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Re-centering Students' Attitudes About Writing: A Qualitative Study of the Effects of a High School Writing Center

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RE-CENTERING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT WRITING: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CENTER

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Writing

Katherine Palacio

Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences, Division of Humanities

Nova Southeastern University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM	1
	My Personal Interest in Writing Center Research	2
	Overview of the Study	4
	Data Collection	5
2	REVIEWING WRITING CENTER LITERATURE	7
	High School Writing Center Literature.....	7
	Creating Writing Centers in Secondary Institutions	7
	The Need for High School Writing Centers	10
	Theory and Practice in the Writing Center	12
	Ethnographic and Qualitative Research.....	16
	Teacher Assessments and Student Attitudes.....	20
3	DATA COLLECTION	23
	Purpose.....	23
	Methods of Data Collection	23
	Observations	23
	Interviews.....	24
	Data Analysis	29
	Internal Review Board	30
	Risks.....	30
	Benefits of the Study.....	31
4	RESULTS: INTERVIEWS.....	32
	Student Participant Interviews Before Visiting the Center.....	32
	Student Participant Interviews After Visiting the Center	37
	College Writing Center Tutor Interview.....	40
5	DISCUSSION: ANALYZING STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING AFTER VISITING THE WRITING CENTER.....	45
	Student-Participants	45
	Tutors	46
	Limitations	47
	Implications of This Study.....	49
	Call for Further Research.....	50
	Conclusion	52

REFERENCES	55
APPENDICES	58
Appendix A – Pre-Visit Interview Questions	58
Appendix B – Post-Visit Interview Questions.....	59
Appendix C – Tutor Interview Questions.....	60
Appendix D – Adolescent Assent Form	61
Appendix E – Parental Consent Form	64
Appendix F – Adult Consent Form.....	67

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CHAPTER 1

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The first year of high school is the most challenging for many teenagers. Their progress that first year can determine how successful they will be throughout their remaining high school years. Confidence levels are tested as students receive passing or failing scores on their work, and attitudes can be greatly affected. Although confidence and attitude are different by definition, they share equal importance in terms of a student's success in a secondary institution. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2010), *confidence* is defined as "a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or of reliance on one's circumstances," while *attitude* is defined as "a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state." Thus, if a student has confidence in his or her abilities, then he or she should have a positive attitude about those abilities.

A lot of emphasis is placed on letter grades, and research studies show that receiving poor markings on an assignment such as a research paper can negatively affect a student's self-esteem. In *College Writing and Beyond*, Anne Beaufort (2007) suggests that writing papers to earn a grade often leads to a "one size fits all" mentality that can in turn lead to a negative transfer of learning, meaning that this negative experience can affect the students' attitudes when learning a new task (p. 10). The purpose of a writing center is to help students learn in a positive way, to "look beyond or through that particular project, that particular text, and see it as an occasion for addressing *our* primary concern, the process by which it is produced" (p. 438) as Stephen North (1984) asserts in his essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center."

A writing center can be an essential part of a secondary school because it can be invaluable to a student's attitudes towards writing, such as Richard Kent suggests in Margaret Nagle's article "Write On! Peer Mentoring Encourages Students to be Authors" (2006): "Writing centers complement, support and enrich a student's experience." On the other hand, tutoring centers are sometimes viewed as places where students can receive immediate help on one particular assignment, and once the assignment has been corrected and the student has received a better score, the student no longer needs the help. It is in a sense a one-stop shop. A writing center, however, is unique because the goal is not to give students a quick fix on an assignment. Instead, the tutors at a writing center work with the students to teach them not only how to correct a problem, but how to become better, confident writers. As North explains, the tutor's job "is to produce better writers, not better writing" (p. 438). However, students can be confident in their abilities and still have apathetic attitudes towards writing. If that attitude can become a positive one, then students can carry that positive attitude with them at the start of any assignment.

My Personal Interest in Writing Center Research

I have been a writing teacher at Monsignor Edward Pace High School for four years. At Pace High School, Writing I is a course that all incoming students must take because every subject has a writing component, and this class prepares them for those other courses. My students are freshmen, and they are testing the waters of independence for the first time. These students have stepped out of the middle school grammar class where they have participated in several drills and tests where emphasis has been placed on parts of speech, sentence structure, and other standardized-test inspired material, and entered a writing workshop where peer editing and positive feedback is encouraged.

My interest in helping students gain confidence in their writing started when students immediately assumed they were no good at writing because they had received such poor markings in their previous English and grammar courses. To these students, the letter grade at the end of a paper was all that mattered because that was the only letter written in a sea of red markings. Beaufort acknowledges this same situation occurs in college writing courses: “Writing papers is perceived by students as an activity to earn a grade rather than to communicate to an audience of readers...and papers are commodified into grades, grades into grade reports, grade reports into transcripts, etc.” (p. 10). This single letter had shaped their attitude about writing. When I graded their essays, some students were surprised that they received a good grade despite their grammar errors. They saw the terminal comments and immediately assumed that the more I wrote, the worse their essays were. I had to encourage them to read the comments, so they could see that those comments were positive and focused on the positive aspects of the essay as well as areas for improvement.

In the summer of 2009, I met Dr. Dvorak, the director of the University Writing Center at St. Thomas University, a Catholic university that has a long-term relationship with Pace High School, and I asked him if he had suggestions on how to improve writing at the high school level. This led to a conversation about a venture one of his University Writing Center tutors was attempting. This particular tutor, Denise, was trying to find a school that would allow her to open a writing center that would permit college tutors to work with high school students. I immediately jumped on this opportunity to manage the writing center because I thought it would be the perfect way to show my students that writing was about so much more than a letter grade written with a red pen. After getting

the approval from my principal, Dr. Dvorak and I set up a workshop day where his tutors would work with my summer writing students. In those three workshop hours, my students had gained new insight into the meaning of writing, something that I alone wouldn't have been able to do in a classroom setting in just one day. I knew that starting a writing center was the right choice for my school, and when the school year began, the university tutors started their weekly visits to the Pace High School campus after school for writing center sessions.

There has been much discussion on the importance of writing centers, such as Amy Levin's article, "Goals and Philosophies of High School Writing Centers," (1989), and various studies have been conducted in the past to measure the effectiveness of writing centers, such as Pamela Childers' case study in "Bottom Up or Top Down: A Case Study of Two Secondary School Writing Centers" (2006). But students' attitudes towards writing didn't seem to be as important as other areas of research, so my goal for this research study was to add to current writing center research by focusing my study on how a writing center can affect students' confidence levels and in turn influence their attitudes towards writing.

Overview of the Study

While attitudes are difficult to assess, a qualitative research study can produce results to give insight into how a student feels a writing center has improved his or her confidence and attitude towards writing. This study reviews the minimal discussion of students' attitudes towards writing in past and current writing center research and builds upon the conversation by following three students' journeys in the writing center and

discussing whether their experiences with the tutors has improved their attitudes about writing.

Data Collection

In order to collect data, I reviewed past and current writing center scholarship, and I interviewed students who visited the writing center and the tutors who worked with them.

The Interviews

The three students I chose were currently enrolled in my Writing I course, and these students were comfortable talking to me and working with me. All three were ninth grade students. After I chose them, I interviewed them. The purpose of the interview was to see how they currently viewed writing.

Following the interviews, the three students scheduled times when they were going to visit the center. The center was open twice a week for one hour after school. The students were allowed to choose the assignments they wanted to work on, whether from my Writing I course or from another subject area, and they had the option of working anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour.

After the students visited the writing center and worked with the writing center tutors, I interviewed them a second time. This time, the purpose was to let them discuss their experiences in the center and to attempt to assess if their confidence towards writing had changed.

I interviewed the writing center tutors after the sessions were completed. The two tutors were college students at St. Thomas University who were participating in the university's new Professional Writing internship program. This program required the

college students to work for the University Writing Center and Pace High School's writing center. The two tutors began their service from the start of the school year until the last month. They had previous experience tutoring, and both looked forward to working with high school students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEWING WRITING CENTER LITERATURE

My review of high school writing center literature revealed that students' attitudes towards writing were not addressed as a prevalent issue. Writing center scholars have published guides on creating and staffing writing centers, theories and practices in the high school writing centers, and evaluating the need for writing centers. This chapter explores the need to address students' attitudes towards writing in secondary institutions.

High School Writing Center Literature

Creating Writing Centers in Secondary Institutions

Guides and articles have been written on how to create and staff a writing center, and all of them stress the importance of training staff members and faculty members in order to ensure that students get the most help with their assignments. But I found that addressing the students' self-esteem and confidence was missing from most of the earlier texts. In a secondary institution, a student's self-esteem is being shaped and his or her confidence fostered by teachers and classmates, so a writing center can offer a space where students can work together and build up their self-confidence.

In *The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One* (1989), Pamela Farrell opens the book with a dialogue between Farrell and William Speiser, a high school writing center director. The conversation was about the set-up of the Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School writing center and the questions Speiser had to address in this process. Administrative goals and teacher-student policies were discussed throughout the article, and finally towards the end of the dialogue, Speiser stated: "And be sure to include a survey that measures attitudinal changes toward writing.

In all cases, your evaluation should involve something besides a head count or points on statewide writing tests” (p. 22). While Speiser is very informative and seems to be right on with the important steps in establishing a high school writing center, this idea of creating a survey to measure the students’ attitudes seemed to be an after-thought instead of an important aspect of a writing center’s mission. A survey may not be sufficient to measure a student’s attitudes about writing. Students may be rushed to complete the questions, and they might have a hard time explaining their responses on paper as opposed to in face-to-face interviews where they have the opportunity to speak about their feelings.

