penelope, and Jill. This finding highlights that, while it seems that, at least among this small participant pool, Writing Fellows are generally more effective commenters in terms of higher-order concerns and specificity, this conclusion must not be utilized as a reason to neglect the importance of peer review. Indeed, the Writing Fellows Program offers an elevated form of peer review due to the education of

peer-tutors, yet even students unaware of writing center pedagogy can provide productive feedback as lay-reviewers.

Methodological Limitation Based on Findings

Upon discovering that Rose Writing Studio members often pointed out lower-order concerns in their peers' drafts, I was prompted to reconsider my methodological focus on higher-order concerns. Among the guiding principles of writing centers is the development and long-term improvement of the writer (Harris), hence prompting my emphasis on higher-order concerns in my comment evaluation scale. However, it is important to note that there are ongoing conversations within the writing center community about addressing lower-order concerns, especially for English Language Learners (Nan, Teo, Min). While none of the drafts I analyzed were written by self-identified English Language Learners and because none of the authors requested that lower-order concerns be addressed in their intake form, I rated comments on grammar and usage as ineffective. While such an approach was, in this case, fitting, it might not be so when analyzing comments made on other drafts.

Another limitation of my method involves its emphasis on specificity in the rating scale. While specificity is important as a student revises their draft, Willingham also notes that comments "should not [be] so specific that students simply implement the instructor's suggestions" (10). However, it was only upon analyzing my results that I recognized this trend. For example, Jill's comments on Anna's draft, while praised above for being specific, were sometimes detrimentally so. When commenting that Anna should include a sentence applying her evidence to her topic sentence, Jill writes that the evidence "perhaps…highlights disparate responses based on whether one was favored or not, a tradition that continues today with the paternalistic rule in many African countries." She then goes on to offer Anna a scholarly article that she recently read in a class that could be beneficial for her argument. Such advice incorporates a higher-order concern, including argumentation, and is particular to the context of Anna's draft, so it received a score of five. However, its specificity discourages the writer from critically engaging with the feedback, instead allowing her to restructure her application with the persuasive connection offered by Jill. A similar trend arose in John's comments for Penelope's draft, as he effectively engaged with the paper's ideas but, in doing so, sometimes offered Penelope words and phrases that could be implemented as her own in a future revision. As such, while particularity in addressing one's comment to the context of the paper is crucial, it is also important that the comment engages the writer's critical thinking, yet my study failed to account for that fact. That said, it is worth noting that directivity is helpful in some contexts. In Jennifer E. Staben and Kathryn Dempsey Nordhaus's "Looking at the Whole Text," for example, the authors argue that a balance between directive and non-directive may be most helpful when working with English Language Learners.

Therefore, I believe that drawing a clearer line between specificity and directivity would likely not have significantly altered my findings, as a comment that is too specific,

bordering on directivity, is, if anything, *more* helpful to a student writer than a tutorial is intended to be. A directive comment may still foster meaningful higher-order revisions to a student's drafts, but it detracts from the overall collaborative experience because it dissuades critical thinking. Because I hinged comment effectiveness on emphasizing higher-order concerns and specializing one's comment in the context of the draft, a consideration of the critical thinking that is involved in the revision process was not included. Hence, while the failure to distinguish specificity and directivity is unfortunate, it is not detrimental to my findings. Finally, it is important to note that I alone assigned values from the numerical scale to each comment. While I created this scale, in part to control for bias, this lack of triangulation may, to some, cast the findings in doubt.

Conclusions

My findings validate the benefits offered by both tutor and peer review. While such forms of collaborative review utilize students "at the boundaries between communities" (Bruffee 1) and differ in theoretical underpinnings, goals, and methods (Harris), they ultimately both offer productive advice for writers who have conceived at least one draft of an upcoming assignment. Indeed, both Writing Fellows and members of the Rose Writing Studio often commented on higher-order concerns. Hence, despite the different theoretical underpinnings and agenda-setting processes of the two forms of review, both the asymmetrical relationship and scaffolded agenda-setting process fomented by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory (Bodrova and Leong) and the balanced, peer-led environment fostered by collaborative learning theory (Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning") produce relevant concerns about a student-writer's draft. However, the effectiveness of collaborative review tends to increase based on the reviewer's access to writing center pedagogy. This is emphasized by the finding that Writing Fellows' comments were more effective in terms of higher-order focus and specificity in two out of the three drafts analyzed. Writing Fellows, who engage in a one-semester course in tutoring writing across the curriculum, tended to comment on higher-order concerns and engage with specific elements of the writer's draft more frequently than Rose Writing Studio members, who only received three weeks of tutor training before reviewing their peers' drafts.

The difference in comment effectiveness was especially brought to light in the Writing Fellows and Rose members' diverging approaches to lower-order concerns and directivity. The finding that members of the *Rose Writing Studio* were more apt to comment on lower-order concerns, often in a very direct manner, and overall utilize fewer questions corroborates Gere and Abbott's discovery that peers tend to be more directive when commenting on drafts. It also suggests that peer tutors tend to view comments as a conversation with the writer, while students often consider comments as a means to correct what is incorrect in a peer's draft, thus fulfilling their supposed role as convention informants.

Even so, on one of the drafts, the Rose member received a higher comment effectiveness score than her Writing Fellow counterpart, underscoring that the

productivity of peer review depends not only on the education level of the reviewer but also on the draft being reviewed and the reviewer's specific response to that draft. While Harris distinguishes the two forms of review based on tutors' goals and methods, she fails to account for the nuance involved in any interaction between two people, whether tutor and student or peer and peer. In contrast, by producing a concrete comparison between peer and tutor reviews, my study offers a new perspective on the idea that any collaborative experience is a highly individualized interaction.

Future Orientations

Future scholarship should pay special attention to differentiating between specificity and directivity. In addition, subsequent research can expand the prevalence of these findings by analyzing comments made in classroom peer review, as compared to the peer review in the Rose Writing Studio. The Rose Writing Studio is unique in that it offers its students a community of writers dedicated to peer review and engaged in discussions about writing processes and linguistic justice. In a classroom, the community aspect and discussions are quite different, so critical analysis of comments made in classroom peer review as compared to those made by Writing Fellows would generate a more widely applicable comparison that adds nuance to the writing center community's understanding of the validity of peer review. Such research remains relevant, as Harvey Kail reminds faculty that collaboration in the writing center "is here to stay" (594).

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