In “Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers, Grades 6-12,” Richard Kent (2006) discusses the steps he took in creating a writing center, along with obstacles he had to overcome. Before starting his own writing center in a secondary institution, he visited an already operational writing lab at another secondary school to better understand how this entity would work best since his experience was in college centers. Kent describes how the principal was supportive, along with the faculty, and the tutors had over 2,000 students visiting the center that year alone. Soon, the student-staffed writing center now had faculty members involved in the supervision, and the writing center was operational every day of the week for eight hours a day. This writing center was now working not only with students but with administrators and community members as well. Kent offers great advice in starting a writing center by stating that two important steps are “getting your classroom teaching practice in order” and “come to know your new colleagues, students, school, and community.” He mentions how positively the writing center impacted his teaching abilities. He was able to construct formal writing assignments for

his students and not have to worry about an overload in grading because the students were used to visiting the fully staffed writing center and their papers needed fewer markings thanks to the tutors. This literature mentions the benefits that a writing center has for the teachers, but it fails to mention how this change in students' work impacted the students' attitudes about writing.

Pamela Childers discusses a case study in "Bottom Up or Top Down: A Case Study of Two Secondary School Writing Centers" (2006). In the early 90s, Childers sought to create her second writing center at a public high school, Red Bank Regional. She felt that because she had successfully opened one writing center, this second venture would be just as successful.

Childers made a speech to the faculty, in which she had to convince the school that this writing center was going to be more than just a space where she would correct the students' mistakes:

The Caldwell Writing Center is not a remedial facility; it is here to serve the entire student body, faculty, staff, and administration. We do not perform band-aid surgery on student papers, and we are not responsible for their grades. Instead, we ask questions to help writers discover ways to improve their own papers and help them become better lifelong writers, thinkers and learners. (p. 382)

After Childers gave this speech to the faculty, students and faculty began to understand what type of center this really was. Childers staffed her center with both student and faculty volunteers because there was not enough money to pay them and not enough hours in the day for her to do it alone. Despite the problems, however, there was a positive impact: "Over the years at Red Bank Regional, students became the backbone of

the writing center; they trained new volunteers, and included students of all academic levels” (p. 386). Creative writers were encouraging students to write for the literary magazine and faculty began attending readings and workshops. She states that the writing center had a positive impact on the students, but it does not tell readers how it did this. It offers results without information on how it happened.

The Need for High School Writing Centers

There has been much debate about the need for high school writing centers, and this debate is discussed in “Is There a Need for Writing Centers in Secondary Schools?” a round table discussion in *The English Journal* (1987). Jerilyn Carter and Finlay McQuade would agree that yes a center is important for a high school. Their center is student-staffed with juniors and seniors who have received exceptional grades in their English courses. While they have some down time, the student-staffers work together on their own writing, and they have created, in a sense, a community of writers. This positive environment is important in a secondary institution, as Carter and McQuade briefly yet indirectly discuss how this community of writers results in a boost in confidence for these teenagers. While it is encouraging that these writing center directors are briefly touching on this issue of confidence, the article lacks information such as how this confidence was created, and my research study can offer current information on this issue.

James Upton (1987) uses his writing center, “The Write Place,” as a space where students learn to “see writing as an important means of communicating and of learning in all areas of education rather than as a skill needed only in English classes” (p. 69). Ellen Brinkley (1987) also argues that secondary schools are more in need of writing centers than colleges: “Secondary teachers usually don’t have office hours or classes staggered

on alternating days. Instead, they are locked into a schedule that allows precious little, if any, time for individual conferences with students about writing” (p. 70). She states that there are several purposes to the writing center at her school in Ohio in the form of conferences: prewriting, pre-revision, and editing conferences. There are also sessions known as “teacher comments” sessions and “tutoring” sessions. Unfortunately, all of the sessions address issues with the writing process that can serve as temporary fixes for lower-order concerns, i.e. what Donald A. McAndrew and Thomas J. Reigstad (2001) define as “the features within a sentence, at the level of individual words and punctuation...grammar and usage, and spelling” (p. 25). The higher order concerns, such as clarity, focus, and tone are not central to those particular sessions and may not offer long-term solutions for the students.

Carol Mendenhall (1987) of San Antonio does see the need for secondary writing centers, but she also feels they have all been misused and therefore should be done away with. She has experienced writing centers where students are “dumped” at the door while the teacher disappeared and left the writing center to teach students grammar using computers, and once those sessions were over, the teacher would begin what she called “the serious part of English.” “This kind of writing center we don’t need,” Mendenhall added, “so, ultimately, if primary writing centers in a school are successful, there really is no need for another” (p. 70). Her frustration, I’m sure, is shared with many others in secondary institutions, but that is why it is so important to address the need for students’ confidence and positive attitudes towards writing. A writing center cannot simply focus on lower order concerns because students will only see the center as a quick fix to an assignment they are forced to complete for a good grade.

Theory and Practice in the Writing Center

It seems that the late 80s brought about a surge of high school writing center literature; however, it wasn't until the last few years that writing center directors turned their attention to students' attitudes in the writing center as the focus of writing center practice. As Kent states in Nagle's "Write On!" article, "At a writing center, those generative conversations that take place over time don't start with the mechanics of writing, but with the writer, the text, and the promise of the text."

Pamela Farrell-Childers addressed the importance of changing students' confidence towards writing in her article, "A Unique Learning Environment" from *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center* (1994). Although this book discusses college and university level writing centers, there are points that may be relevant to high school writing centers. Farrell-Childers explains that while the classroom's atmosphere may be positive and conducive to learning, the presence of a teacher can alter that, so a writing center with peers is beneficial because there it is lacking the presence of someone who must evaluate the student's performance with grades. She states that it is a learning experience for both the tutor and the student, and that experience can elevate levels of confidence. If the initial experience in a writing center is a positive one, even if the students were required to make that first visit, they will return on their own because these students have "found people who will listen to their ideas and actually read their work" (p. 113). Farrell-Childers also claims that a writing center will teach the student to take charge of his or her own work and master every level of the writing process, thus giving the student the confidence needed to complete future assignments. She concludes her article with a statement that directly

relates to my research study: “Attitudes are hard to assess, but those of us who have become part of a writing center atmosphere know that this place is full of fertile minds with ‘what ifs’” (p. 117). If the slightest boost in confidence is evident after a student’s first visit to the writing center, then continued visits may make lasting changes in attitudes about writing, and we can talk about it as more than just a theory.

Amy Levin (1989) states several objectives in regards to starting a high school writing center in her article, “Goals and Philosophies of High School Writing Centers,” found in Pamela Farrell’s *The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One*. Levin explains that writing centers in secondary institutions have several goals, among them “providing individual assistance for under-represented populations” and modeling “relationships among students that administrators might well wish to foster” (p. 24). In terms of affecting students’ attitudes, Levin does mention that Scarsdale’s writing center attracts students who either need help or just need encouragement with their writing. She states that tutors and students alike receive a boost in self-esteem when working together: “The exhilaration of the tutor and the other student in this case reminds us that the tutors are not the only students who benefit from the collaborative setting of a writing center” (p. 27). Levin recognizes that tutors receive a boost in self-confidence when they see that students are coming to them for help, and students also gain self-confidence when they realize how to fix a problem. She continues to discuss that the one-on-one attention given by the tutor to the student is a benefit that the teacher cannot always provide. Levin argues that “Cognitive development is promoted as writing skills are enhanced,” when discussing how a good writing center tutor will work with the student to show him or her how to make changes instead of just editing work. Through

working together, Levin states that students achieve the “necessary realization that [writing] can be done” (p. 28). This signifies a boost in confidence and hopefully a change in attitude towards writing. Levin concludes the chapter by asserting, “a writing center will foster a positive attitude toward writing and encourage students to feel more confident about engaging in the essentially human act of communication” (p. 29). The text, however, lacks concrete examples. My research will provide data of either a change or no change in the student’s attitude towards writing after visiting the writing center.

North details his philosophy on what the goal of a writing center should be in his essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center” (1984). He begins by discussing how faculty members sometimes categorize students as “the talented, the average, and the others” (p. 435) and that a writing center mainly deals with “the others.” I have encountered this similar predicament in my own school, where members of the English department feel that their most talented students have no use for the writing center, and they send over the “average” students who need to redo a research paper. This turns a writing center into a “skills center” or “grammar and drill center” as North suggests.

Instead, North states that a writing center:

represents the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives of teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered. This new writing center, then, defines its province not in terms of some curriculum, but in terms of the writers it serves. (p. 438)

Although North paints a wonderful picture of how a writing center should function, he himself questions the practicality of running such an ideal center. He offers a few suggestions, but examples of these suggestions in motion are missing.

Ellen Brinkley's article, "Writing Centers in Secondary Schools: An Idea Beyond the Puberty Stage" was published in 1986 in *Writing Lab Newsletter*. At the time, Brinkley's mission was to start a high school writing center for Madeira High School that modeled college writing centers in their successes through learning from the failures. She decided that the major purpose of the writing center should be to "offer a place where writing is treated as a process, a process which can benefit from intervention by, and discussion with, a trained reader-responder-advisor" (p. 5). She felt that a teacher could act as a "writing consultant" to "mirror" how the writing process worked for all ability levels. To Brinkley, staffing the center with teacher-tutors worked just as efficiently as college writing centers that were staffed with peer-tutors. She quotes one nameless student who shares joy from the fact that the student's teacher-tutor was able to help put the student's ideas on paper in an organized fashion that would best suit the assignment. Concluding the article, Brinkley states that she looks forward to a time when incoming college students have already experienced a thorough learning of the writing process in their high school writing centers. To Brinkley, measuring how well a student grasps the writing process is vital to the success of a writing center.

Judith Fishman would disagree with this sentiment, stating in her article "The Writing Center: What is its Center?" (1980), that the focus should be the writer and his or her writing. She explains how so many centers begin without establishing a purpose because there is a demand to increase college entrance exam scores or to improve basic

writing skills: “We often become operative without knowing who we are, and once in motion, we find it nearly impossible to discover” (p. 1). Fishman also states that during the ten years prior to her article, writing center directors and teachers had learned more about “writing and the teaching of writing,” and this article was written in 1980. Since then, discussion of what the “center” of a writing center should be has changed, and only a few leaders feel that student confidence is that center.

Three distinguished leaders in the writing center field, Pamela Childers, Dawn Fels, and Jeanette Jordan (2004), published, “The Secondary School Writing Center: A Place to Build Confident, Competent Writers”, to discuss how the goal of high school writing centers should be to build confident and competent writers, a belief that Brinkley and Fishman shared. “Whether we are talking about students who need to fine-tune excellent papers,” they state, “or students who need to discover what they really want to say, a writing center can be a safe harbor within the sometimes stormy seas of the school day.” This article discusses what my research is out to discover. I wanted to find out if students really do feel that the writing center can be that “safe harbor” where students feel confidence in their own voice.

Ethnographic and Qualitative Research

In 2002, a group of writing center directors and professors in the composition field set out to further research and discussions on writing centers. Included in their collection titled *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation* is the research study, “Insider as Outsider: Participant Observation as Writing Center Research,” by Neal Lerner. Lerner discusses the research project he took on when he was completing his dissertation and how difficult it was to complete ethnographic and qualitative

research. His goal was to discover what went on in a writing center session, “to simply investigate what my colleagues did when they tutored, what motivated those actions, and what students would perceive to be their own roles in tutoring sessions” (p. 57) and he thought his research study would be simple. But Lerner encountered difficulties along the way, such as noncompliance from the tutors due to fear that taping sessions would taint the sessions. Eventually, Lerner discovered that his initial research question of what went on in the writing center was far more complicated to answer: “While my experience as an insider with an outsider’s research agenda was filled with dilemmas, exploring those dilemmas – examining and countering my biases, making clear my expectations and their origins, establishing working relationships with my participants – was at times valuable as any answers I might have discovered” (p. 68). Instead, he questioned the very questions that were being asked by both the tutors and students during the session, and this discovery encouraged him to call for further research and discussion. I also found out about the difficulties in qualitative writing center research with my study, and that led me to rethink the way I conducted the study for a future study.

Also in *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation* is a second research study, “Student-Centered Assessment Research,” conducted by graduate students, Dawn Arthur-Moyer, Chester Bateman, and Adelia Falda, who were completing a project for their anthropology course, and they chose to evaluate “the relationship between the image that the Writing Center conveys to the public and other factors that influence perceptions of its role in the community” (p. 117). Their ethnographic study consisted of interviewing two writing center administrators, six writing center tutors, and six student writers. They conducted surveys and observations and had discussions with

faculty and students about the center. These graduate student researchers discovered that there was a discrepancy between what the writing center wanted to portray and the actual portrayal to students and faculty. After making a handful of recommendations, the Writing Center Coordinator responded positively to each one and either made a change or continued to consider the recommendation. The graduate students admitted two disadvantages: 1. Data was lost shortly after the research was conducted, and 2. The university feared that students would give the center a bad reputation if negative characteristics such as double-negatives to express a positive result were found in the research results, such as the following statement: “The research ‘did not find that the Center was not presently beneficial to the community’” (p. 124). The students, however, found more positives than negatives in their research study, and they continue to “urge writing program administrators to consider using student-centered research to assess their programs” (p. 128). While I am conducting my study at a high school, I also feel that there is value in asking students to evaluate a tool that is made specifically for them, and my interview questions asked both students and the tutors to reflect on their experience and discuss what could be improved. And, like Arthur-Moyer, Bateman, and Falda, I have found difficulties in working with this age group and the time constraints of their busy schedules, and there were difficulties with the data collected because one of the three students who volunteered did not follow through with the participation.

“How Was Your Session at the Writing Center?” an article written for *The Writing Center Journal* in 2003 by Julie Bauer Morrison and Jean-Paul Nadeau attempted to assess just how much students valued what they learned in the writing center months after their visits. They immediately noticed that although the initial response was

positive, when the grades on their assignments were not as high as the students expected, the feedback about the writing center turned negative. Morrison and Nadeau knew that the undergraduate students were concerned with passing grades: “Although we both know that the goal of a writing center session is not simply to increase a student’s paper grade, we are grudgingly aware of the hold grades have over students” (p. 26). They were also aware that writing center administrators did not try to “predict” grades that the students might earn, and they understood that while the ideal situation was working with students who yearned to learn, the reality was they were working with students who needed to get an A: “The fact is, however, that if students weren’t so worried about the grades they would earn on their papers, we might be talking amongst ourselves instead of with our students” (p. 26).

After Morrison and Nadeau reviewed the negative feedback students gave after receiving a low grade on their assignments, they realized that “grades did influence students’ level of satisfaction with the writing center” (p. 26). For their data collection, they created a questionnaire for students to complete after their writing center visit, and the results confirmed the importance of earning high grades. Students were less satisfied with the writing center when they did not receive the high grades they were expecting, although their initial response was a positive one. This study explored a very important area in writing center research, one that has not been at the forefront of much discussion. This study can be tied in with attitudes and confidence about writing because a student’s satisfaction with the session can suggest how confident the student is in his or her ability to write well.

Teacher Assessments and Student Attitudes

There has always been debate about what makes a *good* piece of writing. As a teacher, I have witnessed the lasting impression that the notion of “good” and “bad” writers can have on adolescents, and how this label can affect their confidence and attitudes towards writing.

Beaufort (2007) uses an analogy to explain the problem with expectations of “good” writing skills: “it is as if there were a course in general ball handling that were intended to teach skills applicable to playing jacks, tennis, baseball, and soccer” (p. 11). The expectation that all students can acquire the same skill level is unreasonable, and putting this pressure on students of all different learning levels can negatively impact them. This idea relates back to North’s argument that a writing center should be a place where all skill sets are invited and celebrated so that students can feel proud of their work instead of disappointed.

Maria Ornella Treglia, an assistant professor in the English department at Bronx Community College, begins her article, “Feedback on Feedback: Exploring Student Responses to Teachers’ Written Commentary” (2008) by stating that writing “is an act of confidence” (p. 105). She refers to leaders in writing research such as Peter Elbow who claim that positive and dynamic interaction is “necessary to give students the confidence to take charge of their writing” (p. 105) and questions how this theory works. Treglia continues to discuss different theories on how to achieve this confidence, and she explains that teachers must step back from their authoritative positions because if they assume this role, “students then have no or little chance to explore their own opinions of inquiries” (p. 108).

Treglia discusses a research study conducted by Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch (1999) that focused on teachers' grading styles and their effects on students' attitudes. They found that teachers who make extensive corrections on papers cause students to "shift their motives and try to match their writing to 'expectations that lie beyond their own sense of their intention and method'" (p. 108). This in turn can cause students to become disinterested in the act of writing.

After interviewing students for her own research study on the impact of assessment strategies on students' attitudes towards writing, Treglia discovered that fourteen out of the fourteen students she interviewed all relied on teacher commentary to revise their papers. The students felt that positive feedback followed by a suggestion on how to improve gave them a sense of confidence. While this situation may be unique to certain teachers, specifically those who choose to use positive terminal comments instead of marking grammatical errors, a writing center's goal ought to be to create this same situation with face-to-face interaction so that all students' confidence and attitude levels improve by the time the session is over.

In "Across the Drafts," Nancy Sommers (2006) claims that a problem teachers face while grading is that they "often neglect the role of the student in this transaction, and the vital partnership between teacher and student, by focusing, almost exclusively, on the role of the teacher" (p. 249). She explains that feedback plays a very important role, a "social role, especially in large lecture classes, to help students feel less anonymous and to give them a sense of academic belonging" (p. 251). Sommers discusses one student's reaction to an instructor's harsh critique and how it helped him:

Although tough in her assessment, Ellery's instructor treated him as a colleague, someone capable of great things, even if not yet achieved. This kind of intellectual partnership created through feedback showed Ellery that he was part of an academic community...Criticism is not enough; like praise, it has to be paired with instruction. (p. 252)

Sommers argues that for first-year students, feedback is "*monumental*, their most personal, most intimate and direct interaction with their college writing culture," (p. 253), and I will argue that the same may be said about first-year high school students and their writing scores because students are stepping into an environment that should prepare them for that same teacher-student exchange in college.

My findings confirmed the importance of my study on writing center research. While there exists a vast array of writing center literature covering a variety of issues, what seems to be lacking are current studies on students' confidence and attitudes towards writing through the use of a writing center. There is great literature on theories of how a writing center should work, but the concrete examples are few and far between, and I hope my study can offer up-to-date data on how much influence a writing center session can have on students' confidence and attitudes.

CHAPTER 3

DATA COLLECTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover if students who had apathetic or negative attitudes about writing would have positive experiences during their writing center visits and working with the writing center tutors that would lead to positive attitudes towards writing.

Methods of Data Collection

Three student participants were chosen based on my observations of their coursework throughout the semester. The three participants were interviewed about their feelings towards writing. Similarly to Lerner's (2002) and Arthur-Moyer's (2002) studies, this study encountered a few difficulties and did not go as originally planned. All three students were going to visit the writing center on three different occasions, but one student chose not to continue in the study. After the interviews, two of the three students visited the writing center: one student visited two times, and the second student visited three times. After the two student participants completed their visits, they were interviewed one last time. The writing center tutors were also interviewed about the sessions after the sessions were completed.

Observations

Throughout the spring semester, students worked on a variety of writing assignments, as well as grammar packets, in accordance with the writing curriculum. As students completed each assignment, I observed their reactions and willingness to complete the assignments. Midway through the course, I asked students to complete an

evaluation of themselves as writers. They were asked to spend twenty minutes exploring one question: How do you feel about writing? Many of them seemed to struggle to respond to the question, but those who did said they did not like writing and did not feel comfortable completing writing assignments. Their effort and interest in their classwork confirmed what they had written down in their responses. When it came time to begin my research study, I knew based on these observations that the students I would invite to participate in the study would be the students who had negative responses in that particular assignment.

Interviews

Interviews with the student participants were included in the study to see if there would be a change in attitude after the visits to the writing center. The interviews were a vital part of this study as they gave students the opportunity to express their feelings about writing both before and after they used the writing center services. During the initial interview, the students were asked what problems they had with writing and how those problems could be resolved. They were also asked how, if at all, a writing center could benefit them. The post-visit interviews also served as an opportunity to evaluate the writing center and its role in a secondary school by seeing what aspects were helpful to these particular students and what, if anything, could be done to build students' confidence. It was also necessary to interview the writing center tutors after the sessions had been completed. The tutors provided insight into the sessions and the overall experience, and their perspectives were important as they were the ones students came to for help. Their input was going to provide another perspective on the students' improvement in their work and confidence.

Participants

I worked with three students and two college writing center tutors in my study. The student participants were selected based on my observations of their work, responses to the evaluation, and attitudes during class, and the two college writing center tutors make up the writing center staff at the high school. I did not want to choose students I currently did not teach for a few reasons: In my experience as a teacher, students who already knew me would feel more comfortable sitting through an interview and working with the tutors; it would also be easier for the students to contact me with any questions they had throughout the process; and finally, I had established a relationship with all of my students' parents prior to the study, so parents would take comfort in having their son or daughter work with me as opposed to a teacher they had not yet communicated with. All three student-participants were freshmen in high school. Having incoming students was important to me because that first year of adjustment is crucial to building confidence in students, just as Sommers purposely chose first-year college students for her research study. The three students chosen all had unique personalities and opinions about writing. Alexa* was chosen because she was eager to learn new things and generally put a lot of effort into her work. She strived to get straight A's and was a student athlete. Ronald* was quite the opposite. He would often get distracted by classmates and was considered a "class clown" by his peers, but contrary to his reputation for not taking school seriously, Ronald was very intelligent. He claimed that his boredom from most assignments stemmed from struggling to find a challenge. He often questioned the importance of assignments because he needed to see the relevance of writing in the real world and how he could apply writing skills outside of academia in order to give

writing any importance. Mike* was the third student participant, and he typically struggled with different aspects of writing such as forming and organizing ideas. He was involved in basketball and liked spending time with his friends after school. While grades weren't his biggest concern, he did express joy when receiving high markings in his course work. All three students were currently enrolled in my writing course at the time of the study and understood that their grades would not be affected if they chose to stop participating in the study.

The two tutors who also participated in this study were college students and writing center tutors at St. Thomas University. These tutors had previously worked with the students on assignments, so they were all familiar with each other prior to the start of this study.

Preparation

The first part of preparing for this study was complying with Nova Southeastern University's Internal Review Board. The IRB first mandated that another trusted adult in the school, such as a teacher, would have to be the one to invite the students to participate in the study. So a fellow teacher spoke with each student and invited them to participate in the research study. This way, the students would not feel obligated to participate because I was asking them as their teacher. They knew who this other teacher was and felt comfortable asking her questions about the research study before accepting her invitation. The three students who were interested came to see me, and following IRB protocol, I emailed the parents for their consent. Two of the parents had a few questions about the study before they consented, and once I explained the study in further detail, I

sent the consent forms home with the students. After the forms were reviewed and signed, I informed the students that they would be interviewed by me.

In preparation for the scheduled interviews, I met with each student individually to inform them about what to expect from the interview and the research study. I went over the assent forms section by section and asked the students if they had any questions. They seemed to fully understand what was expected of them. Only one student questioned what I would interview her about, and her mother also emailed me the following day to ask about the interview as well. She stated that she wanted to make sure her daughter was prepared to answer the questions. All three students seemed eager to participate, including the student who did not continue in the study. They were also happy to hear that they could work on their research papers during the sessions because their deadlines were quickly approaching. After their questions, I informed each participant of my motives and intentions, and they knew that their information would remain private as the interview was transcribed and the results of the study were shared, and pseudonyms would be used to protect their privacy.

I prepared six guiding questions for the interview that took place before the writing center visits, but I also knew that I should ask questions based on their responses and allow them to explain without interrupting. Though I told students that interviews would last between thirty minutes and one hour, I was aware that each interview would vary. The interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes each. The guiding questions asked students to explore how they felt about writing. The questions invited students to talk about past writing experiences and how that may have affected their attitudes today. See Appendix A for a list of the pre writing center visit interview questions.

There were five questions for the post-session interviews. The students were asked if they felt a change in their attitude towards writing, and other questions asked them about their overall experience at the center. The same amount of time was offered to this interview as the first one, and students were encouraged to give honest answers. Again, however, the students were brief with their responses to certain questions, and the interviews averaged twenty minutes. Unfortunately, one student, Ronald, did not complete this portion of the study. He only completed the first interview, but did not follow through with the writing center visits. When he showed up for what would have been his first session, he came straight to me and stated that he had already fixed his research paper and would wait and see if he had another writing assignment to work on. After two weeks, Ronald said that he still didn't have anything to work on. I suggested that he work on his writing portfolio for my class with the tutors, but he claimed he had already completed most of it and didn't need assistance. Because participation in this study is voluntary, and I did not want any of the students to feel forced to be there as that could affect the results of the study, I let him decide if and when he would visit the center. He decided not to continue in the study. See Appendix B for a list of the post writing center visit interview questions.

The writing center tutors' questions were a bit lengthier. There were seven guiding questions and four probing questions. I planned on interviewing the writing center tutors together because throughout the year, there were several occasions where they worked as a team with students, and I felt if one tutor did not remember a detail, the other tutor would be able to help. I asked them to bring their session forms to the interview. These session forms were part of their routine and had basic session

information: date of the session, name of the student, reason for the visit, and type of writing assignment. These forms could have provided them with notes in the event they did not remember all of the details; however, the tutors had already stored the information in their database at the university and they did not have the information with them. The guiding questions asked the tutors to describe the sessions and to note if there was a change in the student. The probing questions were more specific and touched upon the work the student completed during the sessions. I felt those questions were important because the work assigned could have affected the student's attitude towards writing. This interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and the tutors offered very detailed responses. See Appendix C for a list of the writing center tutors' interview questions.

Digital-Audio Recording

With the consent of the student participants and their parents, the interviews were recorded using Audacity, a digital-audio recording software. This program was downloaded onto the computer and exported the sound files as a WAV file that could be played back on the computer through a variety of other programs. I left the laptop partially open on the desk next to me so that it was not in the way of the face-to-face interaction. This way, the students wouldn't feel nervous seeing a recorder in front of them and could feel a bit at ease just having a conversation with their teacher. I also used this same recording program with the writing center tutors for their interview and placed the laptop aside so it would not be intrusive.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed the recordings. Once the interviews were transcribed, I was able to compare the students' responses before visiting

the center and after completing the writing center sessions. I took note of instances where a student improved on something he or she previously stated was a problem in the first interview. I also took note of how the students viewed their own improvement and compared it to what the tutors noted as improvement. While analyzing confidence levels was difficult, I felt that comparing the responses from all different instances would offer the best results.

Internal Review Board

Because the research study consisted of working with human subjects, specifically minors, it was important that I was compliant with the guidelines of the Internal Review Board at Nova Southeastern University. First, I completed virtual training sessions that discussed guidelines in dealing with human subjects. Then there were forms that had to be completed, such as the IRB protocol form, and had to be approved by the organization. This protocol form was submitted and sent back with revisions on three separate occasions to ensure that all the details of the study were fully explained. The three consent forms (adolescent, adult, and parental forms) as well as the planned email explanation to the parents were submitted and approved by the IRB before I contacted the participants about the research study. In compliance with federal regulations, I will detain all data, including the forms and recordings, for a minimum of three years.

Risks

The potential for risk was minimal in this study. When I first met with the students about this research study, I informed them that to protect their privacy I was going to use pseudonyms when transcribing their interviews. I also gave them contact

information for their principal, the thesis advisor, as well as the IRB. I reassured them that if they did not want to continue participating, their grades would not be affected. When I emailed the parents, I also gave them the same contact information and let them know that their children did not have to continue the study if they chose not to. They were assured that there was no extra credit offered and their children's grades were not going to be affected if they chose not to continue in the study, and I explained that this was not part of their coursework; this was a separate study. All of the risks and reassurances were also explained in the consent and assent forms that were signed by the students and parents.

Benefits of the Study

There are several benefits of this study. Students have the potential to benefit from this study because they will hopefully gain confidence in their writing abilities, which can in turn improve their grades in various subjects. Students may also feel confident in returning to the writing center the following school year when they see they are facing a difficult time with a writing assignment. When students enter college, they will already be familiar with writing centers and will be more likely to use the college writing centers for assistance. The high school can also benefit from the study because the positive results may mean further support for the continuation and expansion of the writing center. This research also benefits writing scholarship by adding to current discussions on writing centers in secondary institutions and their affect on students' attitudes towards writing.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS: INTERVIEWS

This chapter includes results from the interviews conducted with the three student participants and two college writing center tutors. The chapter is organized according to the participants' interviews before visiting the writing center, their post-visit interviews, and the tutors' interview.

Student-Participant Interviews Before Visiting the Center

For the first interview, I had a few specific questions I wanted to ask the students, but, as is typical when working with human subjects, each conversation took a different turn. From each student, I wanted to learn how they felt about writing and why. While some answers may have seemed similar initially, each student had a unique take on writing and completing their assignments. The time originally scheduled for each interview was 30 minutes to one hour, but their busy schedules and unsettled nerves about being recorded caused their answers to be brief.

Alexa

On April 22, 2010, Alexa was interviewed for the first time after school. During her first interview, Alexa expressed that she was nervous but had practiced interview skills with her mother the week before so she would feel prepared. This concerned me at first because I was worried that she may have been coached to give positive responses, but I continued with the interview as planned. The interview lasted twenty minutes, and Alexa tried her best to give complete answers to my questions.

Alexa expressed that she didn't dislike writing; in fact, she enjoyed expressing herself when she could. She used to write in her journal whenever she could about friends

and experiences and places she had been, but she just couldn't find the time anymore and had stopped. I asked Alexa what her first reaction to an essay assignment was, and her response was similar to comments I have heard other high school students her age make: "If it's something I like, I can jump right into it. If it's something I don't care for, then I'll start it, but I don't take any interest in it, so I'll get bored easily." Her attitude towards all subjects tended to be positive, but sometimes there was a bit of apathy towards writing if she did not care for the assignment.

Alexa was used to the traditional methods of learning how to write an essay. So even when she struggled, she told herself that she should follow the steps that make a "good" essay: "I start with the introduction, and I work on the thesis statement. After, I'll write my three ideas to make the body of my essay, and then I'll use introductory words or transition words for the start of all my paragraphs." But even when she followed this method, receiving a good grade was not enough. I asked her what kind of feedback she used to get on papers from her middle-school teachers, and she answered that most of the time, a letter grade or number was the only marking. "Some will only write the grade at the end because they use a rubric. I mean, if I see an A or a 100%, then I'm just good with that. But sometimes I want encouragement, or I want them to tell me how to improve. I want them to let me know that I either did great or awesome or maybe I should have stepped it up a bit. Feedback helps me be a better writer."

I also asked Alexa what motivated her to complete assignments. She explained that grades were very important to her, so if a teacher wanted a certain format such as a specific font or word count, then she would make sure to follow exactly what was expected of her. She wanted to make sure she would get the A. If the teacher allowed her

to write creatively, then she would have more fun in being creative and expressive with colors and pictures. Her positive attitude towards writing seemed to come about when she was allowed creativity in an assignment, and in other more formal writing situations, grades were her source of motivation. In those cases, her positive attitude and even self-confidence would come about after receiving the good grade instead of in starting the assignment.

My last question for her first interview was if Alexa thought a writing center would be beneficial to a student like her who strived to receive straight As in all of her work. She had high hopes that a writing center would do just that. "I think it will be beneficial because if you need help on a paper, like help on a research paper, then you have tutors there to help you."

After this interview, I felt that Alexa had a moderate amount of confidence in herself, and in turn, she had a positive attitude towards all of her subjects. But if she were to receive a marking below her expectations, then her confidence levels and positivity would decrease dramatically because grades have such a large impact on her.

Mike

On April 27, 2010, Mike was interviewed. Out of the three student-participants, and based on my prior observations, Mike seemed to be the most apathetic towards writing. I was unsure how he would handle the interview because he seemed very nervous. He sat with his hands crossed on his knees and his foot tapped nervously on the floor. He gave fairly brief answers to the interview questions, but he did try his best, and his interview lasted just short of 20 minutes.

When asked how he felt about writing, his first words were, "Writing is fine." After a brief moment of silence, he was able to explain himself a bit more and stated that writing is okay, but it depended on what he was asked to write about. The only thing he really liked writing about was sports because he was involved in playing basketball for the school. Even then, he still wasn't very positive or sure of himself when completing a writing assignment. He continued to explain that he did not like expository essays because "I like to give my opinion about something. I don't like not being able to and having to explain how something works or something like that."

When I asked him how he reacted when a teacher assigned an essay, he said his first thought was, "Why do I have to do it? I mean, writing is fine. I just don't like to do it. Not a lot of it." I asked him if he felt writing served a purpose, and he said, "Yeah, it's not that there's no point to the assignment. I guess I'm just lazy about it."

I asked him to identify what areas of writing he thinks he struggled in because I wanted to see if there was something behind his apathetic feelings towards writing. "I need to get into depth with my writing. That's the main problem I think," he said. So I asked, "What is your first step when you have to write an essay or paper?" and he responded that he just starts writing things down so he doesn't forget what he wants to say. "I don't do formal outlines," he continued, "so I just sort of keep writing whatever I'm thinking." This method, however, has not helped him in his writing experiences because the method he used to write his papers had not allowed him to get into depth and be organized with his opinions. I asked him if any teacher had ever given him feedback or commented on this method, but the only comment he could recall receiving from a teacher was that he needed to get more in depth.

After meeting with Mike, I noted that he could recognize the problem he was having with writing, but he didn't know how to fix it. This was affecting his attitude towards writing, and this apathetic attitude was affecting his confidence in his abilities as a writer.

Ronald

Ronald was interviewed on April 28, 2010, after school. Ronald's interview was the shortest of the three, lasting only 15 minutes. The only time he was able to participate in the interview was while a writing center session was taking place, so he was a bit distracted by the others who were tutoring in the same room. I had considered moving to the library, but an SAT preparation course was taking place there, and the classrooms nearby had club meetings in session which is typical during the afternoon, so I decided that the writing center would be the least distracting of the available spaces.

During my observations of the Writing I students, I noticed that although Ronald did not like writing, he seemed to be confident in himself. His work up to that point had earned him high markings, and he had very little difficulties with lower-order concerns. I wondered why such a confident writer had apathetic feelings towards the subject.

Ronald expressed that he didn't necessarily dislike writing; he just "finds it boring." Writing was not something he would consider doing on his free time because he would rather be doing something fun like playing video games or being with his friends. Unlike Alexa and Mike, Ronald did have negative experiences in one particular previous writing course. "I didn't like my middle school writing teacher because I thought the assignments were dumb. They didn't have any point. The free-writing ones were fun though because we could write funny stories and laugh when we read them out loud." I

asked him what he considered to be “dumb” or “pointless,” and he explained that the topics seemed pointless to him because they weren’t anything he could use for the future. “The only essay I thought was worth my time was the ‘how-to’ essay we all had to write.” I asked him why, and he answered that each student had a different ‘how-to’ topic, so they each had a fun time learning how to do different things.

Then I asked him what he struggled with, and he said, “Research papers. I don’t know why. They’re just hard. They take too much time. But I guess they can be useful because it makes you learn about something and learn how to research on the computer.” When I asked him if he thought a writing center would be beneficial to students, he said that they would if the students really needed help on an assignment. But he tended to procrastinate and wait until the last possible moment to work on an assignment, so it would be difficult for him to reap the benefits of a writing center.

Ronald did not have an issue with confidence. He felt sure of his writing abilities. But he did have an apathetic attitude towards writing, and this attitude was causing his procrastination which would affect the quality of his work. Even with his acknowledgment of procrastinating and his apathetic attitude towards writing, he still felt confident enough in himself to maintain his work habits. This was a unique feature from the other two students who seemed to be parallel in their confidence and attitude levels.

Student-Participant Interviews After Visiting the Center

The purpose of the post-visit interview was to compare what their previous expectations were to what actually occurred based on their experiences by letting them talk about how their sessions went. After my previous research and informal observations, I expected to learn that visiting the center would change their attitudes

about writing and improve their confidence when approaching a writing assignment. This time around, Alexa and Mike seemed less nervous in answering questions. Unfortunately, Ronald was not available for the interview because he did not continue in the research study.

Alexa

After making two visits to the writing center, Alexa was ready for her final interview that took place on May 25, 2010, after school. She was able to answer most of the questions, but on a few occasions, she answered the questions in general terms using words such as “we” or “the students,” and I wondered if this was the result of another evening of rehearsing answers with her mother.

Alexa found the center to be very helpful, just as she had hoped. “I got a lot of knowledge about my research paper, especially with the works cited page. [The tutor] showed me a Web site that has really good information on making a works cited page.” She continued to explain that she originally thought writing a research paper was going to take a long time and be a lot of hard work, “but after working with the tutors and getting all the smaller parts done like the works cited page, writing the final draft didn’t take me long at all. It was actually fun.”

I asked her if she felt confident in her writing abilities to start a research paper on her own, and she said, “To a certain point, I can work on it by myself. There are still some things that I know I’ll need help with, but now I can at least get my own ideas down on paper when I get home and get to what I really want to say.” I asked, “What did the tutors do to help you feel confident?” and her response was, “Words of encouragement. Like when the tutor said, ‘That introduction is really good,’ then I felt like I did a good

job and I was confident.” This feedback is what she had been missing from her middle school teachers.

She continued to explain that to her, the writing center was a time to learn. “The people are there to help expand my knowledge. I think it really works, and it does help us get better grades, and it makes us put effort into our work.” Because Alexa’s focus is on getting good grades on all her assignments, I asked her what might be useful for next year’s writing center sessions, and she suggested peer tutors. Then I asked her if she would consider being a peer tutor, and she said, “I would probably be a peer tutor. Most of the time I think peers tend to listen more to people their own age, so peer tutors might be good aside from just the older tutors.”

Mike

After three fruitful visits to the writing center, Mike was sitting in front of me again for his final interview on May 26, 2010. Mike offered very specific examples from his tutoring sessions. “[The tutor] helped me a lot on my paper. He was smart about what to add, especially with my ethics paper.” Mike had to write a paper about a video he watched in his ethics class, and his first two visits to the writing center were spent working on the paper. “I wasn’t confident the first time I came by. I wasn’t sure what to write. I wasn’t specific enough and I wasn’t organized. So he helped me with that.” I asked him how he felt about his visits with Leo and his ethics paper, and he responded positively: “I think I have a better understanding of how to organize a paper now. I still might need some help, but I’m more confident about it now.” I asked him why. “In the beginning, I would just type away whatever I was thinking. I didn’t know how to put it all together. After visiting with Leo and getting some help from my mom, I was able to

see how to organize it.” His response showed me that not only was he confident about completing the assignment, but there was a possibility that the next time a paper was assigned to him, he may have a positive attitude towards completing it.

He also added that working in groups helped him as well. With his English class’s research paper, he said he was able to fix the conclusion of his paper on his own without feeling too worried, and he added, “but I still had my mom double-check it the night before it was due just in case.”

College Writing Center Tutor Interview

Denise & Leo

On May 24th, I was able to sit with Denise and Leo for their interview. I was eager to see if their responses somehow would match what the students would discuss later that week. The questions were general at first and often referred to students the tutors worked with during group sessions apart from the research study, and as time passed, the questions became specifically about Alexa and Mike.

First, I asked them how their sessions throughout the school-year in the new writing center went. “A few students lingered,” Denise started, “and a lot of students came by just to do what they needed to do quickly and leave. They had practice or their ride was waiting so they couldn’t stay very long.” Leo offered a different perspective: “Once we were established, we were seeing repeat students who were staying for the entire hour, sometimes longer. A lot of times, they were in a state where they really needed help because they were not sure about how to do something that was due in just a few days. But even the ones who had to be here because of a requirement really put effort into their work. They were active participants.” Leo continued to discuss what made

students feel comfortable coming to see him: “Students who felt comfortable were the students who we worked with during the school day in group sessions. Most of them came by after school, and there was definite improvement in their writing. Within just that one hour, there was drastic change.” I asked him to be more specific if possible, and we were speaking about a group of 11th grade students who were not participants in the study. He answered, “The first time we worked with them in the classroom on their research papers, they were lost. I’m talking about the junior class downstairs. When we saw them a second time, they had a better understanding of what they had to do. By the third workshop visit, they were prepared and organized with a clear draft of their research paper.”

Denise stepped in the conversation to discuss a possible problem the students were having initially: “They weren’t grasping what the teacher was saying. So we worked with them to figure out how to get them to understand what they needed to do, and then we integrated requirements the teacher gave them. Unfortunately, although some of the students had some great ideas, the teacher wanted the answer written in a certain way. It was like she had a response in mind already, and their responses weren’t matching that. When you’re encouraged to write freely and express your opinion, then it’s different. But when the teacher doesn’t agree with your point of view, you receive a lower grade.” Denise felt that the teacher was possibly a reason why the students felt apathetic towards writing. Leo disagreed with her analysis: “I didn’t see that problem. I saw that their evidence and support was lacking, so in that case, I can see why they received those grades. And yes they do get frustrated because they are teenagers and most teenagers are inherently apathetic towards writing. Once they hit a brick wall of ‘No, this is wrong,’

just one or two times, then they get frustrated and become apathetic.” I asked how students could benefit from a writing center, especially those who are apathetic towards writing. Could the writing center in fact change students’ attitudes towards writing? Leo responded first: “It definitely could. But meeting the students first in the classrooms definitely helps I think because we don’t seem like figures of authority. Instead, we look like college kids who just want to help out.” Denise added, “Some students were just happy that we were college students who were volunteering to help. They felt good about themselves.” I thought this was the perfect opportunity to ask about Mike and Alexa.

I asked about Mike first since Leo had just finished talking about apathetic attitudes in teenagers. My question was simple: “What can you tell me about Mike’s visits to the center?” He said, “When Mike first came in for that crucifixion paper, he had a working knowledge of the material, but he just hadn’t proven his point. The second time I saw it, all he needed was pointers on how to clean up the sentences and support. I definitely saw improvement. This time he was headed in the right direction.” I asked him if he was able to see the finished product, but he did not see it. “I never saw the finished product, but from the first time I saw him, when he only had one paragraph of ideas written down, to the second time, he had developed ideas. There was a significant change.” Mike was an example of Leo’s previous suggestion that teenagers are inherently apathetic, but after spending time working with Leo, Leo felt that the “significant change” was apparent not only in Mike’s writing, but in his approach towards the assignment, and this change in his work could signify a positive change in Mike’s attitude.

When I asked Denise about Alexa, she didn't have much information about her. It seemed as though Alexa took the useful information Denise gave her about the "works cited page" web site and worked alone the rest of the time. While I couldn't get much information about Alexa from the tutors, I did recollect that on two occasions, Alexa came in and helped another student with his works cited page because she had found Denise's advice useful. This could also signify a change in attitude, but the extent of Alexa's change in attitude was difficult to assess because of the limitations I had encountered with her visits to the center.

Denise talked about a group of 9th grade students who came in for help with their English class research papers. "There was one student who liked the one on one attention with me because he could ask whatever questions he wanted. He knew what he wanted to talk about and he had details, but he just needed that push to do it. When I asked him questions about his ideas, then he was able to focus and realized he knew all along what he needed to do. He just needed that push to do it. When it all starts clicking, there's an excitement in their faces." This excitement is what Denise noticed when working with this particular student and what Leo saw when visiting the 11th grade classroom for the third time. I believe that moment when students realize what to do and how to do it is the start of a change in attitude towards writing.

I asked Denise and Leo if they thought anyone else benefited from this experience, and they both agreed that they learned a few things about the writing center field. Leo said, "The students aren't the only ones who benefited from this. Just working with high school students alone is a big step for college students. We don't have this program over at [the university] for the education majors, so this would be a definite

benefit for them.” Denise added by saying, “Working with these kids kept me on my toes. Some students understood something one way and others didn’t, so I had to come up with something new for each of them. That’s how I came up with my movie trailer idea for a thesis statement, and it worked.”

The interviews proved to be a helpful method of data collection for me. I was able to compare the students’ responses before and after their writing center visits, and compare them to what the tutors said as well. While Ronald did not continue with the study, I was able to attain information from his first interview because in his case, his confidence in writing wasn’t as parallel to his attitude towards writing as the other student-participants. He felt pretty good about himself as a writer, but his apathetic attitude towards writing seemed to come from boredom of the topics. With Alexa and Mike, their original lack of confidence added to their apathetic attitudes towards writing, and after visiting the center, there seemed to be some improvement in both. Aside from the student-participants, Denise and Leo also benefited from this study and the overall experience. They were able to explore and exchange ideas about how their work at the writing center truly affected these students, and together, we were able to make suggestions on how next year’s writing center sessions could continue to affect students’ confidence and attitudes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION: ANALYZING STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING AFTER VISITING THE WRITING CENTER

While assessing students' confidence in and attitudes towards writing is a difficult task, I was able to make some connections between the students' responses from both the pre-visit interviews and the post-visit interviews and the tutors' reflections. I also discovered that my students' and tutors' responses reflected what was briefly discussed in the writing center literature.

Student-Participants

I believe that Alexa reflected what Julie Bauer Morrison and Jean-Paul Nadeau (2003) were discussing in their article, "How Was Your Session at the Writing Center?" because she was highly concerned with visiting the center to improve her grades. It was a tool that would improve her writing and help her achieve her goal of maintaining an "A" average. But did it affect her attitude towards writing? With Alexa's main concern being a high average, I think that a positive attitude towards writing wasn't her top priority. She naturally had a positive outlook towards all of her subjects and her sport, but she saw the greatest benefit of the writing center visits when she received help on a lower-order concern in an assignment – formatting a works cited page. If grades were not an issue, I wonder if future writing center visits would inspire her to return to her journaling days where writing was a form of expression for her instead of just a means to get a good grade. She did, however, experience the positive feedback and criticism she was once looking for from her middle school teachers when she visited the writing center.

Mike, on the other hand, was not concerned with getting A's. He was not required to visit the center when he came to work on his ethics assignments. He himself noticed a change in his work after working with Leo. He realized that his method of writing down all of his thoughts without organization was actually hurting him instead of helping him. Through working one-on-one with Leo, Mike was able to understand that he would have to work on organizing his writing after he wrote down his thoughts. While he did not show Leo the finished product of his ethics paper, he did say that he was able to write the conclusion of the assignment on his own without seeking outside help because he had a clearer understanding of what to do. Mike's realization of a problem and the remedy to fix it could be a sign of a change in attitude because he had the confidence to complete the assignment on his own. Amy Levin (1989) discussed this realization in her article, "Goals and Philosophies of High School Writing Centers" by stating that students achieve the "necessary realization that [writing] can be done" (p. 28). This realization is what happened with Mike. I feel that this study could be the concrete example that was missing from her argument.

Tutors

As Levin also discussed in that article, the tutors received their own boost in self-confidence after working with the student-participants as well as the other students who attended sessions throughout the year. Denise stated that it was a challenge coming up with new and unique ideas for each student just to cover one topic. Each student had a different way of interpreting the assignment instructions, and she had to come up with new ways to teach it, such as her movie-trailer idea. Denise also mentioned that one of the students she worked with on multiple occasions saw the greatest benefit when he

worked with her on a one-on-one basis because he felt comfortable asking as many questions as he could. Levin discusses this as well in her article, stating that teachers are not always able to provide this.

Denise and Leo also discovered that working with the junior class on their research papers proved to be beneficial for the students because they felt comfortable visiting the center for help. As stated in “The Secondary School Writing Center: A Place to Build Confident and Competent Writers” by Pamela Childers, Dawn Fels, and Jeanette Jordan (2004), the students eventually saw the writing center as the “safe harbor within the sometimes stormy seas of the school day.” I believe that the results of this study agree with this claim.

In their study, Morrison and Nadeau (2003) discovered that students would become frustrated when their hard work in the writing center did not translate into an A+ paper, and Denise noted a similar situation with some of the students who worked with her. At first, she would help the students write exactly what they wanted to say, but she saw negative feedback made by the teacher who seemed to want a specific response that mimicked what she felt was the “right answer.” So Denise was careful not to predict grades, and she made sure to check with one of the English teachers about the assignment instructions and what was expected.

Limitations

Similar to Neal Lerner’s (2004) discovery that research studies are never as simple and smooth to conduct as they may initially seem, there were a few limitations while completing this study, and if I were to repeat this study, there would be a few changes.

The first limitation was the age group. These high school students are encouraged to participate in after school activities and sports to become well-rounded, and most of their events begin between 2:45 and 3:00 p.m. Because The Writing Center sessions begin at 2:30, one of the students, Alexa, was only available for one sit-down session with Denise, and she spent the second session working on her own to make sure she could make it to basketball practice on time. I understand their busy schedules, and I also am aware that parents often pick up their children at 3:00 so the students must be ready to go before that time. Because of this limitation, a possible solution would be opening the center during the last period of the school day so that students have an hour and a half to work with the tutors if needed and still have time to go to their activities. This could also encourage students to see the center as a place where discussion and working takes place instead of a room where tutors edit their papers.

The second limitation was how I selected the students I planned to work with. I was working with three student-participants, and unfortunately, one student did not complete the study, and there was not enough time to get another student. Originally, I felt that choosing the participants from my own students would be beneficial because they felt comfortable working with me, and they did, but along with this decision came some “flaws” I did not foresee. I allowed my students to choose which papers to take to the writing center, but they did not pick my course work because they didn’t feel that they needed more help because of the class time I gave them to complete the work. This made me rely on other teachers to work with me on encouraging students to bring their work to The Writing Center and caused a lull at the start of the study. After some time had passed, Mike brought his ethic’s paper and Alexa brought her literary research paper.

Unfortunately, Ronald had received high markings on his research paper prior to the commencement of the study, and he did not see it necessary to bring another assignment to The Writing Center. Next time, I could monitor the students who visit the center and request detailed notes from the tutors. Then, after taking note of which students visited the center multiple times, I could contact them and interview them about what they have done and what they have learned. Denise and Leo had a lot to say about one particular group of students who saw them repeatedly, but they were not originally part of my study. A pilot study could have helped to iron out these issues, and I will continue to reflect on the lessons learned from this study when designing future studies. These details, such as monitoring the students who visit the center frequently and using other methods of data collection in addition to the interviews, could set the stage for a future study that could assess students' confidence towards writing with more data and possibly clearer results.

Implications of This Study

This study has many benefits for my school. I will share my findings with the principal in the hopes of receiving operational writing center hours during the school day, so that students can visit the writing center during school hours instead of only after school. This way, every student on campus will have a greater chance of visiting the center for help on assignments. As I discovered in my study, the life of a teenager is filled with after-school activities, sports, and car-rides right at the bell, so showing this discovery to the principal may encourage her to open a space throughout the school day to ensure that every student gets the opportunity to visit the center.

During the 2010-2011 school year, I will be working with the principal and faculty to implement a Writing Across the Curriculum program. I know that teachers outside of the English department may not feel comfortable with the idea of implementing writing into their courses because written assignments may not already be a part of their course work. Teachers would have to check for lower- and higher-order concerns, and the teachers may be distracted by the grammatical errors they find and in turn would not be able to properly assess the students' written work. I can use this study to show them just how beneficial a writing center can be for them because the written work that students would turn in for a grade would be a second draft that has already been revised by the tutors. These teachers will be able to see how comfortable the students feel in working with the tutors and will hopefully continue their support of the writing center.

I also plan on sharing this research with the writing center field in the hopes that others in this field can not only encourage their own students to visit their respective writing centers, but to build on this study as well. If the writing center at Pace High School continues to be successful, I would like to present my findings to other high schools that do not have writing centers so that they can also reap the benefits. I can make a change locally by reaching out to other high schools in South Florida.

Call for Further Research

I am confident that my study was successful and had a clear conclusion: after visiting the writing center, the students did gain confidence in themselves as writers, and they also gained a positive attitude towards their writing assignments. I am interested in seeing an updated study on students' confidence and attitudes, and I hope that I will have

the opportunity to conduct a follow-up study during the next school year. If I, or another writing center director, were to build upon this study, there are specific changes I think could be beneficial:

1. Start the study at the start of the school year. Although the initial steps of this study began in January with the IRB training sessions and forms, the actual study did not begin until early April, and we were interrupted by spring break. During this point in the school year, there seems to be a change in the atmosphere with summer vacation creeping around the corner, and students focusing only on passing their courses. If I were to start in September, I'd be able to work with students who are not pressed for time with deadlines.
2. Open the center during the school day. By having the center open only after school, I have limited the amount of time students can use the center, and based on my experience, some students require much more time than just one one-hour visit. If the center is open during the school day, then students such as athletes will have the opportunity to calmly sit and work with the writing center tutors. If they don't have enough time to complete their assignment, then the after school hour is still available for them to continue.
3. Review the session forms on a weekly basis. This way, I can take note of the students who are frequently returning from the start of the study, and I can take note of the reasons they are visiting the center. If I see that a student is visiting the center for the same reason on multiple occasions, then I can take that opportunity to meet with the student and tutors and get detailed information on what is going

on. That student would be a possible candidate for the research study because I would want to find out if this student's attitude or confidence is being affected.

4. Add quantitative data. While I don't think a survey would be enough on its own, I do believe that a survey would be useful in addition to the interviews.

Currently, I am setting up a survey for my writing center so that students can complete them once they are done with their sessions so that I have an additional tool to measure the effectiveness of the writing center. Although in 2003

Morrison and Nadeau's study discovered that students' feedback on the writing center sometimes changed after the students' grades did not improve, the survey responses could support what the students explain during their interviews.

5. Open the population to all grade levels in the secondary school. Although I find it important to use ninth-grade students as participants, during this study I noted that a lot of our frequent visitors were 11th grade students. As Leo explained during his interview, the group he worked mostly with was an 11th grade group who were working on their research papers, and during their second and third visits, he saw the most improvement out of all the students he worked with throughout the school year.

Conclusion

How will these two students, Mike and Alexa, work on their writing assignments next year? They both have plans to return to the writing center when their next writing assignment is given to them, but will they remember what they learned from their visits? As discussed in the review of literature in Chapter 2, there seems to be insufficient research on students' attitudes after working in a writing center. Writing centers are still

seen by some as quick-fix spots where students go when they are on deadline for an assignment. But I think this study shows that when students schedule their own time to work with the tutors without pressing deadlines, they see the biggest change.

Mike had two weeks before the assignment was due, so he had time to work on it with Leo without rushing. The Writing Center tutors make it a point to work patiently with the students and wait for the students to come to a realization about what they have to do; then they work with the students to get those ideas down on paper. That realization may happen in just one hour alone, but how can this improvement be measured? I could have asked for Mike's grades, but writing is subjective. Would those grades have reflected what he really learned from this? Instead, I had a conversation with him, and he said he felt better about what he had to do from now on. My hope is that he carries that feeling with him for the following year. Alexa had confidence to return to the center to work with a classmate on her works cited page using Denise's guidance. To me, this shows a change in her. Hopefully Ronald will give himself the opportunity to benefit from the writing center services. A student like Ronald could make great use out of working with peers. He enjoys social environments and likes choosing his own topics. The writing center could be an ideal space for him. But his confidence in his own work doesn't allow him to have a positive attitude about it. Instead, he has confidence in his abilities because he interpreted the lack of feedback on his assignments as a sign that he had been doing a great job all along. This lack of teacher-student interaction also could have added to the apathetic attitude he has towards writing.

When a student becomes confident enough in his or her own writing abilities to teach another student, such as Alexa did, something has changed inside that person. I

believe that The Writing Center at my high school is a reflection of what Farrell-Childers (1994) calls the space “full of fertile minds with ‘what-ifs’” because students leave feeling more confident about themselves and the work they have completed, and I think this study explored how the writing center affected two fertile minds.

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APPENDIX A

Student Participant Interview Before Writing Center Sessions Research Study: “Re-Centering Students’ Attitudes about Writing”

Guiding Questions

1. Tell me how you feel about writing.
2. Why do you feel that way?
3. When your teacher assigns an essay, what’s your first reaction?
4. What’s your plan to complete that assignment?
5. Do you write on your spare time?
6. Tell me about a past experience that involved a writing assignment with negative comments or a bad grade.

APPENDIX B

Student Participant Interview After Writing Center Sessions Research Study: “Re-Centering Students’ Attitudes about Writing”

Guiding Questions

1. How did it go?
2. Did you feel a change in how you approach a writing assignment?
3. What made you feel this way?
4. Was there something new you learned at the center?
5. What, if anything, would have helped you feel comfortable or more positive about writing?
6. Would you return to the writing center in the future?

APPENDIX C

Writing Center Tutor Participant Interview Questions After Sessions Research Study: “Re-Centering Students’ Attitudes about Writing”

Guiding Questions

1. How do you feel about this first year at the writing center?
2. How did the sessions go with your students?
3. What were the students working on during their sessions?
4. Was their improvement in their work by the third visit?
5. Overall, does the student seem more confident or positive about working on a writing assignment? (Why/why not?)
6. What do you think were the factors that contributed to their confidence?
7. Is there anything else you think might be important for me to know about regarding your sessions?

APPENDIX D

Assent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled Re-Centering Students' Attitudes about Writing

Funding Source: None.

IRB approval #

Principal investigator:
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What is a research study?

This is a research study to see if working with tutors in a writing center can change your negative attitude about writing into a positive attitude.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to see if a writing center can help students become confident in their writing so that they can work better in future classes without feeling frustrated about writing assignments.

What will happen to me?

You will be interviewed twice for about 30 minutes to one hour by Mrs. Katherine Palacio before you start the tutoring sessions with the college tutors from St. Thomas University. She will ask you a few questions about your past writing experience. Your answers will be recorded with a tape-recorder that will be reviewed by Mrs. Palacio and possibly Dr. Shanti Bruce, her research advisor. This interview will be transcribed which means there will be a typed version of it, but a fake name will be used. Dr. Bruce will review this typed version. Then you will go to three tutoring sessions at the writing

center. You can choose which dates you will go: Tuesdays and Wednesdays are your options, from 2:30 to 3:30 on either day. You will bring in writing assignments and work with the tutors on discussing how you did on the assignment and how you feel about the assignment. You will practice different techniques that will help you feel more confidence about your work and help you understand what is expected of you by your teacher. When you have completed your three sessions, you will be interviewed a second time for 30 minutes to one hour by Mrs. Palacio, and this will also be transcribed and reviewed by Dr. Shanti Bruce. You will be asked for your honesty about the writing center experience. The college tutors will also be interviewed by Mrs. Palacio about the tutoring sessions.

What are the good things about being in the study?

There are a lot of good things about being in this study:

1. You'll learn how to work with negative feedback on your assignments.
2. You'll learn how to work with peers and tutors other than your teacher.
3. You'll understand the writing process.
4. You'll hopefully gain a positive outlook towards writing that will benefit your future.

Will being in the study hurt me?

We don't think you will be hurt by this study.

How long will I be in the study?

You will be asked to visit the center three times, and each session lasts one hour. You will also spend approximately one hour for the pre and post interviews. The first interview will take place before the tutoring sessions, and the second interview will take place after the sessions. The sessions occur every Tuesday and Wednesday from 2:30 – 3:30, and they end the first week of May. So you would make your visits before May.

Do I have other choices?

This is voluntary, so you do not have to participate.

Will people know that I am in the study?

The only people who will know about this study are Mrs. Katherine Palacio, as well as your parent or guardian, and the writing center tutors. Anything you tell us or do for us might be found out by someone else, but we will do everything we can to keep it confidential.

Whom should I ask if I have questions?

You should always speak with your parent or guardian, but if you have other questions, you may contact Mrs. Katherine Palacio.

Is it OK if I say “No, I don’t want to be in the study”?

You do not have to be a part of this study if you don’t want to. Your grade will not be affected by this. Grades and extra credit have nothing to do with this study. There is no punishment for not participating.

Do you understand and do you want to be in the study?

I understand. All my questions were answered.

- I want to be in the study.
- I don’t want to be in the study.

Your name

Your signature

Date

Signature of person explaining the study

Date

APPENDIX E

Parent/Guardian Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled “Re-Centering Students Attitudes about Writing”

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol #:

Principal investigator:
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For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
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What is the research about?

You are being asked to let your child participate in a research study. Students will be asked to attend writing tutoring sessions to see if their attitudes about writing change in a positive way. The current college writing center tutors from St. Thomas University will conduct the tutoring sessions. They will also be interviewed about the writing center sessions. Three students will be asked to participate.

What will my child be doing?

Your child will be interviewed twice for thirty minutes to one hour each by Mrs. Katherine Palacio. The first interview will take place before the three sessions and will be about his or her past experience with writing teachers. The responses will be kept confidential. After the interview, your child will be asked to attend three tutoring sessions, either on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, between 2:30 and 3:30. The purpose of

these sessions is to offer your child the positive experience of working with others on a writing assignment. After the three sessions, your child will be interviewed a second time by Mrs. Katherine Palacio to see if he or she has felt a change in his or her attitude about writing. Your child will be encouraged to be honest, and if he or she is uncomfortable sharing information, then your child will not have to do so.

Is there any audio or video recording?

The interview will include a digital-audio recording. Mrs. Katherine Palacio will listen to the audio tapes and type up notes from the recordings. If needed, her research advisor, Dr. Bruce, or her university's human research oversight board, called the Institutional Review Board (IRB), may also listen to the recordings. The reason the recording is being made is to ensure that the information typed is correct. A pseudonym will be used in transcription, and that will be reviewed by Dr. Shanti Bruce. The recording will be kept for a minimum of three years from the end of the study, at which point the recording will be erased.

Because your child's voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your child's confidentiality for things he or she says on the recording cannot be guaranteed although Mrs. Katherine Palacio will try to limit access to the recording as described in this paragraph.

What dangers are there for (me and/or) my child?

There are no dangers in this study.

What good things might come about for (me and/or) my child?

There are several benefits:

1. Students will learn how to work with negative feedback.
2. Students will learn how to work with peers.
3. Students will understand the writing process.
4. Students will hopefully gain a positive outlook towards writing.

Do I have to pay for anything?

There are no costs for your child's participation in this study.

Will I or my child receive compensation in the form of payment, grades, or extra credit?

There are no payments made for your child's participation in this study. Your child's grades will not be affected in any way, and your child will not receive extra credit. In no way will your child be influenced or persuaded to participate. This is strictly voluntary and we do not want the responses to be influenced.

How will my (and/or my child's) information be kept private and confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, Mrs. Katherine Palacio and her thesis advisor, Dr. Shanti Bruce may review research records. Records will be kept for a maximum of three years, at which point the documents and recordings will be erased.

What if I do not want my child to be in the study or my child doesn't want to be in the study?

You have the right to refuse for your child to participate or withdraw your child at any time. Your child may also refuse to participate or withdraw. If you do withdraw your child, or your child decides not to participate, neither you nor your child will experience any penalty or loss of services that you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw your child, or he/she decides to leave, any information collected about your child **before** the date of withdrawal will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree for your child to participate in the study entitled "Re-Centering Students Attitudes about Writing"

Child's Name: _____

Parent's/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent's/Guardian Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F**Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled “Re-Centering Students’ Attitudes about Writing”**

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol #:

Principal investigator
Katherine Palacio, B.A.
PO Box 266705
Weston, FL 33326
305-490-2209

Co-investigator
Shanti Bruce, Ph. D.
3301 College Ave.
Nova Southeastern University
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
954-262-8355

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information
Monsignor Edward Pace High School
15600 NW 32 Ave
Miami, FL 33054
305-623-7223

What is the study about?

This is a research study to see if students with negative or apathetic feelings towards writing can improve their attitudes about writing by visiting a writing center and working with tutors.

Why are you asking me?

You are an adult college writing center tutor with experience in this field, and you have experience working with the adolescent high school population. You already tutor students from this school twice a week, so for this study, three students from Mrs. Katherine Palacio’s writing classes will visit the writing center on three occasions to work with you.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

You will continue with your scheduled tutoring hours at the writing center on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, from 2:30 – 3:30. You will be given the names of the three student participants beforehand so you will be able to distinguish between participants and non-participants that visit the center. The three student participants will be visiting the center to work with you on any writing assignment they are struggling with, or for general writing practice exercises. They will make a total of three visits for the purpose of this study. These students have negative or apathetic feelings towards writing, so the purpose of these visits is to see if their attitudes change. You will be asked to work with them for up to one hour each visit. After the three visits per student have been completed, Mrs. Palacio will interview you for approximately one hour. During this interview, you will be asked to share your opinion on the students' attitudes towards writing.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include a digital-audio recording of the interview following the students' visits that will be reviewed by Mrs. Palacio and possibly Dr. Shanti Bruce, her research advisor, and the IRB. The recording will be transcribed and reviewed by Mrs. Palacio and Dr. Bruce and possibly the IRB. The digital-audio recording will be transferred to a personal computer. After the three-year retention period, the recording will be erased from the computer and the recording device. After the retention period, the transcription will be shredded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although Mrs. Katherine Palacio will try to limit access to the recording as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?

There are minimal dangers in this study, and some risks may be unforeseeable. If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Mrs. Palacio or Dr. Bruce. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits for taking part in this research study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

The digital-audio recording will be erased after the three-year retention period. The recording will be transferred to the computer, and after the retention period, the computer file will also be erased. After the retention period, the transcription will be shredded. All

information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, and Dr. Bruce may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigator, Mrs. Katherine Palacio.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled “Re-Centering Students’ Attitudes about Writing”

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____